

**RICHARD
DODDRIDGE
BLACKMORE**

FRINGILLA

Richard Doddridge Blackmore

Fringilla

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R. D. Blackmore

Fringilla: Some Tales In Verse

TO MY PEN

I

Thou feeble implement of mind,
Wherewith she strove to scrawl her
name;
But, like a mitcher, left behind
No signature, no stroke, no claim,
No hint that she hath pined—

Shall ever come a stronger time,
When thou shalt be a tool of skill,
And steadfast purpose, to fulfil
A higher task than rhyme?

II

Thou puny instrument of soul,
Wherewith she labours to impart
Her efforts at some arduous goal;
But fails to bring thy coarser art
Beneath a fine control—

Shall ever come a fairer day,
When thou shalt be a buoyant plume,
To soar, where clearer suns illumine,
And fresher breezes play?

Thou weak interpreter of heart,
So impotent to tell the tale
Of love's delight, of envy's smart,
Of passion, and ambition's bale,
Of pride that dwells apart—

Shall I, in length of time, attain
(By walking in the human ways,
With love of Him, who made and sways)
To ply thee, less in vain?

If so, thou shalt be more to me
Than sword, or sceptre, flag, or crown;
With mind, and soul, and heart in thee,
Despising gold, and sham renown;

But truthful, kind, and free—
Then come; though now a pithless quill,
Uncouth, unfledged, indefinite,—
In time, thou shalt be taught to write,
By patience, and good-will.

LITA OF THE NILE

A TALE IN THREE PARTS

PART I

I

"KING, and Father, gift and giver,
God revealed in form of river,
Issuing perfect, and sublime,
From the fountain-head of time;

"Whom eternal mystery shroudeth,
Unapproached, untracked, unknown;
Whom the Lord of heaven encloudeth
With the curtains of His throne;

"From the throne of heaven descending,
Glory, power, and goodness blending,
Grant us, ere the daylight dies,
Token of thy rapid rise,"

II

Ha, it cometh! Furrowing, flashing,
Red blood rushing o'er brown breast;
Peaks, and ridges, and domes, dashing
Foam on foam, and crest on crest!

'Tis the signal Thebes hath waited,
Libyan Thebes, the hundred-gated:
Rouse, and robe thee, River-priest
For thy dedication feast!

Follows him the loveliest maiden,
Afric's thousand hills can show;
White apparel'd, flower-laden,
With the lotus on her brow.

III

Votive maid, who hath espousal
Of the river's high carousal;
Twenty cubits if he rise,
This shall be his bridal prize.

Calm, and meek of face and carriage,
Deigning scarce a quicker breath,
Comes she to the funeral marriage,
The betrothal of black death.

Rosy hands, and hennaed fingers,
Nails whereon the onyx lingers,
Clasped, as at a lover's tale,
In the bosom's marble vale.

IV

Silvery scarf, her waist enwreathing,
Wafts a soft Sabaeen balm;
Like a cloud of incense, breathing
Round the column of a palm:

Snood of lilies interweaveth
(Giving less than it receiveth)
Beauty of her clustered brow,
Calmly bent upon us now.

Through her dark hair, spread before
See the western glory wane,
As in groves of dim Cytorus,
Or the bowers of Taprobane!

V

See, the large eyes, lit by heaven,
Brighter than the Sisters Seven,
(Like a star the storm hath cowed)
Sink their flash in sorrow's cloud.

There the crystal tear refraineth,

And the founts of grief are dry;
"Father, Mother—none remaineth;
All are dead; and why not I?"

Yet, by God's will, heavenly beauty
Owes to Heaven alone its duty;
Off ye priests, who dare adjudge
Bride, like this, to slime and sludge!

VI

When they tread the river's margent,
All their mitred heads are bowed—
What hath browned the ripples argent,
Like the plume of thunder-cloud?

Where yestreen the water slumbered,
With a sickly crust encumbered,
Leapeth now a roaring flood,
Wild as war, and red as blood.

