

Selections from Wordsworth's "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty"

Selections from Poems, in Two Volumes (1807)

Composed by the Sea-side, near Calais, August, 1802

Fair Star of evening, Splendour of the West,
Star of my Country! on the horizon's brink
Thou hangest, stooping, as might seem, to sink
On England's bosom; yet well pleas'd to rest,
Meanwhile, and be to her a glorious crest
Conspicuous to the Nations. Thou, I think,
Should'st be my Country's emblem; and should'st wink,
Bright Star! with laughter on her banners, drest
In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky spot
Beneath thee, it is England; there it lies.
Blessings be on you both! one hope, one lot,
One life, one glory! I, with many a fear
For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs,
Among Men who do not love her linger here.

[I griev'd for Buonaparte]

I griev'd for Buonaparte, with a vain
And an unthinking grief! The vital blood
Of that Man's mind what can it be? What food
Fed his first hopes? what knowledge could *He* gain?
'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The Governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.
Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk
True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these.

On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic

Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee;
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty.
She was a Maiden City, bright and free;
No guile seduced, no force could violate;
And when She took unto herself a Mate,
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.
And what if she had seen those glories fade,
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay,
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid

When her long life hath reach'd its final day:
Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade
Of that which once was great is pass'd away.

To Toussaint L'Ouverture

Toussaint, the most unhappy Man of Men!
Whether the rural Milk-maid by her Cow
Sing in thy hearing, or thou liest now
Alone in some deep dungeon's earless den,
O miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a chearful brow:
Though fallen Thyself, never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and Man's unconquerable mind.

London, 1802

Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In chearful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on itself did lay.

[It is not to be thought]

It is not to be thought of that the Flood
Of British freedom, which, to the open Sea
Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters, unwithstood,"
Road by which all might come and go that would,
And bears out freights of worth to foreign lands;
That this most famous Stream in Bogs and Sands
Should perish; and to evil and to good
Be lost for ever. In our Halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakspeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held. In every thing we are sprung
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

October, 1803 ["When, looking on the present face"]

When, looking on the present face of things,
I see one Man, of Men the meanest too!
Rais'd up to sway the world, to do, undo,
With mighty Nations for his Underlings,
The great events with which old story rings
Seem vain and hollow; I find nothing great;
Nothing is left which I can venerate;
So that almost a doubt within me springs
Of Providence, such emptiness at length
Seems at the heart of all things. But, great God!
I measure back the steps which I have trod,
And tremble, seeing, as I do, the strength
Of such poor Instruments, with thoughts sublime
I tremble at the sorrow of the time.

October, 1803. ["Six thousand veterans"]

Six thousand veterans practis'd in War's game,
Tried Men, at Killicranky were array'd
Against an equal Host that wore the Plaid,
Shepherds and Herdsmen.--Like a whirlwind came
The Highlanders, the slaughter spread like flame;
And Garry thundering down his mountain-road
Was stopp'd, and could not breathe beneath the load
Of the dead bodies. 'Twas a day of shame
For them whom precept and the pedantry
Of cold mechanic battle do enslave.
O for a single hour of that Dundee
Who on that day the word of onset gave!
Like conquest would the Men of England see;
And her Foes find a like inglorious Grave.

November, 1806

Another year!--another deadly blow!
Another mighty Empire overthrown!
And We are left, or shall be left, alone;
The last that dares to struggle with the Foe.
'Tis well! from this day forward we shall know
That in ourselves our safety must be sought;
That by our own right hands it must be wrought,
That we must stand unpropp'd, or be laid low.
O Dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer!
We shall exult, if They who rule the land
Be Men who hold its many blessings dear,
Wise, upright, valiant; not a venal Band,
Who are to judge of danger which they fear,
And honour which they do not understand.

Selections from Collected Poems (1815)

On the Final Submission of the Tyrolese

It was a *moral* end for which they fought;
Else how, when mighty Thrones were put to shame,
Could they, poor Shepherds, have preserved an aim,
A resolution, or enlivening thought?
Nor hath that moral good been *vainly* sought;
For in their magnanimity and fame
Powers have they left--an impulse--and a claim
Which neither can be overturned nor bought.
Sleep, Warriors, sleep! among your hills repose!
We know that ye, beneath the stern controul
Of awful prudence, keep the unvanquished soul.
And when, impatient of her guilt and woes
Europe breaks forth; then, Shepherds! shall ye rise
For perfect triumph o'er your Enemies.

