

Classic Poetry Series

William Gilmore Simms
- poems -

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William Gilmore Simms(1806 - 1870)

Simms was born in Charleston, S.C., and lived much of his life in or near it.

The embodiment of southern letters, Simms was also an influential spokesman for what he saw as the region's social and political concerns. A unionist in the 1832 nullification controversy, in the 1840s he supported the intensely nationalistic Young America group, which pushed for American freedom from British literary models. Active in politics, he served in the South Carolina Legislature from 1844 to 1846, conferred with prominent planters like James Henry Hammond about southern agricultural policies, conducted a copious correspondence with fire-eating Beverley Tucker of Virginia about slavery and secession, and helped develop the proslavery argument. As his southern nationalism mounted in the 1840s and 1850s, he supported the annexation of Texas and advocated the creation of a southern empire in the Caribbean. When the Civil War broke out, he served as advisor to several southern politicians and made elaborate proposals for Confederate military defenses. During the war he wrote little of literary importance save the lively backwoods novel *Paddy McGann* (1863); after it, he ruined his health by the incessant writing and editing chores he took on to support his impoverished family. Energetic and often humorous, his work is important for its sweeping picture of the colonial and antebellum South in its regional diversity and also for its representation of continuing southern literary and intellectual issues.

His extensive knowledge of southern regions influenced novels and tales set in the Low Country, such as *The Yemassee* (1835), *The Partisan* (1835), and *The Golden Christmas* (1852), which trace the development of the region from the colonial era through the Revolution and into the antebellum period. Simms also published border and mountain romances like *Richard Hurdis* (1838) and *Voltmeier* (1869), set in the antebellum backwoods South.

He gave a comprehensive picture of his region in its historical and cultural diversity - of the Low Country with its class hierarchy, its agrarian economy, its increasingly conservative politics, and its keen sectional self-consciousness; of the Gulf South, both civilized and violent, part plantation, part frontier; and of the Appalachian Mountain South in its pioneer phase. His writing exhibits qualities that mark southern literature from its beginnings: a sense of time and history, a love of southern landscape, a respect for southern social institutions, and a firm belief in class stratification and enlightened upper-class rule. In addition to fiction, poetry, drama, orations, and literary criticism, he wrote a history and a geography of South Carolina and biographies of Francis Marion,

Captain John Smith, the Chevalier Bayard, and Nathanael Greene. At the beginning and near the end of his career, he edited several South Carolina newspapers, and in the 1840's and 1850s he served as editor of important southern journals, among them the *Magnolia*, the *Southern and Western*, and the proslavery *Southern Quarterly Review*, which gave voice to sectional issues.

Blessings On Children

Blessings on the blessing children, sweetest gifts of Heaven to earth,
Filling all the heart with gladness, filling all the house with mirth;
Bringing with them native sweetness, pictures of the primal bloom,
Which the bliss for ever gladdens, of the region whence they come;
Bringing with them joyous impulse of a state with outen care,
And a buoyant faith in being, which makes all in nature fair;
Not a doubt to dim the distance, not a grief to vex thee, nigh,
And a hope that in existence finds each hour a luxury;
Going singing, bounding, brightening--never fearing as they go,
That the innocent shall tremble, and the loving find a foe;
In the daylight, in the starlight, still with thought that freely flies,
Prompt and joyous, with no question of the beauty in the skies;
Genial fancies winning raptures, as the bee still sucks her store,
All the present still a garden gleaned a thousand times before;
All the future, but a region, where the happy serving thought,
Still depicts a thousand blessings, by the winged hunter caught;
Life a chase where blushing pleasures only seem to strive in flight,
Lingering to be caught, and yielding gladly to the proud delight;
As the maiden, through the alleys, looking backward as she flies,
Woos the fond pursuer onward, with the love-light in her eyes.

Oh! the happy life in children, still restoring joy to ours,
Making for the forest music, planting for the way-side flowers;
Back recalling all the sweetness, in a pleasure pure as rare,
Back the past of hope and rapture bringing to the heart of care.
How, as swell the happy voices, bursting through the shady grove,
Memories take the place of sorrows, time restores the sway to love!
We are in the shouting comrades, shaking off the load of years,
Thought forgetting strifes and trials, doubts and agonies and tears;
We are in the bounding urchin, as o'er hill and plain he darts,
Share the struggle and the triumph, gladdening in his heart of hearts;
What an image of the vigor and the glorious grace we knew,
When to eager youth from boyhood, at a single bound we grew!
Even such our slender beauty, such upon our cheek the glow,
In our eyes the life and gladness--of our blood the overflow.
Bless the mother of the urchin! in his form we see her truth:
He is now the very picture of the memories in our youth;
Never can we doubt the forehead, nor the sunny flowing hair,
Nor the smiling in the dimple speaking chin and cheek so fair:

Bless the mother of the young one, he hath blended in his grace,
All the hope and joy and beauty, kindling once in either face.

