

SELECTED POEMS OF PHILIP FRENEAU*On The Death Of Dr. Benjamin Franklin*

Thus, some tall tree that long hath stood
The glory of its native wood,
By storms destroyed, or length of years,
Demands the tribute of our tears.

The pile, that took long time to raise,
To dust returns by slow decays:
But, when its destined years are o'er,
We must regret the loss the more.

So long accustomed to your aid,
The world laments your exit made;
So long befriended by your art,
Philosopher, 'tis hard to part!--

When monarchs tumble to the ground,
Successors easily are found:
But, matchless FRANKLIN! what a few
Can hope to rival such as YOU,
Who seized from kings their sceptered pride,
And turned the lightning darts aside.

The Indian Burying Ground

In spite of all the learn'd have said;
I still my old opinion keep,
The posture, that we give the dead,
Points out the soul's eternal sleep.

Not so the ancients of these lands --
The Indian, when from life releas'd
Again is seated with his friends,
And shares gain the joyous feast.

His imag'd birds, and painted bowl,
And ven'son, for a journey dress'd,
Bespeak the nature of the soul,
Activity, that knows no rest.

His bow, for action ready bent,
And arrows, with a head of stone,
Can only mean that life is spent,
And not the finer essence gone.

Thou, stranger, that shalt come this way.
No fraud upon the dead commit --
Observe the swelling turf, and say
They do not lie, but here they sit.

Here still lofty rock remains,
On which the curious eye may trace,
(Now wasted, half, by wearing rains)
The fancies of a older race.

Here still an aged elm aspires,
Beneath whose far -- projecting shade
(And which the shepherd still admires
The children of the forest play'd!

There oft a restless Indian queen
(Pale Shebah, with her braided hair)
And many a barbarous form is seen
To chide the man that lingers there.

By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,
In habit for the chase array'd,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer, a shade!

And long shall timorous fancy see
The painted chief, and pointed spear,
And reason's self shall bow the knee
To shadows and delusions here.

*To Lord Cornwallis
At York, Virginia*

Hail, great destroyer (equalled yet by none)
Of countries not your master's, nor your own;
Hatched by some demon on a stormy day,
Satan's best substitute to burn and slay;
Confined at last, hemmed in by land and sea,
Burgoyne himself was but a type of thee!

Like his, to freedom was your deadly hate,
 Like his your baseness, and be his your fate:
 To you, like him, no prospect Nature yields,
 But ruined wastes and desolated fields—
 In vain you raise the interposing wall,
 And hoist those standards that, like you, must fall,
 In you conclude the glories of your race,
 Complete your monarch's and your own disgrace.
 What has your lordship's pilfering arms attained?—
 Vast stores of plunder, but no State regained—
 That may return, though you perhaps may groan,
 Restore it, Charley,[56] for 'tis not your own—
 Then, lord and soldier, headlong to the brine
 Rush down at once—the devil and the swine.
 Wouldst thou at last with Washington engage,
 Sad object of his pity, not his rage?
 [Pg 87]See, round thy posts how terribly advance
 The chiefs, the armies, and the fleets of France;
 Fight while you can, for warlike Rochambeau
 Aims at your head his last decisive blow,
 Unnumbered ghosts from earth untimely sped,
 Can take no rest till you, like them, are dead—
 Then die, my Lord; that only chance remains
 To wipe away dishonourable stains,
 For small advantage would your capture bring,
 The plundering servant of a bankrupt king.

On a Hessian Debarkation
 1776

There is a book, tho' not a book of rhymes,
 Where truth severe records a nation's crimes;—
 To check such monarchs as with brutal might
 Wanton in blood, and trample on the right.

Rejoice, O Death!—Britannia's tyrant sends
 From German plains his myriads to our shore;
 The Caledonian with the English joined:—
 Bring them, ye winds, but waft them back no more.

To these far climes with stately step they come,
 Resolved all prayers, all prowess to defy;

Smit with the love of countries not their own,
They come, indeed, to conquer—not to die.

In the slow breeze (I hear their funeral song,
The dance of ghosts the infernal tribes prepare:
To hell's dark mansions haste, ye abandoned throng,
Drinking from German skulls old Odin's beer.

From dire Cesarea[A] forced, these slaves of kings,
Quick, let them take their way on eagle's wings:
To thy strong posts, Manhattan's isle, repair,
To meet the vengeance that awaits them there!

[A] The old Roman name of Jersey.—Freneau's note.

Captain Jones's Invitation

Thou, who on some dark mountain's brow
Hast toil'd thy life away till now,
And often from that rugged steep
Beheld the vast extended deep,
Come from thy forest, and with me
Learn what it is to go to sea.

There endless plains the eye surveys
As far from land the vessel strays;
No longer hill nor dale is seen,
The realms of death intrude between,
But fear no ill; resolve, with me
To share the dangers of the sea.

But look not there for verdant fields—
Far different prospects Neptune yields;
Green seas shall only greet the eye,
Those seas encircled by the sky.
Immense and deep—come then with me
And view the wonders of the sea.

Yet sometimes groves and meadows gay
Delight the seamen on their way;
From the deep seas that round us swell
With rocks the surges to repel

Some verdant isle, by waves embrac'd,
Swells, to adorn the wat'ry waste.

Though now this vast expanse appear
With glassy surface, calm and clear;
Be not deceiv'd—'tis but a show,
For many a corpse is laid below—
Even Britain's lads—it cannot be—
They were the masters of the sea!

Now combating upon the brine,
Where ships in flaming squadrons join,
At every blast the brave expire
'Midst clouds of smoke, and streams of fire;
But scorn all fear; advance with me—
'Tis but the custom of the sea.

Now we the peaceful wave divide,
On broken surges now we ride,
Now every eye dissolves with woe
As on some lee-ward coast we go—
Half lost, half buried in the main
Hope scarcely beams on life again.

Above us storms distract the sky,
Beneath us depths unfathom'd lie,
Too near we see, a ghastly sight,
The realms of everlasting night,
A wat'ry tomb of ocean green
And only one frail plank between!

But winds must cease, and storms decay,
Not always lasts the gloomy day,
Again the skies are warm and clear,
Again soft zephyrs fan the air,
Again we find the long lost shore,
The winds oppose our wish no more.

If thou hast courage to despise
The various changes of the skies,
To disregard the ocean's rage,
Unmov'd when hostile ships engage,
Come from thy forest, and with me
Learn what it is to go to sea.

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