

Classic Poetry Series

John Henry Newman

- poems -

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England

Type of the West, and glorying in the name
More than in Faith's pure fame!
Oh, trust not crafty fort nor rock renowned
Earned upon hostile ground;
Wielding Trade's master-keys, at thy proud will
To lock or loose its waters, England! trust not still.

Dread thine own power! Since haughty Babel's prime,
High towers have been man's crime.
Since her hoar age, when the huge moat lay bare,
Strongholds have been man's snare.
Thy nest is in the crags; ah, refuge frail!
Mad counsel in its hour, or traitors, will prevail.

He who scanned Sodom for His righteous men
Still spares thee for thy ten;
But, should vain tongues the Bride of Heaven defy,
He will not pass thee by;
For, as earth's kings welcome their spotless guest,
So gives He them by turn, to suffer or be blest.

John Henry Newman

Reverses

WHEN mirth is full and free,
Some sudden gloom shall be;
When haughty power mounts high,
The Watcher's axe is nigh.
All growth has bound; when greatest found,
It hastes to die.

When the rich town, that long
Has lain its huts among,
Uprears its pageants vast,
And vaunts—it shall not last!
Bright tints that shine are but a sign
Of summer past.

And when thine eye surveys,
With fond adoring gaze,
And yearning heart, thy friend,
Love to its grave doth tend.
All gifts below, save Truth, but grow
Towards an end.

John Henry Newman

The Elements

MAN is permitted much
To scan and learn
In Nature's frame;
Till he well-nigh can tame
Brute mischiefs, and can touch
Invisible things, and turn
All warring ills to purposes of good.
Thus, as a god below,
He can control,
And harmonize, what seems amiss to flow
As sever'd from the whole
And dimly understood.

But o'er the elements
One Hand alone,
One Hand has sway.
What influence day by day
In straiter belt prevents
The impious Ocean, thrown
Alternate o'er the ever-sounding shore?
Or who has eye to trace
How the Plague came?
Forerun the doublings of the Tempest's race?
Or the Air's weight and flame
On a set scale explore?

Thus God has will'd
That man, when fully skill'd,
Still gropes in twilight dim;
Encompass'd all his hours
By fearfulest powers
Inflexible to him.
That so he may discern
His feebleness,
And e'en for earth's success
To Him in wisdom turn,
Who holds for us the keys of either home,
Earth and the world to come.

John Henry Newman

The Pillar of the Cloud

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home --
 Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene, -- one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
 Should'st lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
 Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

John Henry Newman

The Sign Of The Cross

WHENE'ER across this sinful flesh of mine
I draw the Holy Sign,
All good thoughts stir within me, and renew
Their slumbering strength divine;
Till there springs up a courage high and true
To suffer and to do.

And who shall say, but hateful spirits around,
For their brief hour unbound,
Shudder to see, and wail their overthrow?
While on far heathen ground
Some lonely Saint hails the fresh odor, though
Its source he cannot know.

John Henry Newman