Oh! the happy faith of children! that is glad in all it sees,
And with never need of thinking, pierces still its mysteries,
In simplicity profoundest, in their soul abundance blest,
Wise in value of the sportive, and in restlessness at rest,
Lacking every creed, yet having faith so large in all they see,
That to know is still to gladden, and 'tis rapture but to be.
What trim fancies bring them flowers; what rare spirits walk their wood,
What a wondrous world the moonlight harbors of the gay and good!
Unto them the very tempest walks in glories grateful still,
And the lightning gleams, a seraph, to persuade them to the hill:
'Tis a sweet and loving spirit, that throughout the midnight rains,
Broods beside the shuttered windows, and with gentle love complains;
And how wooing, how exalting, with the richness of her dyes,
Spans the painter of the rainbow, her bright arch along the skies,
With a dream like Jacob's ladder, showing to the fancy's sight,
How 'twere easy for the sad one to escape to worlds of light!
Ah! the wisdom of such fancies, and the truth in every dream,
That to faith confiding offers, cheering every gloom, a gleam!
Happy hearts, still cherish fondly each delusion of your youth,
Joy is born of well believing, and the fiction wraps the truth.

William Gilmore Simms

Flight To Nature

SICK of the crowd, the toil, the strife,
Sweet Nature, how I turn to thee,
Seeking for renovated life,
By brawling brook and shady tree!

I knew thy rocks had spells of old,
To soothe the wanderer's woe to calm,
And in thy waters, clear and cold,
My fev'rish brow would seek for balm.

I've bent beneath thy ancient oak,
And sought for slumber in its shade,
And, as the clouds above me broke,
I dream'd to find the boon I pray'd;

For light--a blessed light--was given,
Wide streaming round me from above,
And in the deep, deep vaults of heaven,
There shone, methought, a look of love.

And, through the long, long summer hours,
When every bird had won its wing,
How sweet to think, amidst thy flowers,
That youth might yet renew its spring;--

That sacred season of the heart,
When every pulse with hope is strong,
And, still untaught by selfish art,
Truth fears no guile, and love no wrong.

And who, but nature's self, could yield
The blessing in the prayer I made,
Throned in her realm of wood and field,
Of rocky realm and haunted shade?

Who, but that magic queen, whose sway
Drives winter from his path of strife,
Whilst all her thousand fingers play,
With bud and bird, in games of life!

With these a kindred life I ask,--
Not wealth that mortals vainly seek;
But, in heaven's sunshine let me bask,
My heart as glowing as my cheek;--

An idle heart, that would not heed
That chiding voice, when duty comes,
To drag the soul, but freshly freed,
Back to cold toils and weary glooms.

No lure she finds in mortal schemes,
Which wiser fancies still reprove,--
Far happier in her woodland dreams,
With one sweet teacher, taught by love!

Thou, Nature, that magician be,
Restore each dream that taught the boy,
That warm'd his hope, that made him free,
While wisdom took the shape of joy;

And I will bless thee with a song,
As fond as hers, that idle bird,
That sings above me all day long,
As if she knew I watch'd and heard.

William Gilmore Simms

Fort Wagner

I. Glory unto the gallant boys who stood
At Wagner, and, unflinching, sought the van;
Dealing fierce blows, and shedding precious blood,
For homes as precious, and dear rights of man!
They've won the meed, and they shall have the glory;--
Song, with melodious memories, shall repeat
The legend, which shall grow to themes for story,
Told through long ages, and forever sweet!

II.

High honor to our youth--our sons and brothers,
Georgians and Carolinians, where they stand!
They will not shame their birthrights, or their mothers,
But keep, through storm, the bulwarks of the land!
They feel that they must conquer! Not to do it,
Were worse than death--perdition! Should they fail,
The innocent races yet unborn shall rue it,
The whole world feel the wound, and nations wail!

III.

No! They must conquer in the breach or perish!
Assured, in the last consciousness of breath,
That love shall deck their graves, and memory cherish
Their deeds, with honors that shall sweeten death!
They shall have trophies in long future hours,
And loving recollections, which shall be
Green, as the summer leaves, and fresh as flowers,
That, through all seasons, bloom eternally!

IV.

Their memories shall be monuments, to rise
Next those of mightiest martyrs of the past;
Beacons, when angry tempests sweep the skies,
And feeble souls bend crouching to the blast!
A shrine for thee, young Cheves, well devoted,

Most worthy of a great, illustrious sire;--
A niche for thee, young Haskell, nobly noted,
When skies and seas around thee shook with fire!

V.

