

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **James Montgomery**

**- poems -**

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## A Cry from South Africa

*On building a chapel at Cape Town, for the Negro slaves of the colony, in 1828.*

Afric, from her remotest strand,  
Lifts to high heaven one fetter'd hand,  
And to the utmost of her chain  
Stretches the other o'er the main:  
Then, kneeling 'midst ten thousand slaves,  
Utters a cry across the waves,  
Of power to reach to either pole,  
And pierce, like conscience, through the soul,  
Though dreary, faint, and low the sound,  
Like life-blood gurgling from a wound,  
As if her heart, before it broke,  
Had found a human tongue, and spoke.

"Britain! not now I ask of thee  
Freedom, the right of bond and free;  
Let Mammon hold, while Mammon can,  
The bones and blood of living man;  
Let tyrants scorn, while tyrants dare,  
The shrieks and writhings of despair;  
An end will come -- it will not wait,  
Bonds, yokes, and scourges have their date,  
Slavery itself must pass away,  
And be a tale of yesterday.

"But now I urge a dearer claim,  
And urge it by a mightier name:  
Hope of the world! on thee I call,  
By the great Father of us all,  
By the Redeemer of our race,  
And by the Spirit of all grace;  
Turn not, Britannia, from my plea;  
-- So help Thee GOD as Thou help'st me!  
Mine outcast children come to light  
From darkness, and go down in night;  
-- A night of more mysterious gloom  
Than that which wrapt them in the womb:  
Oh! that the womb had been the grave  
Of every being born a slave!  
Oh! that the grave itself might close  
The slave's unutterable woes!  
But what beyond that gulf may be,  
What portion in eternity,  
For those who live to curse their breath,  
And die without a hope in death,  
I know not, and I dare not think;  
Yet, while I shudder o'er the brink  
Of that unfathomable deep,  
Where wrath lies chain'd and judgments sleep,

To thee, thou paradise of isles!  
Where mercy in full glory smiles;  
Eden of lands! o'er all the rest  
By blessing others doubly blest,  
-- To thee I lift my weeping eye;  
Send me the Gospel, or I die;  
The word of CHRIST's salvation give,  
That I may hear his voice and live."

James Montgomery

## A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief

A poor wayfaring Man of grief  
Hath often crossed me on my way,  
Who sued so humbly for relief  
That I could never answer nay.  
I had not power to ask his name,  
Whereto he went, or whence he came;  
Yet there was something in his eye  
That won my love; I knew not why.

Once, when my scanty meal was spread,  
He entered; not a word he spake,  
Just perishing for want of bread.  
I gave him all; he blessed it, brake,  
And ate, but gave me part again.  
Mine was an angel's portion then,  
For while I fed with eager haste,  
The crust was manna to my taste.

I spied him where a fountain burst  
Clear from the rock; his strength was gone.  
The heedless water mocked his thirst;  
He heard it, saw it hurrying on.  
I ran and raised the sufferer up;  
Thrice from the stream he drained my cup,  
Dipped and returned it running o'er;  
I drank and never thirsted more.

'Twas night; the floods were out; it blew  
A winter hurricane aloof.  
I heard his voice abroad and flew  
To bid him welcome to my roof.  
I warmed and clothed and cheered my guest  
And laid him on my couch to rest;  
Then made the earth my bed, and seemed  
In Eden's garden while I dreamed.

Stripped, wounded, beaten nigh to death,  
I found him by the highway side.  
I roused his pulse, brought back his breath,  
Revived his spirit, and supplied  
Wine, oil, refreshment—he was healed.  
I had myself a wound concealed,  
But from that hour forgot the smart,  
And peace bound up my broken heart.

In pris'n I saw him next, condemned  
To meet a traitor's doom at morn.  
The tide of lying tongues I stemmed,  
And honored him 'mid shame and scorn.  
My friendship's utmost zeal to try,  
He asked if I for him would die.  
The flesh was weak; my blood ran chill,

But my free spirit cried, "I will!"

Then in a moment to my view  
The stranger started from disguise.  
The tokens in His hands I knew;  
The Savior stood before mine eyes.  
He spake, and my poor name He named,  
"Of Me thou hast not been ashamed.  
These deeds shall thy memorial be;  
Fear not, thou didst them unto Me."

James Montgomery

## **Almighty Spirit, Now Behold**

Almighty Spirit, now behold  
A world by sin destroyed:  
Creating Spirit, as of old,  
Move on the formless void,  
Move on the formless void.

