

Three Short Works by Thomas Campbell

Brief Biography

Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) was born in Glasgow, the son of a merchant, and was educated at Glasgow Grammar School and then onto Glasgow University. After university, he briefly became a Tutor in Mull. This short interlude in his life, resulted in a lifelong enchantment with the scenery of the Highlands. But then it was to the City, this time Edinburgh, to law, during this period he also began to do some literary work for the publishers Mundell & Co.

Literary fame came early as the result of the publication of the poem: **The Pleasures of Hope**, when he was still only 21.

Instead of staying in Edinburgh, Campbell went on a tour of Continent and although during this period (1800-1801) no major work was produced, a series of lyrics and short poems were produced (three of which are below) many of these were on military and in particular Royal Naval themes, some of these are now more popular and more oft quoted than his later and in a literary sense more important poems.

A year or two after his return from the continent, both his private life and indeed this career blossomed. He married in 1803 and then moved to London. In 1805 the Government granted him a pension for life.

Whilst hardly idle, with various compilations and working as a critic, plus continued trips to the continent, the next major work was not published until 1809 – **Gertrude of Wyoming** and in the same year followed this up with **O'Connor's Child**.

Due to working on a number of other projects including the cause for Polish Independence and from 1820, the editor of the 'New Monthly Magazine', his final major work **Theodoric** was not published until 1824.

From 1824 until 1830 were a particularly important period during which Campbell agitated for a London University (eventually being co-founder of University College), continuing both his campaign for Polish Freedom and as editor for the 'New Monthly'.

As recognition of his status as Author and campaigner on Educational issues, the Student body of his old university elected him Lord Rector three times in succession between 1826 and 1829. His rival in the last of these elections was his friend Sir Walter Scott. The fact that he was elected instead of Scott, demonstrates the incredibly high respect and affection in which he was held during his life.

He continued to make visits to the Continent for remainder of his life and indeed died in Boulogne. But as was his due, he was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

I have chosen three short works, whilst two are among the most familiar and have a Naval theme the first has no military connotations and is one I particularly like.

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The River of Life

THE more we live, more brief appear
Our life's succeeding stages;
A day to childhood seems a year,
And years like passing ages.

The gladsome current of our youth,
Ere passion yet disorders,
Steals lingering like a river smooth
Along its grassy borders.

But as the careworn cheek grows wan,
And sorrow's shafts fly thicker,
Ye stars, that measure life to man,
Why seem your courses quicker?

When joys have lost their bloom and breath,
And life itself is vapid,
Why, as we reach the Falls of Death
Feel we its tide more rapid?

It may be strange—yet who would change
Time's course to slower speeding,
When one by one our friends have gone,
And left our bosoms bleeding?

Heaven gives our years of fading strength
Indemnifying fleetness;
And those of youth, a seeming length,
Proportion'd to their sweetness.

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The Battle of the Baltic

OF Nelson and the North
Sing the glorious day's renown,
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's crown,
And her arms along the deep proudly shone;
By each gun the lighted brand
In a bold determined hand,
And the Prince of all the land
Led them on.

Like leviathans afloat
Lay their bulwarks on the brine,
While the sign of battle flew
On the lofty British line:
It was ten of April morn by the chime:
As they drifted on their path
There was silence deep as death,
And the boldest held his breath
For a time.

But the might of England flush'd
To anticipate the scene;
And her van the fleeter rush'd
O'er the deadly space between:
'Hearts of oak!' our captains cried, when each gun
From its adamant lips
Spread a death-shade round the ships,
Like the hurricane eclipse
Of the sun.

Again! again! again!
And the havoc did not slack,
Till a feeble cheer the Dane
To our cheering sent us back;—
Their shots along the deep slowly boom:—
Then ceased—and all is wail,
As they strike the shatter'd sail,
Or in conflagration pale
Light the gloom.

Out spoke the victor then
As he hail'd them o'er the wave:
'Ye are brothers! ye are men!
And we conquer but to save:—
So peace instead of death let us bring:
But yield, proud foe, thy fleet,
With the crews, at England's feet,
And make submission meet
To our King.'...

Now joy, old England, raise!
For the tidings of thy might,
By the festal cities' blaze,

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Whilst the wine-cup shines in light!
And yet amidst that joy and uproar,
Let us think of them that sleep
Full many a fathom deep,
By thy wild and stormy steep,
Elsinore!

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Ye Mariners of England

YE Mariners of England
That guard our native seas!
Whose flag has braved a thousand years
The battle and the breeze!
Your glorious standard launch again
To match another foe;
And sweep through the deep,
While the stormy winds do blow!
While the battle rages loud and long
And the stormy winds do blow.

The spirits of your fathers
Shall start from every wave—
For the deck it was their field of fame,
And Ocean was their grave:
Where Blake and mighty Nelson fell
Your manly hearts shall glow,
As ye sweep through the deep,
While the stormy winds do blow!
While the battle rages loud and long
And the stormy winds do blow.

Britannia needs no bulwarks,
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o'er the mountain-waves,
Her home is on the deep.
The thunders from her native oak
She quells the floods below,
As they roar on the shore,
When the stormy winds do blow!
When the battle rages loud and long,
And the stormy winds do blow.

The meteor flag of England
Shall yet terrific burn;
Till danger's troubled night depart
And the star of peace return.
Then, then, ye ocean-warriors!
Our song and feast shall flow
To the fame of your name,
When the storm has ceased to blow!
When the fiery fight is heard no more,
And the storm has ceased to blow.

Finis