

Classic Poetry Series

Trumbull Stickney
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Trumbull Stickney(June 20, 1874 – October 11, 1904)

Joseph Trumbull Stickney was born in Geneva on June 20, 1874, and grew up in many cities and countries as his parents travelled widely ... Wiesbaden, Florence, Nice, London, and New York.

He was educated by his father, Austin at home in both Latin and Greek, and then entered Harvard University in 1891. He graduated magna cum laude in June 1895. The following eight years were spent studying for the degree of Doctorat ès Lettres at the Sorbonne in Paris. For this he wrote two theses, one on the letters of Ermolao Barbaro, a 15th-century ambassador to Rome, and the other on aphorisms in Greek verse. His Dramatic Verses was published in Boston in 1902, dedicated from Paris to his friend "Bay" (George) Lodge, who would co-edit Stickney's collected poems in 1905.

In 1903 his second thesis was published as Les Sentences dans la Poésie Grécque this won him the first Sorbonne Doctorat awarded to an American. Stickney then took on a position as instructor in Greek at Harvard in 1903 and travelled abroad in Greece from April to June that year. A brain tumor caused headaches and partial blindness from early in 1904 and led to his death in Boston on October 11th 1904.

And, The Last Day Being Come

And, the last day being come, Man stood alone
Ere sunrise on the world's dismantled verge,
Awaiting how from everywhere should urge
The Coming of the Lord. And, behold, none

Did come, -- but indistinct from every realm
Of earth and air and water, growing more
And louder, shriller, heavier, a roar
Up the dun atmosphere did overwhelm

His ears; and as he looked affrighted round
Every manner of beast innumerable
All thro' the shadows crying grew, until
The wailing was like grass upon the ground.

Asudden then within his human side
Their anguish, since the goad he wielded first,
And, since he gave them not to drink, their thirst,
Darted compressed and vital. -- As he died,

Low in the East now lighting gorgeously
He saw the last sea-serpent iris-mailed
Which, with a spear transfixèd, yet availed
To pluck the sun down into the dead sea.

Trumbull Stickney

Be Still

Be still. The Hanging Gardens were a dream
That over Persian roses flew to kiss
The curlèd lashes of Semiramis.
Troy never was, nor green Skamander stream.
Provence and Troubadour are merest lies
The glorious hair of Venice was a beam
Made within Titian's eye. The sunsets seem,
The world is very old and nothing is.
Be still. Thou foolish thing, thou canst not wake,
Nor thy tears wedge thy soldered lids apart,
But patter in the darkness of thy heart.
Thy brain is plagued. Thou art a frightened owl
Blind with the light of life thou 'ldst not forsake,
And Error loves and nourishes thy soul.

Trumbull Stickney

I Hear A River Thro' The Valley Wander

I hear a river thro' the valley wander
Whose water runs, the song alone remaining.
A rainbow stands and summer passes under.

Trumbull Stickney

I Used To Think

I used to think

The mind essential in the body, even

As stood the body essential in the mind:

Two inseparable things, by nature equal

And similar, and in creation's song

Halving the total scale: it is not so.

Unlike and cross like driftwood sticks they come

Churned in the giddy trough: a chunk of pine,

A slab of rosewood: mangled each on each

With knocks and friction, or in deadly pain

Sheathing each other's splinters: till at last

Without all stuff or shape they 're jetted up

Where in the bluish moisture rot whate'er

Was vomited in horror from the sea.

Trumbull Stickney

In A City Garden

How strange that here is nothing as it was!
The sward is young and new,
The sod there shapes a different mass,
The random trees stand other than I knew.
No, here the Past has left no residue,
No aftermath!
By a new path
The workmen homeward in the city twilight pass.

Yet was this willow here.
It hung as now its olive skeins aloft
Into the sky, then blue and clear,--
And yonder pair of poplar trees

Rose also, soft
And sibilant in the glory of the breeze.
It's early dark. One scarce distinguishes
Their sullen feathering in the autumn sky.
'Tis warm and still.
Dull o'er the town the vapours lie.
Innumerable
And dodging the uncertain stare,
The small, shrewd lampions dot the air.