Every billow hurries quicker,
Every surge runs up the strand;
While the brindled eddies flicker,
Scourged as with a levin brand.

VII

Every bulrush, parched and welted,
Lifts his long joints yellow-belted;
Every lotus, faint and sick,
Hangs her fragrant tongue to lick.

Countless creatures, lone unthought of,
Swarm from every hole and nook;
What is man, that he make nought of
Other entries in God's book?

Scorpions, rats, and lizards flabby,
Centipedes, and hydras scabby,
Asp, and slug, and toad, whose gem
Outlasts human diadem.

VIII

Therefore hath the priest-procession
Causeway clean of sandal-wood;
That no foul thing make transgression
On the votive maiden's blood.

Pure of blood and soul, she standeth
Where the marble gauge demandeth,
Marble pillar, with black style,
Record of the rising Nile,

White-robed priests around her kneeling,
Ibis-banner floating high,
Conchs, and drums, and sistral pealing,
And Sesostris standing nigh.

IX

He, whose kingdom-city stretches
Further than our eyesight fetches;
Every street it wanders down
Larger than a regal town;

Built, when each man was a giant,
When the rocks were mason's stones,
When the oaks were osiers pliant,
And the mountains scarcely thrones;

City, whose Titanic portals
Scorn the puny modern mortals,
In thy desert winding-sheet,
Sacred from our insect feet.

X

Thebes No-Amon, hundred-gated,
Every gate could then unfold
Cavalry ten thousand, plated,
Man and horse, in solid gold.

Glancing back through serried ranges,

Vivid as his own phalanges,
Every captain might espy
Equal host in sculpture vie;

Down Piromid vista gazing,
Ten miles back from every gate,
He can see that temple blazing,
Which the world shall never mate.

XI

But the Nile-flood, when it swelleth,
Recks not man, nor where he dwelleth;
And—e'en while Sesostris reigns—
Scarce five cubits man attains.

Lo, the darkening river quaieth,
Like a swamp by giant trod,
And the broad commotion waieth,
Stricken with the hand of God I

When the rushing deluge raging
Flung its flanks, and shook the staging,
Priesthood, cowering from the brim,
Chanted thus its faltering hymn.

XII

"Ocean sire, the earth enclasping,
Like a babe upon thy knee,
In thy cosmic cycle grasping
All that hath been, or shall be;

"Thou, that art around and over
All we labour to discover;
Thou, to whom our world no more
Than a shell is on thy shore;

"God, that wast Supreme, or ever
Orus, or Osiris, saw;
God, with whom is no endeavour,
But thy will eternal law:

XIII

"We, who keep thy feasts and fastings,
We, who live on thy off-castings,
Here in low obeisance crave
Rich abundance of thy wave.

"Seven years now, for some transgression,
Some neglect, or outrage vile,
Vainly hath our poor procession
Offered life, and soul to Nile.

"Seven years now of promise fickle,
Niggard ooze, and paltry trickle,
Freshet sprinkling scanty dole,
Where the roaring flood should roll.

XIV

"Therefore are thy children dwindled,
Therefore is thine altar bare;
Wheat, and rye, and millet spindled,
And the fruits of earth despair.

"Men with haggard bellies languish,
Bridal beds are strewn with anguish,
Mothers sell their babes for bread,
Half the holy kine are dead.

"Is thy wrath at last relaxing?
Art thou merciful, once more?
Yea, behold the torrent waxing!
Yea, behold the flooded shore!

XV

"Nile, that now with life-blood tighest,
And in gorgeous cold subsidest,
Richer than our victor tread
Stirred in far Hydaspes' bed;

"When thy swelling crest o'er-waveth

Yonder twenty cubit mark,
And thy tongue of white foam laveth
Borders of the desert dark,

"This, the fairest Theban maiden,
Shall be thine, with jewels laden;
Lift thy furrowed brow, and see
Lita, dedicate to thee!"

