

Classic Poetry Series

John Jay Chapman
- poems -

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John Jay Chapman(1862-1933)

He was born in New York City. His father, Henry Grafton Chapman, was a broker who eventually became president of the New York Stock Exchange. He was educated at Harvard, was admitted to the bar in 1888, and practiced law until 1898. Meanwhile he had attracted attention as an essayist of unusual merit. His work is marked by originality and felicity of expression, and in the opinion of many critics has placed him in the front rank of the American essayists of his day.

He is the subject of an interesting biographical and critical essay by Edmund Wilson in *The Triple Thinkers* which recounts the reasons behind Chapman's deliberately burning off his own left hand.

1914

ALAS, too much we loved the glittering wares
That art and education had devised
To charm the leisure of philosophers;
The thought, the passion have been undersized
In Europe's over-educated brain;
And while the savants attitudinized,
Excess of learning made their learning vain
Till Fate broke all the toys and cried,
Begin Again!

John Jay Chapman

A Prayer

O GOD when the heart is warmest,
And the head is clearest,
Give me to act:
To turn the purposes thou formest
Into fact.

O God, when what is dearest
Seems most dear,
And the path before lies straight,
With neither Chance nor Fate
In my career,—
Then let me act. The wicket gate
In sight, let me not wait, not wait.

We do not always fight.
There comes a dull
And anxious watching. After night
Follows dim dawn before the day is full.
But there's a time to speak, as to be dumb.
O God, when mine shall come,
And I put forth
My strength for blame or praise,
Blow Thou the fire in my heart's hearth
Into a blaze—
(Who kindled it but Thou?)
And let me feel upon that first of days
As I feel now.

John Jay Chapman

A War Wedding

THE dreamy earth is flooded o'er
With warm and hazy light,
September's latest boon, before
She feels the hoar frost in the night;
And, pausing with a sober frown,
Nips the first floweret from her summer crown.

But who are these upon the rising ground
Where the old graveyard guards the vale,
Who talk in whispers clustering round
The old stone church, where teams are found
With horses tethered to the rail,
And village lads and farmers at the gate?
Surely some funeral of state;—
So reverently they stand without a sound,
So decently they wait.

And now the organ mutters and a hymn
Floats in the elmtops. From the doors thrown wide,
Issue, as radiant as the seraphim,
A handsome lad in khaki and his bride.
And next behind the happy pair
The Captain-cousin and best man
Walks with a martial, business air,
Heading the merry-moving van
Of half-grown girls with ribboned hair,—
Brides-maids or sisters,—and a few
Odd, wholesome, savage boys;
(And if a waistcoat is askew
A mother adds a touch or two
To give the victim equipoise).

Neighbors mingle, chat and pass,
The father proud, the adoring friend,
The Dominie, the farmer's lass,—
The village life from end to end,—
With happiness on every face.
And something sacred and benign
Out of these faces seem to shine:

Some god is in the place!

Methinks I see him! One we used to know
Ere sorrow overspread the land,—
The god we met on every hand
And worshipped long ago.
Ah, mark him, there before the rest!
The youngster in the azure vest
And tunic white as snow.
See the late, tiny rosebuds round his brow!
Their ardent breath is whispering his name,
See on his forehead the clear pointed flame;
While from his torch the sparklets blow
Kindling all hearts that follow in his train.
It's Hymen, Hymen, Hymen, come again!

John Jay Chapman

Arethusa

MY heart was emptied like a mountain pool
That sinks in earthquake to some pit below,
As thou did'st leave me. All my waters cool
Burst from their basin when I saw thee go;—
O'erflowed, leaped out, and ran beneath the ground,—
Poured with a surging wave in search of thee!
Where'er thou art, those waters will abound;
But I must wait till life come back to me.

John Jay Chapman

Augustus Peabody Gardner

I SEE—within my spirit—mystic walls,
And slender windows casting hallowed light
Along dim aisles where many a shadow falls
On text and trophy, effigy and tomb;
And here each youthful hero and old knight
Sleeps on his marble couch, while overhead
The tattered banners shed their bloom
Of glory o'er the dead.

Here, raised in brass or graved in stone,
And dated with the passing year,
Are names—companions I have known,
Whose hands I clasped but yesterday,
Whose voices ring within my ear:
And friends of earlier epochs far away,
Whose spirits answer to my call
Of names familiar as my own,
Written upon this chapel wall.
How strange to find them here!

So soon, so early sanctified,
They lie within the nation's heart,
Calm, safe, those sacred tombs beside
Of earlier saints who kept the faith
And waged the battle of their life
As 'twere a part of that celestial strife
That makes a gain of death.

Ah, we ourselves have slept,
And we, who but half knew them, find them here,
Where into light they stept,
Upon the signal that the Angel gave—
Like him who now upon his passing bier
Moves into History. O blessed War,
That sends a blast of brightness from the grave
To show the souls of mortals as they are!

John Jay Chapman

Autumn Dews

THROW open the shutters, it's seven o'clock!
And impertinent crows take their flight at the shock;
Then dropping their breakfast, they scoff as they pass
O'er the blanket of dew that lies white on the grass.

The mists from the shoulders of hillsides are slipping;
The low Autumn sun burns the dew-drops alive;
And barberry-bushes with rubies are dripping,
And gardeners are heaping dead leaves by the drive.

O haste to the forest!—the forest whose fingers
Are clasping dank, green, little jewels of lawn:
Perhaps in some shadowy clearing still lingers
The track of the hare and the flame of the dawn.

John Jay Chapman

Chamber Music

SILENCE: the sunset gilds the frozen ground,
But here within all's curtained; stands are set
In the wide salon where gilt chairs abound,
And eager listeners wait. The band is met
Whose tuning sheds a cheerful hum around:
Prophetic notes! The tapers brighten at the sound.

The scattered sheets of music on the floor
Reflect a lustre from the yellow flame.
My sight dissolves. . . . Lo, Haydn at the door
Enters like some stiff angel from his frame,
Bearing the bundle of his latest score
Which he distributes, smiling to the blessed four.

