

Classic Poetry Series

Theodore de Banville

- poems -

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Theodore de Banville(1823-1891)

Banville was born in Moulins in Allier, Auvergne, the son of a captain in the French navy. His boyhood, by his own account, was cheerlessly passed at a lycée in Paris; he was not harshly treated, but took no part in the amusements of his companions. On leaving school with but slender means of support, he devoted himself to letters, and in 1842 published his first volume of verse (*Les Cariatides*), which was followed by *Les Stalactites* in 1846. The poems encountered some adverse criticism, but secured for their author the approbation and friendship of Alfred de Vigny and Jules Janin.

From then on, Banville's life was steadily devoted to literary production and criticism. He printed other volumes of verse, among which the *Odes funambulesques* (1857) received unstinted praise from Victor Hugo, to whom they were dedicated. Later, several comedies in verse were produced at the Théâtre Français and on other stages; and from 1853 onwards a stream of prose flowed from his industrious pen, including studies of Parisian manners, sketches of well-known persons, and a series of tales, most of which were republished in his collected works (1875–1878). He also wrote freely for reviews, and acted as dramatic critic for more than one newspaper. Throughout a life spent mainly in Paris, Banville's genial character and cultivated mind won him the friendship of the chief men of letters of his time.

In 1858 he was decorated with the Legion of Honour, and was promoted to be an officer of the order in 1886. He died in Paris in 1891 at the age of 68, and was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery.

À Ma Mère

Theodore de Banville

Ariane

Theodore de Banville

Aux Enfants Perdus

I know Cythera long is desolate;
I know the winds have stripped the garden green.
Alas, my friends! beneath the fierce sun's weight
A barren reef lies where Love's flowers have been,
Nor ever lover on that coast is seen!
So be it, for we seek a fabled shore,
To lull our vague desires with mystic lore,
To wander where Love's labyrinths beguile;
There let us land, there dream for evermore,
'It may be we shall touch the happy isle.'

The sea may be our sepulchre. If Fate,
If tempests wreak their wrath on us, serene
We watch the bolt of Heaven, and scorn the hate
Of angry gods that smite us in their spleen.
Perchance the jealous mists are but the screen
That veils the fairy coast we would explore.
Come, though the sea be vexed, and breakers roar,
Come, for the breath of this old world is vile,
Haste we, and toil, and faint not at the oar;
'It may be we shall touch the happy isle.'

Gray serpents trail in temples desecrate
Where Cypris smiled, the golden maid, the queen,
And ruined is the palace of our state;
But happy loves flit round the mast, and keen
The shrill winds sing the silken cords between.
Heroes are we, with wearied hearts and sore,
Whose flower is faded and whose locks are hoar.
Haste, ye light skiffs, where myrtle thickets smile
Love's panthers sleep 'mid roses, as of yore:
'It may be we shall touch the happy isle.'

ENVOI

Sad eyes! the blue sea laughs as heretofore.
Ah, singing birds, your happy music pour;
Ah, poets, leave the sordid earth awhile;

Flit to these ancient gods we still adore:
'It may be we shall touch the happy isle.'

Theodore de Banville

Ballade Des Pendus

Where wide the forest bows are spread,
Where Flora wakes with sylph and fay,
Are crowns and garlands of men dead,
All golden in the morning gay;
Within this ancient garden gray
Are clusters such as no man knows,
Where Moor and Soldan bear the sway:
This is King Louis's orchard close!

These wretched folk wave overhead,
With such strange thoughts as none may say;
A moment still, then sudden sped,
They swing in a ring and waste away.
The morning smites them with her ray;
They toss with every breeze that blows,
They dance where fires of dawning play:
This is King Louis's orchard close!

All hanged and dead, they've summoned
(With Hell to aid, that hears them pray)
New legions of an army dread.
Now down the blue sky flames the day;
The dew dies off; the foul array
Of obscene ravens gathers and goes,
With wings that flap and beaks that flay:
This is King Louis's orchard close!

