

From Hebrew Melodies

George Gordon Lord Byron

Table of Contents

<u>From Hebrew Melodies</u>	1
<u>George Gordon Lord Byron</u>	1
<u>She Walks in Beauty</u>	2
<u>The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept</u>	2
<u>If That High World</u>	3
<u>The Wild Gazelle</u>	3
<u>Oh! Weep for Those</u>	4
<u>On Jordan's Banks</u>	4
<u>Jeptha's Daughter</u>	4
<u>Oh! Snatch'd Away in Beauty's Bloom</u>	5
<u>My Soul is Dark</u>	5
<u>I Saw Thee Weep</u>	6
<u>Thy Days Are Done</u>	6
<u>It Is the Hour</u>	6
<u>Song of Saul, Before His Last Battle</u>	7
<u>On the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept</u>	7
<u>Vision of Belshazzar</u>	8
<u>Herod's Lament for Mariamne</u>	9
<u>Were My Bosom as False as Thou Deem'st It To Be</u>	9
<u>The Destruction of Sennacherib</u>	10
<u>Saul</u>	10
<u>When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay</u>	11
<u>'All is Vanity, Saith the Preacher'</u>	12
<u>On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus</u>	12
<u>Francisca</u>	13
<u>Sun of the Sleepless!</u>	13
<u>Stanzas for Music</u>	13
<u>Stanzas for Music</u>	14
<u>In the Valley of the Waters</u>	14
<u>A Spirit Pass'd Before Me (from Job)</u>	15
<u>Stanzas for Music</u>	15

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- [She Walks in Beauty](#)
 - [The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept](#)
 - [If That High World](#)
 - [The Wild Gazelle](#)
 - [Oh! Weep for Those](#)
 - [On Jordan's Banks](#)
 - [Jeptha's Daughter](#)
 - [Oh! Snatch'd Away in Beauty's Bloom](#)
 - [My Soul is Dark](#)
 - [I Saw Thee Weep](#)
 - [Thy Days Are Done](#)
 - [It Is the Hour](#)
 - [Song of Saul, Before His Last Battle](#)
 - [On the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept](#)
 - [Vision of Belshazzar](#)
 - [Herod's Lament for Mariamne](#)
 - [Were My Bosom as False as Thou Deem'st It To Be](#)
 - [The Destruction of Sennacherib](#)
 - [Saul](#)
 - [When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay](#)
 - ['All is Vanity, Saith the Preacher'](#)
 - [On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus](#)
 - [Francisca](#)
 - [Sun of the Sleepless!](#)
 - [Stanzas for Music](#)
 - [Stanzas for Music](#)
 - [In the Valley of the Waters](#)
 - [A Spirit Pass'd Before Me \(from Job\)](#)
 - [Stanzas for Music](#)
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ADVERTISEMENT

The subsequent poems were written at the request of my friend, the Hon. Douglas Kinnaird, for a Selection of Hebrew Melodies, and have been published, with the music, arranged by Mr. Braham and Mr. Nathan.
January, 1815.

She Walks in Beauty

SHE walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to the tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One ray the more, one shade the less
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress
Or softly lightens o'er her face,
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling place.

And on that cheek and o'er that brow
So soft, so calm yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow
But tell of days in goodness spent
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.

The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept

THE harp the monarch minstrel swept,
The King of men, the loved of Heaven,
Which Music hallow'd while she wept
O'er tones her heart of hearts had given,
Redoubled be her tears, its chords are riven!
It soften'd men of iron mould,
It gave them virtues not their own;
No ear so dull, no soul so cold,
That felt not, fired not to the tone,
Till David's lyre grew mightier than his throne!

It told the triumphs of our King,
It wafted glory to our God;
It made our gladden'd valleys ring,
The cedars bow, the mountains nod;
Its sound aspired to heaven and there abode!
Since then, though heard on earth no more,
Devotion and her daughter Love
Still bid the bursting spirit soar
To sounds that seem as from above,
In dreams that day's broad light can not remove.

If That High World

IF that high world, which lies beyond
Our own, surviving Love endears;
If there the cherish'd heart be fond,
The eye the same, except in tears
How welcome those untrodden spheres!
How sweet this very your to die!
To soar from earth and find all fears
Lost in thy light Eternity!

