

FANNY KEMBLE

POEMS

Fanny Kemble

Poems

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Fanny Kemble

Poems

LINES WRITTEN AT NIGHT

August 9th, 1825

Oh, thou surpassing beauty! that dost live
Shrined in yon silent stream of glorious light!
Spirit of harmony! that through the vast
And cloud-embroidered canopy art spreading
Thy wings, that o'er our shadowy earth hang brooding,
Like a pale silver haze, betwixt the moon
And the world's darker orb: beautiful, hail!
Hail to thee! from her midnight throne of ether,
Night looks upon the slumbering universe.
There is no breeze on silver-crown'd tree,
There is no breath on dew-bespangled flower,
There is no wind sighs on the sleepy wave,
There is no sound hangs in the solemn air.
All, all are silent, all are dreaming, all,
Save those eternal eyes, that now shine forth
Winking the slumberer's destinies. The moon
Sails on the horizon's verge, a moving glory,
Pure, and unrivalled; for no paler orb
Approaches, to invade the sea of light
That lives around her; save yon little star,
That sparkles on her robe of fleecy clouds,
Like a bright gem, fallen from her radiant brow.

VENICE

Night in her dark array
Steals o'er the ocean,
And with departed day
Hushed seems its motion.
Slowly o'er yon blue coast
Onward she's treading,
'Till its dark line is lost,
'Neath her veil spreading.
The bark on the rippling deep
Hath found a pillow,
And the pale moonbeams sleep
On the green billow.
Bound by her emerald zone
Venice is lying,
And round her marble crown
Night winds are sighing.
From the high lattice now
Bright eyes are gleaming,
That seem on night's dark brow
Brighter stars beaming.
Now o'er the bright lagune
Light barks are dancing,
And 'neath the silver moon
Swift oars are glancing.
Strains from the mandolin
Steal o'er the water,
Echo replies between
To mirth and laughter.
O'er the wave seen afar
Brilliantly shining,
Gleams like a fallen star
Venice reclining.

TO MISS –

Time beckons on the hours: the expiring year
Already feels old Winter's icy breath;
As with cold hands, he scatters on her bier
The faded glories of her Autumn wreath.
As fleetly as the Summer's sunshine past,
The Winter's snow must melt; and the young Spring,
Strewing the earth with flowers, will come at last,
And in her train the hour of parting bring.
But, though I leave the harbour, where my heart
Sometime had found a peaceful resting-place,
Where it lay calmly moored; though I depart,
Yet, let not time my memory quite efface.
'Tis true, I leave no void, the happy home
To which you welcomed me, will be as gay,
As bright, as cheerful, when I've turned to roam,
Once more, upon life's weary onward way.
But oh! if ever by the warm hearth's blaze,
Where beaming eyes and kindred souls are met,
Your fancy wanders back to former days,
Let my remembrance hover round you yet.
Then, while before you glides time's shadowy train,
Of forms long vanished, days and hours long gone,
Perchance my name will be pronounced again,
In that dear circle where I once was one.
Think of me then, nor break kind memory's spell,
By reason's censure coldly o'er me cast,
Think only, that I loved ye passing well!
And let my follies slumber with the past.

THE WIND

Night comes upon the earth; and fearfully
Arise the mighty winds, and sweep along
In the full chorus of their midnight song.
The waste of heavy clouds, that veil the sky,
Roll like a murky scroll before them driven,
And show faint glimpses of a darker heaven.
No ray is there of moon, or pale-eyed star,
Darkness is on the universe; save where
The western sky lies glimmering, faint and far,
With day's red embers dimly glowing there.
Hark! how the wind comes gathering in its course,
And sweeping onward, with resistless force,
Howls through the silent space of starless skies,
And on the breast of the swol'n ocean dies.
Oh, though art terrible, thou viewless power!
That rid'st destroying at the midnight hour!
We hear thy mighty pinion, but the eye
Knows nothing of thine awful majesty.
We see all mute creation bow before
Thy viewless wings, as thou careerest o'er
This rocking world; that in the boundless sky
Suspended, vibrates, as thou rushest by.
There is no terror in the lightning's glare,
That breaks its red track through the trackless air;
There is no terror in the voice that speaks
From out the clouds when the loud thunder breaks
Over the earth, like that which dwells in thee,
Thou unseen tenant of immensity.