Haydn is dead, you say? He dies no more
So long as these shall meet. A magic wand
Brings the old Master through the shadowy door,
And upright in the midst his soul doth stand,
While through the chords his sunny force doth pour.
Ah Haydn, hast thou truly ever lived before?

O intimate acquaintance! When we meet
The hearts of old musicians, there is shown
A conversation deeper and more sweet
Than all save saints or lovers e'er have known.
Is there an earthly friendship so complete
As this, that in a heaven-born passion hath its seat?

The gods and half-gods meet us everywhere
But are at home in Music. There they live
In privacy: Apollo suns his hair,
And Aphrodite to the stars doth give
The more-than-mortal eyes that almost stare,
So wide they are, so open and so unaware.

And while the gods do strum and tune a lay
To please their godships,—there comes creeping in
de Coppet with his crew to steal away
The sacred fire. The trembling violin,

Bratsche and cello, which his pirates play
Bear the bright flame,—yes, undiminished reconvey.

We are those guests who knew the joy sincere
Of that Promethean plunder; and to-night
Are wiser for the start of many a tear
That chased surprised beauty in her flight,
And happier for those hours of inward cheer,
The thought of which, dear hosts of many days, doth draw us here.

John Jay Chapman

Harvest Time

BEHOLD, the harvest is at hand;
And thick on the encircling hills
The sheaves like an encampment stand,
Making a martial fairy-land
That half the landscape fills.
The plains in colors brightly blent
Are burnished by the standing grain
That runs across a continent.
In sheets of gold or silver stain
Or red as copper from the mine,
The oats, the barley, and the buckwheat shine.

Autumn has pitched his royal tent,
And set his banner in the field;
Where blazes every ornament
That beamed in an heraldic shield.
He spreads his carpets from the store
Of stuffs the richest burghers wore,
When velvet-robed, and studded o'er
With gems, they faced their Emperor.

A wind is in the laughing grain
That bends to dodge his rough caress,
Knowing the rogue will come again
To frolic with its loveliness.
And in the highways drifts a stream
Of carts, of cattle, and of men;
While scythes in every meadow gleam,
And Adam sweats again.

In the young orchard forms are seen
With throats thrown open to the breeze,
To reap the rye that lies between;
And sickles hang on apple-trees,
Half hidden in the glossy leaves,
And pails beside the reapers lie;
While sturdy yokels toss the sheaves,
And hats are cocked and elbows ply,
And blackbirds rise to cloud the sky

In swarms that chatter as they fly.

From field to field each shady lane
Is strown and traced with wisps of hay,
Where gates lie open to the wain
That creaks upon its toiling way.
And little children, dumb with pride,
Upon the rocking mountain ride,
While anxious parents warn;
And farm-boys guide the lazy team
Till it shall stand beneath the beam
That spans the gaping barn.

The harvest to its cavern sinks,
While shafts of sunlight probe the chinks
And fumes of incense rise.
Then, as the farmers turn the latch,
Good-natured Autumn smiles to watch
The triumph in their eyes.
His gifts, from many a groaning load,
Are heaved and packed, and wheeled and stowed
By gnomes that hoard the prize.
The grist of a celestial mill,
Which man has harnessed to his will,
In one bright torrent falls to fill
The greedy granaries.

Beneath that annual rain of gold
Kingdoms arise, expand, decay;
Philosophers their mind unfold
And poets sing, and pass away.
Forever turns the winnowing fan:
It runs with an eternal force,
As run the planets in their course
Behind the life of man.
Little we heed that silent power,
Save as the gusty chaff is whirled,
When Autumn triumphs for an hour,
And spills his riches on the world.

John Jay Chapman

Heroes

I SEE them hasting toward the light
Where war's dim watchfires glow;
The stars that burn in Europe's night
Conduct them to the foe.

As when a flower feels the sun
And opens to the sky,
Knowing their dream has just begun
They hasten forth to die.

Be it the mystery of love—
Be it the might of Truth—
Some wisdom that we know not of
Controls the heart of youth.

All that philosophy might guess
These children of the light
In one bright act of death compress,
Then vanish from our sight.

Like meteors on a midnight sky
They break—so clear, so brief—
Their glory lingers on the eye
And leaves no room for grief.

And when to joy old sorrows turn,
To spring war's winter long,
Their blood in every heart will burn,
Their life in every song.

John Jay Chapman

In Time Of War

SORROW, that watches while the body sleeps,
Parted the curtains of the cruel dawn
And glided noiselessly to her sad seat
Beside my pillow.—'Art thou there,' I muttered,
'Spirit of silent grief; mute prophetess
That, on the marble furrows of thy brow,
Wearest the print of wisdom and of peace?
Art thou still at my side, thou antique nurse
And sybil of the mind,—who easily
Enterest the prisons of humanity
With footfall soft, and walkest in the glooms
Where none save thee may come? Shield me to-day!
And, when the sun's insufferable finger
Moves o'er the wainscot, and his dreaded ray
Sears the unsheathèd soul, O mighty Spirit,
Darken mine eyes till night be come again!'

John Jay Chapman

Lines In A Copy Of Virgil

CRUMBLING on Tiber's edge
Lie columns sunk in sedge.
A bird upon the spray
Carols and flits away
Across the river.
Only what soars and sings,
Only what flows and springs,
Passing on wheels as light
As fancy or the spirit's flight—
Endures forever.

John Jay Chapman

Lines On The Death Of Bismarck

(Reprinted from 'The Political Nursery,' midsummer number, 1898)

AT midnight Death dismissed the chancellor,
But left the soul of Bismarck on his face.
Titanic, in the peace and power of bronze,
With three red roses loosely in his grasp,
Lies the Constructor. His machinery
Revolving in the wheels of destiny
Rolls onward over him. Alive, inspired,
Vast, intricate, complete, unthinkable,
Nice as a watch and strong as dynamite,
An empire and a whirlwind, on it moves,
While he that set it rolling lies so still.

Unity! Out of chaos, petty courts,
Princelings and potentates—thrift, jealousy,
Weakness, distemper, cowardice, distrust,
To build a nation: the material—
The fibres to be twisted—human strands.
One race, one tongue, one instinct. Unify
By banking prejudice, and, gaining power,
Attract by vanity, compel by fear.
Arm to the teeth: your friends will love you more,
And we have much to do for Germany.
Organized hatred, that is unity.