Thus he spake, and lowly stooping
O'er the Calasiris hem,
Took the holy water, scooping
With a bowl of lucid gem;

Chanting from the Bybline psalter
Touched he then her forehead altar;
Sleeking back the trickled jet,
There the marriage-seal he set.

"None of mortals dare pursue thee,
None come near thy hallowed side:
Nile's thou art, and he shall woo thee,—
Nile, who swalloweth his bride."

XVII

With despair's mute self-reliance,
She accepted death's affianced;
She, who hath no home or rest,
Shrank not from the river's breast.

Haply there she shall discover
Father, lost in wilds unknown,
Mother slain, and youthful lover,
Seen as yet in dreams alone.

Ha! sweet maid, what sudden vision
Hath dispelled thy cold derision?
What new picture hast thou seen,
Of a world that might have been?

XVIII

From Mount Seir, Duke Iram roveth,
Three renewals of the moon:

To see Egypt him behoveth,
Ere his life be past its noon.

Soul, and mind, at first fell under
Flat discomfiture of wonder,
With the Nile before him spread,
Temple-crowned, and tempest-fed!

Yet a nobler creed he owneth,
Than to worship things of space:
One true God his heart enthroneth
Heart that throbs with Esau's race.

XIX

Thus he stood, with calm eyes scorning
Idols, priests, and their adorning;
Seeing, e'en in nature's show,
Him alone, who made it so.

"God of Abraham, our Father,
Earth, and heaven, and all we see,
Are but gifts of thine, to gather
Us, thy children, back to Thee.

"All the grandeur spread before us,
All the miracles shed o'er us,
Echoes of the voice above,
Tokens of a Father's love."

XX

While of heaven his heart indited,
And his dark eyes swept the crowd,
Sudden on the maid they lighted,
Mild and haughty, meek and proud.

Rapid as the flash of sabre,
Strong as giant's toss of caber,
Sure as victor's grasp of goal,
Came the love-stroke through his soul

Gently she, her eyes recalling,
Felt that Heaven had touched their flight,
Peeped again, through lashes falling,

Blushed, and shrank, and shunned the light

XXI

Ah, what booteth sweet illusion,
Fluttering glance, and soft suffusion,
Bliss unknown, but felt in sighs,
Breast, that shrinks at its own rise?

She, who is the Nile's devoted,
Courtied with a watery smile;
Her betrothal duly noted
By the bridesmaid Crocodile!

So she bowed her forehead lowly,
Tightened her tiara holy;
And, with every sigh suppressed,
Clasped her hands on passion's breast.

PART II

I

Twice the moon hath waxed and wasted,
Lavish of her dew-bright horn;
And the wheeling sun hath hasted
Fifty days, towards Capricorn.

Thebes, and all the Misric nation,
Float upon the inundation;
Each man shouts and laughs, before
Landing at his own house door.

There the good wife doth return it,
Grumbling, as she shows the dish,
Chervil, basil, chives, and burnet
Feed, instead of seasoning, fish.

II

Palm trees, grouped upon the highland,

Here and there make pleasant island;
On the bark some wag hath wrote—
"Who would fly, when he can float?"

Udder'd cows are standing—pensive,
Not belonging to that ilk;
How shall horn, or tail defensive,
Keep the water from their milk?

Lo, the black swan, paddling slowly,
Pintail ducks, and sheldrakes holy,
Nile-goose flaked, and herons gray,
Silver-voiced at fall of day!

III

Flood hath swallowed dikes and hedges,
Lately by Sesostris planned;
Till, like ropes, its matted edges
Quiver on the desert sand.

Then each farmer, brisk and mellow,
Graspeth by the hand his fellow;
And, as one gone labour-proof,
Shakes his head at the drowned shadoof

Soon the Nuphar comes, beguiling
Sedgy spears, and swords around,
Like that cradled infant smiling,
Whom, the royal maiden found.

IV

But the time of times foe wonder,
Is when ruddy sun goes under;
And the dusk throws, half afraid,
Silver shuttles of long shade.

Opens then a scene, the fairest
Ever burst on human view;
Once behold, and thou comparest
Nothing in the world thereto.