And others as well chronicled shall be!
What though they fell with unrecorded name--
They live among the archives of the free,
With proudest title to undying fame!
The unchisell'd marble under which they sleep,
Shall tell of heroes, fearless still of fate;
Not asking if their memories shall keep,
But if they nobly served, and saved, the State!

VI.

For thee, young Fortress Wagner--thou shalt wear
Green laurels, worthy of the names that now,
Thy sister forts of Moultrie, Sumter, bear!
See that thou lift'st, for aye, as proud a brow!
And thou shalt be, to future generations,
A trophied monument; whither men shall come
In homage; and report to distant nations,
A SHRINE, which foes shall never make a TOMB!

William Gilmore Simms

Hast Thou A Song For A Flower.

I.

HAST thou a song for a flower,
Such as, if breathed in its ear,
Would waken in beauty's own bower
The spirit most fit to be there?
Then, minstrel, I challenge thy power--
Such song, if thou hast, sing it here!--
Here, where the breeze o'erwearied,
With his travel o'er ocean creeps,
And on the green leaf by her lattice,
Sinks languidly down and sleeps.

II.

For her the sweet music thou bringest
Must in a true spirit be wrought,
And the passion of mine thou singest
Must be pure as the child's first thought.
If none such within thee springest,
Away, for thy presence is naught.
Far better the breeze, at waking,
Should tell her that hopeless I come,
With itself, to the leaf at her lattice,
And laid me down, dreaming but dumb.

William Gilmore Simms

Morris Island

Oh! from the deeds well done, the blood well shed
In a good cause springs up to crown the land
With ever-during verdure, memory fed,
Wherever freedom rears one fearless band,
The genius, which makes sacred time and place,
Shaping the grand memorials of a race!

The barren rock becomes a monument,
The sea-shore sands a shrine;
And each brave life, in desperate conflict spent,
Grows to a memory which prolongs a line!

Oh! barren isle--oh! fruitless shore,
Oh! realm devoid of beauty--how the light
From glory's sun streams down for evermore,
Hallowing your ancient barrenness with bright!

Brief dates, your lowly forts; but full of glory,
Worthy a life-long story;
Remembered, to be chronicled and read,
When all your gallant garrisons are dead;
And to be sung
While liberty and letters find a tongue!

Taught by the grandsires at the ingle-blaze,
Through the long winter night;
Pored over, memoried well, in winter days,
While youthful admiration, with delight,
Hangs, breathless, o'er the tale, with silent praise;
Seasoning delight with wonder, as he reads
Of stubborn conflict and audacious deeds;
Watching the endurance of the free and brave,
Through the protracted struggle and close fight,
Contending for the lands they may not save,
Against the felon, and innumerable foe;
Still struggling, though each rampart proves a grave.
For home, and all that's dear to man below!

Earth reels and ocean rocks at every blow;

But still undaunted, with a martyr's might,
They make for man a new Thermopylae;
And, perishing for freedom, still go free!
Let but each humble islet of our coast
Thus join the terrible issue to the last;
And never shall the invader make his boast
Of triumph, though with mightiest panoply
He seeks to rend and rive, to blight and blast!

William Gilmore Simms

Ode--

I

Do ye quail but to hear, Carolinians,
The first foot-tramp of Tyranny's minions?
Have ye buckled on armor, and brandished the spear,
But to shrink with the trumpet's first peal on the ear?
Why your forts now embattled on headland and height,
Your sons all in armor, unless for the fight?
Did ye think the mere show of your guns on the wall,
And your shouts, would the souls of the heathen appal?
That his lusts and his appetites, greedy as Hell,
Led by Mammon and Moloch, would sink at a spell;--
Nor strive, with the tiger's own thirst, lest the flesh
Should be torn from his jaws, while yet bleeding afresh.

II.

For shame! To the breach, Carolinians!--
To the death for your sacred dominions!--
Homes, shrines, and your cities all reeking in flame,
Cry aloud to your souls, in their sorrow and shame;
Your greybeards, with necks in the halter--
Your virgins, defiled at the altar,--
In the loathsome embrace of the felon and slave,
Touch loathsomer far than the worm of the grave!
Ah! God! if you fail in this moment of gloom!
How base were the weakness, how horrid the doom!
With the fiends in your streets howling paeans,
And the Beast o'er another Orleans!

III.

Do ye quail, as on yon little islet
They have planted the feet that defile it?
Make its sands pure of taint, by the stroke of the sword,
And by torrents of blood in red sacrifice pour'd!
Doubts are Traitors, if once they persuade you to fear,
That the foe, in his foothold, is safe from your spear!
When the foot of pollution is set on your shores,
What sinew and soul should be stronger than yours?

By the fame--by the shame--of your sires,
Set on, though each freeman expires;
Better fall, grappling fast with the foe, to their graves,
Than groan in your fetters, the slaves of your slaves.