ENVOI

Prince, where leaves murmur of the May,
A tree of bitter clusters grows;
The bodies of men dead are they!
This is King Louis's orchard close!

Theodore de Banville

Ballade On The Mysterious Hosts Of The Forest

Still sing the mocking fairies, as of old,
Beneath the shade of thorn and holly-tree;
The west wind breathes upon them pure and cold,
And still wolves dread Diana roving free,
In secret woodland with her company.
'Tis thought the peasants' hovels know her rite
When now the wolds are bathed in silver light,
And first the moonrise breaks the dusky gray;
Then down the dells, with blown soft hair and bright,
And through the dim wood, Dian thrids her way.

With water-weeds twined in their locks of gold
The strange cold forest-fairies dance in glee;
Sylphs over-timorous and over-bold
Haunt the dark hollows where the dwarf may be,
The wild red dwarf, the nixies' enemy:
Then, 'mid their mirth and laughter and affright,
The sudden goddess enters, tall and white,
With one long sigh for summers passed away;
The swift feet tear the ivy nets outright,
And through the dim wood Dian thrids her way.

She gleans her sylvan trophies; down the wold
She hears the sobbing of the stags that flee,
Mixed with the music of the hunting rolled,
But her delight is all in archery,
And naught of ruth and pity wotteth she
More than the hounds that follow on the flight;
The tall nymph draws a golden bow of might,
And thick she rains the gentle shafts that slay;
She tosses loose her locks upon the night,
And through the dim wood Dian thrids her way.

ENVOI

Prince, let us leave the din, the dust, the spite,
The gloom and glare of towns, the plague, the blight;
Amid the forest leaves and fountain spray

There is the mystic home of our delight,
And through the dim wood Dian thrids her way.

Theodore de Banville

Ballade Pour La Servante Du Cabaret

Theodore de Banville

Ballade Pour Une Amoureuse

Theodore de Banville

Ballade Pour Une Amoureuse

Theodore de Banville

Ballade Sur Les Hôtes Mystérieux De La Forêt

Theodore de Banville

Bien Souvent Je Revois Sous Mes Paupières Closes...

Theodore de Banville

Carmen

Theodore de Banville

Conseil

Theodore de Banville

Décor

Theodore de Banville

Érato

Theodore de Banville

La Déesse

Theodore de Banville

La Forêt

Theodore de Banville

La Lunela Lune

Theodore de Banville

La Lyre

Theodore de Banville

La Muse

Theodore de Banville

La Pêche

Theodore de Banville

La Toison D'Or

Theodore de Banville

L'Automne

Theodore de Banville

Le Pressoir

Theodore de Banville

Le Printemps

Theodore de Banville

Le Sang De La Coupe

Theodore de Banville

Le Saut Du Tremplin

Theodore de Banville

Le Thé

Theodore de Banville

Le Vin De L'Amour

Theodore de Banville

Leïla

Theodore de Banville

Les Cariatides

Theodore de Banville

Les Cariatides

Theodore de Banville

L'Été

Theodore de Banville

L'Hiver

Theodore de Banville

Nous N'Irons Plus Au Bois

Theodore de Banville

Ô Jeune Florentine

Theodore de Banville

Premier Soleil

Theodore de Banville

Prière Du Matin

Theodore de Banville

Sculpteur, Cherche Avec Soin...

Theodore de Banville

Sieste

Theodore de Banville

Sous Bois

Theodore de Banville

Sous Bois

Theodore de Banville

The Laurels Are Cut Down

We go to the woods no more, the laurels are cut down.
Figures of Love in low places, the group of Naiads
See shining again in the sun as cut out crystals,
The silent waters which flowed from where they were.
The laurels are cut down, and the stag, quiet in fear,
Trembles at the sound of the horn; we go no more to the woods,
Where playing children laughed, gathered in abandon—
Among the lilies of silver moistened by the sky's tears.
Here is the grass which is reaped and the laurels which are cut down.
We go to the woods no more, the laurels are cut down.

Theodore de Banville

Vous En Qui Je Salue Une Nouvelle Aurore...

Theodore de Banville