While the broad flood murmurs glistening
To the moon that hangeth listening—

Moon that looketh down the sky,
Like an aloe-bloom on high—

V

Sudden conch o'er the wave ringeth!
Ere the date-leaves cease to snake,
All, that hath existence, springeth
Into broad light, wide-awake.

As at a window of heaven thrown up,
All in a dazzling blaze are shown up,
Mellowing, ere our eyes avail,
To some soft enchanter's tale.

Every skiff a big ship seemeth,
Every bush with tall wings clad;
Every man his good brain deemeth
The only brain that is not mad.

VI

Hark! The pulse of measured rowing,
And the silver clarions blowing,
From the distant darkness, break
Into this illumined lake.

Tis Sesostris, lord of nations,
Victor of three continents,
Visiting the celebrations,
Priests, and poms, and regiments.

Kings, from Indus, and Araxes,
Ister, and the Boreal axes,
Horsed his chariot to the waves,
Then embarked, his galley-slaves.

VII

Glittering stands the giant royal,
Four tall sons are at his back;
Twain, with their own corpses loyal,

Bridged the flames Pelusiac.

As he passeth, myriads bless him,
Glorious Monarch all confess him,
Sternly upright, to condone
No injustice, save his own.

He, well-pleased, his sceptre swingeth,
While his four sons strike the gong;
Till the sparkling water ringeth
Joy and laughter, joke and song.

VIII

Ah, but while loud merry-making
Sets the lights and shadows shaking,
While the mad world casts away
Every thought that is not gay,

Hath not earth, our sweet step-mother,
Very different scene hard by,
Tossing one, and trampling other,
Some to laugh, and some to sigh?

Where the fane of Hathor lowereth,
And the black Myrike embowereth,
Weepeth one her life gone by;
Over young, oh death, to die!

IX

Nay, but lately she was yearning
To be quit of life's turmoil,
In the land of no returning,
Where all travel ends, and toil.

What temptations now entice her?
What hath made the world seem nicer?
Whence the charm, that strives anew
To prolong this last adieu?

Ah, her heart can understand it,
Though her tongue can ne'er explain:
Let yon granite Sphinx demand it—
Riddle, ever solved in vain.

X

No constraint of hands hath bound her,
Not a chain hath e'er been round her;
Silver star hath sealed her brow,
Holy as an Isis cow.

Free to wander where she listeth;
No immurement must defile
(So the ancient law insisteth)
This, the hallowed bride of Nile.

What recks Abraham's descendant
Idols, priests, and pomps attendant?
And how long shall nature heed
What the stocks and stones decreed?

XI

"Fiendish superstitions hold thee
To a vile and hideous death.
Break their bonds; let love enfold thee;
Off, and fly with me;"—he saith.

"Off! while priests are cutting capers—
Priests of beetles, cats, and tapirs,
Brutes, who would thy beauty truck,
For an inch of yellow muck.

"Lo, my horse, *Pyropus*, yearneth
For the touch of thy light form;
Like the lightning, his eye burneth;
And his nostril, like the storm.

XII

"What are those unholy pagans?
Can they ride? No more than Dagon.
Fishtails ne'er could sit a steed;
That belongs to Esau's seed.

"I will make thee Queen of far lands,
Flocks, and herds, and camel-trains,
Milk and honey, fruit and garlands,
Vines and venison, woods and wains.

"God is with us; He shall speed us;
Or (if this vile crew impede us)
Let some light into their brain,
By the sword of Tubal Cain."

XIII

"Nay," she answered, deeply sighing,
As the maid grew womanish—
"Love, how hard have I been trying'
To believe the thing I wish!

"Thou hast taught me holy teachings,
Where to offer my beseechings,
Homage due to Heaven alone,
Not to ghosts, and graven stone,

"Thou hast shown me truth and freedom,
Love, and faith in One most High;
But thou hast not, Prince of Edom,
Taught me therewithal, to lie.

XIV

"Little cause had I for fretting,
None on earth to be regretting;
Till I saw thee, brave and kind;
And my heart undid my mind.

