

Classic Poetry Series

Annie Louisa Walker

- 3 poems -

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Annie Louisa Walker (23 June 1836 - 7 July 1907)

Anna Louisa Walker (Staffordshire, 23 June 1836 - Bath, Somerset, 7 July 1907) was an English and Canadian teacher and author. She authored five novels and two collections of poetry, as well as editing one autobiography. Her poem, *The Night Cometh*, serves as the lyrics in the popular hymn *Work, for the night is coming*.

Early life and teaching

Anna Louisa was born to Robert and Anna Walker on 23 June 1836 in Staffordshire, England. She was the last of her father's nine children, although only her brothers Thomas Andrew, and Charles were full siblings, her older siblings being from her father's two previous marriages. Her father was a civil engineer, and brought the family to Pointe-Lévy, Lower Canada around 1853, where he was employed with the Grand Trunk Railroad. In 1858, the family relocated again, to Sarnia, Canada West. Soon after the family's arrival in Sarnia, Anna Louisa founded a private girl's school with her sisters Frances and Isabella. The school was only open a few years before the deaths of Frances and Isabella forced its closure.

Publishing poetry

Poems by Walker had been published in newspapers and periodicals beginning when she was a teenager. She published an anonymous collection of poems entitled *Leaves from the backwoods* in 1861. The volume was printed in Montreal by John Lovell. From this volume the poem *The Night Cometh* was taken and set to music by Ira D. Sankey, who published it as a hymn *Work, for the night is coming* in the collection *Sacred Songs and Solos*. As the poem was published anonymously, Walker received no credit in the volume for the lyrics, which were commonly misattributed to Sidney Dyer. The poem is based on John 9:4. Most poems in the collection concern religious or natural themes. In 1863 or 1864, her parents returned to England, and she accompanied them.

Returning to England

In September 1864, Walker's father died. Soon afterward, her mother died as well. She secured a place in the house of her second cousin, Margaret Oliphant, in 1866, as her companion-housekeeper. Oliphant was a successful writer, and encouraged Walker to write fiction rather than poetry, and recommended her works to publishers, with which she already had contact.

Walker's first novel, *A Canadian heroine*, was published in 1873. It tells the story of a 16 year old woman living in a small town along the St. Lawrence, courted by a Canadian man, who has her suitor almost driven off when she becomes enamoured on a visiting English aristocrat. The English aristocrat's interest turns out to be fleeting, and the story is an allegory for what Walker

perceived as the naivety of the new world and the corruption of the old.

Walker's second novel, *Hollywood*, was published in 1875. In 1876, Walker published a collection entitled *Plays for Children*. Walker's third novel, *Against her will*, was published in 1877. The novel tells the story of how a young woman copes with her father's illness. The protagonist's competence and strength of character evoke the contemporaneously developing idea of the new woman. Walker's fourth novel, *Lady's Holm.*, was published in 1878 by Samuel Tinsey & Company. A contemporary review in *The Spectator* praised the novel for its "picturesque descriptions and good incisive delineation of character". W.W. Tulloch's review in *The Academy* praised the story for its character development, descriptive language, and wholesomeness; while criticising the book for its somewhat stale and outdated style. Walker's fifth novel, *Two rival lovers*, was published in 1881.

On 29 January 1884, Walker married Harry Coghill, a wealthy widower whose fortune was made manufacturing chemicals. The family settled in Staffordshire. In 1890, her volume *Oak and maple: English and Canadian verses* was published under her married name, Anna Louisa Coghill. More than half of the poems in the collection were reprinted from *Leaves from the backwoods*. As with her first collection, most poems concern religious or natural themes. *The Night Cometh* is reprinted, and Coghill remarks that she discovered the poem's use in hymn, and it being improperly attributed in the hymnbook. After hearing the hymn at a temperance meeting, she tracked down the source, and subsequent editions appeared with the correct attribution.

Mrs. Coghill published *The trial of Mary Broom; a Staffordshire story*, a sixth novel, in 1894. Harry Coghill died in 1897. In 1899, Mrs. Coghill served as the editor of her second cousin's autobiography, *Autobiography and letters of Mrs. M. O. W. Oliphant*.

She died 7 July 1907 in Bath, England.

Works:

Leaves from the Backwoods (1861)
Oak and Maple: English and Canadian Verse (1890)

The Night Cometh

Work! for the night is coming;
Work! through the morning hours;
Work! while the dew is sparkling;
Work! 'mid the springing flowers;
Work! while the day grows brighter,
Under the glowing sun;
Work! for the night is coming,--
Night, when man's work is done.

Work! for the night is coming;
Work! through the sunny noon;
Fill the bright hours with labour,
Rest cometh sure and soon.
Give to each flying minute
Something to keep in store;
Work! for the night is coming,--
Night, when man works no more.

Work! for the night is coming;
Under the sunset skies,
While their bright tints are glowing,
Work! for the daylight flies;
Work! till the last beam fadeth,
Fadeth to shine no more;
Work! while the night is darkening,--
Night, when man's work is o'er.

Annie Louisa Walker

The Old Men Used to Sing

The old men used to sing
And lifted a brother
Carefully
Out the door
I used to think they
Were born
Knowing how to
Gently swing
A casket
They shuffled softly
Eyes dry
More awkward
With the flowers
Than with the widow
After they'd put the
Body in
And stood around waiting
In their
Brown suits.

Annie Louisa Walker

Women's Rights

You cannot rob us of the rights we cherish,
Nor turn our thoughts away
From the bright picture of a "Woman's Mission"
Our hearts portray.

We claim to dwell, in quiet and seclusion,
Beneath the household roof,--
From the great world's harsh strife, and jarring voices,
To stand aloof;--

Not in a dreamy and inane abstraction
To sleep our life away,
But, gathering up the brightness of home sunshine,
To deck our way.

As humble plants by country hedgerows growing,
That treasure up the rain,
And yield in odours, ere the day's declining,
The gift again;

So let us, unobtrusive and unnoticed,
But happy none the less,
Be privileged to fill the air around us
With happiness;

To live, unknown beyond the cherished circle,
Which we can bless and aid;
To die, and not a heart that does not love us
Know where we're laid.

Annie Louisa Walker