Classic Poetry Series

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

‘He came unto His own, and His own received Him not’

As Christ the Lord was passing by,
 He came, one night, to a cottage door.
 He came, a poor man, to the poor;
He had no bed whereon to lie.

He asked in vain for a crust of bread,
 Standing there in the frozen blast.
 The door was locked and bolted fast.
‘Only a beggar!’ the poor man said.

Christ the Lord went further on,
 Until He came to a palace gate.
 There a king was keeping his state,
In every window the candles shone.

The king beheld Him out in the cold.
 He left his guests in the banquet-hall.
 He bade his servants tend them all.
‘I wait on a Guest I know of old.’

‘’Tis only a beggar-man!’ they said.
 ‘Yes,’ he said; ‘it is Christ the Lord.’
 He spoke to Him a kindly word,
He gave Him wine and he gave Him bread.

Now Christ is Lord of Heaven and Hell,
 And all the words of Christ are true.
 He touched the cottage, and it grew;
He touched the palace, and it fell.

The poor man is become a king.
 Never was man so sad as he.
 Sorrow and Sin on the throne make three,
He has no joy in mortal thing.

But the sun streams in at the cottage door
 That stands where once the palace stood.
 And the workman, toiling to earn his food,
Was never a king before.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Affection

The earth that made the rose,
She also is thy mother, and not I.
The flame wherewith thy maiden spirit glows
Was lighted at no hearth that I sit by.
I am as far below as heaven above thee.
Were I thine angel, more I could not love thee.

Bid me defend thee!
Thy danger over-human strength shall lend me,
A hand of iron and a heart of steel,
To strike, to wound, to slay, and not to feel.
But if you chide me,
I am a weak, defenceless child beside thee.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

After St. Augustine

Sunshine let it be or frost,
 Storm or calm, as Thou shalt choose;
Though Thine every gift were lost,
 Thee Thyself we could not lose.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Blue and White

BLUE is Our Lady’s colour,
  White is Our Lord’s.
To-morrow I will wear a knot
  Of blue and white cords,
That you may see it, where you ride
  Among the flashing swords.

O banner, white and sunny blue,
  With prayer I wove thee!
For love the white, for faith the heavenly hue,
And both for him, so tender-true,
  Him that doth love me!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Come Home!

When wintry winds are no more heard,
    And joy's in every bosom,
When summer sings in every bird,
    And shines in every blossom,
When happy twilight hours are long,
Come home, my love, and think no wrong!

When berries gleam above the stream
    And half the fields are yellow,
Come back to me, my joyous dream,
    The world hath not thy fellow!
And I will make thee Queen among
The Queens of summer and of song.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Death and the Lady

TURN in, my lord, she said ;
As it were the Father of Sin
I have hated the Father of the Dead,
The slayer of my kin ;
By the Father of the Living led,
Turn in, my lord, turn in.

We were foes of old ; thy touch was cold,
But mine is warm as life ;
I have struggled and made thee loose thy hold,
I have turned aside the knife.
Despair itself in me was bold,
I have striven, and won the strife.

But that which conquered thee and rose
Again to earth descends ;
For the last time we have come to blows.
And the long combat ends.
The worst and secretest of foes,
Be now my friend of friends.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Good Friday in my Heart

GOOD FRIDAY in my heart! Fear and affright!
My thoughts are the Disciples when they fled,
My words the words that priest and soldier said,
My deed the spear to desecrate the dead.
And day, Thy death therein, is changed to night.

Then Easter in my heart sends up the sun.
My thoughts are Mary, when she turned to see.
My words are Peter, answering, 'Lov'st thou Me?'
My deeds are all Thine own drawn close to Thee,
And night and day, since Thou dost rise, are one.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

I ask of thee, love, nothing but relief

I ask of thee, love, nothing but relief.
Thou canst not bring the old days back again;
For I was happy then,
Not knowing heavenly joy, not knowing grief.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Larghetto

Grant me but a day, love,
    But a day,
Ere I give my heart,
    My heart away,
Ere I say the word
    I'll ne'er unsay.

Is it earnest with me?
    Is it play?
Did the world in arms
    Cry to me, "Stay!"
Not a moment then
    Would I delay.

