

THE POEMS

“The Charge of the Light Brigade” (Alfred Tennyson, 1882)

Half a league, half a league, 1

Half a league onward,

All in the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

"Forward, the Light Brigade! 5

[small cavalry

"Charge for the guns!" he said:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"

Was there a man dismay'd? 10

Not tho' the soldier knew

Someone had blunder'd:

[An officer had made a mistake

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

Theirs but to do and die: 15

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them 20

Volley'd and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with shot and shell,

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the jaws of Death, 25

Into the mouth of Hell

Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while 30

All the world wonder'd:

Plunged in the battery-smoke [cannon smoke

Right thro' the line they broke;

Cossack and Russian 35

Reel'd from the sabre stroke

Shatter'd and sunder'd. [cut apart

Then they rode back, but not

Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them, 40
Cannon behind them

Volley'd and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with shot and shell,

Laurel Leaf (Fall 2010)

While horse and hero fell,
 They that had fought so well 45
 Came thro' the jaws of Death
 Back from the mouth of Hell,
 All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade? 50
 O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wondered.
 Honor the charge they made,
 Honor the Light Brigade,
 Noble six hundred. 55

“Sir Patrick Spens” (anonymous, 13th century England, some spelling modernized)

The king sits in Dumferling town, Drinking the blood-red wine.	1	
“O where will I get good sailor, To sail this ship of mine?”		[a good sailor
Up and spoke an elder knight, Sat at the king’s right knee: “Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor That sails upon the sea.”	5	[Sitting at
The king has written a broad letter And signed it with his hand, And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens, Was walking on the sand.	10	[open [Who was
The first line that Sir Patrick read, A loud laugh laughed he; The next line that Sir Patrick read, The tear blinded his ee.	15	[eye, pronounced “ē”
“O who is this has done this deed, This ill deed done to me, To send me out this time of year, To sail upon the sea?”	20	[who has
“Make haste, make haste, my merry men all, Our good ship sails the morn.” “O say not so, my master dear, For I fear a deadly storm.”		
“Late, late yestre’en I saw the new moon With the old moon in her arm, And I fear, I fear, my master dear, That we will come to harm.”	25	[yester evening
O our Scots nobles were right loath		[were very hesitant

Laurel Leaf (Fall 2010)

Which, in life, the Trine allow
 (Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath the moon, [know

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
 Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's 40
 And the Squire and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me now.

"The Raven" (Edgar Allan Poe, 1845)

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary, 1
 Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
 While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
 As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
 'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door— 5
 Only this, and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
 And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
 Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
 From my books surcease of sorrow — sorrow for the lost Lenore— 10 [rest
 For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named Lenore—
 Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
 Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating 15
 'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
 Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
 This it is, and nothing more.'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
 'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore; 20
 But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
 And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
 That I scarce was sure I heard you'—here I opened wide the door;—
 Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, 25
 Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before
 But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
 And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!'
 This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!'
 Merely this and nothing more. 30

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
 Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
 'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
 Let me see then, what thence is, and this mystery explore—
 Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;— 35
 'Tis the wind and nothing more!'

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
 In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.

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- Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
 But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door— 40 [face
 Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—
 Perched, and sat, and nothing more.
- Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
 'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven. 45 [subdued
 Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore—
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'
- Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore; 50
 For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
 Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
 Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
 With such name as 'Nevermore.'
- But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only, 55
 That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
 Nothing further then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
 Till I scarcely more than muttered 'Other friends have flown before—
 On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.' 60
 Then the bird said, 'Nevermore.'
- Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
 'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store,
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore— 65
 Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
 Of "Never—nevermore."
- But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
 Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking 70 [long ago
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
 Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.'
- This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
 To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
 This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining 75
 On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp—light gloated o'er,
 But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp—light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!
- Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
 Swung by Seraphim whose foot—falls tinkled on the tufted floor. 80
 'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he has sent thee
 Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
 Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!' [potion
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' [drink
- 'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!— 85
 Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

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Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—
 On this home by horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
 Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' 90

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! —prophet still, if bird or devil!
 By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore —
 Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
 It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore—
 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named Lenore?' 95
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting—
 'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
 Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
 Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
 Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!' 100
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, 105
 And the lamp—light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
 Shall be lifted—nevermore!

"The Two Old Bachelors" (Edward Lear, 1877)

Two old Bachelors were living in one house; 1
 One caught a Muffin, the other caught a Mouse.
 Said he who caught the Muffin to him who caught the Mouse,—
 'This happens just in time! For we've nothing in the house,
 'Save a tiny slice of lemon and a teaspoonful of honey, 5
 'And what to do for dinner—since we haven't any money?
 'And what can we expect if we haven't any dinner,
 'But to loose our teeth and eyelashes and keep on growing thinner?'