[Look now on that Adventurer]

Look now on that Adventurer who hath paid
His vows to Fortune; who, in cruel slight
Of virtuous hope, of liberty, and right,
Hath followed wheresoe'er a way was made
By the blind Goddess;--ruthless, undismayed;
And so hath gained at length a prosperous Height,
Round which the Elements of worldly might
Beneath his haughty feet, like clouds, are laid.
O joyless power that stands by lawless force!
Curses are *his* dire portion, scorn, and hate,
Internal darkness and unquiet breath;
And, if old judgments keep their sacred course,
Him from that Height shall Heaven precipitate
By violent and ignominious death.

Indignation of a High-Minded Spaniard. 1810

We can endure that He should waste our lands,
Despoil our temples,--and by sword and flame
Return us to the dust from which we came;
Such food a Tyrant's appetite demands:
And we can brook the thought that by his hands
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess,
For his delight, a solemn wilderness
Where all the Brave lie dead. But when of bands,
Which he will break for us, he dares to speak,--
Of benefits, and of a future day
When our enlightened minds shall bless his sway,
Then, the strained heart of fortitude proves weak:
Our groans, our blushes, our pale cheeks declare
That he has power to inflict what we lack strength to bear.

1810. ["O'erweening Statesmen"]

O'erweening Statesmen have full long relied
On fleets and armies, and external wealth:
But from *within* proceeds a Nation's health;
Which shall not fail, though poor men cleave with pride
To the paternal floor; or turn aside,
In the thronged City, from the walks of gain,
As being all unworthy to detain
A Soul by contemplation sanctified.
There are who cannot languish in this strife,
Spaniards of every rank, by whom the good
Of such high course was felt and understood;
Who to their Country's cause have bound a life,
Erewhile by solemn consecration given
To labour, and to prayer, to nature, and to heaven.*

* See Laborde's Character of the Spanish People; from him the sentiment of these two last lines is taken.
Conclusion.

1811. ["Here pause"]

Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise,
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days;
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.
Never may from our souls one truth depart,
That an *accursed* thing it is to gaze
On prosperous Tyrants with a dazzled eye;
Nor, touched with due abhorrence of *their* guilt
For whose dire ends tears flow, and blood is spilt,
And justice labours in extremity,
Forget thy weakness, upon which is built,
O wretched Man, the throne of Tyranny!

Added, November, 1813.

Now that all hearts are glad, all faces bright,
Our aged Sovereign sits;--to the ebb and flow
Of states and kingdoms, to their joy or woe,
Insensible;--he sits deprived of sight,
And lamentably wrapt in twofold night,
Whom no weak hopes deceived,--whose mind ensued,
Through perilous war, with regal fortitude,
Peace that should claim respect from lawless Might.
Dread King of Kings, vouchsafe a ray divine
To his forlorn condition! let thy grace
Upon his inner soul in mercy shine;
Permit his heart to kindle, and embrace
(Though it were only for a moment's space)
The triumphs of this hour; for they are THINE!

Selections from Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816

February 1816

O, for a kindling touch from that pure flame
Which taught the offering of song to rise
From thy lone bower, beneath Italian skies,
Great FILICAIA!--With celestial aim
It rose,--thy saintly rapture to proclaim
Then, when the imperial city stood released
From bondage threatened by the embattled East,
And Christendom respired; from guilt and shame
Redeemed,--from miserable fear set free
By one day's feat--one mighty victory.
--Chaunt the Deliverer's praise in every tongue!
The cross shall spread,--the crescent hath waxed dim,--
He conquering--as in Earth and Heaven sung--
HE CONQUERING THROUGH GOD, AND GOD BY HIM. *

* Ond'è ch'Io grido e griderò: guignesti,
Guerregiasti, è vincesti;
Si, si, vincesti, o Campion forte e pio,
Per dio vincesti, e per te vinse Iddio.

See Filicaia's Canzone, addressed to John Sobieski, king of Poland, upon his raising the siege of Vienna. This, and his other poems on the same occasion, are superior perhaps to any lyrical pieces that contemporary events have ever given birth to, those of the Hebrew Scriptures only excepted.

Sonnet. On the Same Occasion [French Defeat in Russia]. February 1816

Ye Storms, resound the praises of your King!
And ye mild Seasons--in a sunny clime,
Midway on some high hill, while Father Time
Looks on delighted--meet in festal ring,
And loud and long of Winter's triumph sing!
Sing ye, with blossoms crowned, and fruits, and flowers,
Of Winter's breath surcharged with sleety showers,
And the dire flapping of his hoary wing!
Knit the blithe dance upon the soft green grass;
With feet, hands, eyes, looks, lips, report your gain;
Whisper it to the billows of the main,
And to the aerial zephyrs as they pass,
That old decrepit Winter--*He* hath slain
That Host, which rendered all your bounties vain!