Many like me
Loiter perhaps as I in after years,
As looking here to see
Some vestige of the living that was theirs,
Some trace of yesterday,
Somae hint or remnant, echo, clue--some thing,
Some very little thing of what was they.
Sure such are near! Else were it not so still
This evening,
So human-still and warm and kind.
'Tis as of many moved
In unison of will and mind to sing
Low litanies to that which they had wholly loved.
How sweet it is
Under the perishable trees

To hear the wings of the one human soul
Fluttering up
In Time's dark branches to the lucid stars.
More than Despair is Hope,
And more than Hope is the Hope that despairs,
And more than all
Is Love that disbelieves the real years.

Here in this place
One August morning--when the earlier crowd,
Showmen or populace,
From many a region and of curious face,
Abroad the holiday
Quaint in the sun with garb and gesture glowed,
And, speaking grave or gay
The various accent of their lonely race,
Between the shadowy gold bazars idled away--
She, as a cloud
All sunrise-coloured and alone,
Thro' the blue summer tremblin came to me.
I dried her tears and here we sat us down.
Little by little, as tripping oversea
On flame-tipped waves the daylight's long surprise
Sweeps world and heaven in one,
So love across our eyes
Broke with the sun.
Happy we walked away. The fairy sight
Untangling shook a thousand chequered fires.
Low under scarlet awnings rung on rung,
Copper and bronze and azurite,
Ranged on the sagging wires
The trifles clinked in the red light.
From beam and niche vendors in strange attires,
Slipping dark hands along,
Unhooked the quiet wool, the gaudy chintz,
Or, precious where it hung,
Long fluid jewels of auroral silk:
And dryly to the sense
Their attars old and dusty powders clung.
Still passed the weavers and the dyers
Many a jar, a bowl
Turned as of water or of milk--

Glazen and jade and porcelain--
Far down the shadows colouring stole.
As one had shook a jungle after rain
And basketing the drops at random spilled
Their red and green, their topaz and sapphires,
All were here piled.--
And wandering out we smiled
To see across the glowing noon so high,
So high and far,
The incandescent minarets and domes and spires
Lifting the fusion of the coloured choirs
To the sky
Softly--save only where
A flag or pennant fallen slack
Shotted the dazzling air.
I came to-day to find her, I came back
Humble with sweet desires
Across this dun September atmosphere
To her.
I came, I knew she was not here:
Now let me go.
I came, I come because I love her so.

Not in the acres of the Soul
Does Nature drive the ploughshare of her change.
It is not strange
That here in part and whole
The faithful eye sees all things as before.
For past the newer flowers,
Above the recent trees and clouds come o'er,
Love finds the other hours
Once more.

Trumbull Stickney

In Ampezzo

Only once more and not again--the larches
Shake to the wind their echo, "Not again,"--
We see, below the sky that over-arches
Heavy and blue, the plain

Between Tofana lying and Cristallo
In meadowy earths above the ringing stream:
Whence interchangeably desire may follow,
Hesitant as in dream,

At sunset, south, by lilac promontories
Under green skies at Italy, or forth
By calms of morning beyond Lavinores
Tyrolward and to north:

As now, this last of latter days, when over
The brownish field by peasants are undone
Some widths of grass, some plots of mountain clover
Under the autumn sun,

With honey-warm perfume that risen lingers
In mazes of low heat, or takes the air,
Passing delicious as a woman's fingers
Passing aid the hair;

When scythes are swishing and the mower's muscle
Spans a repeated crescent to and fro,
Or in dry stalks of corn the sickles rustle,
Tangle, detach and go,

Far thro' the wide blue day and greening meadow
Whose blots of amber beaded are with sheaves,
Wherever pallidly a cloud-shadow
Deadens the earth and leaves:

Whilst high around and near, their heads of iron
Sunken in sky whose azure overlights
Ravine and edges, stand the gray and maron
Desolate Dolomites,--

And older than decay from the small summit
Unfolds a stream of pebbly wreckage down
Under the suns of midday, like some comet
Struck into gravel stone.

