

Classic Poetry Series

Coventry Patmore

- poems -

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A Farewell

With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now part.
My Very Dear,
Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear.
It needs no art,
With faint, averted feet
And many a tear,
In our opposed paths to persevere.
Go thou to East, I West.
We will not say
There 's any hope, it is so far away.
But, O, my Best,
When the one darling of our widowhead,
The nursling Grief,
Is dead,
And no dews blur our eyes
To see the peach-bloom come in evening skies,
Perchance we may,
Where now this night is day,
And even through faith of still averted feet,
Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazed meet;
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet
Seasoning the termless feast of our content
With tears of recognition never dry.

Coventry Patmore

Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore

Love, light for me
Thy ruddiest blazing torch,
That I, albeit a beggar by the Porch
Of the glad Palace of Virginity,
May gaze within, and sing the pomp I see;
For, crown'd with roses all,
'Tis there, O Love, they keep thy festival!
But first warn off the beatific spot
Those wretched who have not
Even afar beheld the shining wall,
And those who, once beholding, have forgot,
And those, most vile, who dress
The charnel spectre drear
Of utterly dishallow'd nothingness
In that refulgent fame,
And cry, Lo, here!
And name
The Lady whose smiles inflame
The sphere.
Bring, Love, anear, And bid be not afraid
Young Lover true, and love-foreboding Maid,
And wedded Spouse, if virginal of thought;
for I will sing of nought
Less sweet to hear
Than seems
A music their half-remember'd dreams.
The magnet calls the steel:
Answers the iron to the magnet's breath;
What do they feel
But death!
The clouds of summer kiss in flame and rain,
And are not found again;
But the heavens themselves eternal are with fire
Of unapproach'd desire,
By the aching heart of Love, which cannot rest,
In blissfullest pathos so indeed possess'd.
O, spousals high;
O, doctrine blest,
Unutterable in even the happiest sigh;
This know ye all
Who can recall
With what a welling of indignant tears
Love's simpleness first hears
The meaning of his mortal covenant,
And from what pride comes down
To wear the crown
Of which 'twas very heaven to feel the want.
How envies he the ways
Of yonder hopeless star,
And so would laugh and yearn
With trembling lids eterne,
Ineffably content from infinitely far

Only to gaze
 On his bright Mistress's responding rays,
 That never know eclipse;
 And, once in his long year, With praeternuptial ecstasy and fear,
 By the delicious law of that ellipse
 Wherein all citizens of ether move,
 With hastening pace to come
 Nearer, though never near,
 His Love
 And always inaccessible sweet Home;
 There on his path doubly to burn,
 Kiss'd by her doubled light
 That whispers of its source,
 The ardent secret ever clothed with Night,
 Then go forth in new force
 Towards a new return,
 Rejoicing as a Bridegroom on his course!
 This know ye all;
 Therefore gaze bold,
 That so in you be joyful hope increas'd,
 Thorough the Palace portals, and behold
 The dainty and unsating Marriage-Feast.
 O, hear
 Them singing clear
 'Cor meum et caro mea'round the 'I am',
 The Husband of the Heavens, and the Lamb
 Whom they for ever follow there that kept,
 Or, losing, never slept
 Till they reconquer'd had in mortal fight
 The standard white.
 O, hear
 From the harps they bore from Earth, five-strung, what music springs,
 While the glad Spirits chide
 The wondering strings!
 And how the shining sacrificial Choirs,
 Offering for aye their dearest hearts' desires,
 Which to their hearts come back beatified,
 Hymn, the bright aisles along,
 The nuptial song,
 Song ever new to us and them, that saith,
 'Hail Virgin in Virginity a Spouse!'
 Heard first below
 Within the little house
 At Nazareth;
 Heard yet in many a cell where brides of Christ
 Lie hid, emparadised,
 And where, although
 By the hour 'tis night,
 There's light,
 The Day still lingering in the lap of snow.
 Gaze and be not afraid
 Ye wedded few that honour, in sweet thought

And glittering will,
 So freshly from the garden gather still
 The lily sacrificed;
 For ye, though self-suspected here for nought,
 Are highly styled
 With the thousands twelve times twelve of undefiled.
 Gaze and be not afraid
 Young Lover true and love-foreboding Maid.
 The full Moon of deific vision bright
 Abashes nor abates
 No spark minute of Nature's keen delight,
 'Tis there your Hymen waits!
 There wher in courts afar, all unconfused, they crowd,
 As fumes the starlight soft
 In gulfs of cloud,
 And each to the other, well-content,
 Sighs oft,
 "Twas this we meant!"
 Gaze without blame
 Ye in whom living Love yet blushes for dead shame.
 There of pure Virgins none
 Is fairer seen,
 Save One,
 Than Mary Magdalene.
 Gaze without doubt or fear
 Ye to whom generous Love, by any name, is dear.
 Love makes the life to be
 A fount perpetual of virginity;
 For, lo, the Elect
 Of generous Love, how named soe'er, affect
 Nothing but God,
 Or mediate or direct,
 Nothing but God,
 The Husband of the Heavens:
 And who Him love, in potence great or small
 Are, one and all,
 Heirs of the Palace glad,
 And inly clad
 With the bridal robes of ardour virginal.

