Classic Poetry Series

Alice Meynell

- poems -

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Alice Meynell (22 September 1847 - 27 November 1922)

lice Christiana Gertrude Thompson Meynell was an English writer, editor, critic, and suffragist, now remembered mainly as a poet.

Biography

Meynell was born in Barnes, London, to Thomas James and Christiana (née Weller) Thompson. The family moved around England, Switzerland, and France, but she was brought up mostly in Italy, where a daughter of Thomas from his first marriage had settled. Her father was a friend of Charles Dickens.

Preludes (1875) was her first poetry collection, illustrated by her elder sister Elizabeth (the artist Lady Elizabeth Butler, 1850–1933, whose husband was Sir William Francis Butler). The work was warmly praised by Ruskin, although it received little public notice. Ruskin especially singled out the sonnet Renunciation for its beauty and delicacy.

After Alice, the entire Thompson family converted to the Roman Catholic Church (1868 to 1880),[4] and her writings migrated to subjects of religious matters. This eventually led her to the Catholic newspaper publisher and editor Wilfrid Meynell (1852–1948) in 1876. A year later (1877) she married Meynell, and they settled in Kensington. They became proprietor and editor of The Pen, the Weekly Register, Merry England, and other magazines. Alice and Wilfrid had a family of eight children, Sebastian, Monica, Everard, Madeleine, Viola, Vivian (who died at three months), Olivia, and Francis. Viola Meynell (1885–1956) became an author in her own right, and the youngest child Francis Meynell (1891–1975) was the poet and printer at the Nonesuch Press.

Alice was much involved in editorial work on publications with her husband, and in her own writing, poetry and prose. She wrote regularly for The World, The Spectator, The Magazine of Art, The Scots Observer, The Tablet, The Art Journal, the National Observer, edited by W. E. Henley the Pall Mall Gazette, and The Saturday Review.

The British poet Francis Thompson, down and out in London and trying to recover from the opium addiction that had overtaken him, sent the couple a manuscript. His poems were first published in Wilfred's Merrie England, and the Meynells became a supporter of Thompson. His 1893 book Poems was a Meynell production and initiative. Another supporter of Thompson was the poet Coventry Patmore. Alice had a deep friendship with Patmore, lasting several years, which led to his

becoming obsessed with her, forcing her to break with him.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in conjunction with uprisings against the British (among them the Indians', the Zulus', the Boxer Rebellion, and the Muslim revolt led by Muhammad Ahmed in the Sudan), many European scholars, writers, and artists, especially Catholics, began to question Europe’s colonial imperialism, and its attempt to rule the world. This led Alice, Wilfrid, Elizabeth, and others in their circle to speak out for the oppressed. Alice became a leading figure in the Women Writers' Suffrage League, which was founded by Cicely Hamilton and active 1908 to 1919.

Her prose essays were remarkable for fineness of culture and peculiar restraint of style. After a series of illnesses, including migraine and depression, she died 27 November 1922. She is buried at Kensal Green Catholic Cemetery, London, England.

Eserleri:

Preludes (1875)
The Rhythm of Life (1893)
Poems by Francis Thompson (1893)
Holman Hunt (1893)
Selected Poems of Thomas Gordon Hake (1894)
The Color of Life and other Essays (1896)
Poetry of Pathos and Delight by Coventry Patmore (1896)
The Flower of the Mind (1897)
The Children (1897)
The Spirit of Place (1898)
London Impressions (1898)
Ruskin (1900)
Later Poems (1901)
The Work of John S. Sargent (1903)
Essays (1914)
The Second Person Singular (1921)
The Poems of Alice Meynell, Complete Edition (1940)
Prose and Poetry (1947)

A Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age

Listen, and when thy hand this paper presses,
O time-worn woman, think of her who blesses
What thy thin fingers touch, with her caresses.

O mother, for the weight of years that break thee!
O daughter, for slow time must yet awake thee,
And from the changes of my heart must make thee!

O fainting traveller, morn is gray in heaven.
Dost thou remember how the clouds were driven?
And are they calm about the fall of even?