Faintly across this gold and amethystine
September, images of summer fade;
And gentle dreams now freshen on the pristine
Viols, awhile unplayed,

Of many a place where lovingly we wander,
More dearly held that quickly we forsake,--
A pine by sullen coasts, an oleander
Reddening on the lake.

And there, each year with more familiar motion,
From many a bird and windy forestries,
Or along shaking fringes of the ocean,
Vapours of music rise.

From many easts the morning gives her splendour;
The shadows fill with colours we forget;
Remembered tints at evening grow tender,
Tarnished with violet.

Let us away! soon sheets of winter metal
On this discoloured mountain-land will close,
While elsewhere Spring-time weaves a crimson petal,
Builds and perfumes a rose.

Away! for her the mountain sinks in gravel.
Let us forget the unhappy site with change,
And go, if only happiness be travel
After the new and strange:--

Unless 'twere better to be very single,
To follow some diviner monotone,
And in all beauties, where ourselves commingle,
Love but a love, but one,

Across this shadowy minute of our living,

What time our hearts so magically sing,
To meditate our fever, simply giving
All in a little thing?

Just as here, past yon dumb and melancholy
Sameness of ruin, while the mountains ail,
Summer and sunset-coloured autumn slowly
Dissipate down the vale;

And all these lines along the sky that measure
Sorapis and the rocks of Mezzodi
Crumble by foamy miles into the azure
Mediterranean sea:

Whereas to-day at sunrise, under brambles,
A league above the moss and dying pines
I picked this little--in my hand that trembles--
Parcel of columbines.

Trumbull Stickney

In The Past

There lies a somnolent lake
Under a noiseless sky,
Where never the mornings break
Nor the evenings die.

Mad flakes of colour
Whirl on its even face
Iridescent and streaked with pallour;
And, warding the silent place,

The rocks rise sheer and gray
From the sedgeless brink to the sky
Dull-lit with the light of pale half-day
Thro' a void space and dry.

And the hours lag dead in the air
With a sense of coming eternity
To the heart of the lonely boatman there:
That boatman am I,

I, in my lonely boat,
A waif on the somnolent lake,
Watching the colours creep and float
With the sinuous track of a snake.

Now I lean o'er the side
And lazy shades in the water see,
Lapped in the sweep of a sluggish tide
Crawled in from the living sea;

And next I fix mine eyes,
So long that the heart declines,
On the changeless face of the open skies
Where no star shines;

And now to the rocks I turn,
To the rocks, around
That lie like walls of a circling sun
Wherein lie bound

The waters that feel my powerless strength
And meet my homeless oar
Labouring over their ashen length
Never to find a shore.

But the gleam still skims
At times on the somnolent lake,
And a light there is that swims
With the whirl of a snake;

And tho' dead be the hours i' the air,
And dayless the sky,
The heart is alive of the boatman there:
That boatman am I.

Trumbull Stickney

Leave Him Now Quiet By The Way

Leave him now quiet by the way
To rest apart.
I know what draws him to the dust alway
And churns him in the builder's lime:
He has the fright of time.

I heard it knocking in his breast
A minute since;
His human eyes did wince,
He stubborned like the massive slaughter beast
And as a thing o'erwhelmed with sound
Stood bolted to the ground.

Leave him, for rest alone can cure—
If cure there be—
This waif upon the sea.
He is of those who slanted the great door
And listened—wretched little lad—
To what they said.

Trumbull Stickney

Live Blindly

Live blindly and upon the hour. The Lord,
Who was the Future, died full long ago.
Knowledge which is the Past is folly. Go,
Poor child, and be not to thyself abhorred.
Around thine earth sun-winged winds do blow
And planets roll; a meteor draws his sword;
The rainbow breaks his seven-coloured chord
And the long strips of river-silver flow:
Awake! Give thyself to the lovely hours.
Drinking their lips, catch thou the dream in flight
About their fragile hairs' aerial gold.
Thou art divine, thou livest, -- as of old
Apollo springing naked to the light,
And all his island shivered into flowers.