Coventry Patmore

Departure

It was not like your great and gracious ways!
Do you, that have naught other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye?
I knew, indeed, that you were parting soon;
And so we sate, within the low sun's rays,
You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,
Your harrowing praise.
Well, it was well
To hear you such things speak,
And I could tell
What made your eyes a growing gloom of love,
As a warm South-wind sombres a March grove.
And it was like your great and gracious ways
To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,
Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash
To let the laughter flash,
Whilst I drew near,
Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.
But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd:
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

Coventry Patmore

Faint Yet Pursuing

Heroic Good, target for which the young
Dream in their dreams that every bow is strung,
And, missing, sigh
Unfruitful, or as disbelievers die,
Thee having miss'd, I will not so revolt,
But lowlier shoot my bolt,
And lowlier still, if still I may not reach,
And my proud stomach teach
That less than highest is good, and may be high.
And even walk in life's uneven way,
Though to have dreamt of flight and not to fly
Be strange and sad,
Is not a boon that's given to all who pray.
If this I had
I'd envy none!
Nay, trod I straight for one
Year, month or week,
Should Heaven withdraw, and Satan me amerce
Of power and joy, still would I seek
Another victory with a like reverse;
Because the good of victory does not die,
As dies the failure's curse,
And what we have to gain
Is, not one battle, but a weary life's campaign.
Yet meaner lot being sent
Should more than me content;
Yea, if I lie
Among vile shards, though born for silver wings,
In the strong flight and feathers gold
Of whatsoever heavenward mounts and sings
I must by admiration so comply
That there I should my own delight behold.
Yea, though I sin each day times seven,
And dare not lift the fearfulest eyes to Heaven,
Thanks must I give
Because that seven times are not eight or nine,
And that my darkness is all mine,
And that I live
Within this oak-shade one more minute even,
Hearing the winds their Maker magnify.

Coventry Patmore

If I were dead

'If I were dead, you'd sometimes say, Poor Child!'
The dear lips quiver'd as they spake,
And the tears brake
From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smiled.
Poor Child, poor Child!
I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song.
It is not true that Love will do no wrong.
Poor Child!
And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,
And of those words your full avengers make?
Poor Child, poor Child!
And now, unless it be
That sweet amends thrice told are come to thee,
O God, have Thou no mercy upon me!
Poor Child!

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Love's Reality

I walk, I trust, with open eyes;
I've travelled half my worldly course;
And in the way behind me lies
Much vanity and some remorse;
I've lived to feel how pride may part
Spirits, tho' matched like hand and glove;
I've blushed for love's abode, the heart;
But have not disbelieved in love;
Nor unto love, sole mortal thing
Or worth immortal, done the wrong
To count it, with the rest that sing,
Unworthy of a serious song;
And love is my reward: for now,
When most of dead'ning time complain,
The myrtle blooms upon my brow,
Its odour quickens all my brain.

Coventry Patmore

Magna Est Veritas

Here, in this little Bay,
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
Where, twice a day,
The purposeless, gay ocean comes and goes,
Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
I sit me down.
For want of me the world's course will not fail:
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not.

Coventry Patmore

The Foreign Land

A woman is a foreign land,
Of which, though there he settle young,
A man will ne'er quite understand
The customs, politics, and tongue.
The foolish hie them post-haste through,
See fashions odd, and prospects fair,
Learn of the language, "How d'ye do,"
And go and brag they have been there.
The most for leave to trade apply,
For once, at Empire's seat, her heart,
Then get what knowledge ear and eye
Glean chancewise in the life-long mart.
And certain others, few and fit,
Attach them to the Court, and see
The Country's best, its accent hit,
And partly sound its polity.

Coventry Patmore

The Kiss

'I saw you take his kiss!' 'Tis true.'
'O, modesty!' ' 'Twas strictly kept:
He thought me asleep; at least I knew
He thought I thought he thought I slept.'

Coventry Patmore

The Married Lover

Why, having won her, do I woo?
Because her spirit's vestal grace
Provokes me always to pursue,
But, spirit-like, eludes embrace;
Because her womanhood is such
That, as on court-days subjects kiss
The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch
Affirms no mean familiarity;
Nay, rather marks more fair the height
Which can with safety so neglect
To dread, as lower ladies might,
That grace could meet with disrespect;
Thus she with happy favour feeds
Allegiance from a love so high
That thence no false conceit proceeds
Of difference bridged, or state put by;
Because although in act and word
As lowly as a wife can be,
Her manners, when they call me lord,
Remind me 'tis by courtesy;
Not with her least consent of will,
Which would my proud affection hurt,
But by the noble style that still
Imputes an unattain'd desert;
Because her gay and lofty brows,
When all is won which hope can ask,
Reflect a light of hopeless snows
That bright in virgin ether bask;
Because, though free of the outer court
I am, this Temple keeps its shrine
Sacred to Heaven; because, in short,
She 's not and never can be mine.

Coventry Patmore

The Revelation

An idle poet, here and there,
Looks around him; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling's jest.
Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
They lift their heavy lids, and look;
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
They read with joy, then shut the book.
And some give thanks, and some blaspheme
And most forget; but, either way,
That and the Child's unheeded dream
Is all the light of all their day.

Coventry Patmore

The Spirit's Depths

Not in the crisis of events
Of compass'd hopes, or fears fulfill'd,
Or acts of gravest consequence,
Are life's delight and depth reveal'd.
The day of days was not the day;
That went before, or was postponed;
The night Death took our lamp away
Was not the night on which we groan'd.
I drew my bride, beneath the moon,
Across my threshold; happy hour!
But, ah, the walk that afternoon
We saw the water-flags in flower!

Coventry Patmore

The Toys

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
—His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

Coventry Patmore

Unthrift

Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
On her sweet self set her own price,
Knowing men cannot choose but pay,
How she has cheapen'd paradise;
How given for nought her priceless gift,
How spoil'd the bread and spill'd the wine,
Which, spent with due, respective thrift,
Had made brutes men, and men divine.

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