

Classic Poetry Series

**Richard Chenevix Trench**  
**- poems -**

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## Richard Chenevix Trench(1807 - 1886)

Richard Chenevix Trench was born on September 9, 1807, North Frederick Street, Dublin, Ireland. His father was Richard Trench, his mother Melesina, only grandchild and heiress of Richard Chenevix, Bishop of Waterford, and widow of Colonel St. George. Trench's home in childhood was Elm Lodge, close to the village of Bursledon, not far from Southampton. In February, 1816 he attended Twyford School, and in 1819 Harrow, where he won great distinction. In October 1825 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge. His mother's correspondence is full of references to a little periodical called "The Translator", begun in 1825, or immediately on his becoming an undergraduate. She was his ardent co-worker both as contributor and critic.

In 1826 he learned Spanish, and in that year applied himself to preparing and publishing a volume of Miscellanies, of which the "profits were to be sent to the committee formed for the relief of the exiled Spaniards." On May 27th, 1827, his mother died at Malvern. The Letters and Memorials give vivid and exciting details of his continuous interest and daring personal service and sacrifices on behalf of Spain.

Until early manhood he was undecided as to his calling, Law rather than Divinity colouring his thoughts and plans. He left Cambridge on February 1st, 1829, and rejoined his widowed father at Elm Lodge, near Southampton. He married, at the Abbey Church, Bath, on May 31st, 1832, his own cousin, Frances Mary Trench, daughter of his uncle, Francis Trench. He was ordained priest early in July, 1835, by Bishop Sumner, of Winchester. In 1846 he was appointed Professor of Divinity at King's College, London, later changed into "Professor of the Exegesis of the New Testament," which he held until 1858. In 1856 he was appointed Dean of Westminster. On New Year's Day, 1864, he was consecrated Archbishop of Dublin in Christ Church Cathedral. His final confirmation was in St. Bartholomew's Church on May 16th, 1884. On November 28th, 1884, he resigned his Archbishopric. Few have left behind them a more stainless, a more loveable, a more enviable memory. He has been referred to as "sweetness and light embodied".

# After The Battle

WE crown'd the hard-won heights at length,  
Baptiz'd in flame and fire;  
We saw the foeman's sullen strength,  
That grimly made retire—

Saw close at hand, then saw more far  
Beneath the battle-smoke  
The ridges of his shatter'd war,  
That broke and ever broke.

But one, an English household's pride,  
Dear many ways to me,  
Who climb'd that death-path by my side,  
I sought, but could not see.

Last seen, what time our foremost rank  
That iron tempest tore;  
He touch'd, he scal'd the rampart bank—  
Seen then, and seen no more.

One friend to aid, I measur'd back  
With him that pathway dread;  
No fear to wander from our track—  
Its waymarks English dead.

Light thicken'd: but our search was crown'd,  
As we too well divin'd;  
And after briefest quest we found  
What we most fear'd to find.

His bosom with one death-shot riven,  
The warrior-boy lay low;  
His face was turn'd unto the heaven,  
His feet unto the foe.

As he had fallen upon the plain,  
Inviolate he lay;  
No ruffian spoiler's hand profane  
Had touch'd that noble clay.

And precious things he still retain'd,  
Which, by one distant hearth,  
Lov'd tokens of the lov'd, had gain'd  
A worth beyond all worth.

I treasur'd these for them who yet  
Knew not their mighty wo;  
I softly seal'd his eyes, and set  
One kiss upon his brow.

A decent grave we scoop'd him, where  
Less thickly lay the dead,  
And decently compos'd him there  
Within that narrow bed.

O theme for manhood's bitter tears:  
The beauty and the bloom  
Of less than twenty summer years  
Shut in that darksome tomb!

Of soldier-sire the soldier-son;  
Life's honor'd eventide  
One lives to close in England, one  
In maiden battle died:

And they, that should have been the mourn'd,  
The mourners' parts obtain:  
Such thoughts were ours, as we return'd  
To earth its earth again.