Give Thou the Word: that healing sound  
Shall quell the deadly strife;  
And earth again, like Eden crowned,  
Bring forth the tree of life,  
Bring forth the tree of life.

If sang the morning stars for joy,  
When nature rose to view,  
What strains will angel harps employ,  
When Thou shalt all renew,  
When Thou shalt all renew!

And if the sons of God rejoice  
To hear a Savior's Name,  
How will the ransomed raise their voice  
To whom that Savior came,  
To whom that Savior came!

Lo, every kindred, every tribe,  
Assembling round the throne,  
The new creation shall ascribe  
To sovereign love alone,  
To sovereign love alone!

James Montgomery

## **In the Hour of Trial**

In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me,  
Lest by base denial I depart from Thee.  
When Thou seest me waver, with a look recall,  
Nor for fear or favor suffer me to fall.

With forbidden pleasures would this vain world charm,  
Or its sordid treasures spread to work me harm,  
Bring to my remembrance sad Gethsemane,  
Or, in darker semblance, cross-crowned Calvary.

Should Thy mercy send me sorrow, toil and woe,  
Or should pain attend me on my path below,  
Grant that I may never fail Thy hand to see;  
Grant that I may ever cast my care on Thee.

When my last hour cometh, fraught with strife and pain,  
When my dust returneth to the dust again,  
On Thy truth relying, through that mortal strife,  
Jesus, take me, dying, to eternal life.

James Montgomery

## Inscription under the Picture of an Aged Negro-woman

Art thou a woman? -- so am I; and all  
That woman can be, I have been, or am;  
A daughter, sister, consort, mother, widow.  
Whiche'er of these thou art, O be the friend  
Of one who is what thou canst never be!  
Look on thyself, thy kindred, home, and country,  
Then fall upon thy knees, and cry "Thank GOD,  
An English woman cannot be a SLAVE!"

Art thou a man? -- Oh! I have known, have loved,  
And lost, all that to woman man can be;  
A father, brother, husband, son, who shared  
My bliss in freedom, and my woe in bondage.  
-- A childless widow now, a friendless slave,  
What shall I ask of thee, since I have nought  
To lose but life's sad burden; nought to gain  
But heaven's repose? -- these are beyond thy power;  
Me thou canst neither wrong nor help; -- what then?  
Go to the bosom of thy family,  
Gather thy little children round thy knees,  
Gaze on their innocence; their clear, full eyes,  
All fix'd on thine; and in their mother, mark  
The loveliest look that woman's face can wear,  
Her look of love, beholding them and thee:  
Then, at the altar of your household joys,  
Vow one by one, vow altogether, vow  
With heart and voice, eternal enmity  
Against oppression by your brethern's hands:  
Till man nor woman under Britain's laws,  
Nor son nor daughter born within her empire,  
Shall buy, or sell, or hold, or be, a slave.

James Montgomery

## **Lord, Teach Us How to Pray Aright**

Lord, teach us how to pray aright,  
With reverence and with fear;  
Though dust and ashes in Thy sight,  
We may, we must draw near.

We perish if we cease from prayer;  
O grant us power to pray;  
And when to meet Thee we prepare,  
Lord, meet us by the way.

God of all grace, we come to Thee  
With broken, contrite hearts;  
Give what Thine eye delights to see,  
Truth in the inward parts.

Faith is the only sacrifice  
That can for sin atone;  
To cast our hopes, to fix our eyes,  
On Christ, on Christ alone.

Patience to watch, and wait, and weep,  
Though mercy long delay;  
Courage our fainting souls to keep,  
And trust Thee though Thou slay.

Give these, and then Thy will be done,  
Thus, strengthened with all might,  
We, through Thy Spirit and Thy Son,  
Shall pray, and pray aright.

James Montgomery

## **O Spirit of the Living God**

O Spirit of the living God,  
In all Thy plenitude of grace,  
Where'er the foot of man hath trod,  
Descend on our apostate race.

Give tongues of fire and hearts of love  
To preach the reconciling Word,  
Give power and unction from above,  
Whene'er the joyful sound is heard.

Be darkness, at Thy coming, light;  
Confusion, order in Thy path;  
Souls without strength inspire with might;  
Bid mercy triumph over wrath.

O Spirit of the Lord, prepare  
All the round earth her God to meet;  
Breathe Thou abroad like morning air,  
Till hearts of stone begin to beat.