IV.

The voice of your loud exultation
Hath rung, like a trump, through the nation,
How loudly, how proudly, of deeds to be done,
The blood of the sire in the veins of the son!
Old Moultrie and Sumter still keep at your gates,
And the foe in his foothold as patiently waits.
He asks, with a taunt, by your patience made bold,
If the hot spur of Percy grows suddenly cold--
Makes merry with boasts of your city his own,
And the Chivalry fled, ere his trumpet is blown;
Upon them, O sons of the mighty of yore,
And fatten the sands with their Sodomite gore!

V.

Where's the dastard that cowers and falters
In the sight of his hearthstones and altars?
With the faith of the free in the God of the brave,
Go forth; ye are mighty to conquer and save!
By the blue Heaven shining above ye,
By the pure-hearted thousands that love ye,
Ye are armed with a might to prevail in the fight,
And an aegis to shield and a weapon to smite!
Then fail not, and quail not; the foe shall prevail not:
With the faith and the will, ye shall conquer him still.
To the knife--with the knife, Carolinians,
For your homes, and your sacred dominions.

William Gilmore Simms

Ode--

I.

Our city by the sea,
As the rebel city known,
With a soul and spirit free
As the waves that make her zone,
Stands in wait for the fate
From the angry arm of hate;
But she nothing fears the terror of his blow;
She hath garrisoned her walls,
And for every son that falls,
She will spread a thousand palls
For-the foe!

II.

Old Moultrie at her gate,
Clad in arms and ancient fame.
Grimly watching, stands elate
To deliver bolt and flame!
Brave the band, at command,
To illumine sea and land
With a glory that shall honor days of yore;
And, as racers for their goals,
A thousand fiery souls,
While the drum of battle rolls,
Line the shore.

III.

Lo! rising at his side,
As if emulous to share
His old historic pride,
The vast form of Sumter there!
Girt by waves, which he braves
Though the equinoctial raves,
As the mountain braves the lightning on his steep;
And, like tigers crouching round,
Are the tribute forts that bound
All the consecrated ground,

By the deep!

IV.

It was calm, the April noon,
When, in iron-castled towers,
Our haughty foe came on,
With his aggregated powers;
All his might 'gainst the right,
Now embattled for the fight,
With Hell's hate and venom working in his heart;
A vast and dread array,
Glooming black upon the day,
Hell's passions all in play,
With Hell's art.

V.

But they trouble not the souls
Of our Carolina host,[1]
And the drum of battle rolls,
While each hero seeks his post;
Firm, though few, sworn to do,
Their old city full in view,
The brave city of their sires and their dead;
There each freeman had his brood,
All the dear ones of his blood,
And he knew they watching stood,
In their dread!

VI.

To the bare embattled height,
Then our gallant colonel sprung--
'Bid them welcome to the fight,'
Were the accents of his tongue--
'Music! band, pour out--grand--
The free song of Dixie Land!
Let it tell them we are joyful that they come!
Bid them welcome, drum and flute,
Nor be your cannon mute,
Give them chivalrous salute--

To their doom!'[2]

VII.

Out spoke an eager gun,
From the walls of Moultrie then;
And through clouds of sulph'rous dun,
Rose a shout of thousand men,
As the shot, hissing hot,
Goes in lightning to the spot--
Goes crashing wild through timber and through mail;
Then roared the storm from all,
Moultrie's ports and Sumter's wall--
Bursting bomb and driving ball--
Hell in hail!

VIII.

Full a hundred cannon roared
The dread welcome to the foe,
And his felon spirit cowered,
As he crouched beneath the blow!
As each side opened wide
To the iron and the tide,
He lost his faith in armor and in art;
And, with the loss of faith,
Came the dread of wounds and scath--
And the felon fear of death
Wrung his heart!

IX.

Quenched then his foul desires;
In his mortal pain and fear,
How feeble grew his fires,
How stayed his fell career!
How each keel, made to reel
'Neath our thunder, seems to kneel,
Their turrets staggering wildly, to and fro, blind and lame;
Ironsides and iron roof,
Held no longer bullet-proof,
Steal away, shrink aloof,

In their shame!

X.

But our lightnings follow fast,
With a vengeance sharp and hot;
Our bolts are on the blast,
And they rive with shell and shot!
Huge the form which they warm
With the hot breath of the storm;
Dread the crash which follows as each Titan mass is struck--
They shiver as they fly,
While their leader, drifting nigh,
Sinks, choking with the cry--
'Keokuk!'

XI.

To the brave old city, joy!
For that the hostile race,
Commissioned to destroy,
Hath fled in sore disgrace!
That our sons, at their guns,
Have beat back the modern Huns--
Have maintained their household fanes and their fires;
And free from taint and scath,
Have kept the fame and faith
(And will keep, through blood and death)
Of their sires!