Pause near the ending of thy long migration;
For this one sudden hour of desolation
Appeals to one hour of thy meditation.

Suffer, O silent one, that I remind thee
Of the great hills that stormed the sky behind thee,
Of the wild winds of power that have resigned thee.

Know that the mournful plain where thou must wander
Is but a gray and silent world, but ponder
The misty mountains of the morning yonder.

Listen:-the mountain winds with rain were fretting,
And sudden gleams the mountain-tops besetting.
I cannot let thee fade to death, forgetting.

What part of this wild heart of mine I know not
Will follow with thee where the great winds blow not,
And where the young flowers of the mountain grow not.

Yet let my letter with thy lost thoughts in it
Tell what the way was when thou didst begin it,
And win with thee the goal when thou shalt win it.

I have not writ this letter of divining
To make a glory of thy silent pining,
A triumph of thy mute and strange declining.

Only one youth, and the bright life was shrouded;
Only one morning, and the day was clouded;
And one old age with all regrets is crowded.

O hush, O hush! Thy tears my words are steeping.
O hush, hush, hush! So full, the fount of weeping?
Poor eyes, so quickly moved, so near to sleeping?

Pardon the girl; such strange desires beset her.
Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter
That breaks thy heart; the one who wrote, forget her:

The one who now thy faded features guesses,
With filial fingers thy gray hair caresses,
With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses.

Alice Meynell

A Poet of One Mood

A poet of one mood in all my lays,
Ranging all life to sing one only love,
Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harp of floods mine own wild ways.
The countries change, but not the west-wind days
Which are my songs. My soft skies shine above,
And on all seas the colours of a dove,
And on all fields a flash of silver greys.
I made the whole world answer to my art
And sweet monotonous meanings. In your ears
I change not ever, bearing, for my part,
One thought that is the treasure of my years-
A small cloud full of rain upon my heart
And in mine arms, clasped, like a child in tears.

Alice Meynell

A Song of Derivations

I come from nothing; but from where
Come the undying thoughts I bear?
Down, through the long links of death and birth,
From the past poets of the earth,
My immortality is there.

I am like the blossom of an hour.
But long, long vanished sun and shower
Awoke my breath i' the young world's air;
I track the past back everywhere
Through seed and flower and seed and flower.

Or I am like a stream that flows
Full of the cold springs that arose
In morning lands, in distant hills;
And down the plain my channel fills
With melting of forgotten snows.

Voices, I have not heard, possessed
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed
With relics of the far unknown.
And mixed with memories not my own
The sweet streams throng in my breast.

Before this life began to be,
The happy songs that wake in me
Woke long ago and far apart.
Heavily on this little heart
Presses this immortality.

Alice Meynell

After Parting

Farewell has long been said; I have forgone thee;
I never name thee even.
But how shall I learn virtues and yet shun thee?
For thou art so near Heaven
That Heavenward meditations pause upon thee.

Thou dost beset the path to every shrine;
My trembling thoughts discern
Thy goodness in the good for which I pine;
And, if I turn from but one sin, I turn
Unto a smile of thine.

How shall I thrust thee apart
Since all my growth tends to thee night and day--
To thee faith, hope, and art?
Swift are the currents setting all one way;
They draw my life, my life, out of my heart.

Alice Meynell

An Unmarked Festival

There's a feast undated, yet
Both our true lives hold it fast,--
Even the day when we first met.
What a great day came and passed,
--Unknown then, but known at last.

And we met: You knew not me,
Mistress of your joys and fears;
Held my hand that held the key
Of the treasure of your years,
Of the fountain of your tears.

For you knew not it was I,
And I knew not it was you.
We have learnt, as days went by.
But a flower struck root and grew
Underground, and no one knew.

Day of days! Unmarked it rose,
In whose hours we were to meet;
And forgotten passed. Who knows,
Was earth cold or sunny, Sweet,
At the coming of your feet?

One mere day, we thought; the measure
Of such days the year fulfills.
Now, how dearly would we treasure
Something from its fields, its rills,
And its memorable hills.