Baptize the nations; far and nigh  
The triumphs of the cross record;  
The Name of Jesus glorify,  
Till every kindred call Him Lord.

God from eternity hath willed  
All flesh shall His salvation see:  
So be the Father's love fulfilled,  
The Savior's sufferings crowned through Thee.

James Montgomery

## People of the Living God

People of the living God,  
I have sought the world around;  
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,  
Peace and comfort nowhere found:  
Now to you my spirit turns—  
Turns a fugitive unblest;  
Brethren, where your altar burns,  
Oh, receive me into rest.

Lonely I no longer roam  
Like the cloud, the wind, the wave;  
Where you dwell shall be my home,  
Where you die shall be my grave;  
Mine the God Whom you adore;  
Your Redeemer shall be mine;  
Earth can fill my soul no more—  
Every idol I resign.

Tell me not of gain and loss,  
Ease, enjoyment, pomp, and pow'r;  
Welcome poverty and cross,  
Shame reproach, affliction's hour.  
"Follow Me"—I know Thy voice;  
Jesus, Lord, Thy steps I see;  
Now I take Thy yoke by choice,  
Light Thy burden now to me.

James Montgomery

## **Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire**

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Unuttered or expressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
That infant lips can try;  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death;  
He enters heaven with prayer.

O Thou, by Whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way;  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:  
Lord, teach us how to pray!

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,  
Returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice  
And cry, "Behold, he prays!"

The saints in prayer appear as one  
In word, in deed, and mind,  
While with the Father and the Son  
Sweet fellowship they find.

No prayer is made by man alone  
The Holy Spirit pleads,  
And Jesus, on th'eternal throne,  
For sinners intercedes.

O Thou by Whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way,  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:  
Lord, teach us how to pray.

James Montgomery

## **Servants of God, in Joyful Lays**

Servants of God, in joyful lays,  
Sing ye the Lord Jehovah's praise;  
His glorious Name let all adore,  
From age to age, forevermore.

Blest be that Name, supremely blest,  
From the sun's rising to its rest;  
Above the heav'ns His pow'r is known,  
Through all the earth His goodness shown.

Who is like God? so great, so high,  
He bows Himself to view the sky;  
And yet, with condescending grace,  
Looks down upon the human race.

He hears the uncomplaining moan  
Of those who sit and weep alone;  
He lifts the mourner from the dust;  
In Him the poor may safely trust.

O then, aloud, in joyful lays,  
Sing to the Lord Jehovah's praise;  
His saving Name let all adore,  
From age to age, forevermore.

James Montgomery

## **Songs of Praise the Angels Sang**

Songs of praise the angels sang,  
Heav'n with alleluias rang,  
When creation was begun,  
When God spoke and it was done.

Songs of praise awoke the morn  
When the Prince of Peace was born;  
Songs of praise arose when He  
Captive led Captivity.

Heav'n and earth must pass away!  
Songs of praise shall crown that day!  
God will make new heav'ns and earth;  
Songs of praise shall hail their birth.

And can man alone be dumb,  
Till that glorious kingdom come?  
No: the church delights to raise  
Psalms, and hymns, and songs of praise.

Saints below, with heart and voice,  
Still in songs of praise rejoice,  
Learning here, by faith and love,  
Songs of praise to sing above.

Borne upon their latest breath,  
Songs of praise shall conquer death;  
Then amidst eternal joy,  
Songs of praise their powers employ.

Hymns of glory, songs of praise,  
Father, unto Thee we raise;  
Jesus, glory unto Thee,  
With the Spirit, ever be.

James Montgomery

## **Sow in the Morn Thy Seed**

Sow in the morn thy seed,  
At eve hold not thy hand;  
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,  
Broadcast it o'er the land.

Thou know'st not which may thrive,  
The late or early sown;  
God keeps His precious seed alive,  
When and wherever thrown.

Thou canst not toil in vain;  
Cold, heat, and moist, and dry,  
Shall foster and mature the grain  
For garnerers in the sky.

Thence, when the glorious end,  
The day of God is come,  
The angels reapers shall descend,  
And heav'n cry, "Harvest Home."

James Montgomery

## **Stand Up and Bless the Lord**

Stand up and bless the Lord  
Ye people of His choice;  
Stand up and bless the Lord your God  
With heart and soul and voice.

Though high above all praise,  
Above all blessing high,  
Who would not fear His holy Name,  
And laud and magnify?

