

Classic Poetry Series

James Brunton Stephens

- poems -

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Day

Linger, oh Sun, for a little, nor close yet this day of a million!
Is there not glory enough in the rose-curtained halls of the West?
Hast thou no joy in the passion-hued folds of thy kingly pavilion?
Why shouldst thou only pass through it? Oh rest thee a little while, rest!

Why should the Night come and take it, the wan Night that cannot enjoy it,
Bringing pale argent for golden, and changing vermilion to grey?
Why should the Night come and shadow it, entering but to destroy it?
Rest 'mid thy ruby-trailed splendours! Oh stay thee a little while, stay!

Rest thee at least a brief hour in it! 'Tis a right royal pavilion.
Lo, there are thrones for high dalliance all gloriously canopied o'er!
Lo, there are hangings of purple, and hangings of blue and vermilion,
And there are fleeces of gold for thy feet on the diapered floor!

Linger, a little while linger. To-morrow my heart may not sing to thee:
This shall be Yesterday, numbered with memories, folded away.
Now should my flesh-fettered soul be set free! I would soar to thee,
cling to thee,
And be thy rere-ward Aurora, pursuing the skirts of To-day!

James Brunton Stephens

Night

Hark how the tremulous night-wind is passing in joy-laden sighs;
Soft through my window it comes, like the fanning of pinions angelic,
Whispering to cease from myself, and look out on the infinite skies.

Out on the orb-studded night, and the crescent effulgence of Dian;
Out on the far-gleaming star-dust that marks where the angels have trod;
Out on the gem-pointed Cross, and the glittering pomp of Orion,
Flaming in measureless azure, the coronal jewels of God;

Luminous streams of delight in the silent immensity flowing,
Journeying surgelessly on through impalpable ethers of peace.
How can I think of myself when infinitude o'er me is glowing,
Glowing with tokens of love from the land where my sorrows shall cease?

Oh, summer-night of the South! Oh, sweet languor of zephyrs love-sighing!
Oh, mighty circuit of shadowy solitude, holy and still!
Music scarce audible, echo-less harmony joyously dying,
Dying in faint suspirations o'er meadow, and forest, and hill!

I must go forth and be part of it, part of the night and its gladness.
But a few steps, and I pause on the marge of the shining lagoon.
Here then, at length, I have rest; and I lay down my burden of sadness,
Kneeling alone 'neath the stars and the silvery arc of the moon.

James Brunton Stephens

Not Understood

Not understood, we move along asunder;
Our paths grow wider as the seasons creep
Along the years; we marvel and we wonder
Why life is life, and then we fall asleep
Not understood.

Not understood, we gather false impressions
And hug them closer as the years go by;
Till virtues often seem to us transgressions;
And thus men rise and fall, and live and die
Not understood.

Not understood! Poor souls with stunted vision
Oft measure giants with their narrow gauge;
The poisoned shafts of falsehood and derision
Are oft impelled 'gainst those who mould the age,
Not understood.

Not understood! The secret springs of action
Which lie beneath the surface and the show,
Are disregarded; with self-satisfaction
We judge our neighbours, and they often go
Not understood.

Not understood! How trifles often change us!
The thoughtless sentence and the fancied slight
Destroy long years of friendship, and estrange us,
And on our souls there falls a freezing blight;
Not understood.

Not understood! How many breasts are aching
For lack of sympathy! Ah! day by day
How many cheerless, lonely hearts are breaking!
How many noble spirits pass away,
Not understood.

O God! that men would see a little clearer,
Or judge less harshly where they cannot see!
O God! that men would draw a little nearer
To one another, -- they'd be nearer Thee,
And understood.

James Brunton Stephens

Spirit of Song

Where is thy dwelling-place? Echo of sweetness,
Seraph of tenderness, where is thy home?
Angel of happiness, herald of fleetness,
Thou hast the key of the star-blazon'd dome.
Where lays that never end
Up to God's throne ascend,
And our fond heart-wishes lovingly throng,
Soaring with thee above,
Bearer of truth and love,
Teacher of heaven's tongue -- Spirit of Song!

Euphony, born in the realms of the tearless,
Mingling thy notes with the voices of Earth;
Wanting thee, all would be dreary and cheerless,
Weaver of harmony, giver of mirth.
Comfort of child and sage,
With us in youth and age,
Soothing the weak and inspiring the strong,
Illuming the blackest night,
Making the day more bright,
Oh! thou art dear to us, Spirit of Song!

