

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Eliza Cook**

**- poems -**

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## **Eliza Cook (24 December 1818 – 23 September 1889)**

Eliza Cook was an English author, Chartist poet and writer born in London Road, Southwark

### Background

She was the daughter of a local tradesman. She attended the local Sunday Schools and was encouraged by the son of the music master to produce her first volume of poetry. From this she took confidence and in 1837 began to offer verse to the radical Weekly Dispatch, then edited by William Johnson Fox. She was a staple of its pages for the next ten years. She also offered material to The Literary Gazette, Metropolitan Magazine and New Monthly.

### Work

Her work for the Dispatch and New Monthly was later pirated by George Julian Harney, the Chartist, for the Northern Star. Familiar with the London Chartist movement, in its various sects, she followed many of the older radicals in disagreeing with the O'Brienites and O'Connorites in their disregard for repeal of the Corn Laws. She also preferred the older Radicals' path of Friendly Societies and self-education.

In 1835 while only seventeen years of age she published her first volume titled Lays of a Wild Harp. In 1838 she published Melia and other Poems, and from 1849 to 1854 wrote, edited, and published Eliza Cook's Journal, a weekly periodical she described as one of "utility and amusement." Cook also published Jottings from my Journal (1860), and New Echoes (1864); and in 1863 she was given a Civil List pension income of £100 a year.

Her poem The Old Armchair (1838) made hers a household name for a generation, both in England and in America. Cook was a proponent of political and sexual freedom for women, and believed in the ideology of self-improvement through education, something she called "levelling up." This made her great favourite with the working-class public. Her works became a staple of anthologies throughout the century. She died in Wimbledon.

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### Selected Works

The Fair Rose of Killarney - A Ballad - By Miss Eliza Cook - Music by Stephen Glover (New-York Mirror Saturday 29 June 1839 pp 32 [2])

Her article "People Who Do Not Like Poetry" (May 1849) can be found in the book *A Serious Occupation: Literary Criticism by Victorian Women Writers* ISBN 1-55111-350-3.

## **Be Kind When You Can**

Be kind when you can, though the kindness be little,  
'Tis small letters make up philosophers' scrolls;  
The crystal of Happiness, vivid and brittle,  
Can seldom be cut into very large bowls.

'Tis atoms that dwell in the measureless mountain,  
'Tis moments that sum up the century's flight;  
'Tis but drops that unite in Niagara's fountain,  
'Tis rays, single rays, from the harvest-sun light.

Stone by stone builds the temple that rises in glory,  
Inch by inch grows the child till maturity's prime;  
The jewels so famous in bright, Eastern story  
Have been nursed, tint by tint, in the blossom of Time.

'Tis grains make the desert-sheet, trackless and spreading;  
'Tis but petals that deck every blossom-twin'd spray;  
There are leaves - only leaves - where the forest is shedding  
Its gloom till the density shuts out the day.

A word or a glance which we give 'without thinking',  
May shadow or lighten some sensitive breast;  
And the draught from the well-spring is wine in the drinking,  
If quaffed from the brim that Affection has blest.

Then be kind when you can in the smallest of duties,  
Don't wait for the larger expressions of Love;  
For the heart depends less for its joys and its beauties  
On the flight of the Eagle than coo of the Dove.

Eliza Cook

## **Black Bess**

TURPIN had his Black Bess, and she carried him well,  
As fame with her loud-breathing trumpet will tell;  
She knew not the lash, and she suffered no spur;  
A bold rider was all that was needed by her.  
That rider grew pallid and cautious with fear,  
There was danger around him and death in the rear;  
But he mocked at the legion of foes on his track,  
When he found himself firm on his bonnie steed's back.

She carried him on as no steed did before,  
She travelled as courser will never do more;  
Bounding on like the wild deer, she scarce left a trace,  
On the road or the turf, of her antelope pace.  
The pistol was levelled, what was it to Dick?  
The shot might be rapid, but Bess was as quick:  
'Ha! Ha!' shouted Turpin, 'a horse and a man  
Are fair marks for your bullets to reach, if they can.'

The mountain was high, and the valley was deep;  
She sprang up the hill and she flew down the steep;  
She came to the waste, rough with furrow and weed,  
But the brushwood and gap were no checks to her speed.  
She dashed through the stream and she climbed the broad bank,  
With no word to urge forward, no heel to her flank;  
The gate with its padlock might stand in her way;  
It took more than five bars to keep Black Bess at bay.