Prussia's a unit; Denmark's enmity
Is so much gain, and gives us all the North.
Next, humble Austria: a rapid stroke
That leaves us laurels and a policy.
Now for some chance, some—any fluke or crime
By which a war with France can be brought on:
And, God be glorified, the thing is done.
Organized hatred. That foundation reaches
The very bottom rock of Germany
And out of it the structure rises up
Bristling with arms.

'But you forget the soul,

'The universal shout, the Kaiser's name,
'Fatherland, anthems, the heroic dead,
'The discipline, the courage, the control,
'The glory and the passion and the flame—'
Are calculated by the captain's eye
Are used, subdued, like electricity
Turned on or off, are set to making roads,
Or building monuments, or writing verse,
Twitched by the inspired whim of tyranny
To make that tyranny perpetual
And kill what intellect it cannot use.

The age is just beginning, yet we see
The fruits of hatred ripen hourly
And Germany's in bondage—muzzled press,
The private mind suppressed,—while shade on shade
Is darkened o'er the intellectual sky.
And world-forgotten, outworn crimes and cries
With dungeon tongue accost the citizen
And send him trembling to his family.

.....

Thought cannot grasp the Cause: 'tis in the abyss
With Nature's secrets. But, gigantic wreck,
Thou wast the Instrument! And thy huge limbs
Cover nine kingdoms as thou lie'st asleep.

John Jay Chapman

Lines Read At The New York City Hall Meeting On Lafayette Day, 1918

AGAIN we gather here,
Beneath the aegis of a sacred name,
To hold our feast, and with our altar-flame
Signal the passage of the furtive year.
Alas, how small our gifts, how light appear
Our vows, our songs, the words that we declaim!
While o'er the tortured nations from afar
Rolls the hot breath of universal war.

Yet must I speak—Again we dedicate
Ourselves, our children and our country's fame
To Her from whom our earliest welcome came.
Once more—but now in arms—we kneel,
Like Joan of Arc in shining steel
A Sword to consecrate
To France, and to the Cause that makes her great!

And even while we hold our holiday
The Allied ranks in fierce array
Press on the foe like huntsman on the prey:
The Wild Boar of the North is brought to bay!

Hark, did you hear the triumph in the air?
Horns and halloos—a universal shout.
The hunters have him: he has turned about:
The Teuton beast is lurching toward his lair.
The boar is sorely wounded; but beware!
Strike, when you strike, to kill! For in his eye
Cunning and Hatred shine, a ghastly pair!
Which of these passions is the last to die,
When both are linked together by despair?

'Tis not alone the havoc; but his breath
Spreads desecration o'er mankind.
Beware lest in his gasp of death
The German leave behind
A sting to hurt the heart of man

Worse than his living fury can—
The poison of his mind.

When shall the shepherd sup in peace once more,
Or tend his trellis unafraid
While children play about the farmhouse door,
Or cows at even watch the river
Beneath the elm-tree's shade?
Is heart's ease gone forever?
Must there be newer anguish, endless strife?
Ah, huntsman draw the knife
That kills the creature at the core!
Plunge the bright truncheon and restore
The bloom to human life.

John Jay Chapman

May, 1917

THE earth is damp: in everything
I taste the bitter breath of pallid spring.
Hark! In the air a fanning sound,
Like distant beehives.—Ah, the woods awake;
And finding they are naked, cast around
A mist, like that which trembles on the lake.
The forest murmurs, shudders, sings
On pipes and strings,
With harp and flute;
And then turns coy,
As if ashamed to show its joy,
And in a flush of happiness grows mute.
Alas, the spring! Ah, liquid light,
Your vistas of transparent green
Fall on my spirit like a blight.
The tapestries you hang on high
Are like a pageant to a sick man's eye,
Or sights in fever seen.
Behind your bowers and your blooms
Volcanic desolation looms;
Your life doth death express;
Each leaf proclaims a blackened waste,
Each tree, some paradise defaced,
Each bud, a wilderness.
And all your lisping notes are drowned
By one deep murmur underground
That tells us joy is fled,
Love, innocence, the heart's desire,
The flashing of Apollo's lyre,—
Beauty herself is dead.
In all the valleys of the earth,—
Save for the dead,—no wreath is hung.
Long, long ago the sounds of mirth
Died on man's tongue.
Love is an interrupted song,
And life a broken lute;
Time's pendulum has stopped: a throng
Of huddling moments press along
Untimed, in mad pursuit,

And into days and months are whirled,
As in a dream of pain.
Chaos has wrecked the outer world,
Chaos invades the brain.
The sounds, the sights, the scents of spring
Awake that sullen suffering
Which opium soothes in vain,—
Like the sad dawn of dread relief
That tells the greatness of his grief
To him that is insane.
Would I had perished with the past!
Would I had shared the fate
Of those who heard the trumpet-call
And rode upon the blast,—
Who stopped not to debate,
Nor strove to save,
But giving life, gave all,
Casting their manhood as a man might cast
A rose upon a grave.
Would that like them beneath the sod I lay,
Beneath the glistening grass,
Beneath the flood of things that come, and pass,
Beckon, and shine and fade away.

John Jay Chapman

May, 1918

THE moon at midnight quenched her vaporous light,
Leaving the stars but faintly bright
Like tapers that burn ill;
And in the fragrant bosom of the night
The summer breezes round the garden creep,
Now moving and now still,
Nursing the buds their care has laid to sleep;
Or tip-toe softly to my window-sill
And whisper through the room,
To tell that close at hand
The lilies-of-the-valley stand,
And lilacs are in bloom.

A breathing night,—no ray, no beam,—
But shadowy stillness over everything.
I listen to the flooding of a stream
That 'mid the joyous secrets of the spring
Subdues his murmuring;
And in the silence cool
Huddles his waves, till, at a bound,
I hear as in a gleam of sound
The gathered waters plunging to their pool.