"Better, if the Gods had slain me,
When no difference could be;
Ere the joy had come to pain me,
And, alas, my dear one, thee!

"But shall my poor life throw shame on
Royal lineage of Amor?
Tis of Egypt's oldest strains;
Kingly blood flows in my veins.

XV

"Thou hast seen; my faith is plighted,
That I will not fly my doom.
Honour is a flower unblighted,
Though the fates cut off its bloom.

"I have sent my last sun sleeping,
And I am ashamed of weeping.
God, my new God, give me grace
To be worthy of my race.

"Though this death our bodies sever,
Thou shalt find me there above;
Where I shall be learning ever,
To be worthy of thy love."

XVI

From his gaze she turned, to borrow
Pride's assistance against sorrow—
God vouchsafes that scanty loan,
When He taketh all our own.

Sudden thought of heaven's inspiring
Flashed through bold Duke Iram's heart;
Angels more than stand admiring,
When a man takes his own part.

'Tis the law the Lord hath taught us,
To undo what Satan wrought us;
To confound the foul fiend's plan,
With the manliness of man.

XVII

"Thou art right," he answered lowly,
As a youth should sneak a maid;
"Like thyself, thy word is holy;
Love is hate, if it degrade.

"But when thou hast well surrendered,

And thy sacrifice is tendered—
God do so, and more to me,
If I slay not, who slay thee!

"Abraham's God hath ne'er forsaken
Them who trust in Him always.
Thy sweet life shall not be taken.
Rest, and calm thee, while I pray."

XVIII

Like a little child, that kneeleth
To tell God whate'er he feeleth,
Bent the tall young warrior there,
And the palm-trees whispered prayer.

She, outworn with woe and weeping,
Shared that influence from above;
And the fear of death went sleeping
In the maiden faith and love.

Less the stormy water waileth,
E'en the human tumult faileth;
Stars their silent torches light,
To conduct the car of night

PART III

I

Lo, how bright-eyed morn awaketh
Tower and temple, nook and Nile;
How the sun exultant maketh
All the world return his smile!

O'er the dry sand, vapour twinkleth,
Like an eye when old age wrinkleth;
While, along the watered shore
Runs a river of gold ore.

Temple-front and court resemble
Mirrors swung in wavering light;
While the tapering columns tremble
At the view of their own height.

II

Marble shaft, and granite portal,
Statues of the Gods immortal
Quiver, with their figures bent,
In a liquid pediment

Thence the flood-leat followeth swiftly,
Where the peasant, spade in hand,
Guideth many a runnel deftly
Through his fruit and pasture-land;

Oft, the irriguous bank cross-slicing,
Plaited trickles he keeps enticing;
Till their gravelly gush he feels,
Overtaking his brown heels.

III

Life—that long hath born the test of
More than ours could bear, and live,
Springs anew, to make the best of
Every chance the Gods may give,

Doum-tree stiffeneth flagging feather;
Pate-leaves cease to cling together;
Citrons clear their welted rind;
Vines their mildewed sprays unwind.

Gourds, and melons, spread new lustre
On their veiny dull shagreen;
While the starred pomegranates cluster
Golden balls, with pink between.

IV

Yea, but heaven hath ordered duly,
Lest mankind should wax unruly,
Egypt, garner of all lore,
Narrow as a threshing-floor.

East, and West, lies desolation,
Infinite, untracked, untold
Shroud for all of God's creation,
When the wild blast lifts its fold;

There eternal melancholy
Maketh all delight unholy;
As a stricken widow glides
Past a group of laughing brides.

Who is this, that so disdaineth
Dome and desert, fear and fate;
While his jewell'd horse he reineth.
At Amen-Ra's temple-gate?

He, who crushed the kings of Asia,
Like a pod of colocasia;
Whom the sons of Anak fled,
Puling infants at his tread.