It must be so: 'tis not for self
That we so tremble on the brink;
And striving to o'erleap the gulf,
Yet cling to Being's severing link.
Oh! in that future let us think
To hold each heart the heart that shares;
With them the immortal waters drink,
And soul in soul grow deathless theirs!

The Wild Gazelle

THE wild gazelle on Judah's hills,
Exulting yet may bound,
And drink from all the living rills
That gush on holy ground:
Its airy step and glorious eye
May glance in tameless transport by.:

A step as fleet, an eye more bright,
Hath Judah witness'd there;
And o'er her scenes of lost delight
Inhabitants more fair,
The cedars wave on Lebanon,
But Judah's statelier maids are gone!

More blest each palm that shades those plains
Than Israel's scatter'd race:
For, taking root, it there remains
In solitary grace:
It cannot quit the place of birth,
It will not live in other earth.

But we must wander witheringly,
In other lands to die;
And where our fathers' ashes be,
Our own may never lie:
Our temple hath not left a stone.
And Mockery sits on Salem's throne.

Oh! Weep for Those

OH! weep for those that wept by Babel's stream,
Whose shrines are desolate, whose land a dream;
Weep for the harp of Judah's broken shell;
Mourn where their God that dwelt the godless dwell!

And where shall Israel lave her bleeding feet?
And when shall Zion's songs again seem sweet?
And Judah's melody once more rejoice
The hearts that leap'd before its heavenly voice?

Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,
How shall ye flee away and be at rest!
The wild-dove hath her nest, the fox his cave,
Mankind their country Israel but the grave!

On Jordan's Banks

ON Jordan's banks the Arab's camels stray,
On Sion's hill the False One's votaries pray,
The Baal-adorer bows on Sinai's steep
Yet there even there Oh God! thy thunders sleep:

There where thy finger scorch'd the tablet stone!
There where thy shadow to thy people shone!
Thy glory shrouded in its garb of fire:
Thyself none living see and not expire!

Oh! in the lightning let thy glance appear;
Sweep from his shiver'd hand the oppressor's spear!
How long by tyrants shall thy land be trod?
How long thy temple worshipless, Oh God?

Jeptha's Daughter

SINCE our Country, our God Oh, my Sire!
Demand that thy Daughter expire;
Since thy triumph was brought by thy vow
Strike the bosom that's bared for thee now!

And the voice of my mourning is o'er,
And the mountains behold me no more:
If the hand that I love lay me low,
There cannot be pain in the blow!

And of this, oh, my Father! be sure
That the blood of thy child is as pure
As the blessing I beg ere it flow,
And the last thought that soothes me below.

Though the virgins of Salem lament,
Be the judge and the hero unbent!
I have won the great battle for thee,
And my Father and Country are free!

When this blood of thy giving hath gush'd,
When the voice that thou lovest is hush'd,
Let my memory still be thy pride,
And forget not I smiled as I died!

Oh! Snatch'd Away in Beauty's Bloom

OH! snatch'd away in beauty's bloom,
On thee shall press no ponderous tomb;
 But on thy turf shall roses rear
 Their leaves, the earliest of the year;
And the wild cypress wave in tender gloom:

And oft by yon blue gushing stream
 Shall Sorrow lean her drooping head,
And feed deep thought with many a dream,
 And lingering pause and lightly tread:
Fond wretch! as if her step disturb'd the dead!

Away! we know that tears are vain,
 That death nor heeds nor hears distress:
Will this unteach us to complain?
 Or make one mourner weep the less?
And thou who tell'st me to forget,
Thy looks are wan, thine eyes are wet.

My Soul is Dark

MY soul is dark Oh! quickly string
 The harp I yet can brook to hear;
And let thy gentle fingers fling
 Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.
If in this heart a hope be dear,
 That sound shall charm it forth again:
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,
 'Twill flow, and cease to burn my brain.

But bid the strain be wild and deep,
 Nor let thy notes of joy be first;
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
 Or else this heavy heart will burst;
For it hath been by sorrow nursed,
 And ached in sleepless silence long;
And now 'tis doom'd to know the worst,
 And break at once or yield to song.

I Saw Thee Weep

I SAW thee weep the big bright tear
Came o'er that eye of blue;
And then methought it did appear
A violet dropping dew;
I saw thee smile the sapphire's blaze
Beside thee ceased to shine;
It could not match the living rays
That fill'd that glance of thine.