Brief words we read of faith and prayer  
Beside that hasty grave;  
Then turn'd away, and left him there,  
The gentle and the brave:

I calling back with thankful heart,  
With thoughts to peace allied,  
Hours when we two had knelt apart  
Upon the lone hillside;

And, comforted, I prais'd the grace

Which him had led to be  
An early seeker of that Face  
Which he should early see.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# Christ's Restraint

He might have reared a palace at a word,  
Who sometimes had not where to lay his head:  
Time was, and He who nourished crowds with bread  
Would not one meal unto Himself afford:  
Twelve legions girded with angelic sword  
Were at his beck, the scorned and buffeted:  
He healed another's scratch, his own side bled,  
Side, feet, and hands, with cruel piercings gored.  
Oh wonderful the wonders left undone!  
And scarce less wonderful than those He wrought;  
Oh self-restraint, passing all human thought,  
To have all power, and be as having none;  
Oh self-denying Love, which felt alone  
For needs of others, never for its own!

Richard Chenevix Trench

# England

Peace, Freedom, Happiness, have loved to wait  
On the fair islands, fenced by circling seas;  
And ever of such favoured spots as these  
Have the wise dreamers dreamed, who would create  
That perfect model of a happy state,  
Which the world never saw. Oceana,  
Utopia such, and Plato's isle that lay  
Westward of Gades and the Great Sea's gate.  
Dreams are they all, which yet have helped to make  
That underneath fair polities we dwell,  
Though marred in part by envy, faction, hate-  
Dreams which are dear, dear England, for thy sake,  
Who art indeed that sea-girt citadel,  
And nearest image of that perfect state.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# Harmosan

Now the third and fatal conflict for the Persian throne was done,  
And the Moslem's fiery valor had the crowning victory won.

Harmosan, the last and boldest the invader to defy,  
Captive overborne by numbers, they were bringing forth to die.

Then exclaimed the noble captive: "Lo! I perish in my thirst;  
Give me but one drink of water, and let then arrive the worst!"

In his hand he took the goblet, but awhile the draught forbore,  
Seeming doubtfully the purpose of the foemen to explore.

Well might then have paused the bravest -- for around him angry foes  
With a hedge of naked weapons did that lonely man enclose.

"But what fear'st thou?" cried the caliph; -- "is it, friend, a secret blow?  
Fear it not! -- our gallant Moslem no such treacherous dealing know.

"Thou mayst quench thy thirst securely, for thou shalt not die before  
Thou hast drunk that cup of water -- this reprieve is thine -- no more!"

Quick the satrap dashed the goblet down to earth with ready hand,  
And the liquid sand for ever, lost amid the burning sand.

"Thou hast said that mine my life is, till the water of that cup  
I have drained; then bid thy servants that spilled water gather up!"

For a moment stood the calph as by doubtful passions stirred --  
Then exclaimed: "For ever sacred must remain a monarch's word.

"Bring another cup, and straightway to the noble Persian give:  
Drink, I said before, and perish -- now I bid thee drink and live!"

Richard Chenevix Trench

## In A Pass Of Bavaria

A sound of many waters!--now I know  
To what was likened the large utterance sent  
By Him who mid the golden lampads went:  
Innumerable streams, above, below,  
Some seen, some heard alone, with headlong flow  
Come rushing; some with smooth and sheer descent,  
Some dashed to foam and whiteness, but all blent  
Into one mighty music.

As I go,

The tumult of a boundless gladness fills  
My bosom, and my spirit leaps and sings:  
Sounds and sights are there of the ancient hills,  
The eagle's cry, the mountain when it flings  
Mists from its brow, but none of all these things  
Like the one voice of multitudinous rills.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# New Year's Eve

The strong in spiritual action need not look  
Upon the new-found year as on a scroll,  
The which their hands lack cunning to unroll,  
But in it read, as in an open book,  
All they are seeking- high resolve unshook  
By circumstance's unforeseen control,  
Successful striving, and whate'er the soul  
Has recognized for duty, not forsook.  
But they whom many failures have made tame,  
Question the future with that reverent fear,  
Which best their need of heavenly aid may show,  
Will it have purer thought, and loftier aim  
Pursued more loftily? That a man might know  
What thou wilt bring him, thou advancing year!

Richard Chenevix Trench

# On Leaving Rome

ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND RESIDING IN THAT CITY

O lately written in the roll of friends,  
O written late, not last, three happy months  
Under the shadow of the Capitol,  
A pleasant time, made pleasanter by thee,  
It has been mine to live- three months of spring,  
Which pleasant in themselves and for thy sake,  
Had yet this higher, that they stirred in the heart  
The motions of continual thankfulness  
For me, considering by what gracious paths  
I had been guided, by what paths of love,  
Since I was last a dweller in these gates.  
That meditation could not prove to me  
But as a spring that ever bubbles up,  
Sparkling in the face of heaven, while every day  
Reminded me how little of delight  
I gathered from this wondrous city then,  
But what a rare and ample gladness now.