EASTERN SUNSET

'Tis only the nightingale's warbled strain,
That floats through the evening sky:
With his note of love, he replies again,
To the muezzin's holy cry;
As it sweetly sounds on the rosy air,
"Allah, il allah! come to prayer!"
Warm o'er the waters the red sun is glowing,
'Tis the last parting glance of his splendour and might,
While each rippling wave on the bright shore is throwing
Its white crest, that breaks into showers of light.
Each distant mosque and minaret
Is shining in the setting sun,
Whose farewell look is brighter yet,
Than that with which his course begun.
On the dark blue mountains his smile is bright,
It glows on the orange grove's waving height,
And breaks through its shade in long lines of light.
No sound on the earth, and no sound in the sky,
Save murmuring fountains that sparkle nigh,
And the rustling flight of the evening breeze,
Who steals from his nest in the cypress trees,
And a thousand dewy odours fling,
As he shakes their white buds from his gossamer wing,
And flutters away through the spicy air,
At sound of a footstep drawing near.

FAREWELL TO ITALY

Farewell awhile, beautiful Italy!
My lonely bark is launched upon the sea
That clasps thy shore, and the soft evening gale
Breathes from thy coast, and fills my parting sail.
Ere morning dawn, a colder breeze will come,
And bear me onward to my northern home;
That home, where the pale sun is not so bright,
So glorious, at his noonday's fiercest height,
As when he throws his last glance o'er the sea,
And fires the heavens, that glow farewell on thee.
Fair Italy! perchance some future day
Upon thy coast again will see me stray;
Meantime, farewell! I sorrow, as I leave
Thy lovely shore behind me, as men grieve
When bending o'er a form, around whose charms,
Unconquered yet, Death winds his icy arms:
While leaving the last kiss on some dear cheek,
Where beauty sheds her last autumnal streak,
Life's rosy flower just mantling into bloom,
Before it fades for ever in the tomb.
So I leave thee, oh! thou art lovely still!
Despite the clouds of infamy and ill
That gather thickly round thy fading form:
Still glow thy glorious skies, as bright and warm,
Still memory lingers fondly on thy strand,
And Genius hails thee still her native land.
Land of my soul's adoption! o'er the sea,
Thy sunny shore is fading rapidly:
Fainter and fainter, from my gaze it dies,
'Till like a line of distant light it lies,
A melting boundary 'twixt earth and sky,
And now 'tis gone;—farewell, fair Italy!

THE RED INDIAN

Rest, warrior, rest! thine hour is past,—
Thy longest war-whoop, and thy last,
Still rings upon the rushing blast,
That o'er thy grave sweeps drearily.

Rest, warrior, rest! thy haughty brow,
Beneath the hand of death bends low,
Thy fiery glance is quenched now,
In the cold grave's obscurity.

Rest, warrior, rest! thy rising sun
Is set in blood, thy day is done;
Like lightning flash thy race is run,
And thou art sleeping peacefully.

Rest, warrior, rest! thy foot no more
The boundless forest shall explore,
Or trackless cross the sandy shore,
Or chase the red deer rapidly.

Rest, warrior, rest! thy light canoe,
Like thy choice arrow, swift and true,
Shall part no more the waters blue,
That sparkle round it brilliantly.

Rest, warrior, rest! thine hour is past,
Yon sinking sunbeam is thy last,
And all is silent, save the blast,
That o'er thy grave sweeps drearily.

TO –

Oh, turn those eyes away from me!
Though sweet, yet fearful are their rays;
And though they beam so tenderly,
I feel, I tremble 'neath their gaze.
Oh, turn those eyes away! for though
To meet their glance I may not dare,
I know their light is on my brow,
By the warm blood that mantles there.

SONG

Yet once again, but once, before we sever,
Fill we one brimming cup,—it is the last!
And let those lips, now parting, and for ever,
Breathe o'er this pledge, “the memory of the past!”

Joy's fleeting sun is set; and no to-morrow
Smiles on the gloomy path we tread so fast,
Yet, in the bitter cup, o'erfilled with sorrow,
Lives one sweet drop,—the memory of the past.

But one more look from those dear eyes, now shining
Through their warm tears, their loveliest and their last;
But one more strain of hands, in friendship twining,
Now farewell all, save memory of the past.

LAMENT FOR ISRAEL

Where is thy home in thy promised land?
Desolate and forsaken!
The stranger's arm hath seized thy brand,
Thou art bowed beneath the stranger's hand,
And the stranger thy birthright hath taken.

Where is the mark of thy chosen race?
Infamous and degraded!
It hath fallen on thee, on thy dwelling-place,
And that heaven-stamped sign to a foul disgrace
And the scoff of the world, has faded.

First-born of nations! upon thy brow,
Resistless and revenging,
The fiery finger of God hath now
Written the sentence of thy wo,
The innocent blood avenging!