She kept her career up for many a league,  
With no slackening of pace and no sign of fatigue;  
Right onward she went till she staggered and dropped;  
But her limbs only failed when her heart-pulse had stopped.  
Her dare-devil rider lived on for a while,  
And told of her work with a triumphing smile:  
And the fame of Dick Turpin had been something less  
If he'd ne'er rode to York on his bonnie Black Bess.

Here's a health to her memory! shirk it who dare-  
If you love what is noble, pledge Turpin's brave mare;  
And the draught will be welcome, the wine will be good;  
If it have half the spirit and strength of her blood.  
May the steed that comes nigh her in courage and fire  
Carry rider more worthy to make its heart tire;  
Though she saved him, and died to prove what she could do,  
Yet her life was most precious by far of the two.

I live on the sea and I'm lord of a ship,  
That starts from her rest like a hound from the slip;  
Her speed is unrivalled, her beauty is rare;  
But her timbers are black as the highwayman's mare.  
From her keel-spanning beam to her sky-greeting spar  
She's as dark as a midnight without moon or star:  
Her name, boys! her name, you may easily guess,

She is christened, right nobly, 'The Bonnie Black Bess.'

Eliza Cook

## Buttercups and Daisies

I never see a young hand hold  
The starry bunch of white and gold,  
But something warm and fresh will start  
About the region of my heart; -  
My smile expires into a sigh;  
I feel a struggling in my eye,  
'Twixt humid drop and sparkling ray,  
Till rolling tears have won their way;  
For, soul and brain will travel back,  
Through memory's chequer'd mazes,  
To days, when I but trod life's track  
For buttercups and daisies.

There seems a bright and fairy spell  
About their very names to dwell;  
And though old Time has mark'd my brow  
With care and thought, I love them now.  
Smile, if you will, but some heartstrings  
Are closest link'd to simplest things;  
And these wild flowers will hold mine fast,  
Till love, and life, and all be past;  
And then the only wish I have  
Is, that the one who raises  
The turf sod o'er me, plant my grave  
With buttercups and daisies.

Eliza Cook

## **Don't Tell the World that You're Waiting for Me**

THREE summers have gone since the first time we met, love,  
And still 'tis in vain that I ask thee to wed ;  
I hear no reply but a gentle " Not yet, love,"  
With a smile of your lip, and a shake of your head.  
Ah ! how oft have I whispered, how oft have I sued thee,  
And breathed my soul's question of " When shall it be ?"  
You know, dear, how long and how truly I've wooed thee,  
So don't tell the world that you're waiting for me.

I have fashioned a home, where the fairies might dwell, love,  
I've planted the myrtle, the rose, and the vine ;  
But the cottage to me is a mere hermit's cell, love,  
And the bloom will be dull till the flowers are thine.  
I've a ring of bright gold, which I gaze on when lonely,  
And sigh with Hope's eloquence, " When will it be ?"  
There needs but thy " Yes," love--one little word only,  
So don't tell the world that you're waiting for me.

Eliza Cook

## Grey-eyed mabel

I gazed on orbs of flashing black;  
I met the glow of hazel light;  
I marked the hue of laughing blue,  
That sparkled in the festive night.  
But none could fling a lasting spell  
To hold me with unchanging power--  
The chains they cast were never fast  
Beyond the gay and fleeting hour--  
Till Grey-eyed Mabel's gentle glance,  
With blushing sense and beauty rife,  
Bade my soul cry with burning sigh,  
'I'm thine, and only thine, for life.'  
Black, blue, and hazel stars have set,  
But Mabel's grey eyes lead me yet.

What was it in sweet Mabel's eyes  
That told me what no others told,  
That roused the dull, that pleased the wise,  
That charmed the young and cheered the old?  
What was it held my world-worn breast  
In holy thrall--unknown before?  
What was it those grey eyes expressed  
That made me worship and adore?  
It was the pure and tender ray  
That filled those eyes in joy or woe;  
It was the beam that could not play  
Without the fountain stream below;  
It was the beam of simple truth,  
Of Woman's faith and trusting Youth.

Those soft, grey eyes were watched by mine  
With earnest, deep, and secret prayer;  
I knew, I felt, my earthly shrine  
Was found and fixed for ever--there.  
I poured my heart one moonlit night  
Into sweet Mabel's listening ear;  
Our mutual vow, from then till now,  
Bound each to each--fond, firm, and dear.  
Our boys and girls are growing round,  
And all give promise, brave and fair,  
But one, young cherub form is found  
First in my love, my hope, my care.  
And why?--ah! why? My soul replies,  
'She has dear Mabel's soft, grey eyes.'

Eliza Cook

## **I Leave Thee for Awhile**

I leave thee for awhile, my love, I leave thee with a sigh;  
The fountain spring within my soul is playing in mine eye;  
I do not blush to own the tear,--let, let it touch my cheek,  
And what my lip has failed to tell, that drop perchance may speak.  
Mavourneen! when again I seek my green isle in the West,  
Oh, promise thou wilt share my lot, and set this heart at rest.

I leave thee for awhile, my love; but every hour will be  
Uncheered and lonely till the one that brings me back to thee.  
I go to make my riches more; but where is man to find  
A vein of gold so rich and pure as that I leave behind?  
Mavourneen! though my home might be the fairest earth possessed,  
Till thou wouldst share and make it warm, this heart would know no rest.

I leave thee for awhile, my love; my cheek is cold and white,  
But ah, I see a promise stand within thy glance of light;  
When next I seek old, Erin's shore, thy step will bless it too,  
And then the grass will seem more green, the sky will have more blue.  
Mavourneen! first and dearest loved, there's sunshine in my breast,  
For thou wilt share my future lot, and set this heart at rest.

Eliza Cook

## **Song of the Sailor Boy**

Cheer up, cheer up, my mother dear!  
Ah! Why do you sit and weep?  
Do you think that he who guards me here,  
Forsakes me on the deep?  
Let hope and faith light up your glance,  
When you see our ship set sail;  
Look, look at her now, and see her dance;  
Oh! Why do you turn so pale?  
There's an English flag, and an English crew;  
So, mother, be proud of your boy in blue.

Ah! Wonder not that, next to thee,  
I love the galloping wave;  
'Tis the first of coursers, bold and free -  
And fit to carry the brave.  
It may bear me on to a dark lee-shore,  
To sink with a gallant band;  
But early or late - here's a heart for my fate,  
Let it come on the sea or the land.  
The storm and the battle shall find me true,  
So, mother, be proud of your boy in blue.

And if the breakers kill our ship,  
And your boy goes down in the foam,  
Be sure the last breath on his lip  
Was a prayer for those at home.  
But come, cheer up! methinks I heard  
A voice in the anchor chain,  
That whispered, like a fairy bird,  
'The Ship will come again.'  
God bless thee, mother, adieu, adieu!  
But never weep for your boy in blue.

Eliza Cook

## Song of the Worm

THE worm, the rich worm, has a noble domain  
In the field that is stored with its millions of slain ;  
The charnel-grounds widen, to me they belong,  
With the vaults of the sepulchre, sculptured and strong.  
The tower of ages in fragments is laid,  
Moss grows on the stones, and I lurk in its shade ;  
And the hand of the giant and heart of the brave  
Must turn weak and submit to the worm and the grave.

Daughters of earth, if I happen to meet  
Your bloom-plucking fingers and sod-treading feet--  
Oh ! turn not away with the shriek of disgust  
From the thing you must mate with in darkness and dust.  
Your eyes may be flashing in pleasure and pride,  
'Neath the crown of a Queen or the wreath of a bride ;  
Your lips may be fresh and your cheeks may be fair--  
Let a few years pass over, and I shall be there.

Cities of splendour, where palace and gate,  
Where the marble of strength and the purple of state ;  
Where the mart and arena, the olive and vine,  
Once flourished in glory ; oh ! are ye not mine ?  
Go look for famed Carthage, and I shall be found  
In the desolate ruin and weed-covered mound ;  
And the slime of my trailing discovers my home,  
'Mid the pillars of Tyre and the temples of Rome.

I am sacredly sheltered and daintily fed  
Where the velvet bedecks, and the white lawn is spread ;  
I may feast undisturbed, I may dwell and carouse  
On the sweetest of lips and the smoothest of brows.  
The voice of the sexton, the chink of the spade,  
Sound merrily under the willow's dank shade.  
They are carnival notes, and I travel with glee  
To learn what the churchyard has given to me.

Oh ! the worm, the rich worm, has a noble domain,  
For where monarchs are voiceless I revel and reign ;  
I delve at my ease and regale where I may ;  
None dispute with the worm in his will or his way.  
The high and the bright for my feasting must fall--  
Youth, Beauty, and Manhood, I prey on ye all :  
The Prince and the peasant, the despot and slave ;  
All, all must bow down to the worm and the grave.