XII.

To the Lord of Hosts the glory,
For His the arm and might,
That have writ for us the story,
And have borne us through the fight!
His our shield in that field--
Voice that bade us never yield;
Oh! had he not been with us through the terrors of that day?
His strength hath made us strong,
Cheered the right and crushed the wrong,
To His temple let us throng--

PRAISE AND PRAY!

William Gilmore Simms

Ode--Shell The Old City! Shell!

I.

Shell the old city I shell!
Ye myrmidons of Hell;
Ye serve your master well,
With hellish arts!
Hurl down, with bolt and fire,
The grand old shrines, the spire;
But know, your demon ire
Subdues no hearts!

II.

There, we defy ye still,
With sworn and resolute will;
Courage ye cannot kill
While we have breath!
Stone walls your bolts may break,
But, ere our souls ye shake,
Of the whole land we'll make
One realm of death!

III.

Dear are our homes! our eyes
Weep at their sacrifice;
And, with each bolt that flies,
Each roof that falls,
The pang extorts the tear,
That things so precious, dear
To memory, love, and care,
Sink with our walls.

IV.

Trophies of ancient time,
When, with great souls, sublime,
Opposing force and crime,
Our fathers fought;
Relics of golden hours,

When, for our shrines and bowers,
Genius, with magic powers,
Her triumphs wrought!

V.

Each Sabbath-hallowed dome,
Each ancient family home,
The dear old southwest room,
All trellised round;
Where gay, bright summer vines,
Linked in fantastic twines
With the sun's blazing lines,
Rubied the ground!

VI.

Homes, sacred to the past,
Which bore the hostile blast,
Though Spain, France, Britain cast
Their shot and shell!
Tombs of the mighty dead,
That in our battles bled,
When on our infant head
These furies fell!

VII.

Halls which the foreign guest
Found of each charm possessed,
With cheer unstinted blessed,
And noblest grace;
Where, drawing to her side
The stranger, far and wide,
Frank courtesy took pride
To give him place!

VIII.

The shaded walks--the bowers
Where, through long summer hours,
Young Love first proved his powers

To win the prize;
Where every tree has heard
Some vows of love preferred,
And, with his leaves unstirred,
Watch'd lips and eyes.

IX.

Gardens of tropic blooms,
That, through the shaded rooms,
Sent Orient-winged perfumes
With dusk and dawn;
The grand old laurel, tall,
As sovereign over all,
And, from the porch and hall,
The verdant lawn.

X.

Oh! when we think of these
Old homes, ancestral trees;
Where, in the sun and breeze,
At morn and even,
Was to enjoy the play
Of hearts at holiday,
And find, in blooms of May,
Foretaste of Heaven!

XI.

Where, as we cast our eyes
On thing's of precious prize,
Trophies of good and wise,
Grand, noble, brave;
And think of these, so late
Sacred to soul and state,
Doomed, as the wreck of fate,
By fiend and slave!--

XII.

The inevitable pain,

Coursing through blood and brain,
Drives forth, like winter rain,
The bitter tear!
We cannot help but weep,
From depth of hearts that keep
The memories, dread and deep.
To vengeance dear!

XIII.

Aye, for each tear we shed,
There shall be torrents red,
Not from the eye-founts fed,
But from the veins!
Bloody shall be the sweat,
Fiends, felons, that shall yet
Pay retribution's debt,
In torture's pains!

XIV.

Our tears shall naught abate,
Of what we owe to hate--
To the avenging fate--
To earth and Heaven!
And, soon or late, the hour
Shall bring th' atoning power,
When, through the clouds that lower,
The storm-bolt's driven!

XV.

Shell the old city--shell!
But, with each rooftree's knell,
Vows deep of vengeance fell,
Fire soul and eye!
With every tear that falls
Above our stricken walls
Each heart more fiercely calls,
'Avenge, or die!'

Song In March

NOW are the winds about us in their glee,
Tossing the slender tree;
Whirling the sands about his furious car,
March cometh from afar;
Breaks the sealed magic of old Winter's dreams,
And rends his glassy streams;
Chafing with potent airs, he fiercely takes
Their fetters from the lakes,
And, with a power by queenly Spring supplied,
Wakens the slumbering tide.

With a wild love he seeks young Summer's charms
And clasps her to his arms;
Lifting his shield between, he drives away
Old Winter from his prey;—
The ancient tyrant whom he boldly braves,
Goes howling to his caves;
And, to his northern realm compelled to fly,
Yields up the victory;
Melted are all his bands, o'erthrown his towers,
And March comes bringing flowers.

William Gilmore Simms

Sumter In Ruins

I.