Lion of Judah! thy glory is past,
Vanished and fled for ever.
Homeless and scattered, thy race is cast
Like chaff in the breath of the sweeping blast,
To rally or rise again, never!

A WISH

Let me not die for ever, when I'm gone
To the cold earth! but let my memory
Live like the gorgeous western light that shone
Over the clouds where sank day's majesty.
Let me not be forgotten! though the grave
Has clasped its hideous arms around my brow.
Let me not be forgotten! though the wave
Of time's dark current rolls above me now.
Yet not in tears remembered be my name;
Weep over those ye loved; for me, for me,
Give me the wreath of glory, and let fame
Over my tomb spread immortality!

SONG

The moment must come, when the hands that unite
In the firm clasp of friendship, will sever;
When the eyes that have beamed o'er us brightly to-night,
Will have ceased to shine o'er us, for ever.
Yet wreath again the goblet's brim
With pleasure's roseate crown!
What though the future hour be dim—
The present is our own!

The moment is come, and again we are parting,
To roam through the world, each our separate way;
In the bright eye of beauty the pearl-drop is starting,
But hope, sunny hope, through the tear sheds its ray.
Then wreath again the goblet's brim
With pleasure's roseate crown!
What though the present hour be dim—
The future's yet our own!

The moment is past, and the bright throng that round us
So lately was gathered, has fled like a dream;
And time has untwisted the fond links that bound us,
Like frost wreaths that melt in the morning's first beam.
Still wreath once more the goblet's brim!
With pleasure's roseate crown!
What though all else beside be dim—
The past has been our own!

TO MRS. –

Oh lady! thou, who in the olden time
Hadst been the star of many a poet's dream!
Thou, who unto a mind of mould sublime,
Weddest the gentle graces that beseem
Fair woman's best! forgive the darling line
That falters forth thy praise! nor let thine eye
Glance o'er the vain attempt too scornfully;
But, as thou read'st, think what a love was mine,
That made me venture on a theme, that none
Can know thee, and not feel a hopeless one.
Thou art most fair, though sorrow's chastening wing
Hath past, and left its shadow on thy brow,
And solemn thoughts are gently mellowing
The splendour of thy beauty's summer now.
Thou art most fair! but thine is loveliness
That dwells not only on the lip, or eye;
Thy beauty, is thy pure heart's holiness;
Thy grace, thy lofty spirit's majesty.
While thus I gaze on thee, and watch thee glide,
Like some calm spirit o'er life's troubled stream,
With thy twin buds of beauty by thy side
Together blossoming; I almost deem
That I behold the loveliness and truth,
That like fair visions hovered round my youth,
Long sought—and then forgotten as a dream.

A WISH

Let me not die for ever when I'm laid
In the cold earth! but let my memory
Live still among ye, like the evening shade,
That o'er the sinking day steals placidly.
Let me not be forgotten! though the knell
Has tolled for me its solemn lullaby;
Let me not be forgotten! though I dwell
For ever now in death's obscurity.
Yet oh! upon the emblazoned leaf of fame,
Trace not a record, not a line for me,
But let the lips I loved oft breathe my name,
And in your hearts enshrine my memory!

A SPIRIT'S VOICE

It is the dawn! the rosy day awakes;
From her bright hair pale showers of dew she shakes,
And through the heavens her early pathway takes;
 Why art thou sleeping?

It is the noon! the sun looks laughing down
On hamlet still, on busy shore, and town,
On forest glade, and deep dark waters lone;
 Why art thou sleeping?

It is the sunset! daylight's crimson veil
Floats o'er the mountain tops, while twilight pale
Calls up her vaporous shrouds from every vale;
 Why art thou sleeping?

It is the night! o'er the moon's livid brow,
Like shadowy locks, the clouds their darkness throw,
All evil spirits wake to wander now;
 Why art thou sleeping?

TO THE DEAD

On the lone waters' shore
Wander I yet;
Brooding those moments o'er
I should forget.
'Till the broad foaming surge
Warns me to fly,
While despair's whispers urge
To stay and die.
When the night's solemn watch
Falls on the seas,
'Tis thy voice that I catch
In the low breeze;
When the moon sheds her light
On things below,
Beams not her ray so bright,
Like thy young brow?
Spirit immortal! say,
When wilt thou come,
To marshal me the way
To my long home?