As clouds from yonder sun receive
A deep and mellow dye,
Which scarce the shade of coming eve
Can banish from the sky,
Those smiles unto the moodiest mind
Their own pure joy impart;
Their sunshine leaves a glow behind
That lightens o'er the heart.

Thy Days Are Done

THY days are done, thy fame begun;
Thy country's strains record
The triumphs of her chosen Son,
The slaughter of his sword!
The deeds he did, the fields he won,
The freedom he restored!

Though thou art fall'n, while we are free
Thou shalt not taste of death!
The generous blood that flow'd from thee
Disdain'd to sink beneath:
Within our veins its currents be,
Thy spirit on our breath!

Thy name, our charging hosts along,
Shall be the battle-word!
Thy fall, the theme of choral song
From virgin voices pour'd!
To weep would do thy glory wrong:
Thou shalt not be deplored.

It Is the Hour

IT is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lover's vows
Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;
And gentle winds and waters near,

Make music to the lonely ear.
Each flower the dews have lightly wet,
And in the sky the stars are met,
And on the wave is deeper blue,
And on the leaf a browner hue,
And in the Heaven that clear obscure
So softly dark, and darkly pure,
That follows the decline of day
As twilight melts beneath the moon away.

Song of Saul, Before His Last Battle

WARRIORS and chiefs! should the shaft or the sword
Pierce me in leading the host of the Lord,
Heed not the corse, though a king's, in your path:
Bury your steel in the bosoms of Gath!

Thou who art bearing my buckler and bow,
Should the soldiers of Saul look away from the foe,
Stretch me that moment in blood at thy feet!
Mine be the doom which they dared not to meet.

Farewell to others, but never we part,
Heir to my royalty, son of my heart!
Bright is the diadem, boundless the sway,
Or kingly the death, which awaits us to-day!

On the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept

WE sat down and wept by the waters
Of Babel, and thought of the day
When our foe, in the hue of his slaughters,
Made Salem's high places his prey;
And ye, oh her desolate daughters!
Were scatter'd all weeping away.

While sadly we gazed on the river
Which roll'd on in freedom below,
They demanded the song: but, oh never
That triumph the stranger shall know!
May this right hand be wither'd for ever,
Ere it string our high harp for the foe!

On the willow that harp is suspended,
Oh, Salem! its sound should be free;
And the hour when thy glories were ended
But left me that token of thee:
And ne'er shall its soft tones be blended
With the voice of the spoiler by me!

Vision of Belshazzar

THE King was on his throne,
The Satraps throng'd the hall:
A thousand bright lamps shone
O'er that high festival.
A thousand cups of gold,
In Judah deem'd divine
Jehovah's vessels hold
The godless Heathen's wine!

In that same hour and hall,
The fingers of a hand
Came forth against the wall,
And wrote as if on sand:
The fingers of a man;
A solitary hand
Along the letters ran,
And traced them like a wand.

The monarch saw, and shook,
And bade no more rejoice;
All bloodless wax'd his look
And tremulous his voice.
'Let the men of lore appear,
The wisest of the earth,
And expound the words of fear,
Which mar our royal mirth.'

Chaldea's seers are good,
But here they have no skill;
And the unknown letters stood
Untold and awful still.
And Babel's men of age
Are wise and deep in lore;
But now they were not sage,
They saw but knew no more.

A captive in the land,
A stranger and a youth,
He heard the king's command,
He saw that writing's truth.
The lamps around were bright,
The prophecy in view;
He read it on that night,
The morrow proved it true.

'Belshazzar's grave is made,
His kingdom pass'd away,
He, in the balance weigh'd,
Is light and worthless clay;

The shroud his robe of state,
His canopy the stone:
The Mede is at his gate!
The Persian on his throne!

Herod's Lament for Mariamne

OH, Mariamne! now for thee
The heart of which thou bled'st is bleeding;
Revenge is lost in agony,
And wild remorse to rage succeeding.
Oh, Mariamne! where art thou?
Thou canst not hear my bitter pleading:
Ah! could'st thou thou would'st pardon now,
Though Heaven were to my prayer unheeding.

And is she dead? and did they dare
Obey my frenzy's jealous raving?
My wrath but doom'd my own despair:
The sword that smote her's o'er me waving.
But thou art cold, my murder'd love!
And this dark heart is vainly craving
For her who soars alone above,
And leaves my soul unworthy saving.

She's gone, who shared my diadem;
She sunk, with her my joys entombing;
I swept that flower from Judah's stem,
Whose leaves for me alone were blooming;
And mine's the guilt, and mine the hell,
This bosom's desolation dooming;
And I have earn'd those tortures well,
Which unconsumed are still consuming!

Were My Bosom as False as Thou Deem'st It To Be

WERE my bosom as false as thou deem'st it to be,
I need not have wander'd from far Galilee;
It was but abjuring my creed to efface
The curse which, thou say'st, is the crime of my race.

If the bad never triumph, then God is with thee!
If the slave only sin, thou art spotless and free!
If the Exile on earth is an Outcast on high,
Live on in thy faith, but in mine I will die.

I have lost for that faith more than thou canst bestow,
As the God who permits thee to prosper doth know;
In his hand is my heart and my hope and in thine
The land and the life which for him I resign.

The Destruction of Sennacherib

THE Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on the Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are load in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Saul

THOU whose spell can raise the dead,
Bid the prophet's form appear.
'Samuel, raise thy buried head!
King, behold the phantom seer!'

Earth yawn'd; he stood the centre of a cloud:
Light changed its hue, retiring from his shroud.
Death stood all glassy in his fixed eye:
His hand was wither'd, and his veins were dry;
His foot, in bony whiteness, glitter'd there,
Shrunken and sinewless, and ghastly bare;
From lips that moved not and unbreathing frame,
Like cavern'd winds, the hollow accents came.
Saul saw, and fell to earth, as falls the oak,
At once, and blasted by the thunderstroke.

'Why is my sleep disquieted?
Who is he that calls the dead?
Is it thou, O King? Behold,
Bloodless are these limbs, and cold:
Such are mine; and such shall be
Thine to-morrow, when with me:
Ere the coming day is done,
Such shalt thou be, such thy son.
Fare thee well, but for a day,
Then we mix our mouldering clay.
Thou, thy race, lie pale and low,
Pierced by shafts of many a bow;
And the falchion by thy side
To thy heart thy hand shall guide:
Crownless, breathless, headless fall,
Son and sire, the house of Saul!'

When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay

WHEN coldness wraps this suffering clay,
 Ah! whither strays the immortal mind?
It cannot die, it cannot stay,
 But leaves its darken'd dust behind.
Then, unembodied, doth it trace
 By steps each planet's heavenly way?
Or fill at once the realms of space,
 A thing of eyes, that all survey?

Eternal, boundless, undecay'd,
 A thought unseen, but seeing all,
All, all in earth or skies display'd,
 Shall it survey, shall it recall:
Each fainter trace that memory holds
 So darkly of departed years,
In one broad glance the soul beholds,
 And all, that was, at once appears.

Before Creation peopled earth,
 Its eye shall roll through chaos back;
And where the farthest heaven had birth,
 The spirit trace its rising track.
And where the future mars or makes,
 Its glance dilate o'er all to be,
While sun is quench'd or system breaks,
 Fix'd in its own eternity.

Above or Love, Hope, Hate, or Fear,
 It lives all passionless and pure:
An age shall fleet like earthly year;
 Its years as moments shall endure.
Away, away, without a wing,

O'er all, through all, its thought shall fly,
A nameless and eternal thing,
Forgetting what it was to die.

'All is Vanity, Saith the Preacher'

FAME, wisdom, love, and power were mine,
And health and youth possess'd me;
My goblets blush'd from every vine,
And lovely forms carress'd me;
I sunn'd my heart in beauty's eyes,
And felt my soul grow tender;
All earth can give, or mortal prize,
Was mine of regal splendour.

I strive to number o'er what days
Remembrance can discover,
Which all that life or earth displays
Would lure me to live over.
There rose no day, there roll'd no hour
Of pleasure unembitter'd:
And not a trapping deck'd my power
That gall'd not while it glitter'd.

The serpent of the field, by art
And spells, is won from harming;
But that which coils around the heart,
Oh! who hath power of charming?
It will not list to wisdom's lore,
Nor music's voice can lure it;
But there it stings for evermore
The soul that must endure it.

On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus

FROM the last hill that looks on thy once holy dome,
I beheld thee, oh Sion! when render'd to Rome:
'Twas thy last sun went down, and the flames of thy fall
Flash'd back on the last glance I gave to thy wall.

I look'd for thy temple, I look'd for my home,
And forgot for a moment my bondage to come;
I beheld but the death-fire that fed on thy fane,
And the fast-fetter'd hands that made vengeance in vain.