Once more the silence; then the sound again!
I cannot say how long I stood
And listened to that velvet flood;
Perhaps the stream poured lethe on my brain—
Displaced the stars—for in their train
I saw the French Cathedrals looming by,
Like citadels that beaconed on the night
Or swinging urns that scattered golden light
In the surrounding sky.
Chartres, Beauvais, Rouen—I could mark
Each Gothic lantern of the mind
That, kindling in the ages dark,
Rose, flamed and left behind
The sacred shell of a mysterious ark,
The treasure and the solace of mankind.

Voices they have,—a language of their own
That floats in arches, domes and spires;
And many a traveler and pilgrim young,
Wandering unconscious and alone,
Has heard the accents of the ancient choirs
Still echoing in their avenues of stone
From men who wrought and dreamed and sung
And fought and prayed in that forgotten tongue.

Again my eyes upon the night were turned.
The central darkness bloomed, and—robed in state—
While her great works about her burned—
Sate France enthronèd and incoronate!

But ah! the vision fades: a sky of lead
Has drunk the apparition. In such pain
As breaks the rest of one whose love is dead
I wake to greet the vacant world again.
The garden is a blank. Unquiet birds
Are warbling gently in the rain.
Sweet are their voices, desolate the words
That from their little throats they pour,
Chanting, like choristers, a requiem:
'Beauvais and Chartres and Rouen yet remain;
Rheims is no more;
And Amiens is fading like thy dream.
Alas, when all is done
What shall the dayspring find to shine upon?'

John Jay Chapman

Moonlight

I

THE evening air exhales a spicy scent,
The robin warbles, and the thrush replies;
And on the terrace a tall regiment
Of lillies and of larkspur seem to rise
In the last glow of the transparent skies,
And shed a radiance hitherto unseen.
Distant, and yet distinct, come joyous cries
And twilight echoes, few and far between,—
Children at play,—dogs barking,—fairies on the green.

II

The shadows deepen; in the bushy lanes
The fireflies brighten and the crickets cheep:
And hark, an owl! how dolorous the strains,
At which the field-mouse to his bed doth creep.
The birds, the trees, the flowers have dropped to sleep;
The noises from the village float no more;
Night doth enwrap the world in slumber deep.
And while upon reposeful gloom we pore,
Behold, a ghostly glow that was not there before!

III

Slowly, with laboring steps, doth she emerge:
Like a stout shallop in the foaming seas
She holds her prow against the fleecy surge,
And steers between the cliffs of giant trees,
Rounding the headlands, winning by degrees,
Till she outpours the fulness of her beam,
Unrolling all her silver treasuries
On hamlet, plain, and mountain, farm and stream,
With inky shadows that make light more glorious seem.

IV

Reason dissolves in moonlight; for the moon,
Passing the porch of man's dilated eyes,
Doth cast him straight into a kind of swoon:
She, while the wretch in a delirium lies,
Unveils her passions, longings, rhapsodies,—
Shows him a crystal sea that floods the space
Between the darkling earth and liquid skies;
And bids him enter her cool resting-place

That clasps the whole of nature in one bright embrace.

V

She would persuade him it is everywhere,
Disguised beneath the blaze of Phœbus' ray,
Alive in the illuminated air,
Imprisoned in the glamour of the day,—
Which by her art she weaves and shreds away,
Using such magic that each blade of grass,
Bush, mead and brake her potency betray,
Yea, stand like sentinels to watch her pass,
And toward her naked truth hold up earth's looking-glass.

VI

Alas, in vain she reasons; men reply
That Phœbus gave her all the wealth she had,
And clepe her sacred wisdom sorcery:
Those who believe her are accounted mad.
And therefore is her visage ever sad;
And as she climbs she suffers, for she feels
The arrows of the over-weening lad
Falling in deadly showers at her heels.
She fears the lightning of those ever-burning wheels.

VII

Yet in her flight she leaves her realm behind
To poets and to lovers, whose wide eyes,
Dilated by the moonlight of the mind,
See every object in a mad disguise,—
Within a tide between the earth and skies;
And every common bank or brook or flower
To their ecstatic questioning replies,
Glow, throbs and moves with a mysterious power,—
As in a moonlit garden at the trysting hour.

John Jay Chapman

October

CLEAR as the dew it kindles on the spray
Across the shadows of each shelving lawn,
The rising sun, with low and level ray
Scatters the cold, gray phantoms of the dawn.
Like ghosts they flee, like dreams expire
Within the elemental fire
Of our first calm October day.

A day all zenith; the enclosing air,
Like to the lens of a vast telescope,
Shows the enameled globe, which now doth wear
Its gayest motley; every jutting slope
And quiet spire appears both far and near,
Seen through the splendor of the atmosphere.

Something Elysian,—a faint tang of joy,—
Breathes from the moisture of the open field,
Recalling Spring, yet Spring with no alloy
Of heartache, such as hovers on the view
Of things in promise. Here is harvest-yield;
Old Earth hath done her best and can no further do.

The yellowing pages of Earth's ledger lie,
In new-cropped acres, open to the sky;
A text that all may understand,
With margins where wild vines expand
In crimson revelry.

Beyond the valley lies a ledge
Of rocky pasture and a tier
Of hemlock and of juniper;
And close to the embattled edge,—
Their roots embedded in the stony stairs,—
The agèd cedars flaunt their burning wares.

Like banners in a gallery,
They hang above the bright ravine,
Where from the mountains to the sea
The farms and villages are seen,

All clad in twinkling sheen.

Above our heads the mountain bleak
Bears his cold summit to the view,
As one in scorn of earthly mists,
Who, in his gesture, seems to seek
The silent depths of the transparent blue
Where nought save light exists.
There penetrates
Nor sight nor mutter from the world below,
Nor sound of joy or woe;
For that clear realm is deaf to man's debates.
There nought save Contemplation ever came;
For reason is extinguished by the glow,
And passion dies within its parent flame.

Rays of religion, shafts of power,
From that eternal upper day
Descend on man, the creature of an hour,
And whirl him as a leaf is whirled away.
Born to phantasmal contest, he survives
A moment merely; yet the fray,
The whirlwind, seizes other lives,
And, raging like a mountain fire,
Burns on with inextinguishable ire.