SONG

I sing the yellow leaf,
That rustling strews
The wintry path, where grief
Delights to muse,
Spring's early violet, that sweetly opes
Its fragrant leaves to the young morning's kiss,
Type of our youth's fond dreams, and cherished hopes,
Will soon be this:
A sere and yellow leaf,
That rustling strews
The wintry path, where grief
Delights to muse.
The summer's rose, in whose rich hues we read
Pleasure's gay bloom, and love's enchanting bliss,
And glory's laurel, waving o'er the dead,
Will soon be this:
A sere and yellow leaf,
That rustling strews
The wintry path, where grief
Delights to muse.

TO THOMAS MOORE, Esq

Here's a health to thee, Bard of Erin!
To the goblet's brim we will fill;
For all that to life is endearing,
Thy strains have made dearer still!

Wherever fond woman's eyes eclipse
The midnight moon's soft ray;
Whenever around dear woman's lips,
The smiles of affection play:

We will drink to thee, Bard of Erin!
To the goblet's brim we will fill,
For all that to life is endearing,
Thy strains have made dearer still!

Wherever the warrior's sword is bound
With the laurel of victory,
Wherever the patriot's brow is crowned
With the halo of liberty:

We will drink to thee, Bard of Erin!
To the goblet's brim we will fill;
For all that to life is endearing
Thy strains have made dearer still!

Wherever the voice of mirth hath rung,
On the listening ear of night,
Wherever the soul of wit hath flung
Its flashes of vivid light:

We will drink to thee, Bard of Erin!
To the goblet's brim we will fill;
For all that to life is endearing,
In thy strains is dearer still.

A WISH

Oh! that I were a fairy sprite, to wander
In forest paths, o'erarched with oak and beech;
Where the sun's yellow light, in slanting rays,
Sleeps on the dewy moss: what time the breath
Of early morn stirs the white hawthorn boughs,
And fills the air with showers of snowy blossoms.
Or lie at sunset 'mid the purple heather,
Listening the silver music that rings out
From the pale mountain bells, swayed by the wind.
Or sit in rocky clefts above the sea,
While one by one the evening stars shine forth
Among the gathering clouds, that strew the heavens
Like floating purple wreaths of mournful nightshade!

THE MINSTREL'S GRAVE

Oh let it be where the waters are meeting,
In one crystal sheet, like the summer's sky bright!
Oh let it be where the sun, when retreating,
May throw the last glance of his vanishing light.
Lay me there! lay me there! and upon my lone pillow
Let the emerald moss in soft starry wreaths swell;
Be my dirge the faint sob of the murmuring billow,
And the burthen it sings to me, nought but "farewell!"

Oh let it be where soft slumber enticing,
The cypress and myrtle have mingled their shade:
Oh let it be where the moon at her rising,
May throw the first night-glance that silvers the glade.
Lay me there! lay me there! and upon the green willow
Hang the harp that has cheered the lone minstrel so well,
That the soft breath of heaven, as it sighs o'er my pillow,
From its strings, now forsaken, may sound one farewell.

TO –

When we first met, dark wintry skies were glooming,
And the wild winds sang requiem to the year;
But thou, in all thy beauty's pride wert blooming,
And my young heart knew hope without a fear.

When we last parted, summer suns were smiling,
And the bright earth her flowery vesture wore;
But thou hadst lost the power of beguiling,
For my wrecked, wearied heart, could hope no more.

ON A FORGET-ME-NOT, Brought from Switzerland

Flower of the mountain! by the wanderer's hand
Robbed of thy beauty's short-lived sunny day;
Didst thou but blow to gem the stranger's way,
And bloom, to wither in the stranger's land?
Hueless and scentless as thou art,
How much that stirs the memory,
How much, much more, that thrills the heart,
Thou faded thing, yet lives in thee!

Where is thy beauty? in the grassy blade,
There lives more fragrance, and more freshness now;
Yet oh! not all the flowers that bloom and fade,
Are half so dear to memory's eye as thou.
The dew that on the mountain lies,
The breeze that o'er the mountain sighs,
Thy parent stem will nurse and nourish;
But thou—not e'en those sunny eyes
As bright, as blue, as thine own skies,
Thou faded thing! can make thee flourish.

SONNET

'Twas but a dream! and oh! what are they all,
All the fond visions Hope's bright finger traces,
All the fond visions Time's dark wing effaces,
But very dreams! but morning buds, that fall
Withered and blighted, long before the night:
Strewing the paths they should have made more bright,
With mournful wreaths, whose light hath past away,
That can return to life and beauty never,
And yet, of whom it was but yesterday,
We deemed they'd bloom as fresh and fair for ever.
Oh then, when hopes, that to thy heart are dearest,
Over the future shed their sunniest beam,
When round thy path their bright wings hover nearest,
Trust not too fondly!—for 'tis but a dream!