Who, with his own shoulders, lifted
Thrones of many a conquered land;
Who the rocks of Scythia rifted—
King Sesostris waves his hand

VI

Blare of trumpet fills the valley;
Slowly, and majestically,
Swingeth wide, in solemn state,
Lord Amen-Ra's temple-gate.

Thence the warrior-host emeigeth,
Casque, and corselet, spear, and shield;
As the tide of red ore suigeth
From the furnace-door revealed.

After them, tumultuous rushing,
Mob, and medley, crowd, and crushing;
And the hungry file of priests,
Loosely zoned for larger feasts.

VII

"Look!" The whispered awe enhances

With a thrill their merry treat;
As one readeth grim romances,
In a sunny window-seat

"Look! It is the maid selected
For the sacrifice expected:
By the Gods, how proud and brave
Steps she to her watery grave!"

Strike up cymbals, gongs, and tabours,
Clarions, double-flutes, and drums;
All that bellows, or belabours,
In a surging discord comes.

VIII

Scarce Duke Iram can keep under
His wild steed's disdain and wonder,
While his large eyes ask alway—
"Dareth man attempt to neigh?"

He hath snuffed the great Sahara,
And the mute parade of stars;
Shall he brook this shrill fanfara,
Ramshorns, pigskins, screechy jars?

What hath he to do with rabble?
Froth is better than their babble;
Let him toss them flakes of froth,
To pronounce his scorn and wrath.

IX

With his nostrils fierce dilating,
With his crest a curling sea,
All his volumed power is waiting
For the will, to set it free.

"Peace, my friend!" The touch he knoweth
Calms his heart, howe'er it gloweth:
Horse can shame a man, to quell
Passion, where he loveth well.

"Nay, endure we," saith the rider,
"Till her plighted word be paid;

Then, though Satan stand beside her,
God shall help me swing this blade."

X

Lo, upon the deep-piled dais,
Wrought in hallowed looms of Sais,
O'er the impetuous torrent's swoop,
Stands the sacrificial group!

Tall High-priest, with zealot fires
Blazing in those eyeballs old,
Swathes him, as his rank requires,
Head to foot, in linen fold.

Seven attendants round him vying,
In a lighter vesture plying,
Four with skirts, and other three
Tunic'd short from waist to knee.

XI

Free among them stands the maiden,
Clad in white for her long rest;
Crowned with gold, and jewel-laden,
With a lily on her breast

Lily is the mark that showeth
Where that pure and sweet heart gloweth;
Here must come, to shed her life,
Point of sacrificial knife.

Here the knife is, cold and gleaming,
Here the colder butcher band.
Was the true love nought but dreaming,
Feeble heart, and coward hand?

XII

Strength unto the weak is given,
When their earthly bonds are riven;
Ere the spirit is called away,

Heaven begins its tranquil sway.

Life hath been unstained, and therefore
Pleasant to look back upon;
But there is not much to care for,
When the light of love is gone.

Still, though love were twice as fleeting,
Longeth she for one last greeting;
If her eyes might only dwell
Once on his, to say farewell

XIII

"Glorious Hapi," spake Piromis,
Lifting high his weapon'd hand;
"Earth thy footstool, heaven thy dome is,
We the pebbles on thy strand.

"Thou hast leaped the cubits twenty,
Dowering us with peace and plenty;
Mutha shows thee her retreat,
And the desert licks thy feet,

"We have passed through our purgation,
Once again we are thy kin;
God, accept our expiation,
Maiden pure of mortal sin."

XIV

"Ha!" the king cried, smiling blandly;
"Ha!" the trumpets answered grandly.
Proudly priest whirled, knife on high,
While the maiden bowed—to die.

Sudden, through the ranks beside her,
Scattering men, like sparks of flint,
Burst a snow-white horse and rider,
Rapid as the lightning's glint.

One blow hurls Arch-priest to quiver
Headless, in his beloved river,
In the twinkling of an eye,
All the rest are dead, or fly.

XV

Iram, from *Pyropus* sweeping,
As a mower swathes the rye,
Caught his love, in terror sleeping,
And her light form swings on high.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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