For though not then indifferent to me  
Nature or Art, yea rather though from these  
I drew whatever lightened for a while  
Life's burden and intolerable load;  
Yet seldom could I gather heart enough,  
With all their marvels round me, to go forth  
In quest of any. But some lonely spot,  
Some ridge of ruin fringed with cypresses,  
Such as have everywhere so loved to make  
Their chosen home, more than all other trees,  
'Mid the fall'n structures of imperial Rome,  
Me did such haunt please better; or I loved,  
With others whom a like disquietude,  
At the like crisis of their lives, now kept  
Restless, with them to question to and fro  
And to debate the evil of the world,  
As though we bore no portion of that ill,  
As though with subtle phrases we could spin  
A woof to screen us from life's undelight:  
Sometimes prolonging far into the night

Such talk, as loth to separate, and find  
Each in his solitude how vain are words,  
When that which is opposed to them is more.

I would not live that time again for worlds,  
Full of rebellious askings, for what end,  
And by what power, without our own consent,  
Caught in this snare of life we knew not how,  
We were placed here, to suffer and to sin,  
To be in misery and know not why.  
Yet so it fared with me, a sojourner,  
Five years ago, beneath these mouldering walls,  
As I am now; and, trusted friend, to thee  
I have not doubted to reveal my soul,  
For thou hast known, if I may read aright  
The pages of thy past existence, thou  
Hast known the dreary sickness of the soul,  
Which falls upon us in our lonely youth,  
The fear of all bright visions leaving us,  
The sense of emptiness, without the sense  
Of an abiding fulness anywhere;  
When all the generations of mankind,  
With all their purposes, their hopes and fears,  
Seem nothing truer than those wandering shapes  
Cast by a trick of light upon a wall,  
And nothing different from these, except  
In their capacity for suffering;-  
That fearful moment of our youth, when first  
We have the sense of sin, and none as yet  
Of expiation. Our own life seemed then  
But as an arrow flying in the dark  
Without an aim; a most unwelcome gift,  
Which we might not put by. But now, what God  
Intended as a blessing and a boon  
We have received as such; and we can say  
A solemn yet a joyful thing is life,  
Which, being full of duties, is for this  
Of gladness full, and full of lofty hopes.  
And He has taught us what reply to make  
Or secretly in spirit, or in words,  
If there be need, when sorrowing men complain  
The fair illusions of their youth depart,

All things are going from them, and today  
Is emptier of delights than yesterday,  
Even as tomorrow will be barer yet;  
We have been taught to feel this need not be,  
This is not life's inevitable law-  
But that the gladness we are called to know,  
Is an increasing gladness; that the soil  
Of the human heart, tilled rightly, will become  
Richer and deeper, fitter to bear fruit  
Of an immortal growth, from day to day,  
Fruit of love, life, and indeficient joy.

Oh! not for baneful self-complacency,  
Not for the setting up our present selves  
To triumph o'er our past (worst pride of all),  
May we compare this present with that past;  
But to provoke renewed acknowledgments,  
But to incite unto an earnest hope  
For all our brethren. And how should I fear  
To own to thee that this is in my heart,  
This longing- that it leads me home today,  
Glad even while I turn my back on Rome,  
Yet half unseen- its arts, its memories,  
Its glorious fellowship of living men;  
Glad in the hope to tread the soil again  
Of England, where our place of duty lies-  
Yet not as though we deemed we could do much,  
Or claimed large sphere of action for ourselves;  
Not in this thought- since rather be it ours,  
Both thine and mine, to ask for that calm frame  
Of spirit, in which we know and deeply feel  
How little is the most which we can do,  
Yet leave not so that little unfulfilled.

Richard Chenevix Trench

## On Perseus and Medusa

In what fierce spasms upgathered, on the plain  
Medusa's headless corpse has quivering sunk,  
While all the limbs of that undying trunk  
To their extremest joint with torture strain;  
But the calm visage has resumed again  
Its beauty- the orb'd eyelids are let down,  
As though a living sleep might once more crown  
Their placid circlets, guiltless of all pain.  
And thou- is thine the spirit's swift recoil,  
Which follows every deed of acted wrath,  
That, holding in thine hand this loveliest spoil,  
Thou dost not triumph, feeling that the breath  
Of life is sacred, whether it inform,  
Loathly or beauteous, man or beast or worm?

