

Classic Poetry Series

James Lionel Michael

- poems -

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`Through Pleasant Paths'

Through pleasant paths, through dainty ways,
Love leads my feet;
Where beauty shines with living rays,
Soft, gentle, sweet;
The placid heart at random strays,
And sings, and smiles, and laughs and plays,
And gathers from the summer days
Their light and heat,
That in its chambers burn and blaze
And beam and beat.

I throw myself among the ferns
Under the shade,
And watch the summer sun that burns
On dell and glade;
To thee, my dear, my fancy turns,
In thee its Paradise discerns,
For thee it sighs, for thee it yearns,
My chosen maid;
And that still depth of passion learns
Which cannot fade.

The wind that whispers in the night,
Subtle and free,
The gorgeous noonday's blinding light,
On hill and tree,
All lovely things that meet my sight,
All shifting lovelinesses bright,
Speak to my heart with calm delight,
Seeming to be
Cloth'd with enchantment, robed in white,
To sing of thee.

The ways of life are hard and cold
To one alone;
Bitter the strife for place and gold --
We weep and groan:
But when love warms the heart grows bold;
And when our arms the prize enfold,
Dearest! the heart can hardly hold
The bliss unknown,
Unspoken, never to be told --
My own, my own!

James Lionel Michael

Personality

"Death is to us change, not consummation."
Heart of Midlothian.

A change! no, surely, not a change,
The change must be before we die;
Death may confer a wider range,
From pole to pole, from sea to sky,
It cannot make me new or strange
To mine own Personality!

For what am I? -- this mortal flesh,
These shrinking nerves, this feeble frame,
For ever racked with ailments fresh
And scarce from day to day the same --
A fly within the spider's mesh,
A moth that plays around the flame!

THIS is not I -- within such coil
The immortal spirit rests awhile:
When this shall lie beneath the soil,
Which its mere mortal parts defile,
THAT shall for ever live and foil
Mortality, and pain, and guile.

Whatever Time may make of me
Eternity must see me still
Clear from the dross of earth, and free
From every stain of every ill;
Yet still, where-e'er -- what-e'er I be,
Time's work Eternity must fill.

When all the worlds have ceased to roll,
When the long light has ceased to quiver
When we have reached our final goal
And stand beside the Living River,
This vital spark -- this loving soul,
Must last for ever and for ever.

To choose what I must be is mine,
Mine in these few and fleeting days,
I may be if I will, divine,
Standing before God's throne in praise, --
Through all Eternity to shine
In yonder Heaven's sapphire blaze.

Father, the soul that counts it gain
To love Thee and Thy law on earth,
Unchanged but free from mortal stain,
Increased in knowledge and in worth,
And purified from this world's pain,
Shall find through Thee a second birth.

A change! no surely not a change!
The change must be before we die;
Death may confer a wider range
From world to world, from sky to sky,
It cannot make me new or strange
To mine own Personality!

James Lionel Michael

The Eye of the Beholder

IF, as they tell in stories old,
The waters of Pactolus roll'd
Over a sand of shifting gold;

If ever there were fairies, such
As those that charm the child so much,
With jewels growing 'neath their touch;

If, in the wine-cup's sweet deceit,
There lies a secret pleasant cheat,
That turns to beauty all we meet;

The stream, the fairy, and the wine,
In the first love of youth combine
To make its object seem divine.

No golden sand of fabl'd river,
No jewel glittering for ever,
No wine-born vision's melting quiver,

In vivid glory can compare
With that which we ourselves prepare
To throw round that we fancy fair.

Never such beauty glittered yet,
In golden beams of suns that set
On cupola and minaret.

Never such beauty met men's eyes
In silver light of moons that rise
O'er lonely lakes 'neath tropic skies.

The world holds nothing of such worth,
There 's nothing half so fair on earth,
As that to which the heart gives birth:

External beauties pall and fade;
But that which my own soul hath made,
To my conception, knows no shade.

To every ark there comes a dove,
To every heart from heaven above
Is sent a beauty born of love.

The moonlit lake, the waving trees,
It is the eye which looks on these
That makes the loveliness it sees.

Out of myself the beauty grows,
Out of myself the beauty flows
That decks the petals of the rose.

So, when at Ada's feet I lay,
And saw her glorious as the day,
'Twas my own heart that lent the ray.

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