Trumbull Stickney

Loneliness

These autumn gardens, russet, gray and brown,
The sward with shrivelled foliage strown,
The shrubs and trees
By weary wings of sunshine overflown
And timid silences,--

Since first you, darling, called my spirit yours,
Seem happy, and the gladness pours
From day to day,
And yester-year across this year endures
Unto next year away.

Now in these places where I used to rove
And give the dropping leaves my love
And weep to them,
They seem to fall divinely from above,
Like to a diadem

Closing in one with the disheartened flowers.
High up the migrant birds in showers
Shine in the sky,
And all the movement of the natural hours
Turns into melody.

Trumbull Stickney

Mnemosyne

It 's autumn in the country I remember.

How warm a wind blew here about the ways!
And shadows on the hillside lay to slumber
During the long sun-sweetened summer-days.

It's cold abroad the country I remember.

The swallows veering skimmed the golden grain
At midday with a wing aslant and limber;
And yellow cattle browsed upon the plain.

It 's empty down the country I remember.

I had a sister lovely in my sight:
Her hair was dark, her eyes were very sombre;
We sang together in the woods at night.

It 's lonely in the country I remember.

The babble of our children fills my ears,
And on our hearth I stare the perished ember
To flames that show all starry thro' my tears.

It 's dark about the country I remember.

There are the mountains where I lived. The path
Is slushed with cattle-tracks and fallen timber,
The stumps are twisted by the tempests' wrath.

But that I knew these places are my own,
I 'd ask how came such wretchedness to cumber
The earth, and I to people it alone.

It rains across the country I remember.

Trumbull Stickney

Mt. Lykaion

Alone on Lykaion since man hath been
Stand on the height two columns, where at rest
Two eagles hewn of gold sit looking East
Forever; and the sun goes down between.
Far down the mountain's oval green
An order keeps the falling stones abreast.
Below within the chaos last and least
A river like a curl of light is seen.
Beyond the river lies the even sea,
Beyond the sea another ghost of sky,--
O God, support the sickness of my eye
Lest the far space and long antiquity
Suck out my heart, and on this awful ground
The great wind kill my little shell with sound.

Trumbull Stickney

Near Helikon

By such an all-embalming summer day
As sweetens now among the mountain pines
Down to the cornland yonder and the vines,
To where the sky and sea are mixed in gray,
How do all things together take their way
Harmonious to the harvest, bringing wines
And bread and light and whatsoe'er combines
In the large wreath to make it round and gay.
To me my troubled life doth now appear
Like scarce distinguishable summits hung
Around the blue horizon: places where
Not even a traveller purposeth to steer, --
Whereof a migrant bird in passing sung,
And the girl closed her window not to hear.

Trumbull Stickney

On Some Shells Found Inland

These are my murmur-laden shells that keep
A fresh voice tho' the years be very gray.
The wave that washed their lips and tuned their lay
Is gone, gone with the faded ocean sweep,
The royal tide, gray ebb and sunken neap
And purple midday,--gone! To this hot clay
Must sing my shells, where yet the primal day,
Its roar and rhythm and splendour will not sleep.
What hand shall join them to their proper sea
If all be gone? Shall they forever feel
Glories undone and world that cannot be?--
'Twere mercy to stamp out this aged wrong,
Dash them to earth and crunch them with the heel
And make a dust of their seraphic song.

Trumbull Stickney

Once

That day her eyes were deep as night.
She had the motion of the rose,
The bird that veers across the light,
The waterfall that leaps and throws
Its irised spindrift to the sun.
She seemed a wind of music passing on.

Alone I saw her that one day
Stand in the window of my life.
Her sudden hand melted away
Under my lips, and without strife
I held her in my arms awhile
And drew into my lips her living smile, --

Now many a day ago and year!
Since when I dream and lie awake
In summer nights to feel her near,
And from the heavy darkness break
Glitters, till all my spirit swims
And her hand hovers on my shaking limbs.

If once again before I die
I drank the laughter of her mouth
And quenched my fever utterly,
I say, and should it cost my youth,
'T were well! for I no more should wait
Hammering midnight on the doors of fate.

Trumbull Stickney

Service

Chide me not, darling, that I sing
Familiar thoughts and metres old:
Nay, do not scold
My spirit's childish uttering.

I know not why 't is that or this
I murmur to you thus or so:
Only I know
It throbs across my silences,

It blows over my heart,—a long
Infinite wind, again, again!
Again! and then
My life kneels down into a song.

Trumbull Stickney

Sir, Say No More

Sir, say no more.
Within me 't is as if
The green and climbing eyesight of a cat
Crawled near my mind's poor birds.

Trumbull Stickney

Six O'Clock

Now burst above the city's cold twilight
The piercing whistles and the tower-clocks:
For day is done. Along the frozen docks
The workmen set their ragged shirts aright.
Thro' factory doors a stream of dingy light
Follows the scrimmage as it quickly flocks
To hut and home among the snow's gray blocks. --
I love you, human labourers. Good-night!
Good-night to all the blackened arms that ache!
Good-night to every sick and sweated brow,
To the poor girl that strength and love forsake,
To the poor boy who can no more! I vow
The victim soon shall shudder at the stake
And fall in blood: we bring him even now.

Trumbull Stickney

The Melancholy Year Is Dead With Rain

The melancholy year is dead with rain.
Drop after drop on every branch pursues.
From far away beyond the drizzled flues
A twilight saddens to the window pane.
And dimly thro' the chambers of the brain,
From place to place and gently touching, moves
My one and irrecoverable love's
Dear and lost shape one other time again.
So in the last of autumn for a day
Summer or summer's memory returns.
So in a mountain desolation burns
Some rich belated flower, and with the gray
Sick weather, in the world of rotting ferns
From out the dreadful stones it dies away.

Trumbull Stickney

The Passions That We Fought With

The passions that we fought with and subdued
Never quite die. In some maimed serpent's coil
They lurk, ready to spring and vindicate
That power was once our torture and our lord.

Trumbull Stickney

They Lived Enamoured Of The Lovely Moon

They lived enamoured of the lovely moon,
The dawn and twilight on their gentle lake.
Then Passion marvellously born did shake
Their breast and drave them into the mid-noon.
Their lives did shrink to one desire, and soon
They rose fire-eyed to follow in the wake
Of one eternal thought,--when sudden brake
Their hearts. They died, in miserable swoon.
Of all their agony not a sound was heard.
The glory of the Earth is more than they.
She asks her lovely image of the day:
A flower grows, a million boughs are green,
And over moving ocean-waves the bird
Chases his shadow and is no more seen.

Trumbull Stickney

Tho' Lack Of Laurels

Tho' lack of laurels and of wreaths not one
Prove you our lives abortive, shall we yet
Vaunt us our single aim, our hearts full set
To win the guerdon which is never won.
Witness, a purpose never is undone.
And tho' fate drain our seas of violet
To gather round our lives her wide-hung net,
Memories of hopes that are not shall atone.
Not wholly starless is the ill-starred life,
Not all is night in failure, and the shield
Sometimes well grasped, tho' shattered in the strife.
And here while all the lowering heaven is ringed
With our loud death-shouts echoed, on the field
Stands forth our Nikè, proud, tho' broken-winged.

Trumbull Stickney

You Say, Columbus With His Argosies

You say, Columbus with his argosies
Who rash and greedy took the screaming main
And vanished out before the hurricane
Into the sunset after merchandise,
Then under western palms with simple eyes
Trafficked and robbed and triumphed home again:
You say this is the glory of the brain
And human life no other use than this?
I then do answering say to you: The line
Of wizards and of saviours, keeping trust
In that which made them pensive and divine,
Passes before us like a cloud of dust.
What were they? Actors, ill and mad with wine,
And all their language babble and disgust.

Trumbull Stickney