Yet, for very love,
    I say thee nay.
Ere I give my heart,
    My heart away,
Grant me but a day, love,
    But a day!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Our Lady

MOTHER of God! no lady thou:
  Common woman of common earth
Our Lady ladies call thee now,
  But Christ was never of gentle birth;
  A common man of the common earth.

For God's ways are not as our ways:
  The noblest lady in the land
Would have given up half her days,
  Would have cut off her right hand,
  To bear the child that was God of the land.

Never a lady did He choose,
Only a maid of low degree,
So humble she might not refuse
The carpenter of Galilee:
A daughter of the people, she.

Out she sang the song of her heart.
  Never a lady so had sung.
She knew no letters, had no art;
  To all mankind, in woman's tongue,
  Hath Israelitish Mary sung.

And still for men to come she sings,
Nor shall her singing pass away.
'He hath fillàd the hungry with good things'—
O listen, lords and ladies gay!—
'And the rich He hath sent empty away.'

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Punctilio

O LET me be in loving nice,
Dainty, fine, and o’er precise,
That I may charm my charmàd dear
As tho’ I felt a secret fear
To lose what never can be lost,—
Her faith who still delights me most!
So shall I be more than true,
Ever in my ageing new.
So dull habit shall not be
Wrongly call’d Fidelity.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

The Other Side of a Mirror

I sat before my glass one day,
And conjured up a vision bare,
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,
That erst were found reflected there -
The vision of a woman, wild
With more than womanly despair.
Her hair stood back on either side
A face bereft of loveliness.
It had no envy now to hide
What once no man on earth could guess.
It formed the thorny aureole
Of hard, unsanctified distress.

Her lips were open - not a sound
Came though the parted lines of red,
Whate'er it was, the hideous wound
In silence and secret bled.
No sigh relieved her speechless woe,
She had no voice to speak her dread.

And in her lurid eyes there shone
The dying flame of life's desire,
Made mad because its hope was gone,
And kindled at the leaping fire
Of jealousy and fierce revenge,
And strength that could not change nor tire.

Shade of a shadow in the glass,
O set the crystal surface free!
Pass - as the fairer visions pass -
Nor ever more return, to be
The ghost of a distracted hour,
That heard me whisper: - 'I am she!'

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

The Witch

I HAVE walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall nor strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,
But I never came here before.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
I dare not stand in the blast.
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
And the worst of death is past.
I am but a little maiden still,
My little white feet are sore.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
Who plead for their heart's desire.
She came--she came--and the quivering flame
Sunk and died in the fire.
It never was lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

To Memory

Strange Power, I know not what thou art,
Murderer or mistress of my heart.
I know I'd rather meet the blow
Of my most unrelenting foe
Than live---as now I live---to be
Slain twenty times a day by thee.

Yet, when I would command thee hence,
Thou mockest at the vain pretence,
Murmuring in mine ear a song
Once loved, alas! forgotten long;
And on my brow I feel a kiss
That I would rather die than miss.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

Unwelcome

|WE were young, we were merry, we were very very wise,
And the door stood open at our feast,
When there passed us a woman with the West in her eyes,
And a man with his back to the East.

O, still grew the hearts that were beating so fast,
The loudest voice was still.
The jest died away on our lips as thy passed,
And the rays of July struck chill.

The cups of red wine turned pale on the board,
The white bread black as soot.
The hound forgot the hand of her lord,
She fell down at his foot.

Low let me lie, where the dead dog lies,
Ere I sit me down again at a feast,
When there passes a woman with the West in her eyes,
And a man with his back to the East.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

We Never Said Farewell

WE never said farewell, nor even looked
Our last upon each other, for no sign
Was made when we the linkèd chain unhooked
And broke the level line.

And here we dwell together, side by side,
Our places fixed for life upon the chart.
Two islands that the roaring seas divide
Are not more far apart.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

When my love did what I would not, what I would not

When my love did what I would not, what I would not,
  I could hear his merry voice upon the wind,
Crying, "e;Fairest, shut your eyes, for see you should not.
    Love is blind!"

When my love said what I say not, what I say not,
  With a joyous laugh he quieted my fears,
Whispering, "Fairest, hearken not, for hear you may not.
    Hath Love ears?"

When my love said, "Will you longer let me seek it?
  Blind and deaf is she that doth not bid me come!"
All my heart said murmuring, "Dearest, can I speak it?
    Love is dumb!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge