

VARIOUS

EYES OF

YOUTH

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«Public Domain»

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Eyes of Youth / Various — «Public Domain»,

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Various
Eyes of Youth / A Book of Verse by Padraic
Colum, Shane Leslie, Viola Meynell, Ruth
Lindsay, Hugh Austin, Judith Lytton,
Olivia Meynell, Maurice Healy, Monica
Saleeby & Francis Meynell. With four
early poems by Francis Thompson &
a foreword by Gilbert K. Chesterton

FOREWORD

My office on this occasion is one which I may well carry as lightly as possible. In our society, I am told, one needs an introduction to a beautiful woman; but I have never heard of men needing an introduction to a beautiful song. Prose before poetry is an unmeaning interruption; for poetry is perhaps the one thing in the world that explains itself. The only possible prelude for songs is silence; and I shall endeavour here to imitate the brevity of the silence as well as its stillness.

This collection contains four new poems by one whom all serious critics now class with Shelley and Keats and those other great ones cut down with their work unfinished. Yet I would not speak specially of him, lest modern critics should run away with their mad notion of a one-man influence; and call this a "school" of Francis Thompson. Francis Thompson was not a schoolmaster. He would have said as freely as Whitman (and with a far more consistent philosophy), "I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free." The modern world has this mania about plagiarism because the modern world cannot comprehend the idea of communion. It thinks that men must steal ideas; it does not understand that men may share them. The saints did not imitate each other; not always even study each other; they studied the Imitation of Christ. A real religion is that in which any two solitary people might suddenly say the same thing at any moment. It would therefore be most misleading to give to this collection an air of having been inspired by its most famous contributor. The little lyrics of this little book must surely be counted individual, even by those who may count them mysterious. A variety verging on quaintness is the very note of the assembled bards.

Take, for example, Mr. Colum's stern and simple rendering of the bitter old Irish verses:

"O woman, shapely as the swan,
On your account I shall not die."

Like Fitzgerald's Omar and all good translations, it leaves one wondering whether the original was as good; but to an Englishman the note is not only unique, but almost hostile. It is the hardness of the real Irishman which has been so skilfully hidden under the softness of the stage Irishman. The words are ages old, I believe; they come out of the ancient Ireland of Cairns and fallen Kings: and yet the words might have been spoken by one of Bernard Shaw's modern heroes to one of his modern heroines. The curt, bleak words, the haughty, heathen spirit are certainly as remote as anything can be from the luxuriant humility of Francis Thompson.

If the writers have a real point of union it is in a certain instinct for contrast between their shape and subject matter. All the poems are brief in form, and at the same time big in topic. They remind us of the vivid illuminations of the virile thirteenth century, when artists crowded cosmic catastrophes into the corner of an initial letter; where one may find a small picture of the Deluge or of the flaming Cities of the Plain. One of the specially short poems sees the universe overthrown and the good angels conquered. Another short poem sees the newsboys in Fleet Street shouting the news of the end of the world, and the awful return of God. The writers seem unconsciously to have sought to make a poem as large as a revelation, while it was nearly as short as a riddle. And though Francis Thompson himself was rather in the Elizabethan tradition of amplitude and ingenuity, he could write separate lines that were separate poems in themselves:—

"And thou, what needest with thy tribe's black tents,
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart?"

A mediaeval illuminator would have jumped out of his sandals in his eagerness to illustrate that.
G.K. CHESTERTON.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

Threatened Tears

Do not loose those rains thy wet
Eyes, my Fair, unsurely threat;
Do not, Sweet, do not so;
Thou canst not have a single woe,
But this sad and doubtful weatlier
Overcasts us both together.
In the aspect of those known eyes
My soul's a captain weatherwise.
Ah me! what presages it sees
In those watery Hyades.

Arab Love Song

The hunchèd camels of the night*
Trouble the bright
And silver waters of the moon.
The Maiden of the Morn will soon
Through Heaven stray and sing,
Star gathering.

Now while the dark about our loves is strewn,
Light of my dark, blood of my heart, O come!
And night will catch her breath up, and be dumb.

Leave thy father, leave thy mother
And thy brother;
Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart!
Am I not thy father and thy brother,
And thy mother?
And thou—what needest with thy tribe's black tents
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart?
* The cloud-shapes often observed by travellers in the East.

Buona Notte

Jane Williams, in her last letter to Shelley, wrote: "Why do you talk of never enjoying moments like the past? Are you going to join your friend Plato, or do you expect I shall do so soon? Buona Notte." This letter was dated July 6th, and Shelley was drowned on the 8th. The following is his imagined reply from, another world:—

Ariel to Miranda:—hear
This good-night the sea-winds bear;
And let thine unacquainted ear
Take grief for their interpreter.