Here, here, from this ærial zone
Flows all the force the world has known,
All insight and all sight,
The substance of all just resolves,
Solid and pure;
The rest is lightning, here is light:
And when the varied earth dissolves,
This shall endure.

But see! above the sinking sun
The angel of the west
Has set his star against the mountain's breast:
October's day is done.
The shadows mount, the twilight clear
Shows all of Autumn's mellow husk,
Where one belated teamster in the dusk

Circles the plain, like a dark charioteer
Who scatters secretly the gleaming seeds,
And drives his mystic steeds
Before the tread of the pursuing year.

John Jay Chapman

Ode On The Sailing Of Our Troops For France

Go fight for Freedom, Warriors of the West!
At last the word is spoken: Go!
Lay on for Liberty. 'Twas at her breast
The tyrant aimed his blow;
And ye were wounded with the rest
In Belgium's overthrow.

The anguish of the night is past,
The months of torment, when the roar
Of distant battles rolled against our shore,
Each summons sounding louder than the last;
And in the surge and swell
We heard the deep vibrations of a bell,
The tongue of Fate, that tolling on the blast,
Repeated o'er and o'er
'Awake! your horoscope is cast;
The Old World and the New shall live apart no more.
Awake! the Future claims you. Europe's soul
Hangs in the balance, and the gods contrive
That without her thou never canst be whole,
Nor she without thee save her soul alive.

'Like to the sleeping hero dost thou lie,
Whose father's gear the nymphs beneath a mound
Concealed, while centaurs watched his infancy
Till honor's great occasion should be found.
Awake! the virgins perish, monsters rage;
The earth is mastered by Hell's Overlord;
Accept the manhood of thine heritage:
Behold the shield, the sandals and the sword.'

The dying thunder of the ocean's voice
Left music on the air. The sleeper stirred,
As one who in a dream must make a choice
Of pleasure mixed with pain.
Something he muttered like a broken word;
Then heaved his length and seemed to sleep again.
And still the awful weight of that recurrent sound
Smote on our shores and seemed to shake the ground.

So long, before our lips, fate held the cup, —
So long we waited for the dawn, —
We scarcely breathed or dared look up
For fear that draught of life should be withdrawn.
Vain fears! the stars that shined upon our birth
Had made us freedom's champions on the earth.
Thanks be to God, our page of history
Flashes with all one lightning; one design
From first to last appears in every line,
Which, being noted, makes the tale divine,
But being missed or slighted, all becomes
A meaningless and aimless revery, —
A tale of moving mobs and swords and drums,
A maze without a key, —
A history of pebbles which the sea
Disturbs and rearranges endlessly.

Time was, the world a vision saw.
A faith was born in nations far away
From whom our life and mind we draw, —
A hope, as when the earliest ray
Of peeping dawn predicts the day.
The ancient peoples of the time-worn earth
Divined the meaning of our birth
Before our life began:
The Vision was America,
The Faith was faith in man.
Thus, when our fathers crossed the sea
To found a state that should become
The Capitol of Liberty,
And Freedom's home,
The hopes of Europe with them came,
And in the new republic's name

Pæans were chanted, garlands hung;
The Old World praised the great event,
And blessed the untrodden continent
That should a shrine provide,
Where mercy, justice, strength and truth,
In new-found and immortal youth
Forever should abide.

America became a myth
That Europe's wise-men conjured with,
And prayers went up in many a tongue,
And seers dreamed, and poets sung
And sages prophesied.
And lo, before the echoes died
Of that great pæan, there arose
A state that to the dream replied,
And gave the saints repose.

Thanks be to God who chose of old
The masters of our race,
And stamped an image on the mold
Which time cannot efface.
As if to show what Nature can, —
When, teeming in expansive ease
She overbrims her earlier plan,
Outbursts all ancient boundaries
Of farm and kingdom, race and creed, —
Creation gave the world a man
To meet the larger need.
Nor came he unto us alone,
The world's new hero, Washington.

Him did those opening thunders call
That smite our shores with grinding power;
His name was in the crash and fall
Of every Belgian tower.
By bloody pool, by reeking wall,
'Mid countless deeds of dark offence,
That name went up with every cry
Of prostrate innocence.
For when Incarnate Tyranny
Streamed over lovely France,
And homesteads, roofless to the sky,
Looked up to God askance,

His tattered portrait shared the doom
Of holy pictures in the gloom
Of each abandoned peasant home.
Here by the lowliest hearths of earth,
While generations came and went,

His face had shone o'er death and birth,
And mingled with the hopes and fears, —
The household words, the merriment, the tears, —
The deep religious sentiment
That tells men God doth not forget.
So burned he, and his lamp is burning yet.

Ah France, thou art the home of Memory,
The Mother of the Muses! In thy hands
The Past is safe: each peasant holds a key
To archives which the savant understands,
And all conspire to guard a treasury,
Where flock the enthusiasts of other lands
To dip their minds in thee.
France, France herself doth not forget!
So mused I, — wondering what we,
The lost tribe of the new world, had to set
Against such piety.
Have we no saints? Within our atrium stands
No altar to the great of other lands?

And, as I question, there appears, —
An image, — pictures, statues, prints.
The earliest memories of my earliest years
Are filled with lithographs and mezzotints
That on each wall and stair and stoop were met.
Ay, let France search our homes! She'll find
In many a manse, in many a nook
In every old-time picture book,
In every pious and ingenuous mind, —
In simple folk of the ancestral kind, —
The shade of Lafayette.

Another name, a sacred name there is, —
A nature more than human, a great mind, —
Less like to Cæsar than to Socrates,
Which on our native roster ye shall find.
'Twas liberty that gave him to mankind;

And as her soldier fell he, to the last
Drawing from her the light by which he shined,
And knitting up his legend with the past.

Subdued to contemplation's wand
He set his compass by a star
And pondered ever the beyond
That lay behind the veils of war.
The Fate of Man, the mystic aim,
The unimaginable end,
Floats like an angel in the flame
Of every word he spoke or penned.
While the dictator's robe he wore
He was the poet of the poor.