SONNET

Oh weary, weary world! how full thou art
Of sin, of sorrow, and all evil things!
In thy fierce turmoil, where shall the sad heart,
Released from pain, fold its unrested wings?
Peace hath no dwelling here, but evermore
Loud discord, strife, and envy, fill the earth
With fearful riot, whilst unhallowed mirth
Shrieks frantic laughter forth, leading along,
Whirling in dizzy trance the eager throng,
Who bear aloft the overflowing cup,
With tears, forbidden joys, and blood filled up,
Quaffing long draughts of death; in lawless might,
Drunk with soft harmonies, and dazzling light,
So rush they down to the eternal night.

ON A MUSICAL BOX

Poor little sprite! in that dark, narrow cell
Caged by the law of man's resistless might!
With thy sweet liquid notes, by some strong spell,
Compelled to minister to his delight!
Whence, what art thou? art thou a fairy wight
Caught sleeping in some lily's snowy bell,
Where thou hadst crept, to rock in the moonlight,
And drink the starry dew-drops, as they fell?
Say, dost thou think, sometimes when thou art singing,
Of thy wild haunt upon the mountain's brow,
Where thou wert wont to list the heath-bells ringing,
And sail upon the sunset's amber glow?
When thou art weary of thy oft-told theme,
Say, dost thou think of the clear pebbly stream,
Upon whose mossy brink thy fellows play,
Dancing in circles by the moon's soft beam,
Hiding in blossoms from the sun's fierce gleam,
Whilst thou, in darkness, sing'st thy life away?
And canst thou feel when the spring-time returns,
Filling the earth with fragrance and with glee;
When in the wide creation nothing mourns,
Of all that lives, save that which is not free?
Oh! if thou couldst, and we could hear thy prayer,
How would thy little voice beseeching cry,
For one short draught of the sweet morning air,
For one short glimpse of the clear azure sky!
Perchance thou sing'st in hope thou shalt be free,
Sweetly and patiently thy task fulfilling;
While thy sad thoughts are wandering with the bee,
To every bud with honey dew distilling.
That hope is vain: for even couldst thou wing
Thy homeward flight back to the greenwood gay,
Thou'dst be a shunned and a forsaken thing,
'Mongst the companions of thy happier day.
For fairy sprites, like many other creatures,
Bear fleeting memories, that come and go;
Nor can they oft recall familiar features,
By absence touched, or clouded o'er with woe.
Then rest content with sorrow: for there be
Many that must that lesson learn with thee;
And still thy wild notes warble cheerfully,
Till, when thy tiny voice begins to fail,
For thy lost bliss sing but one parting wail,
Poor little sprite! and then sleep peacefully!

TO THE PICTURE OF A LADY

Lady, sweet lady, I behold thee yet,
With thy pale brow, brown eyes, and solemn air,
And billowy tresses of thy golden hair,
Which once to see, is never to forget!
But for short space I gazed, with soul intent
Upon thee; and the limner's art divine,
Meantime, poured all thy spirit into mine.
But once I gazed, then on my way I went:
And thou art still before me. Like a dream
Of what our soul has loved, and lost for ever,
Thy vision dwells with me, and though I never
May be so blest as to behold thee more,
That one short look has stamped thee in my heart,
Of my intensest life a living part,
Which time, and death, shall never triumph o'er.

FRAGMENT

Walking by moonlight on the golden margin
That binds the silver sea, I fell to thinking
Of all the wild imaginings that man
Hath peopled heaven, and earth, and ocean with;
Making fair nature's solitary haunts
Alive with beings, beautiful and fearful.
And as the chain of thought grew link by link,
It seemed, as though the midnight heavens waxed brighter,
The stars gazed fix'dly with their golden eyes,
And a strange light played o'er each sleeping billow,
That laid its head upon the sandy beach.
Anon there came along the rocky shore
A far-off sound of sweetest minstrelsy.
From no one point of heaven, or earth, it came;
But under, over, and about it breathed,
Filling my soul with thrilling, fearful pleasure.
It swelled, as though borne on the floating wings
Of the midsummer breeze: it died away
Towards heaven, as though it sank into the clouds,
That one by one melted like flakes of snow
In the moonbeams. Then came a rushing sound,
Like countless wings of bees, or butterflies;
And suddenly, as far as eye might view,
The coast was peopled with a world of elves,
Who in fantastic ringlets danced around,
With antic gestures, and wild beckoning motion,
Aimed at the moon. White was their snowy vesture,
And shining as the Alps, when that the sun
Gems their pale robes with diamonds. On their heads
Were wreaths of crimson and of yellow foxglove.
They were all fair, and light as dreams; anon

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