Said he who caught the Mouse to him who caught the Muffin,—
 'We might cook this little Mouse, if we had only some Stuffin'!
 'If we had but Sage and Onion we could do extremely well, 10
 'But how to get that Stuffin' it is difficult to tell'—

Those two old Bachelors ran quickly to the town
 And asked for Sage and Onions as they wandered up and down;
 They borrowed two large Onions, but no Sage was to be found 15
 In the Shops, or in the Market, or in all the Gardens round.

But some one said, —'A hill there is, a little to the north,
 'And to its purpledicular top a narrow way leads forth; —
 'And there among the rugged rocks abides an ancient Sage,—
 'An earnest Man, who reads all day a most perplexing page. 20
 'Climb up, and seize him by the toes! —all studious as he sits,—

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'And pull him down,—and chop him into endless little bits!
 'Then mix him with your Onion, (cut up likewise into Scraps,)—
 'When your Stuffin' will be ready—and very good: perhaps.'

Those two old Bachelors without loss of time 25
 The nearly purpledicular crags at once began to climb;
 And at the top, among the rocks, all seated in a nook,
 They saw that Sage, a reading of a most enormous book.

'You earnest Sage!' aloud they cried, 'your book you've read enough in! —
 'We wish to chop you into bits to mix you into Stuffin'!'— 30

But that old Sage looked calmly up, and with his awful book,
 At those two Bachelors' bald heads a certain aim he took;—
 and over crag and precipice they rolled promiscuous down,—
 At once they rolled, and never stopped in lane or field or town,—
 And when they reached their house, they found (besides their want of Stuffin',) 35
 The Mouse had fled; —and, previously, had eaten up the Muffin.

They left their home in silence by the once convivial door. [cheerful
 And from that hour those Bachelors were never heard of more.

“On My First Son” (Ben Jonson, ca. 1605)

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy; 1
 My sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy.
 Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
 Oh, could I lose all father now! For why 5
 Will man lament the state he should envy?
 To have so soon 'scaped world's and flesh's rage,
 And if no other misery, yet age!
 Rest in soft peace, and, asked, say, Here doth lie
 Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry. 10
 For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such
 As what he loves may never like too much.

“Eve” (Ralph Hodgson, 1920)

Eve, with her basket, was 1
 Deep in the bells and grass,
 Wading in bells and grass
 Up to her knees.
 Picking a dish of sweet 5
 Berries and plums to eat,
 Down in the bells and grass
 Under the trees.

Laurel Leaf (Fall 2010)

Mute as a mouse in a
 Corner the cobra lay, 10
 Curled round a bough of the
 Cinnamon tall....

Now to get even and
 Humble proud heaven and 15
 Now was the moment or
 Never at all.

"Eva!" Each syllable
 Light as a flower fell,
 "Eva!" he whispered the 20
 Wondering maid,
 Soft as a bubble sung
 Out of a linnet's lung,
 Soft and most silverly
 "Eva!" he said.

Picture that orchard sprite; 25 [spirit
 Eve, with her body white,
 Supple and smooth to her
 Slim finger tips;
 Wondering, listening,
 Listening, wondering, 30
 Eve with a berry
 Half-way to her lips.

Oh, had our simple Eve
 Seen through the make-believe!
 Had she but known the 35
 Pretender he was!
 Out of the boughs he came,
 Whispering still her name,
 Tumbling in twenty rings
 Into the grass. 40

Here was the strangest pair
 In the world anywhere,
 Eve in the bells and grass
 Kneeling, and he
 Telling his story low.... 45
 Singing birds saw them go
 Down the dark path to
 The Blasphemous Tree.

Oh, what a clatter when
 Titmouse and Jenny Wren 50
 Saw him successful and
 Taking his leave!
 How the birds rated him,
 How they all hated him!
 How they all pitied 55
 Poor motherless Eve!

Picture her crying
 Outside in the lane,

Eve, with no dish of sweet
 Berries and plums to eat, 60
 Haunting the gate of the
 Orchard in vain...
 Picture the lewd delight
 Under the hill to-night—
 "Eva!" the toast goes round, 65
 "Eva!" again.

"The Convergence of the Twain" (Thomas Hardy, 1914)

Lines on the Loss of the "Titanic"

I		
In a solitude of the sea	1	
Deep from human vanity,		
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.		[lies
II		
Steel chambers, late the pyres		
Of her salamandrine fires,	5	[red/orange
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.		[thread or move
III		
Over the mirrors meant		
To glass the opulent		
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.		
IV		
Jewels in joy designed	10	
To ravish the sensuous mind		
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.		
V		
Dim moon-eyed fishes near		
Gaze at the gilded gear		
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?"...	15	[ask
VI		
Well: while was fashioning		
This creature of cleaving wing,		
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything		
VII		
Prepared a sinister mate		
For her—so gaily great—	20	
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.		[as of yet unmet
VIII		
And as the smart ship grew		[fancy
In stature, grace, and hue,		
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.		