Not unto us alone came he,
This prophet of humanity.
His was that fight at dawn that left us free
To meet the issue of these darker days.
Then too we battled for posterity.
And had we lost, the world to-day could raise
Its head no longer. Thus doth God appraise
So carefully the weights in either scale
That every ounce must count to make the truth prevail.

Such are our beacons; near them stand
A lesser yet illumined band,
Who of the self-same springs have drunk,
And through whose minds the stream has sunk
To water all the land.
The old heroic creed is taught
In every hamlet, grange and town,
And children lisp the giant thought
Of Franklin and of Hamilton.
The young were never steeped before
So deep in governmental lore.

What wonder that each shining rank
Of martial striplings takes its way
Handsome as Hermes, and as frank
As lads upon a holiday!
Think ye they do not understand
The mighty thing they have in hand? —
'Tis the religion of their land.

And when that bell-like thunder-sound

Crashed on our shores and cried, Awake!
Thought ye no answering lightning should be found?
Behold the answer! Look around.
Yea, and our winds to Europe take
Not soldiers merely — but the mind,
The deathless part that doth consist
In our soul's message, — the debate
Of life with death and love with hate,
Framed by our great protagonist
To documents of state.
They speak our spirit; for he knew
The magic horn to wind
Of Lincoln and of Washington: he drew
As clear a note as ever trumpet blew,
While round the world the music flew
That unified mankind.

Go, Western Warriors! Take the place
The ages have assigned you in a strife
Which to have died in were enough of life;
For you there waits a quest
Such as no paladin or hero knew
Of all who lifted sword or wielded mace
Since George the Dragon slew;
For you a sacramental feast
Too rich, too happy, too fulfilled
Of all that man e'er craved or God hath willed,
Too blessèd to be offered save to you.

John Jay Chapman

Our Sailor

OH yes, he came again! But 'twas not he.
A youth no longer ours, nay, taller, older;
A serious young ensign, stern, yet gay;
Shy as the sea-bird, driven by a storm
Into the doorway of a fisher's hut,
Who proudly suffers every fond caress,
And loves the warmth and welcome; but his eye
Roves the tempestuous billows of that world
To which his life takes wing. At eventide
He fluttered in, and with the earliest dawn
His form had vanished o'er the vaporous sea.

John Jay Chapman

Retrospection

WHEN we all lived together
In the farm among the hills,
And the early summer weather
Had flushed the little rills;

And Jack and Tom were playing
Beside the open door,
And little Jane was maying
On the slanting meadow floor;

And mother clipped the trellis,
And father read his book
By the little attic window,—
So close above the brook:

How little did we reckon
Of ghosts that flit and pass,
Of fates that nod and beckon
In the shadows on the grass;

Of beauty soon deflowered,
Engulfed, and borne away,—
And youth that sinks devoured
In the chasm of a day!

Courageous and undaunted,
As in a golden haze
We lived a life enchanted,
Nor stopped to count the days.

We that were in the story
Saw not the magic light,
The pathos, and the glory
That shines on me to-night.

John Jay Chapman

Revery

I HAVE a garden,—weeds paradise call it;
The moles hold the paths in fee;
The wild creepers rave
O'er the flowers' grave,
O'er box-row and nodding pear-tree.
The heart-broken, moss-covered railings that wall it,
Have made an arbor for me;
And I lie in an angle
Of the dappled tangle
And dream of Energy.

John Jay Chapman

Roosevelt

[Lines read at the Harvard Club, New York, on February 9, 1919]

LIFE seems belittled when a great man dies;
The age is cheapened and time's furnishings
Stare like the trappings of an empty stage.
Ring down the curtain! We must pause, go home
And let the plot of the world reshape itself
To comprehensive form. Roosevelt dead!
The genial giant walks the earth no more,
Grasping the hands of all men, deluging
Their hearts, like Pan, with bright Cyclopean fire
That dizzied them at times, yet made them glad.

Where dwells he? Everywhere! In cottages,
And by the forge of labor and the desk
Of science. The torn spelling book
Is blotted with the name of Roosevelt,
And like a myth he floats upon the winds
Of India and Ceylon. His brotherhood
Includes the fallen kings. Himself a king,
He left a stamp upon his countrymen
Like Charlemagne.

Yes, note the life of kings!
A throne's a day of judgment in itself,
And shows the flaw within the emerald.
For every king must seem more than he is;
Ambition holds her prism before his eye,
Burlesques his virtues, rides upon his car
Clouded with false effulgence, till the man
Loses his nature in a second self,
Which is his rôle. Yet Theodore survived—
Resumed his natural splendor as he sank
Like Titan in the ocean.

The great war
Was all a fight for Paris—must she fall
And be a heap of desolation ere
Relief could reach her? Sad America

Dreamed in the distance as a charmed thing
Till Roosevelt, like Roland, blew his horn.
Alone he did it! By his personal will.
Alone—till others echoed—bellowing
From shore to shore across the continent,
Like a sea monster to the sleeping seals
Of Pribylov. Then, slowly waking,
The flock prepared for war. 'Twas just in time!
One blast the less, and our preparedness
Had come an hour too late.

Ay, traveller,
Who wanderest by the bridges of the Seine,
Past palaces and churches, marts and streets,
Whose names are syllables in history,
'Twas Roosevelt saved Paris. There she stands!
Look where you will—the towers of Notre Dame,
The quays, the columns, the Triumphal Arch—
To those who know, they are his monument.

John Jay Chapman

Sappho's Last Song

THIS was the summer whose gradual splendor
Burned the meridian while the deep sea
Whispering, murmuring, watched the surrender,
Cradled my union, my loved one, with thee.

Mute was the music and mystic the pæan
That skirted the magical days as they fled.
These were the nights when the starred empyrean
Bent o'er the passion it silently fed.

Turn, ancient Earth! as with slumbering motion
Thou steerest thy course through the spaces divine,
The dome of thy stars, and the caves of thine ocean
Re-echo forever the love that was mine.

John Jay Chapman

Song

OLD Farmer Oats and his son Ned
They quarreled about the old mare's bed,
And some hard words by each were said,
Sing, sing, ye all!

Chorus

Let every man stand for what is in his hand, say I,
Let every man give to keep a man alive, say I,
For it's all one when all's done,
Ye'll keep none when death's come, say I!

II

Then Oats he bade the boy be hanged;
So up he stormed and out he banged;
And away to the heath and the wars he's ganged.
Sing, sing, ye all!—Chorus.

III

Old Farmer Oats with his bent head
Is ever thinking of his son Ned,
And whether the lad be alive or dead,
Sing, sing, ye all!—Chorus.

IV

And every beggar and every thief
May go to the old man for relief;
For love is love and grief is grief
Sing, sing, ye all!

Chorus

Let every man stand for what is in his hand, say I,
Let every man give to keep a man alive, say I,
For it's all one when all's done,
Ye'll keep none when death's come, say I!

John Jay Chapman

Song After Ronsard

('Fais rafraîchir mon vin')

SINK the wine within the spring,
And cool it deep and long:
Send Jeanne to me, and let her bring
Her lute, to chant a song.
Three shall dance and one shall sing,
Call Barbe, that in the whirl
Her heavy tresses she may fling
Like a mad Tuscan girl.

See! the sun has dipped his head,
We may not live till morning;
Fill my cup, boy, till the bead
Run over with no warning.
Curse the dolt that slaves to get,
Curse doctor and divine;
My wits were never sober yet
Till they were washed with wine!

John Jay Chapman

Taps At West Point

THE dim and wintry river lies
Torpida and ice-bound, like a giant snake;
And, shouldering round his course, the mountains rise,
Hedging his waters to a frozen lake;
And over him in tattered shrouds
Drift the disconsolate, low-stooping clouds,
That slowly form and climb and sheathe
Some dark and slippery crag;
Then break to a dissolving wreath,
Or make a window for the ground
Where, on Fort Putnam's holy mound
Gleams the bright, silent flag.

West Point! The Eagle of the West
Has searched the wilderness to find
A fitting spot to build a martial nest,
Some skyey shelter from the wind,
A refuge from the north—
Rock-bound, inviolate;—
And here upon the mountain ledge
Facing the Highland Gate,
He builds his eyrie and looks forth
Between black headlands streaked with rills,
And sees the winding river-edge
Die in the distance, pillared by the hills.

But now the nest is snow-clad: the abyss
Smokes like a crater, and from east to west
Pine-trees are whispering across the crest
In little puffs and jets of steam,
That meet and kiss
A thousand feet above the frozen stream.
'The Storm King nods,' they say.—
The Storm King dreams!—and they
Are creatures of his dream.

Upon a dainty table-land
Where the redundant river turns
And hugs the acre to its breast,

A little grave-yard juts above the strand,
With tombs and walks and quiet urns,
Trophies and tablets quaintly dressed
And graved with many an honored name
Of those who drew the sword or nursed the flame
Of Mars, among whose monuments they rest.

And there upon the higher ground,
New-digged and strown with branches green
To grace the trench and hide the mound,
An open grave is seen.
A dirge, low-blown upon sonorous brass,
Is floating up the glen,
And swells to triumph as they pass
With heavy tramp of armèd men
That shakes the dwellings of the dead,
Till each old warrior lifts his head
To hear the trumpet speak again.

Slowly the moving pageant looms
With emblems dark and bright;
And bayonets glance among the mossy tombs;
The bier, the flag, the mourners come in sight,
Framed by the steady musket-line
That makes their deeper meanings shine
With concentrated light.
And hark, a volley at the grave!
With echoes from the rifle-shock,—
Voices that leap from rock to rock.
They mingle with the murmurs half divine
Of Nature's music in each dark ravine,
And speed to mountain and to wave
The challenge that the salvo gave:—
'Love, Death, Our Country,—Honor, Discipline.'

John Jay Chapman

The Armistice

WHEN from a mighty storm far out at sea
Roll in the glassy and gigantic waves,—
Wreck-laden Tritons, bearing in their arms
The wastage of a world;—and o'er the scene
Rises the sun-god; and along the shore
People with uplift eyes await the fleet,
Or falling on their knees, stretch up their hands
To the restored serenity of heaven,
For in their hearts the storm is running still;
So we await our warships on the flood,
Brimming with laureled legions and the gleam
Of gun and helmet, and the tattered flags
That tinge the sea with crimson, telling of those
Left sleeping on the battlefields of France,
Or on the piney ridges of Lorraine
Holding the steeps for freedom. Shall we not
Take to our hearts the living and the dead
In one long, proud embrace upon the shore?

John Jay Chapman

The Christening

THE evening wore on with the Judge in the chair
While song after song sought the rafter;
We crowned him with holly to match his white hair
And redden the bloom of our laughter:

Chorus

For the Doctor, the Parson, His Honor and me
Were waking the baby that soon was to be.

Around went the bowl while the doctor could stand,
Around while the lawyer could reason,
Till speechless and legless they lay hand in hand,
Conversing on subjects in season.—Chorus.

The Parson like Bacchus was draining a cup
('Twas the wineglass he smashed in his joy, Sir,)
When the maids at the door made the toppers look up,
'O Master, O Judge, it's a boy, Sir!'—Chorus.

'A boy!' cried the Parson, 'Ye pagans come down!
All Christians shall sing and be thankful.
Go fetch us the child in his christening gown;
Egad, but we'll give him a tankful!'—Chorus.

'For the Church and the Law and all medical aid
Are here represented in toddy;
The child in a christening dish shall be laid
And good liquor poured over his body.'—Chorus.

The maids gave a squeal could be heard half a mile
And straight locked the doors on the crew, Sir;
And so to our pleasures they left us a while.
It's little that women can do, Sir!

Chorus

But the Doctor, the Parson, His Honor and me
Devoted the night to that little babee.

John Jay Chapman

The Hudson

BATHED in a dying light
The far out-stretching valley lies
Beneath the mingling veils of day and night;
Fruit trees and gardens, woodland and champaign,
Paths, lawns and labyrinths—a Paradise.
The mountains darken, and the clear
Black waters at their base appear
Sending a last bright message from the skies.
It floods the all-but-lost Elysian plain
Where knoll and bower
Shimmer and peep, till the soft twilight hour,—
To add the magic of a new surprise,—
Washes them into silver gloom again.