Alice Meynell

At Night

Home, home from the horizon far and clear,
Hither the soft wings sweep;
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near
The dovecote doors of sleep.

Oh which are they that come through sweetest light
Of all these homing birds?
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?
Your words to me, your words!

Alice Meynell

Builders of Ruins

We build with strength and deep tower wall
That shall be shattered thus and thus.
And fair and great are court and hall,
But how fair--this is not for us,
Who know the lack that lurks in all.

We know, we know how all too bright
The hues are that our painting wears,
And how the marble gleams too white;--
We speak in unknown tongues, the years
Interpret everything aright,

And crown with weeds our pride of towers,
And warm our marble through with sun,
And break our pavements through with flowers,
With an Amen when all is done,
Knowing these perfect things of ours.

O days, we ponder, left alone,
Like children in their lonely hour,
And in our secrets keep your own,
As seeds the color of the flower.
To-day they are not all unknown,

The stars that 'twixt the rise and fall,
Like relic-seers, shall one by one
Stand musing o'er our empty hall;
And setting moons shall brood upon
The frscoes of our inward wall.

And when some midsummer shall be,
Hither shall come some little one
(Dusty with bloom of flowers is he),
Sit on a ruin i' the late long sun,
And think, one foot upon his knee.

And where they wrought, these lives of ours,
So many-worded, many-souled,
A north-west wind will take the towers,
And dark with color, sunny and cold,
Will range alone among the flowers.

And here or there, at our desire,
The little clamorous owl shall sit,
Through her still time, and we aspire
To make a law (and know not it)
Unto the life of a wild briar.

Our purpose is distinct and dear,
Though from our open eyes 'tis hidden,
Thou, time to come, shall make it clear,
Undoing our work; we are children chidden

With pity and smiles of many a year.

We shall allot the praise, and guess
What part is yours and what is ours?--
O years that certainly will bless
Our flowers with fruits, our seeds with flowers,
With ruin all our perfectness.

Be patient, Time, of our delays,
Too happy hopes, and wasted fears,
Our faithful ways, our wilful ways;
Solace our labors, O our seers
The seasons, and our bards the days;

And make our pause and silence brim
With the shrill children's play, and sweets
Of those pathetic flowers and dim,
Of those eternal flowers my Keats,
Dying, felt growing over him!

Alice Meynell

Cradle-Song at Twilight

The child not yet is lulled to rest.
Too young a nurse, the slender Night
So laxly holds him to her breast
That throbs with flight.

He plays with her, and will not sleep.
For other playfellows she sighs;
An unmaternal fondness keep
Her alien eyes.

Alice Meynell

In Autumn

The leaves are many under my feet,
And drift one way.
Their scent of death is weary and sweet.
A flight of them is in the grey
Where sky and forest meet.

The low winds moan for sad sweet years;
The birds sing all for pain,
Of a common thing, to weary ears,--
Only a summer's fate of rain,
And a woman's fate of tears.

I walk to love and life alone
Over these mournful places,
Across the summer overthrown,
The dead joys of these silent faces,
To claim my own.

I know his heart has beat to bright
Sweet loves gone by;
I know the leaves that die to-night
Once budded to the sky;
And I shall die from his delight.

O leaves, so quietly ending now,
You heard the cuckoos sing.
And I will grow upon my bough
If only for a spring,
And fall when the rain is on my brow.

O tell me, tell me ere you die,
Is it worth the pain?
You bloomed so fair, you waved so high;
Now that the sad days wane,
Are you repenting where you lie?

I lie amongst you, and I kiss
Your fragrance mouldering.
O dead delights, is it such bliss,
That tuneful Spring?
Is love so sweet, that comes to this?

Kiss me again as I kiss you;
Kiss me again;
For all your tuneful nights of dew,
In this your time of rain,
For all your kisses when Spring was new.

You will not, broken hearts; let be.
I pass across your death
To a golden summer you shall not see,
And in your dying breath

There is no benison for me.

There is an autumn yet to wane,
There are leaves yet to fall,
Which, when I kiss, may kiss again,
And, pitied, pity me all for all,
And love me in mist and rain.