Good-night; I have risen so high
Into slumber's rarity,
Not a dream can beat its feather
Through the unsustaining ether.
Let the sea-winds make avouch
How thunder summoned me to couch,
Tempest curtained me about
And turned the sun with his own hand out:
And though I toss upon my bed
My dream is not disquieted;
Nay, deep I sleep upon the deep,
And my eyes are wet, but I do not weep;
And I fell to sleep so suddenly
That my lips are moist yet—could'st thou see
With the good-night draught I have drunk to thee.
Thou can'st not wipe them; for it was Death
Damped my lips that has dried my breath.
A little while—it is not long—
The salt shall dry on them like the song.

Now know'st thou, that voice desolate,
Mourning ruined joy's estate,
Reached thee through a closing gate.
"Go'st thou to Plato?" Ah, girl, no!
It is to Pluto that I go.

The Passion of Mary

O Lady Mary, thy bright crown
Is no mere crown of majesty;
For with the reflex of His own
Resplendent thorns Christ circled thee.

The red rose of this passion tide
Doth take a deeper hue from thee,
In the five Wounds of Jesus dyed,
And in Thy bleeding thoughts, Mary.

The soldier struck a triple stroke
That smote thy Jesus on the tree;
He broke the Heart of hearts, and broke
The Saint's and Mother's hearts in thee.

Thy Son went up the Angels' ways,
His passion ended; but, ah me!
Thou found'st the road of further days
A longer way of Calvary.

On the hard cross of hopes deferred
Thou hung'st in loving agony,
Until the mortal dreaded word,
Which chills our mirth, spake mirth to thee.

The Angel Death from this cold tomb
Of life did roll the stone away;
And He thou barest in thy womb
Caught thee at last into the day—
Before the living throne of Whom
The lights of heaven burning pray.

L'ENVOY

O thou who dwellest in the day,
Behold, I pace amidst the gloom:
Darkness is ever round my way,
With little space for sunbeam room.

Yet Christian sadness is divine,
Even as thy patient sadness was:
The salt tears in our life's dark wine
Fell in it from the saving Cross.

Bitter the bread of our repast;
Yet doth a sweet the bitter leaven:
Our sorrow is the shadow cast
Around it by the light of Heaven.
O Light in light, shine down from Heaven!

PADRAIC COLUM

"I shall not die for you"

(From the Irish)

O woman, shapely as the swan,
On your account I shall not die.
The men you've slain—a trivial clan—
Were less than I.

I ask me shall I die for these:
For blossom-teeth and scarlet lips?
And shall that delicate swan-shape
Bring me eclipse?

Well shaped the breasts and smooth the skin,
The cheeks are fair, the tresses free;
And yet I shall not suffer death,
God over me.

Those even brows, that hair like gold,
Those languorous tones, that virgin way;
The flowing limbs, the rounded heel
Slight men betray.

Thy spirit keen through radiant mien,
Thy shining throat and smiling eye,
Thy little palm, thy side like foam—
I cannot die.

O woman, shapely as the swan,
In a cunning house hard-reared was I;
O bosom white, O well-shaped palm,
I shall not die.

An Idyll

You stay at last at my bosom, with your beauty
young and rare,
Though your light limbs are as limber as the
foal's that follows the mare,
Brow fair and young and stately where thought
has now begun—Hair
bright as the breast of the eagle when he
strains up to the sun!

In the space of a broken castle I found you on
a day
When the call of the new-come cuckoo went
with me all the way.
You stood by the loosened stones that were
rough and black with age:
The fawn beloved of the hunter in the panther's
broken cage!

And we went down together by paths your
childhood knew—
Remote you went beside me, like the spirit of
the dew;
Hard were the hedge-rows still: sloe-bloom
was their scanty dower—
You slipped it within your bosom, the bloom
that scarce is flower.

And now you stay at my bosom with you
beauty young and rare,
Though your light limbs are as limber as the
foal's that follows the mare;
But always I will see you on paths your childhood
knew,
When remote you went beside me like the
spirit of the dew.

Christ the Comrade

Christ, by thine own darkened hour
Live within my heart and brain!
Let my hands not slip the rein.

Ah, how long ago it is
Since a comrade rode with me!
Now a moment let me see

Thyself, lonely in the dark,
Perfect, without wound or mark.

Arab Songs (I)

Saadi the Poet stood up and he put forth his
living words.
His songs were the hurtling of spears and
his figures the flashing of swords.
With hearts dilated our tribe saw the creature
of Saadi's mind;
It was like to the horse of a king, a creature
of fire and of wind.

Uminah my loved one was by me: without
love did these eyes see my fawn,
And if fire there were in her being, for me
its splendour had gone;
When the sun storms up on the tent, he makes
waste the fire of the grass—
It was thus with my loved one's beauty: the
splendour of song made it pass.

The desert, the march, and the onset—these
and these only avail,
Hands hard with the handling of spear-shafts,
brows white with the press of the mail!
And as for the kisses of women—these are
honey, the poet sings;
But the honey of kisses, beloved, it is lime
for the spirit's wings.

Arab Songs (II)

The poet reproaches those who have affronted him.

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