John Jay Chapman

The Kneisel Quartet

(Lines read at the dinner given to its members upon their retirement)

HAPPY the man who with steadfast devotion
Walks through the turmoil where passions are rife,
Feeding one flame of enduring emotion,
Bearing unshattered the urn of his life.

Bright o'er the bay the gay sailboats are dancing,
Cutting like birds through the waters of youth;
Bold to the fair come the paladins prancing,
Sidling and eyeing the prizes of Truth.

Ah, in the press, in the clash of the onset,
How many strong riders and sailors are thrown!
The gala of morning is past, and at sunset
With wrecks of bright talent life's ocean is strown.

Few,—the unswerving, the slaves of endeavor,—
Beat homeward in trim, gallop in to our cheers;
The prizes they win are our prizes forever,
Though earned with their labor and bought with their tears.

Then welcome the mind that through sheer concentration
Imprisons the world in a gem or a strain,—
Throws open our soul to the rays of creation
And gives us a glimpse of life's morning again.

O servants of Art, 'tis a hard road ye follow;
Here poets and thinkers and mystics have trod:
Rough, upward, and steep are the paths of Apollo,
But round them shines ever the light of the god.

Then chant we a hymn for these sons of the lyre,
How humble soever the pæan we raise;
Our wreath must be laid by the altar whose fire
Has waked us to gratitude, friendship and praise.
April 21, 1917.

John Jay Chapman

The Moral Of History

ALL is one issue, every skirmish tells,
And war is but the picture in the story;
The plot's below: from time to time upwells
A scene of blood and glory,
That makes us understand the allegory,—
A lurid flash of verse,—and at its close
Recurring, undiscipherable prose.

John Jay Chapman

The Poet Orders His Sepulchre

(After Ronsard)

YE caverns, and ye rills
That from the beetling hills
Down every rocky wall
Glide, gleam, and fall;
Ye woods and streams around,
Where poplar'd isles abound,
And glistening myrtles throng,—
List to my song.

When Fate and heavenly power
Forecast my dying hour,
Enchanted with the ray
Of common day,
I wish not that Pretence
Of Grandeur or Expense
Shall build some marble gloom
About my tomb.

But let a green tree wave
His arms above my grave,
And be my body laid
Within that shade:
Thus from my corpse below
Ivy shall climb and grow,
To canopy that ground
In many a round.

The coiling grapevine there
Shall wreath my sepulchre,
And all its leaves become
A fragrant gloom.
And yearly to these rocks
Shall shepherds bring their flocks,
And by my dripping wall
Hold festival.

First, having paid the price

Of some quaint sacrifice,
They to the isles and trees
Speak words like these:—
'Ah happy tomb, whose fate
'Tis to commemorate
The name of one, whose worth
Fills all the earth.
Who in his life was such
As envy might not touch;
Who fawned not on the great,
For all their state,

'Nor dabbled in the lore
By Wisdom shunned of yore,
Nor in the divinations
Of Pagan nations.
But with his songs divine
He lured the Sacred Nine,
Till all might hear and see
Their minstrelsy.

'He drew so sweet a note
From the lyre that he smote,
That our whole countryside
Was sanctified.
And manna from the skies
Falls ever where he lies;
And summer nights diffuse
Celestial dews.

'The murmuring river clear
Circles his grassy bier,
Weaving,—like walls around,—
Verdure and sound.
And we who know his fame,
His glory here proclaim;
His honor here prolong
With gift and song.'

And now the little band
Turn, and with pious hand
Pour out libations nine

Of milk and wine,
O'er me, who at that hour
Lie in Elysium's bower,
Where every spirit blest
Doth take his rest.

Nor hail, nor snow, nor rain
Disturb that bright domain,
Nor bolt, that from on high
Bursts from the sky.
But the immortal sheen
Of leaves is ever seen;
And deathless blossoming
Of happy spring.

Ambition, strife, and care
Are banished from that air,
And wars, by kings designed,
To rule mankind.
There all like brothers true
Their ancient deeds renew,
Living in love and faith,
Even after death.

There, there, my soul shall know
The pang of Sappho's woe!
There clangs, with dreaded fire,
Alcæus' lyre;
And harmonies resound
From every island mound
Where sages pause to drink
Song at its brink.

Yea distant echoes wake
Across the Infernal Lake,
And e'en the damned receive
Some sweet reprieve.
Beneath that heavy charm
Ixion takes no harm,
And Tantalus is freed
From thirst and greed.
The poet's voice hath sent

To every mind content,
And poured across his lyre
To every human heart the heart's desire.

John Jay Chapman

The Swallows

THE hills of Camden mile on mile
Fling their green mantle o'er the bay;
The dark waves dance about the isle
Where we have nested many a day.
The shadows mount; the air is chill;
Away!

The hermit thrush has left the bed
Where late his giddy music shone,
The sumac in the swamp is red,
And Autumn binds her sandals on.
The season wanes; summer's at end.
Away!

John Jay Chapman

To A Dog

PAST happiness dissolves. It fades away,
Ghost-like, in that dim attic of the mind
To which the dreams of childhood are consigned.
Here, withered garlands hang in slow decay,
And trophies glimmer in the dying ray
Of stars that once with heavenly glory shined.
But you, old friend, are you still left behind
To tell the nearness of life's yesterday?
Ah, boon companion of my vanished boy,
For you he lives; in every sylvan walk
He waits; and you expect him everywhere.
How would you stir, what cries, what bounds of joy,
If but his voice were heard in casual talk,
If but his footstep sounded on the stair!

John Jay Chapman

Trees In Autumn

THE poets have made Autumn sorrowful;
I find her joyous, radiant, serene.
Her pomp is hung in a deep azure sky
That turns about the world by day and night,
Nor loses its bright charm.
And when the trees resign their foliage,
Loosing their leaves upon the cradling air
As liberally as if they ne'er had owned them,—
They show the richer for the nakedness
That weds them with the clarity of heav'n.

John Jay Chapman