Eliza Cook

## **Teddy O'Neale**

I've come to the cabin he danced his wild jigs in,  
As neat a mud palace as ever was seen;  
And considering it served to keep poultry and pigs in,  
I'm sure it was always most elegant clean.  
But now all about it seems lonely and dreary,  
All sad and all silent, no piper, no reel;  
Not even the sun, through the casement, is cheery,  
Since I miss the dear, darling boy, Teddy O'Neale.

I dreamt but last night--oh! bad luck to my dreaming,  
I'd die if I thought 'twould come truly to pass,--  
But I dreamt, while the tears down my pillow were streaming,  
That Teddy was courting another fair lass.  
Oh! didn't I wake with a weeping and wailing,--  
The grief of that thought was too deep to conceal;  
My mother cried--'Norah, child, what is your ailing?'  
And all I could utter was--'Teddy O'Neale!'

Shall I ever forget when the big ship was ready,  
And the moment was come when my love must depart;  
How I sobbed like a spalpeen, 'Good-bye to you, Teddy!'  
With drops on my cheek and a stone at my heart.  
He says 'tis to better his fortune he's roving,  
But what would be gold to the joy I should feel,  
If I saw him come back to me, honest and loving,  
Still poor, but my own darling, Teddy O'Neale.

Eliza Cook

## **The Banner of Union**

Bring the Harp of the West, and the Pipes of the North,  
When our Trumpet note calls to the field;  
Let the men of old Scotia and Erin come forth,  
And our foemen shall see who must yield.

Side by side in the battle, like granite we'll stand,  
With a will and a might none shall sever;  
For Glory or Death, we will twine in one wreath  
Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle for ever.

Our Banner of Union shall float in the wind  
Over hearts that have never yet quailed;  
The sword shall be drawn and the banner be borne,  
By hands that have never yet failed.  
Sons of heather! your fame in the fight  
Is as old as your glens and your valleys,  
Men of Hibernia! let Right ask for Might;  
And where is the spirit but rallies.

Side by side in the battle, like granite we'll stand,  
With a will and a might none shall sever;  
For Glory or Death, we will twine in one wreath  
Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle for ever.

Eliza Cook

## The Flag of the Free

'Tis the streamer of England - it floats o'er the brave-  
'Tis the fairest unfurled o'er the land or the wave;  
But though brightest in story and matchless in fight,  
'Tis the heralds of Mercy as well as of Might.  
In the cause of the wronged may it ever be first-  
When tyrants are humbled and fetters are burst:  
Be 'Justice' the war-shout, and dastard is he  
Who would scruple to die 'neath the Flag of the Free!

It may trail o'er the halcyons-a bullet-torn rag,  
Or flutter in shreds from the battlement-crag;  
Let the shot whistle through it as fast as it may,  
Till it sweep the last glorious tatter away.  
What matter! we'd hoist the blue jacket on high  
Or the soldier's red sash from the spearhead should fly:  
Though it were but a riband, the foeman should see  
The proud signal and own it-the Flag of the Free!

Have we ever looked out from a far foreign shore,  
To mark the gay pennon each passing ship bore;  
And watch'd every speck that arose from the foam,  
In hope of glad tidings from country and home?-  
Has our straining eye caught the loved colours at last.  
And seen the dear bark bounding on to us fast?  
Then, then have our hearts learnt how precious can be  
The fair streamer of England-the Flag of the Free!

Eliza Cook

## The Old Arm-chair

I LOVE it, I love it ; and who shall dare  
To chide me for loving that old Arm-chair ?  
I've treasured it long as a sainted prize ;  
I've bedewed it with tears, and embalmed it with sighs.  
'Tis bound by a thousand bands to my heart ;  
Not a tie will break, not a link will start.  
Would ye learn the spell ? -- a mother sat there ;  
And a sacred thing is that old Arm-chair.

In Childhood's hour I lingered near  
The hallowed seat with listening ear ;  
And gentle words that mother would give ;  
To fit me to die, and teach me to live.  
She told me shame would never betide,  
With truth for my creed and God for my guide ;  
She taught me to lisp my earliest prayer ;  
As I knelt beside that old Arm-chair.

I sat and watched her many a day,  
When her eye grew dim, and her locks were grey :  
And I almost worshipped her when she smiled,  
And turned from her Bible, to bless her child.  
Years rolled on; but the last one sped--  
My idol was shattered; my earth-star fled :  
I learnt how much the heart can bear,  
When I saw her die in that old Arm-chair.