Richard Chenevix Trench

## Sonnet 01

ALL beautiful things bring sadness, nor alone  
Music, whereof that wisest poet spake;  
Because in us keen longings they awake  
After the good for which we pine and groan,  
From which exil'd we make continual moan,  
Till once again we may our spirits slake  
At those clear streams, which man did first forsake,  
When he would dig for fountains of his own.  
All beauty makes us sad, yet not in vain:  
For who would be ungracious to refuse,  
Or not to use, this sadness without pain,  
Whether it flows upon us from the hues  
Of sunset, from the time of stars and dews,  
From the clear sky, or waters pure of stain?

Richard Chenevix Trench

## Sonnet 02

I stood beside a pool, from whence ascended,  
Mounting the cloudy platforms of the wind,  
A stately heron; its soaring I attended,  
Till it grew dim, and I with watching blind--  
When lo! a shaft of arrowy light descended  
Upon its darkness and its dim attire;  
It straightway kindled them, and was a fire,  
And with the unconsuming radiance blended.

And bird, a cloud, flecking the sunny air,  
It had its golden dwelling 'mid the lightning  
Of those empyreal domes, and it might there  
Have dwelt for ever, glorified and bright'ning,  
But that its wings were weak--so it became  
A dusky speck again, that was a winged flame.

Richard Chenevix Trench

## Sonnet 03

Lord, what a change within us one short hour  
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make --  
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,  
What parchèd grounds refresh, as with a shower!  
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;  
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,  
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;  
We kneel how weak, we rise how full of power!  
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,  
Or others -- that we are not always strong;  
That we are ever overborne with care;  
That we should ever weak or heartless be,  
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,  
And joy, and strength, and courage, are with Thee?

Richard Chenevix Trench

## Sonnet 04

A garden so well watered before morn  
Is hotly up, that not the swart sun's blaze  
Down beating with unmitigated rays,  
Nor arid winds from scorching places borne,  
Shall quite prevail to make it bare and shorn  
Of its green beauty -- shall not quite prevail  
That all its morning freshness shall exhale,  
Till evening and the evening dews return --  
A blessing such as this our hearts might reap,  
The freshness of the garden they might share,  
Through the long day a heavenly freshness keep,  
If, knowing how the day and day's glare  
Must beat upon them, we would largely steep  
And water them betimes with dews of prayer.

Richard Chenevix Trench

## Sonnet 05

When hearts are full of yearning tenderness,  
For the loved absent, whom we can not reach --  
By deed or token, gesture or kind speech,  
The spirit's true affection to express;  
When hearts are full of innermost distress,  
And we are doomed to stand inactive by,  
Watching the soul's or body's agony,  
Which human effort helps not to make less --  
Then like a cup capacious to contain  
The overflowings of the heart, is prayer:  
The longing of the souls is satisfied,  
The keenest darts of anguish blunted are;  
And, though we can not cease to yearn or grieve,  
Yet we have learned in patience to abide.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# The Onward Course

Our course is onward, onward into light:  
What though the darkness gathereth amain,  
Yet to return or tarry both are vain.  
How tarry, when around us is thick night?  
Whither return? what flower yet ever might,  
In days of gloom and cold and stormy rain,  
Enclose itself in its green bud again,  
Hiding from wrath of tempest out of sight?

Courage--we travel through a darksome cave;  
But still as nearer to the light we draw,  
Fresh gales will reach us from the upper air  
And wholesome dews of heaven our foreheads lave,  
The darkness lighten more, till full of awe  
We stand in the open sunshine unaware.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# To a Robin Redbreast

## SINGING IN WINTER

Oh light of heart and wing,  
Light-hearted and light-winged, that dost cheer  
With song of sprightliest note the waning year,  
Thou canst so blithely sing,  
That we must only chide our own dull heart,  
If in thy music we can bear no part.

Thy haunts are winter-bare,  
The leaves in which thou didst so lately keep  
Are being trodden to a miry heap;  
But thou art void of care,  
And singest not the less, or rather thou  
Hast kept thy best and boldest notes till now.

Thou art so bold to sing  
Thy sweetest music in the saddest hour,  
Because thy trust is in the love and power,  
Which can bring back the spring,  
Which can array the naked groves again,  
And paint with seasonable flowers the plain.

But we are merely sad,  
Whenas for us this earthly life has shed  
The leaves that once arrayed it; and instead  
Of rich boughs, foliage-clad,  
A few bare sticks and twigs stand nakedly,  
Fronting against the cold and angry sky.

Yet would we only see  
That hope and joy, the growth of lower earth,  
Fall from us, that another truer birth  
Of the same things may be;  
That the new buds are travelling up behind,  
Though hid as yet beneath the naked rind,

We should not then resign  
All gladness, when spring promises depart,

But 'mid our wintriest bareness should find heart  
To join our songs with thine,  
Strong to fulfil, in spirit and in voice,  
That hardest of all precepts- to rejoice.

Richard Chenevix Trench

# To Poetry

In my life's youth, while yet the deeper needs  
Of the inmost spirit unawakened were,  
Thou couldst recount of high heroic deeds,  
Couldst add a glory unto earth and air,  
A crowning glory, making fair more fair:  
So that my soul was pleased and satisfied,  
Which had as yet no higher, deeper care,  
And said that thou shouldst evermore abide  
With me, and make my bliss, and be my spirit's bride.

But years went on, and thoughts which slept before,  
O'er the horizon of my soul arose-  
Thoughts which perplexed me ever more and more;  
As though a Sphinx should meet one, and propose  
Enigmas hard, and which whoso not knows  
To interpret, must her prey and victim be;  
And I, round whom thick darkness seemed to close,  
Knew only this one thing, that misery  
Remained, if none could solve this riddle unto me.

Then I remembered that from thy lips fell  
Large words of promise, how thou couldst succeed  
All darkest mysteries of life to spell;  
Therefore I pleaded with thee now to read  
The riddle that was baffling me, with speed,  
To yield some answer to the questioning.  
Something thou spak'st, but nothing to my need,  
So that I counted thee an idle thing,  
Who, having promised much, couldst no true succour bring.

And I turned from thee, and I left thee quite,  
And of thy name to hear had little care:  
For I was only seeking if by flight  
I might shun her, who else would rend and tear  
Me, who could not her riddle dark declare:-  
This toil, the anguish of this flight was mine,  
Until at last, enquiring everywhere,  
I won an answer from another shrine,  
A holier oracle, a temple more divine.

But when no longer without hope I mourned,  
When peace and joy revived in me anew,  
Even from that moment my old love returned,  
My former love, yet wiser and more true,  
As seeing what for us thy power can do,  
And what thy skill can make us understand  
And know- and where that skill attained not to;  
How far thou canst sustain us by the hand,  
And what things shall in us a holier care demand-

My love of thee and thine; for earth and air,  
And every common sight of sea and plain,  
Then put new robes of glory on, and wear  
The same till now; and things which dead had lain  
Revived, as flowers that smell the dew and rain:  
I was a man again of hopes and fears,  
The fountains of my heart flowed forth again,  
Whose sources had seemed dry for many years,  
And there was given me back the sacred gift of tears.

And that old hope, which never quite had perished,  
A longing which had stirred me from a boy,  
And which in darkest seasons I had cherished,  
Which nothing could quite vanquish or destroy,  
This with all other things of life and joy  
Revived within me- and I too would seek  
The power, that moved my own heart, to employ  
On others, who perchance would hear me speak,  
If but the tones were true, although the voice were weak.

Though now there seems one only worthy aim  
For poet- for my strength were as my will!-  
And which renounce he cannot without blame-  
To make men feel the presence by his skill  
Of an eternal loveliness, until  
All souls are faint with longing for their home,  
Yet the same while are strengthened to fulfil  
Their task on earth, that they may surely come  
Unto the land of life, who here as exiles roam.

And what though loftiest fancies are not mine,

Nor words of chiefest power, yet unto me  
Some voices reach out of the inner shrine,  
Heard in mine heart of hearts, and I can see  
At times some glimpses of the majesty,  
Some prints and footsteps of the glory trace,  
Which have been left on earth, that we might be  
By them led forward to the secret place,  
Where we perchance might see that glory face to face.

If in this quest, O power of sacred song,  
Thou canst assist- oh, never take thy flight!  
If thou canst make us gladder or more strong,  
If thou canst fling glimpses of glorious light  
Upon life's deepest depth and highest height,  
Or pour upon its low and level plain  
A gleam of mellower gladness, if this might  
Thou hast- (and it is thine)- then not in vain  
Are we henceforth prepared to follow in thy train.

Richard Chenevix Trench