Oft in the springtime, sweet words of affection
Are whispered by thee in thy tenderest tone,
And in the winter dark clouds of dejection
By thee are dispelled till all sorrow has flown.
Thou'rt with the zephyrs low,
And with the brooklet's flow,
And with the feathered choir all the year long;
Happy each child of thine,
Blest with thy gifts divine,
Charming our senses, sweet Spirit of Song!

James Brunton Stephens

The Dark Companion

There is an orb that mocked the lore of sages
Long time with mystery of strange unrest;
The steadfast law that rounds the starry ages
Gave doubtful token of supreme behest.

But they who knew the ways of God unchanging,
Concluded some far influence unseen --
Some kindred sphere through viewless ethers ranging,
Whose strong persuasions spanned the void between.

And knowing it alone through perturbation
And vague disquiet of another star,
They named it, till the day of revelation,
"The Dark Companion" -- darkly guessed afar.

But when, through new perfection of appliance,
Faith merged at length in undisputed sight,
The mystic mover was revealed to science,
No Dark Companion, but -- a speck of light.

No Dark Companion, but a sun of glory;
No fell disturber, but a bright compeer;
The shining complement that crowned the story;
The golden link that made the meaning clear.

Oh, Dark Companion, journeying ever by us,
Oh, grim Perturber of our works and ways --
Oh, potent Dread, unseen, yet ever nigh us,
Disquieting all the tenor of our days --

Oh, Dark Companion, Death, whose wide embraces
O'ertake remotest change of clime and skies --
Oh, Dark Companion, Death, whose grievous traces
Are scattered shreds of riven enterprise --

Thou, too, in this wise, when, our eyes unsealing,
The clearer day shall change our faith to sight,
Shalt show thyself, in that supreme revealing,
No Dark Companion, but a thing of light.

No ruthless wrecker of harmonious order;
No alien heart of discord and caprice;
A beckoning light upon the Blissful Border;
A kindred element of law and peace.

So, too, our strange unrest in this our dwelling,
The trembling that thou joinest with our mirth,
Are but thy magnet-communings compelling
Our spirits farther from the scope of earth.

So, doubtless, when beneath thy potency swerving,
'Tis that thou lead'st us by a path unknown,

Our seeming deviations all subserving
The perfect orbit round the central throne.

The night wind moans. The Austral wilds are round me.
The loved who live -- ah, God! how few they are!
I looked above; and heaven in mercy found me
This parable of comfort in a star.

James Brunton Stephens

The Dominion Of Australia

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

James Brunton Stephens

The Dominion of Australia (A Forecast, 1877)

She is not yet; but he whose ear
Thrills to that finer atmosphere
Where footfalls of appointed things,
Reverberant of days to be,
Are heard in forecast echoings,
Like wave-beats from a viewless sea --
Hears in the voiceful tremors of the sky
Auroral heralds whispering, "She is nigh."

She is not yet; but he whose sight
Foreknows the advent of the light,
Whose soul to morning radiance turns
Ere night her curtain hath withdrawn,
And in its quivering folds discerns
The mute monitions of the dawn,
With urgent sense strained onward to descry
Her distant tokens, starts to find Her nigh.

Not yet her day. How long "not yet"? . . .
There comes the flush of violet!
And heavenward faces, all aflame
With sanguine imminence of morn,
Wait but the sun-kiss to proclaim
The Day of The Dominion born.
Prelusive baptism! -- ere the natal hour
Named with the name and prophecy of power.

Already here to hearts intense,
A spirit-force, transcending sense,
In heights unscaled, in deeps unstirred,
Beneath the calm, above the storm,
She waits the incorporating word
To bid her tremble into form.
Already, like divining-rods, men's souls
Bend down to where the unseen river rolls; --

For even as, from sight concealed,
By never flush of dawn revealed,
Nor e'er illumed by golden noon,
Nor sunset-streaked with crimson bar,
Nor silver-spanned by wake of moon,
Nor visited of any star,
Beneath these lands a river waits to bless
(So men divine) our utmost wilderness, --

Rolls dark, but yet shall know our skies,
Soon as the wisdom of the wise
Conspires with nature to disclose
The blessing prisoned and unseen,
Till round our lessening wastes there glows
A perfect zone of broadening green, --
Till all our land, Australia Felix called,

Become one Continent-Isle of Emerald;

So flows beneath our good and ill
A viewless stream of Common Will,
A gathering force, a present might,
That from its silent depths of gloom
At Wisdom's voice shall leap to light,
And hide our barren feuds in bloom,
Till, all our sundering lines with love o'ergrown,
Our bounds shall be the girdling seas alone.

James Brunton Stephens