Ye batter down the lion's den,
But yet the lordly beast g'oes free;
And ye shall hear his roar again,
From mountain height, from lowland glen,
From sandy shore and reedy fen--
Where'er a band of freeborn men
Rears sacred shrines to liberty.

II.

The serpent scales the eagle's nest,
And yet the royal bird, in air,
Triumphant wins the mountain's crest,
And sworn for strife, yet takes his rest,
And plumes, to calm, his ruffled breast,
Till, like a storm-bolt from the west,
He strikes the invader in his lair.

III.

What's loss of den, or nest, or home,
If, like the lion, free to go;--
If, like the eagle, wing'd to roam,
We span the rock and breast the foam,
Still watchful for the hour of doom,
When, with the knell of thunder-boom,
We bound upon the serpent foe!

IV.

Oh! noble sons of lion heart!
Oh! gallant hearts of eagle wing!
What though your batter'd bulwarks part,
Your nest be spoiled by reptile art--
Your souls, on wings of hate, shall start
For vengeance, and with lightning-dart,
Rend the foul serpent ere he sting!

V.

Your battered den, your shattered nest,
Was but the lion's crouching-place;--
It heard his roar, and bore his crest,
His, or the eagle's place of rest;--
But not the soul in either breast!
This arms the twain, by freedom bless'd,
To save and to avenge their race!

William Gilmore Simms

The Angel Of The Church

I.

Aye, strike with sacrilegious aim
The temple of the living God;
Hurl iron bolt and seething flame
Through aisles which holiest feet have trod;
Tear up the altar, spoil the tomb,
And, raging with demoniac ire,
Send down, in sudden crash of doom,
That grand, old, sky-sustaining spire.

II.

That spire, for full a hundred years,[1]
Hath been a people's point of sight;
That shrine hath warmed their souls to tears,
With strains well worthy Salem's height;
The sweet, clear music of its bells,
Made liquid soft in Southern air,
Still through the heart of memory swells,
And wakes the hopeful soul to prayer.

III.

Along the shores for many a mile,
Long ere they owned a beacon-mark,
It caught arid kept the Day-God's smile,
The guide for every wandering bark;[2]
Averting from our homes the scaith
Of fiery bolt, in storm-cloud driven,
The Pharos to the wandering faith,
It pointed every prayer to Heaven!

IV.

Well may ye, felons of the time,
Still loathing all that's pure and free,
Add this to many a thousand crime
'Gainst peace and sweet humanity:
Ye, who have wrapped our towns in flame,

Defiled our shrines, befouled our homes,
But fitly turn your murderous aim
Against Jehovah's ancient domes.

V.

Yet, though the grand old temple falls,
And downward sinks the lofty spire,
Our faith is stronger than our walls,
And soars above the storm and fire.
Ye shake no faith in souls made free
To tread the paths their fathers trod;
To fight and die for liberty,
Believing in the avenging God!

VI.

Think not, though long his anger stays,
His justice sleeps--His wrath is spent;
The arm of vengeance but delays,
To make more dread the punishment!
Each impious hand that lights the torch
Shall wither ere the bolt shall fall;
And the bright Angel of the Church,
With seraph shield avert the ball!

VII.

For still we deem, as taught of old,
That where the faith the altar builds,
God sends an angel from his fold,
Whose sleepless watch the temple shields,
And to his flock, with sweet accord,
Yields their fond choice, from THRONES and POWERS;
Thus, Michael, with his fiery sword
And golden shield, still champions ours!

VIII.

And he who smote the dragon down,
And chained him thousand years of time,
Need never fear the boa's frown,

Though loathsome in his spite and slime.
He, from the topmost height, surveys
And guards the shrines our fathers gave;
And we, who sleep beneath his gaze,
May well believe his power to save!

IX.

Yet, if it be that for our sin
Our angel's term of watch is o'er,
With proper prayer, true faith must win
The guardian watcher back once more I
Faith, brethren of the Church, and prayer--
In blood and sackcloth, if it need;
And still our spire shall rise in air,
Our temple, though our people bleed!