Oh many an eve, the high spot whence I gazed
Had reflected the last beam of day as it blazed;
While I stood on the height, and beheld the decline
Of the rays from the mountain that shone on thy shrine.

And now on that mountain I stood on that day,
But I mark'd not the twilight beam melting away;
Oh! would that the lightning had glared in its stead,
And the thunderbolt burst on the conqueror's head!

But the gods of the Pagan shall never profane
The shrine where Jehovah disdain'd not to reign;
And scatter'd and scorn'd as thy people may be,
Our worship, oh Father! is only for thee.

Francisca

FRANCISCA walks in the shadow of night,
But it is not to gaze on the heavenly light
But if she sits in her garden bower,
'Tis not for the sake of its blowing flower.
She listens but not for the nightingale
Though her ear expects as soft a tale.
There winds a step through the foliage thick,
And her cheek grows pale, and her heart beats quick.
There whispers a voice thro' the rustling leaves;
A moment more and they shall meet
'Tis past her lover's at her feet.

Sun of the Sleepless!

SUN of the sleepless! melancholy star!
Whose tearful beam glows tremulously far,
That show'st the darkness thou canst not dispel,
How like art thou to joy remember'd well!

So gleams the past, the light of other days,
Which shines, but warms not with its powerless rays;
A night-beam Sorrow watcheth to behold,
Distinct but distant clear but, oh how cold!

Stanzas for Music

BRIGHT be the place of thy soul!
No lovelier spirit than thine
E'er burst from its mortal control,
In the orbs of the blessed to shine.
On earth thou wert all but divine,
As thy soul shall immortally be;
And our sorrow may cease to repine
When we know that thy God is with thee.

Light be the turf of thy tomb!
May its verdure like emeralds be!
There should not be the shadow of gloom

In aught that reminds us of thee.
Young flowers and an evergreen tree
May spring from the spot of thy rest:
But not cypress not yew let us see;
For why should we mourn for the blest?

Stanzas for Music

I SPEAK not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name,
There is grief in the sound, there is guilt in the fame;
But the tear which now burns on my cheek may impart
The deep thoughts that dwell in that silence of heart.

Too brief for our passion, too long for our peace,
Were those hours can their joy or their bitterness cease?
We repent, we abjure, we will break from our chain,
We will part, we will fly to unite it again!

Oh! thine be the gladness, and mine be the guilt!
Forgive me, adored one! forsake, if thou wilt:
But the heart which is thine shall expire undebased,
And man shall not break it whatever thou mayst.

And stern to the haughty, but humble to thee,
This soul, in its bitterest blackness, shall be;
And our days seem as swift, and our moments more sweet,
With thee by my side than with worlds at our feet.

One sigh of thy sorrow, one look of thy love,
Shall turn me or fix, shall reward or reprove;
And the heartless may wonder at all I resign
Thy lip shall reply, not to them, but to mine.

In the Valley of the Waters

IN the valley of the waters we wept o'er the day
When the host of the stranger made Salem his prey,
And our heads on our bosoms all droopingly lay,
And our hearts were so full of the land far away.

The song they demanded in vain it lay still
In our souls as the wind that died on the hill;
They called for the harp but our blood they shall spill
Ere our right hand shall teach them one tone of our skill.

All stringlessly hung on the willow's sad tree,
As dead as her dead leaf those mute harps must be;
Our hands may be fetter'd our tears still are free,
For our God and our glory and, Sion! Oh, thee.

A Spirit Pass'd Before Me (from Job)

A SPIRIT pass'd before me: I beheld
The face of immortality unveil'd
Deep sleep came down on every eye save mine
And there it stood, all formless but divine;
Along my bones the creeping flesh did quake;
And as my damp hair stiffen'd, thus it spake:

'Is man more just than God? Is man more pure
Than he who deems even Seraphs insecure?
Creatures of clay vain dwellers in the dust!
The moth survives you, and are ye more just?
Things of day! you wither ere the night,
Heedless and blind to Wisdom's wasted light!'

Stanzas for Music

THEY say that Hope is happiness;
But genuine Love must prize the past,
And Memory wakes the thoughts that bless:
They rose the first they set the last;

And all that Memory loves the most
Was once our only Hope to be,
And all that Hope adored and lost
Hath melted into Memory.

Alas it is delusion all:
The future cheats us from afar,
Nor can we be what we recall,