Alice Meynell

In Early Spring

O Spring, I know thee! Seek for sweet surprise
In the young children's eyes.
But I have learnt the years, and know the yet
Leaf-folded violet.
Mine ear, awake to silence, can foretell
The cuckoo's fitful bell.
I wander in a gray time that encloses
June and the wild hedge-roses.
A year's procession of the flowers doth pass
My feet, along the grass.
And all you sweet birds silent yet, I know
The notes that stir you so,
Your songs yet half devised in the dim dear
Beginnings of the year.
In these young days you meditate your part;
I have it all by heart.
I know the secrets of the seeds of flowers
Hidden and warm with showers,
And how, in kindling Spring, the cuckoo shall
Alter his interval.
But not a flower or song I ponder is
My own, but memory's.
I shall be silent in those days desired
Before a world inspired.
O dear brown birds, compose your old song-phrases,
Earth, thy familiar daisies.

The poet mused upon the dusky height,
Between two stars towards night,
His purpose in his heart. I watched, a space,
The meaning of his face:
There was the secret, fled from earth and skies,
Hid in his gray young eyes.
My heart and all the Summer wait his choice,
And wonder for his voice.
Who shall foretell his songs, and who aspire
But to divine his lyre?
Sweet earth, we know thy dimmest mysteries,
But he is lord of his.

Alice Meynell

In February

Rich meanings of the prophet-Spring adorn,
Unseen, this colourless sky of folded showers,
And folded winds; no blossom in the bowers;
A poet's face asleep in this grey morn.
Now in the midst of the old world forlorn
A mystic child is set in these still hours.
I keep this time, even before the flowers,
Sacred to all the young and the unborn.

To all the miles and miles of unsprung wheat,
And to the Spring waiting beyond the portal,
And to the future of my own young art,
And, among all these things, to you, my sweet,
My friend, to your calm face and the immortal
Child tarrying all your life-time in your heart.

Alice Meynell

Maternity

One wept whose only child was dead,
New-born, ten years ago.
"Weep not; he is in bliss," they said.
She answered, "Even so,

"Ten years ago was born in pain
A child, not now forlorn.
But oh, ten years ago, in vain,
A mother, a mother was born."

Alice Meynell

Maternity.

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New-born, ten years ago.
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But oh, ten years ago, in vain,
A mother, a mother was born."

Alice Meynell

My heart shall be thy garden

My heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,
Into thy garden; thine be happy hours
Among my fairest thoughts, my tallest flowers,
From root to crowning petal, thine alone.
Thine is the place from where the seeds are sown
Up to the sky inclosed, with all its showers.
But ah, the birds, the birds! Who shall build bowers
To keep these thine? O friend, the birds have flown.

For as these come and go, and quit our pine
To follow the sweet season, or, new-corners,
Sing one song only from our alder-trees,
My heart has thoughts, which, though thine eyes hold mine.
Flit to the silent world and other summers,
With wings that dip beyond the silver seas.

Alice Meynell

Parted

Farewell to one now silenced quite,
Sent out of hearing, out of sight,--
My friend of friends, whom I shall miss,
He is not banished, though, for this,--
Nor he, nor sadness, nor delight.

Though I shall talk with him no more,
A low voice sounds upon the shore.
He must not watch my resting-place,
But who shall drive a mournful face
From the sad winds about my door?

I shall not hear his voice complain,
But who shall stop the patient rain?
His tears must not disturb my heart,
But who shall change the years and part
The world from any thought of pain?

Although my life is left so dim,
The morning crowns the mountain-rim;
Joy is not gone from summer skies,
Nor innocence from children's eyes,
And all of these things are part of him.

He is not banished, for the showers
Yet wake this green warm earth of ours.
How can the summer but be sweet?
I shall not have him at my feet,
And yet my feet are on the flowers.

Alice Meynell

Renouncement

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the love that lurks in all delight--
The love of thee--and in the blue heaven's height,
And in the dearest passage of a song.
Oh, just beyond the sweetest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.
But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,--
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gather'd to thy heart.

