

Classic Poetry Series

# Thibaut de Champagne

## - poems -

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# Thibaut de Champagne(1201 - 1253)

Born in France in 1201, Thibaut IV was the Count of Champagne and King of Navarre. The countship was inherited from his father, but he had to defend it twice - first against his uncle, Count of Brienne in 1221 and later against his aunt, Alice, Queen of Cyprus. In 1234 he succeeded his childless uncle Sancho VII as King of Navarre.

In 1239 Thibaut was the leader of the Christian crusade organized by Gregory IX, after several unsuccessful battles he composed four Crusade Songs in order to arouse some fighting spirit. As well as this, he was a prolific poet and is regarded as one of the greatest lyrical poets of his generation. The Catholic Encyclopedia describe his style like this: "His rhythm are most harmonious, his combinations of metres show a real skill, while his expressions are full of refinement and true sentiment." Sixty six of his poems were published in the collection *Poésies du Roi de Navarre* in 1742.

Little is known of Thibaut's life after he returned from the crusade in Palestine. It is thought that he died on 8th July 1253, although it is unknown where.

# I Can't Prevent Myself From Singing

I can't prevent myself from singing,  
And yet I'm full of grief and sadness,  
Though joy is always a lovely thing,  
And no one takes pleasure in distress.  
I don't sing as one loved will sing  
But as one troubled, downcast, weeping,  
Since I've no more hope of happiness,  
Ever deceived by what words are weaving.

I will tell you one thing without lying:  
Love greatly depends on fate and chance,  
If I could sever from her, cease loving,  
It would be better than ruling France.  
Now I've spoken like a mad thing,  
Her beauties I'd rather die recalling  
Her great wisdom and sweet acquaintance,  
Than see the whole wide world bowing.

I'll never be happy, I'm sure that's true,  
Since Love hates, and my lady forgets me,  
Yet there's sense for one with love in view  
In not fearing death, or pain, or folly.  
As I give myself, with Love so willing,  
To my lady, then it's of his desiring,  
That I shall die or regain my lady,  
Or my life will be not worth living.

The Phoenix seeks the wood of the vine  
And plunging there dies an incendiary.  
So I sought death and this torment of mine  
When I saw her, should pity not find me.  
God! How beautiful that first seeing  
That brought upon me so much suffering!  
The memory makes me die of my need  
For her, my desire, and my great longing.

The marvellous power of Love is such  
He gives joy and sadness as He wishes,  
Me he keeps in misery overmuch.

Reason tells me to think of other issues.  
But I have a heart beyond discovering:  
'Love! Love! Love!' ever commanding.  
No other argument's there but kisses,  
And I'll love, from that there is no turning.

Mercy, my lady, who knows all things!  
All goodness and everything worth having  
Are yours: more than any woman living.  
Help me, now, it is in your giving!

Song! To my friend, Philip, go running!  
Since he's become a Courtly being,  
All his love is transformed to hating:  
He's scarcely loved by the fair and loving.

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# Lady, The Fates Command

Lady, the fates command, and I must go,---  
Leaving the pleasant land so dear to me:  
Here my heart suffered many a heavy woe:  
But what is left to love, thus leaving thee?  
Alas! that cruel land beyond the see!  
Why thus dividing many a faithful heart,  
Never again from pain and sorrow free,  
Never again to meet, when thus they part?

I see not, when thy presence bright I leave,  
How wealth, or joy, or peace can be my lot:  
Ne'er yet my spirit found such cause to grieve  
As now in leaving thee; and if thy thought  
Of me in absence should be sorrow-fraught,  
Oft will my heart repentant turn to thee,  
Dwelling, in fruitless wishes, on this spot,  
And all the gracious words here said to me.

O gracious God! to thee I bend my knee,  
For thy sake yielding all I love and prize;  
And O, how mighty must that influence be,  
That steals me thus from all my cherished joys!  
Here, ready, then, myself surrendering,  
Prepared to serve thee, I submit; and ne'er  
To one so faithful could I service bring,  
So kind a master, so beloved and dear.

And strong my ties---my grief unspeakable!  
Grief, all my choicest treasures to resign;  
Yet stronger still the affections that impel  
My heart toward Him, the God whose love is mine.  
That holy love, how beautiful! how strong!  
Even wisdom's favorite sons take refuge there;  
'T is the redeeming gem that shines among  
Men's darkest thoughts,---for ever bright and fair.