William Gilmore Simms

The Bard

Where dwells the spirit of the Bard--what sky
Persuades his daring wing,--
Folded in soft carnation, or in snow
Still sleeping, far o'er summits of the cloud,
And, with a seeming, sweet unconsciousness,
Wooing his plume, through baffling storms to fly,
Assured of all that ever yet might bless
The spirit, by love and loftiest hope made proud,
Would he but struggle for the dear caress!--
Or would his giant spring,
Impelled by holiest ire,
Assail the sullen summits of the storm,
Bent with broad breast and still impatient form,
Where clouds unfold themselves in leaping fire!
What vision wins his soul,--
What passion wings his flight,--
What dream of conquest woos his eager eye!--
How glows he with the strife,--
How spurns he at control,--
With what unmeasured rage would he defy
The foes that rise around and threaten life!--
His upward flight is fair,
He goes through parting air,
He breaks the barrier cloud, he sees the eye that's there,
The centre of the realm of storm that mocked him but to dare!
And now he grasps the prize,
That on the summit lies,
And binds the burning jewel to his brow;
Transfigured by its bright,
He wears a mightier face,
Nor grovels more in likeness of the earth;--
His wing a bolder flight,
His step a wilder grace,
He glows, the creature of a holier birth;--
Suns sing, and stars glow glad around his light;
And thus he speeds afar,
'Mid gathering sun and star,
The sov'reign, he, of worlds, where these but subjects are;
And men that marked his wing with mocking sight,

Do watch and wonder now;--
Will watch and worship with delight, anon,
When far from hiss and hate, his upward form hath gone!

Oh! ere that van was won,
Whose flight hath braved the sun--
Whose daring strength and aim
Have scaled the heights of cloud and bared their breasts of flame;
What lowly toil was done,--
How slow the moments sped,--
How bitter were the pangs that vexed the heart and head!
The burden which he bore,
The thorns his feet that tore,
The cruel wounds he suffered with no moan,--
Alone,--and still alone!--
Denial, which could smile,
Beholding, all the while,
How salter than the sea were the salt tears he shed;
And over all, the curse,
Than all of these more worse.
Prostrate, before the common way, to bear
The feet of hissing things,
Whose toil it is to tear,
And cramp the glorious creature born to wings!
Ah! should he once despair!--

Not lonely, with the sad nymph Solitude,
Deep in the cover of the ancient wood,
Where the sun leaves him, and the happy dawn,
Stealing with blushes over the gray lawn,
Stills finds him, all forgetful of the flight
Of hours, that passing still from dark to bright,
Know not to loiter,--all their progress naught:--
His eye, unconscious of the day, is bright
With inward vision; till, as sudden freed,
By the superior quest of a proud thought,
He darts away with an unmeasured speed;
His pinion purpling as he gains the height,
Where still, though all obscured from mortal sight,
He bathes him in the late smiles of the sun;--
And oh! the glory, as he guides his steed,

Flakes from his pinions falling, as they soar
 To mounts where Eos binds her buskins on
 And proud Artemis, watching by her well,
 For one,---sole fortunate of all his race,--
 With hand upon his mouth her beagle stays,
 Lest he should baffle sounds too sweet to lose,
 That even now are gliding with the dews.
 How nobly he arrays
 His robes for flight--his robes, the woven of songs,
 Borrowed from starry spheres,--with each a muse
 That, with her harmonies, maintains its dance
 Celestial, and its circles bright prolongs.
 Fair ever, but with warrior form and face,
 He stands before the eye of each young grace
 Beguiling the sweet passion from her cell,
 And still subjecting beauty by the glance,
 Which speaks his own subjection to a spell.
 The eldest born of rapture, that makes Love,
 At once submissive and the Conqueror.
 He conquers but to bring deliverance,
 And with deliverance light;--
 To conquer, he has only to explore,--
 And makes a permanent empire, but to spread,
 Though speeding on with unobserving haste,--
 A wing above the waste.
 A single feather from his pinion shed,
 A single beam of beauty from his eye,
 Takes captive of the dim sleeping realm below,
 Through eyes of truest worshippers, that straight
 Bring shouts to welcome and bright flowers to wreath
 His altars; and, as those, to life from death,
 Plucked sudden, in their gratitude and faith
 Deem him a god who wrought the miracle,--
 So do they take him to their shrines, and vow
 Their annual incense of sweet song and smell,
 For him to whom their happiness they owe.
 Thus goes he still from desert shore to shore,
 Where life in darkness droops, where beauty errs,
 Having no worshippers,
 And lacking sympathy for the light!--The eye
 That is the spirit of his wing, no more,
 This progress once begun, can cease to soar,

Suffers eclipse, or sleeps!--
No more be furled
The wing,--that, from the first decreed to fly,
Must speed to daily conquests, deep and high,
Till no domain of dark unlighted keeps,
And all the realm of strife beneath the sky
Grows one, in beauty and peace for evermore,--
Soothed to eternal office of delight,
By these that wing the soul on its first flight,
For these are the great spirits that shape the world!

William Gilmore Simms

The Decay Of A People

THIS the true sign of ruin to a race—
It undertakes no march, and day by day
Drowns in camp, or, with the laggard's pace,
Walks sentry o'er possessions that decay;
Destined, with sensible waste, to fleet away;—
For the first secret of continued power
Is the continued conquest;—all our sway
Hath surety in the uses of the hour;
If that we waste, in vain walled town and lofty tower!

