

Six Memorable Poems

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club



Poems to Enrich your Life

In this paper, I have put together a selection of poems that are among the most popular and endearing of all time. You've probably got your favourite poem. Mine is Casabianca. What's yours?

The Charge of the Light Brigade

by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Tennyson was the grand old man of Victorian poetry, holding the Laureateship for 42 years and famous for *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, *The Idylls of The King* and *Maud*, and *Other Poems* – the last of which includes *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

HALF a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Charge," was the captain's cry;
There's not to reason why,
Their's not to make reply,
Their's but to do and die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well;
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell,
Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd all at once in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Fiercely the line they broke;
Strong was the sabre-stroke;
Making an army reel
Shaken and sunder'd.

Then they rode back, but not,
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,

They that had struck so well
Rode thro' the jaws of Death,
Half a league back again,
Up from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

Honour the brave and bold!
Long shall the tale be told,
Yea, when our babes are old—
How they rode onward.



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"If—"

by Rudyard Kipling

"If—" first appeared in the "Brother Square Toes" chapter of the book *Rewards and Fairies*, a collection of Kipling's poetry and short-story fiction published in 1910. In his posthumously published autobiography, *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling said that, in writing the poem, he was inspired by the character of Leander Starr Jameson, leader of the failed Jameson Raid against the Transvaal Republic to overthrow the Boer Government of Paul Kruger.

IF YOU can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream—and not make dreams your
master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss:

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

All the World's a Stage (from *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VI)

By William Shakespeare

'All the world's a stage' is the opening line from Jaques's monologue (aka *The Seven Ages of Man*) in William Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*. Through Jaques, Shakespeare takes the audience on a journey of the complete lifecycle of a human being, made particularly vivid by its visual images of the different stages of an Elizabethan's life.

ALL the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.

Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.

Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.

And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;

And so he plays his part.

The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

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Love and Death

by Lord Byron

Thought to be Lord Byron's last poem, posthumously published and awarded its rather obvious title, *Love and Death* reflects his participation in the Greek war of independence.

I WATCHED thee when the foe was at our side,
Ready to strike at him – or thee and me,
Were safety hopeless – rather than divide
Aught with one loved save love and liberty.

I watched thee on the breakers, when the rock
Received our prow, and all was storm and fear,
And bade thee cling to me through every shock;
This arm would be thy bark, or breast thy bier.

I watched thee when the fever glazed thine eyes,
Yielding my couch and stretched me on the ground
When overworn with watching, ne'er to rise
From thence if thou an early grave hadst found.

The earthquake came, and rocked the quivering wall,
And men and nature reeled as if with wine.
Whom did I seek around the tottering hall?
For thee. Whose safety first provide for? Thine.

And when convulsive throes denied my breath
The faintest utterance to my fading thought,
To thee – to thee – e'en in the gasp of Death
My spirit turned, oh! oftener than it ought.

Thus much and more; and yet thou lov'st me not,
And never wilt! Love dwells not in our Will.
Nor can I blame thee, though it be my lot
To strongly, wrongly, vainly love thee still.

Invictus

by William Henley

Invictus is a short poem by the Victorian British poet William Ernest Henley, written in 1875 and published in 1888 in his first volume of poems, *Book of Verses*, in the section *Life and Death (Echoes)*.

OUT OF the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud ("Daffodils")

by William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth's literary classic, *Daffodils* (also known as *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*), is one of the most famous and popular poems in the English language. The poem reflects Wordsworth's love of nature and has inspired and moved generations of poetry lovers and young minds.

I WANDERED lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

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Casabianca

by Felicia Dorothea Hemans

The poem commemorates an actual incident that happened during the Battle of the Nile between British and French fleets on 1 August 1798 aboard the French flagship L'Orient. Giocante, the young son (his age is variously given as ten, twelve and thirteen) of the ship's commander Luc-Julien-Joseph. *Casabianca* (Giocante) remained at his post and perished when at 22:00 hours, the fire reached the magazine, and L'Orient was destroyed by a massive explosion that damaged nearby ships.

THE BOY stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck,
Shone round him o'er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud, though childlike form.

The flames rolled on – he would not go,
Without his father's word;
That father, faint in Death below,
His voice no longer heard.

He called aloud – 'Say, father, say
If yet my task is done?'
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his son.

'Speak, father!' once again he cried,
'If I may yet be gone!'
– And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath
And in his waving hair;
And look'd from that lone post of Death,
In still yet brave despair.

And shouted but once more aloud,
'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapped the ship in splendour wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound –
The boy – oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strewed the sea!

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
That well had borne their part,
But the noblest thing which perished there,
Was that young faithful heart.



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