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# Love I Have Served, For Such Length Of Time

Love I have served, for such length of time  
If I forsake Him no man should blame me,  
Now I go, and commend him to God in rhyme,  
Man shouldn't give his whole life to folly.  
And he's a fool who can't keep from loving,  
And can't see in it all these torments of mine.  
I'd be thought a child if I furthered the crime,  
There's a season for everything in being.

I've never been like those other men  
Who having loved, seek to decry him,  
And speak of him with boorish intent:  
A man shouldn't sell his loyalty towards him  
Nor slander his Lord nor turn against him:  
Let whoever renounces avoid dissent.  
For myself, my wishes are all well meant.  
May lovers have joy, now I'm free again.

Love has been good to me until now,  
For he made me love with nobility  
The loveliest and the best I vow,  
That in my opinion's ever been seen.  
Love wishes it and my Lady begs me  
To leave off loving, I thank her and bow,  
Since it pleases my lady I do allow  
No better reason than that for me.

No other reward from Love I received  
Long though I served him faithfully:  
But God in his mercy has rescued me,  
And released me from his mastery.  
Since I've escaped with my life, I see  
This as the best hour of life, set free,  
And I'll still write many an elegy,  
And many a sonnet and eulogy.

A man at the outset should always take care  
To aim at something modest to win,  
Though Love won't always let us beware

What we choose as object, or what we think.  
We fall for a stranger, and in we sink,  
Who lives so far off we can't travel there,  
Rather than with one who's always near:  
And that shows the folly Love traps us in.

Now God save me from love, and loving again,  
Except love of Her whom we should love here,  
Through whom every man's redeemed from sin.

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## Mercy, My Lady! One Thing I Ask You,

'Mercy, my lady! One thing I ask you,  
As God may bless you, answer me fairly:  
When you are dead, and I – for it's true  
After you there can be no life for me –  
What of Love, without our company?  
For there's such wisdom and worth in you  
And I love so: after us, He'll not be.'

'Before God, Thibaut, I judge it true  
No one's death ever killed Love. I see  
You mean perhaps to mock me too,  
Since you don't seem wasted much to me.  
When we're dead (Long may our lives be!)  
I'm sure Love will suffer a pang or two,  
But Love's worth holds for eternity.'

'Lady, you mustn't merely imagine  
But know in your heart I love you deeply.  
That is why I have put on flesh again,  
This joy makes me love myself more dearly:  
For God never made a creature so lovely  
As you, but it makes me fear that when  
We die it will end all Love completely.'

'Thibaut, silence! No one should begin  
A discussion developed so foolishly.  
It's only your means of softening  
My heart, when you've already beguiled me.  
I don't say I hate you, certainly,  
But if Love's fate's left for me to sing,  
He would still be served honourably.'

'Lady God grant that you judge aright  
And see the ills that you make me suffer:  
Since I well know, that if die I might,  
Whatever the judgement Love will wither,  
If you, Lady, don't keep him together,  
In the place he has always occupied:  
To your wisdom aspires no other.'



'Thibaut, if Love is making you suffer,  
For me, don't regret it, if I love ever,  
Mine is a heart that will fail you never.'

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# Pastourelle

The other day I went wandering  
Without any companion  
On my palfrey, thinking  
To make a song,  
When I heard—I don't know how—  
Near a bush  
The voice of the most beautiful child  
That any man has ever seen;  
And she was not a child,  
For she was fifteen and a half years old.  
I have never seen anyone  
With such a noble face.  
Laughing, I rode towards her  
And made this speech:  
'Beautiful one, tell me,  
By God, what your name is.'

But she jumped up  
With her crook:  
'If you come any nearer,  
You'll get a blow from this.  
Sir, get away from here!  
I don't care for a friend such as you,  
And I'd rather choose  
A more handsome one called Robin!'

When I saw that she was scared  
So thoroughly  
That she wouldn't look at me  
Or give any other positive sign,  
Then I began to think  
How to make her  
Fall in love with me  
And change her mind.  
I sat down on the ground beside her,  
And the more I looked upon her bright face,  
The more it fired my heart,  
Which doubled my desire.

Then I took upon myself to ask her,  
In the most beautiful terms,  
To look at me  
And give me a different expression.  
She started to cry  
And said thus:  
'I cannot look at you;  
I don't even know what you're after.'  
I leant towards her, and told her:  
'My beautiful one, by God, your mercy.'  
She laughed and responded:  
'You make folk scared.'

Then I took her up before me  
And made straightaway  
In the direction of a small, green wood.  
Across the fields I saw  
And heard calling out  
Two shepherds amongst the wheat;  
They came shouting  
And raising a great cry.  
And I accomplished nothing more than I have said.  
I let her down and fled from there;  
I didn't care for such folk.

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