William Gilmore Simms

The Lost Pleiad

NOT in the sky,
Where it was seen
So long in eminence of light serene,—
Nor on the white tops of the glistening wave,
Nor down in mansions of the hidden deep,
Though beautiful in green
And crystal, its great caves of mystery,—
Shall the bright watcher have
Her place, and, as of old, high station keep!

Gone! gone!
Oh! nevermore, to cheer
The mariner, who holds his course alone
On the Atlantic, through the weary night,
When the stars turn to watchers, and do sleep,
Shall it again appear,
With the sweet-loving certainty of light,
Down shining on the shut eyes of the deep!

The upward-looking shepherd on the hills
Of Chaldea, night-returning with his flocks,
He wonders why his beauty doth not blaze,
Gladding his gaze,—
And, from his dreary watch along the rocks,
Guiding him homeward o'er the perilous ways!
How stands he waiting still, in a sad maze,
Much wondering, while the drowsy silence fills
The sorrowful vault!—how lingers, in the hope that night
May yet renew the expected and sweet light,
So natural to his sight!

And lone,
Where, at the first, in smiling love she shone,
Brood the once happy circle of bright stars:
How should they dream, until her fate was known,
That they were ever confiscate to death?
That dark oblivion the pure beauty mars,
And, like the earth, its common bloom and breath,
That they should fall from high;

Their lights grow blasted by a touch, and die,
All their concerted springs of harmony
Snapt rudely, and the generous music gone!

Ah! still the strain
Of wailing sweetness fills the saddening sky;
The sister stars, lamenting in their pain
That one of the selectest ones must die,—
Must vanish, when most lovely, from the rest!
Alas! 't is ever thus the destiny.
Even Rapture's song hath evermore a tone
Of wailing, as for bliss too quickly gone.
The hope most precious is the soonest lost,
The flower most sweet is first to feel the frost.
Are not all short-lived things the loveliest?
And, like the pale star, shooting down the sky,
Look they not ever brightest, as they fly
From the lone sphere they blest!

William Gilmore Simms

The Swamp Fox

WE follow where the Swamp Fox guides,
His friends and merry men are we;
And when the troop of Tarleton rides,
We burrow in the cypress tree.
The turfy hammock is our bed,
Our home is in the red deer's den,
Our roof, the tree-top overhead,
For we are wild and hunted men.

We fly by day and shun its light,
But prompt to strike the sudden blow,
We mount and start with early night,
And through the forest track our foe,
And soon he hears our chargers leap,
The flashing saber blinds his eyes,
And ere he drives away his sleep,
And rushes from his camp, he dies.

Free bridle-bit, good gallant steed,
That will not ask a kind caress
To swim the Santee at our need,
When on his heels the foemen press -
The true heart and the ready hand,
The spirit stubborn to be free,
The twisted bore, the smiting brand -
And we are Marion's men, you see.

Now light the fire and cook the meal,
The last, perhaps, that we shall taste;
I hear the Swamp Fox round us steal,
And that's a sign we move in haste.
He whistles to the scouts, and hark!
You hear his order calm and low.
Come, wave your torch across the dark,
And let us see the boys that go.

We may not see their forms again,
God help 'em, should they find the strife!
For they are strong and fearless men,

And make no coward terms for life;
They'll fight as long as Marion bids,
And when he speaks the word to shy,
Then, not till then, they turn their steeds,
Through thickening shade and swamp to fly.

Now stir the fire and lie at ease -
The scouts are gone, and on the brush
I see the Colonel bend his knees,
To take his slumbers too. But hush!
He's praying, comrades; 't is not strange;
The man that's fighting day by day
May well, when night comes, take a change,
And down upon his knees to pray.

Break up that hoecake, boys, and hand
The sly and silent jug that 's there;
I love not it should idly stand
When Marion's men have need of cheer.
'T is seldom that our luck affords
A stuff like this we just have quaffed,
And dry potatoes on our boards
May always call for such a draught.

Now pile the brush and roll the log;
Hard pillow, but a soldier's head
That's half the time in brake and bog
Must never think of softer bed.
The owl is hooting to the night,
The cooter crawling o'er the bank,
And in that pond the flashing light
Tells where the alligator sank.

What! 't is the signal! start so soon,
And through the Santee swamp so deep,
Without the aid of friendly moon,
And we, Heaven help us! half asleep!

But courage, comrades! Marion leads;
The Swamp Fox takes us out to-night;
So clear your swords and spur your steeds,
There's goodly chance, I think, of fight.

We follow where the Swamp Fox guides,
We leave the swamp and cypress tree,
Our spurs are in our coursers' sides,
And ready for the strife are we.
The Tory camp is now in sight,
And there he cowers within his den;
He hears our shouts, he dreads the fight,
He fears, and flies from Marion's men.

William Gilmore Simms