'Tis past, 'tis past, but I gaze on it now  
With quivering breath and throbbing brow :  
'Twas there she nursed me ; 'twas there she died :  
And Memory flows with lava tide.  
Say it is folly, and deem me weak,  
While the scalding drops start down my cheek ;  
But I love it, I love it ; and cannot tear  
My soul from a mother's old Arm-chair.

Eliza Cook

## The Quiet Eye

THE ORB I like is not the one  
That dazzles with its lightning gleam;  
That dares to look upon the sun,  
As though it challenged brighter beam.  
That orb may sparkle, flash, and roll;  
Its fire may blaze, its shaft may fly;  
But not for me: I prize the soul  
That slumbers in a quiet eye.

There 's something in its placid shade  
That tells of calm, unworldly thought;  
Hope may be crown'd, or joy delay'd—  
No dimness steals, no ray is caught.  
Its pensive language seems to say,  
"I know that I must close and die;"  
And death itself, come when it may,  
Can hardly change the quiet eye.

There 's meaning in its steady glance,  
Of gentle blame or praising love,  
That makes me tremble to advance  
A word, that meaning might reprove.  
The haughty threat, the fiery look,  
My spirit proudly can defy,  
But never yet could meet and brook  
The upbraiding of a quiet eye.

There 's firmness in its even light,  
That augurs of a breast sincere:  
And, oh! take watch how ye excite  
That firmness till it yield a tear.  
Some bosoms give an easy sigh,  
Some drops of grief will freely start,  
But that which sears the quiet eye  
Hath its deep fountain in the heart.

Eliza Cook

## The Sea-Child

HE crawls to the cliff and plays on a brink  
Where every eye but his own would shrink;  
No music he hears but the billow's noise,  
And shells and weeds are his only toys.  
No lullaby can the mother find  
To sing him to rest like the moaning wind;  
And the louder it wails and the fiercer it sweeps,  
The deeper he breathes and the sounder he sleeps.

And now his wandering feet can reach  
The rugged tracks of the desolate beach;  
Creeping about like a Triton imp,  
To find the haunts of the crab and shrimp.  
He clings, with none to guide or help,  
To the furthest ridge of slippery kelp;  
And his bold heart glows while he stands and mocks  
The seamew's cry on the jutting rocks.

Few years have wan'd—and now he stands  
Bareheaded on the shelving sands.  
A boat is moor'd, but his young hands cope  
Right well with the twisted cable rope;  
He frees the craft, she kisses the tide;  
The boy has climb'd her beaten side:  
She drifts—she floats—he shouts with glee;  
His soul hath claim'd its right on the sea.

'T is vain to tell him the howling breath  
Rides over the waters with wreck and death:  
He 'll say there 's more of fear and pain  
On the plague-ridden earth than the storm-lash'd main.  
'T would be as wise to spend thy power  
In trying to lure the bee from the flower,  
The lark from the sky, or the worm from the grave,  
As in weaning the Sea-Child from the wave.

Eliza Cook

## Winter the Season For the Exercise of Charity

We know 'tis good that old Winter should come,  
Roving awhile from his Lapland home;  
'Tis fitting that we should hear the sound  
Of his reindeer sledge on the slippery ground.

For his wide and glittering cloak of snow  
Protects the seeds of life below;  
Beneath his mantle are nurtured and born,  
The roots of the flowers - the germs of the corn.

The whistling tone of his pure strong breath  
Rides purging the vapours of pestilent death:  
I love him, I say, and avow it again,  
For God's wisdom and might shew well in his train.

But the naked - the poor! I know they quail,  
With crouching limbs from the biting gale:  
They pine and starve by the fireless hearth,  
And weep as they gaze on the frost-bound earth.

Stand nobly forth, ye rich of the land!  
With kindly heart and bounteous hand;  
Remember 'tis now their season of need,  
And a prayer for help is a call you must heed.

A few of thy blessings, a tithe of thy gold,  
Will save the young and cherish the old;  
'Tis a glorious task to work such good;  
Do it, ye great ones! Ye can and ye should!

He is not worthy to hold from Heaven  
The trust reposed, the talents given,  
Who will not add to the portion that's scant,  
In the pinching hours of cold and want.

Oh! listen in mercy, ye sons of wealth,  
Basking in comfort and glowing with health;  
Give whate'er ye can spare, and be sure,  
He serveth his Maker who aideth the poor.

Eliza Cook