

Classic Poetry Series

James Lionel Michael

- 3 poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

James Lionel Michael (October 1824 – 26 April 1868)

James Lionel Michael was an Anglo-Australian solicitor and poet.

Early Life

Michael was born in Red Lion Square, London, the second son of James Walter Michael, a solicitor, and his wife, Rose Lemon née Hart. Michael told his friend Joseph Sheridan Moore, that the passage on page 12 of John Cumberland, beginning "My earliest memory", gives an exact picture of his childhood. After visiting Europe, Michael was articled to his father and began to mix in artistic and literary society. Sheridan Moore states that Michael became friendly with Millais and Ruskin, and published a pamphlet which made some stir at the time, vindicating the position of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. Moore also says that though "always temperate and abstemious in his habits he had a talent for frittering away his money". This could have been one of the reasons for his migration to Australia.

Australia

Michael arrived in New South Wales on 30 July 1853 and practised as a solicitor with some success. He became friendly with Joseph Sheridan Moore who introduced him to [Henry Kendall](http://www.poemhunter.com/henry-kendall/), whom he afterwards took into his office and "treated as an affectionate elder brother would a younger one". In 1857 Michael published *Songs without Music*, a collection of lyrics, and in 1860 *John Cumberland*, a long, largely autobiographical poem. In 1861 he moved to Grafton on the Clarence River and for a time practised successfully; but towards the end of his life he appears to have made enemies and was in financial difficulties. In 1864, Michael was legally separated from his wife. On the evening of Sunday 26 April 1868 Michael went for a walk dressed in a great-coat, cap and galoshes; two days later his body was found floating in the Clarence River. The medical evidence stated that there was a deep cut over the right eye "such as might be produced by falling on a broken bottle". The coroner's jury returned an open verdict, and although a set of verses Michael had written a few weeks before suggested to some people that he had contemplated suicide, the possibility of this was indignantly denied by his friend, Sheridan Moore, who declared that the evidence suggested either foul play or accident, rather than suicide. Michael married in 1854 and was survived by a son. He died heavily in debt.

Michael wrote musical verse, some of which has been included in Australian anthologies. His long poem, *John Cumberland*, contains some good passages, however has many patches of prose. Though a minor Australian

poet, Michael's encouragement of the young Kendall gives him a special interest. His friends said he had a charming personality.

Works:

Songs without Music (1857)
John Cumberland (1860)

`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.

James Lionel Michael