Alice Meynell

Singers to Come

New delights to our desire
The singers of the past can yield.
I lift mine eyes to hill and field,
And see in them your yet dumb lyre,
poets unborn and unrevealed.

Singers to come, what thoughts will start
To song? What words of yours be sent
Through man's soul, and with earth be blent?
These words of nature and the heart
Await you like an instrument.

Who knows what musical flocks of words
Upon these pine-tree tops will light,
And crown these towers in circling flight,
And cross these seas like summer birds,
And give a voice to the day and night?

Something of you already is ours;
Some mystic part of you belongs
To us whose dream of your future throngs,
Who look on hills, and trees, and flowers,
Which will mean so much in your songs.

I wonder, like the maid who found,
And knelt to lift, the lyre supreme
Of Orpheus from the Thracian stream.
She dreams on its sealed past profound;
On a deep future sealed I dream.

She bears it in her wanderings
Within her arms, and has not pressed
Her unskilled fingers but her breast
Upon those silent sacred strings;
I, too, clasp mystic strings at rest.

For I, i' the world of lands and seas,
The sky of wind and rain and fire,
And in man's world of long desire--
In all that is yet dumb in these--
Have found a mysterious lyre.

Alice Meynell

Summer in England, 1914

On London fell a clearer light;
Caressing pencils of the sun
Defined the distances, the white
Houses transfigured one by one,
The 'long, unlovely street' impearled.
O what a sky has walked the world!

Most happy year! And out of town
The hay was prosperous, and the wheat;
The silken harvest climbed the down:
Moon after moon was heavenly-sweet,
Stroking the bread within the sheaves,
Looking 'twixt apples and their leaves.

And while this rose made round her cup,
The armies died convulsed. And when
This chaste young silver sun went up
Softly, a thousand shattered men,
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
After a league-long throb of pain.

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
And berries; and benignant skies
Made thrive the serried flocks and herds. --
Yonder are men shot through the eyes.
Love, hide thy face
From man's unpardonable race.

Who said 'No man hath greater love than this,
To die to serve his friend'?
So these have loved us all unto the end.
Chide thou no more, O thou unsacrificed!
The soldier dying dies upon a kiss,
The very kiss of Christ.

Alice Meynell

The Lady of the Lambs

She walks -- the lady of my delight --
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep.
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Her dreams are innocent at night;
The chastest stars may peep.
She walks -- the lady of my delight --
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks -- the lady of my delight --
A shepherdess of sheep.

Alice Meynell

The Return to Nature.

(I) PROMETHEUS 1-
IT was the south : mid-everything,
-
Mid-land, mid-summer, noon ;
-
And deep within a limpid spring
-
The mirrored sun of June.

-
Splendour in freshness ! Ah, who stole
-
This sun, this fire, from heaven?
-
He holds it shining in his soul,
-
Prometheus the forgiven.

(II) THETIS2-
In her bright title poets dare
-
What the wild eye of fancy sees --
-
Similitude -- the clear, the fair
-
Light mystery of images.

-
Round the blue sea I love the best
-
The argent foam played, slender, fleet ;
-
I saw -- past Wordsworth and the rest --
-
Her natural, Greek, and silver feet.

Alice Meynell

The Shepherdess

She walks-the lady of my delight-
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She keeps them from the steep;
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Into that tender breast at night
The chastest stars may peep.
She walks-the lady of my delight-
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks-the lady of my delight-
A shepherdess of sheep.

Alice Meynell

Your Own Fair Youth

Your own fair youth, you care so little for it--
Smiling toward Heaven, you would not stay the advances
Of time and change upon your hapiest fancies.
I keep your golden hour, and will restore it.
If ever, in time to come, you would explore it--
Your old self, whose thoughts went like last year's pansies,
Look unto me; no mirror keeps its glances;
In my unfailing praises now I store it.

To guard all joys of yours from Time's estranging,
I shall then be a treasury where your gay,
Happy, and pensive past unaltered is.
I shall then be a garden charmed from changing,
In which your June has never passed away.
Walk there awhile among my memories.

Alice Meynell