O for the living flame  
From His own altar brought,  
To touch our lips, our minds inspire,  
And wing to heaven our thought!

There, with benign regard,  
Our hymns He deigns to hear;  
Though unrevealed to mortal sense,  
Our spirits feel Him near.

God is our Strength and Song,  
And His salvation ours;  
Then be His love in Christ proclaimed  
With all our ransomed powers.

Stand up and bless the Lord;  
The Lord your God adore;  
Stand up and bless His glorious Name;  
Henceforth forevermore.

James Montgomery

## **Thank and Praise Jehovah's Name**

Thank and Praise Jehovah's Name;  
For His mercies, firm and sure,  
From eternity the same  
To eternity endure.

Let the ransomed thus rejoice,  
Gathered out of every land,  
As the people of His choice,  
Plucked from the destroyer's hand.

Praise Him, ye who know His love;  
Praise Him from the depths beneath;  
Praise Him in the heights above;  
Praise your Maker all that breathe.

For His truth and mercy stand,  
Past, and present, and to be,  
Like the years of His right hand—  
Like His own eternity.

James Montgomery

## **The Flash at Midnight**

The flash at midnight! - 'twas a light  
That gave the blind a moment's sight  
Then sank in tenfold gloom;  
Loud, deep, and long, the thunder broke,  
The deaf ear instantly awoke,  
Then closed as in the tomb:  
An angel might have passed my bed,  
Sounded the trump of God, and fled.

So life appears; - a sudden birth,  
A glance revealing heaven and earth  
It is - and it is not!  
So fame the poet's hope deceives,  
Who sings for after time, and leaves  
A name - to be forgot,  
Life - is a lightning-flash of breath;  
Fame - but a thunder clap at death.

James Montgomery

## **The Lord Is My Shepherd**

The Lord is my Shepherd, no want shall I know;  
I feed in green pastures, safe folded I rest;  
He leadeth my soul where the still waters flow,  
Restores me when wand'ring, redeems when oppressed.

Through valley and shadow of death though I stray,  
Since Thou art my Guardian, no evil I fear;  
Thy rod shall defend me, Thy staff be my stay;  
No harm can befall, with my Comforter near.

In midst of affliction my table is spread;  
With blessings unmeasured my cup runneth o'er;  
With perfume and oil Thou anointest my head;  
O what shall I ask of Thy providence more?

Let goodness and mercy, my bountiful God,  
Still follow my steps till I meet Thee above;  
I seek, by the path which my forefathers trod,  
Through land of their sojourn, Thy Kingdom of love.

James Montgomery

## **To the Temple I Repair**

To Thy temple I repair;  
Lord, I love to worship there  
When within the veil I meet  
Christ before the mercy seat.

I through Him am reconciled,  
I through Him become Thy child.  
Abba, Father, give me grace  
In Thy courts to seek Thy face.

While Thy glorious praise is sung,  
Touch my lips, unloose my tongue,  
That my joyful soul may bless  
Christ the Lord, my Righteousness.

While the prayers of saints ascend,  
God of Love, to mine attend.  
Hear me, for Thy Spirit pleads;  
Hear, for Jesus intercedes.

While I hearken to Thy law,  
Fill my soul with humble awe  
Till Thy Gospel bring to me  
Life and immortality.

While Thy ministers proclaim  
Peace and pardon in Thy Name,  
Through their voice, by faith, may I  
Hear Thee speaking from the sky.

From Thy house when I return,  
May my heart within me burn,  
And at evening let me say,  
"I have walked with God today."

James Montgomery

## **When Jesus Left His Father's Throne**

When Jesus left His Father's throne,  
He chose a humble birth;  
Like us, unhonored and unknown,  
He came to dwell on earth.  
Like Him may we be found below,  
In wisdom's path of peace;  
Like Him in grace and knowledge grow,  
As years and strength increase.

Sweet were His words and kind His look,  
When mothers round Him pressed;  
Their infants in His arms He took,  
And on His bosom blessed.  
Safe from the world's alluring harms,  
Beneath His watchful eye,  
Thus in the circle of His arms  
May we forever lie.

When Jesus into Zion rode,  
The children sang around;  
For joy they plucked the palms and strewed  
Their garments on the ground.  
Hosanna our glad voices raise,  
Hosanna to our King!  
Should we forget our Savior's praise,  
The stones themselves would sing.

James Montgomery