

Classic Poetry Series

James Joseph Sylvester

- poems -

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Kepler's Apostrophe

Yes! on the annals of my race,
In characters of flame,
Which time shall dim not nor deface,
I'll stamp, my deathless name.

The fire which on my vitals preys,
And inly smouldering lies,
Shall flash out to a meteor's blaze
And stream along the skies.

Clafed as the angry ocean's swell
My soul within me boils,
Like a chained monarch in his cell,
Or lion in the toils.

To wealth, to pride, to lofty state,
No more I'll bend the knee,
But Fortune's minions, meanly great,
Shall stoop their necks to me.

The God which formed me for command,
And gave me strength to rise,
Shall plant His sceptre in my hand,
His lightning in my eyes;

Shall with the thorny crown of fame
My aching temples bind,
And hail me by a mighty name
A monarch of the mind.

Me, heaven's bright galaxy shall greet
Theirs by primordial choice,
And earth the eternal tones repeat
Of my prophetic voice.

Stung in her turn, the heartless fair
Who proudly eyes me now,
Shall weep to see some other share
The godhead of my brow;

Shall weep to see some lovelier star
Snatched to my soul's embrace,
Ascend with me Fame's fiery car
And claim celestial place.

Tune oh! my soul thy loftiest strain,
Exult in song and glee,
For worn has snapped each earthlier chain
And set the immortal free.

Minds destined to a glorious shape
Must first affliction feel;

Wine oozes from the trodden grape,
Iron's blistered into steel;

So gushes from affection bruised
Ambition's purple tide,
And steadfast faith unkindly used
Hardens to stubborn pride.

James Joseph Sylvester

Remonstrance

Oh! why those narrow rules extol?
These but restrain from ill,
True virtue lies in strength of soul
And energy of will.

To all that's great and high aspires,
Prompts to the path of fame
From Heaven draws down Promethean fires
And wraps the soul in flame.

With brow erect, eye undismayed
Confronts the midday sun,
Nor sleeps inglorious in the shade
Of praises cheaply won;

Scans not too curiously the chance
Of good or evil fate,
But with a free and fearless glance
Knocks at Hope's, golden gate;

The truthful course pursues and knows
By Heaven-imparted light,
And scorns to shape to outward shows
Its conscious sense of right.

Still, while it renders Reason's name
The meed of honour due
Forgets not sacred instincts claim
Their share of reverence too.

The frown of unjust censure braves,
Retreats not with the tide,
But nobly stems and stills the waves
Of prejudice and pride.

James Joseph Sylvester