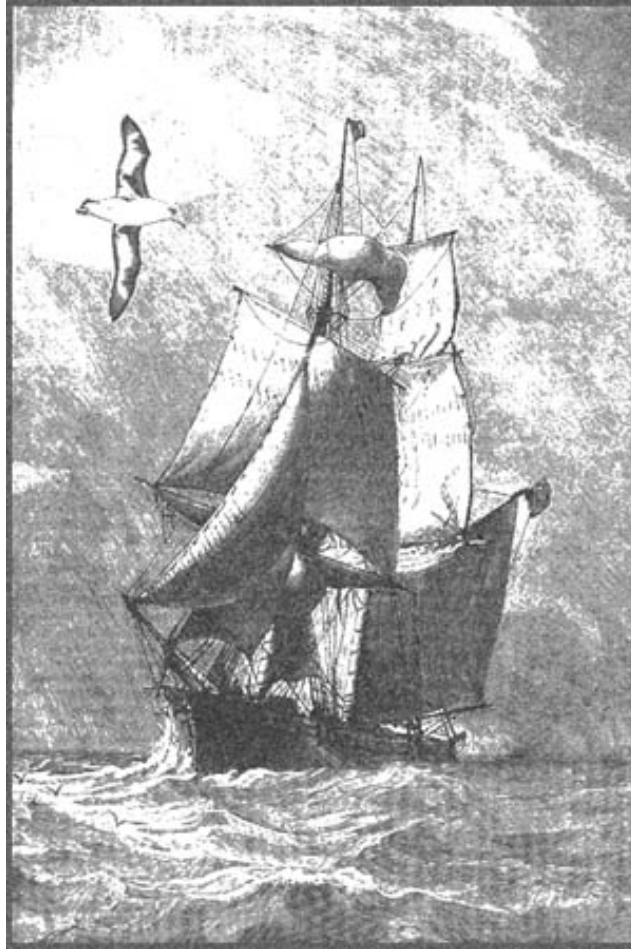


# Samuel Taylor Coleridge



## Selected Poems

Compiled by Emma Laybourn 2019

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## Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in 1772 in Devon, the youngest of ten children. His father, a vicar and headmaster, died when Samuel was eight, and he was sent to a charity school in London, Christ's Hospital, where he became friendly with the writer Charles Lamb. He went on to study at Jesus College, Cambridge, and became interested in radical politics. Along with the poet Robert Southey, he planned a commune in New England under a scheme they called 'Pantisocracy'. The friends married two sisters, but then fell out with each other. Coleridge moved to Somerset, where his wife Sara (nee Fricker) bore the first of their four children, Hartley, in 1796.

The following year Coleridge met William Wordsworth, beginning a friendship and collaboration that was to shape the lives and work of each. Coleridge had already published a number of poems, but now began to write some of his best-known works, including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This was published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) – a collection of works by both poets that proved to be a seminal point in literary Romanticism.

After a spell in Germany, Coleridge moved to the Lake District, as did the Wordsworths. However, by this time his marriage was in trouble, and he was becoming increasingly addicted to laudanum, an opiate drug, which he seems to have taken for neuralgia and depression. He travelled to Sicily and Malta for some years; on settling back in England with his new partner, Sara Hutchinson, he gave lectures, wrote Shakespearean criticism, and edited a literary journal.

However, by 1811 Sara had left and Coleridge had quarrelled with Wordsworth. Returning to London, he underwent something of a religious rebirth and tried to conquer his opium addiction. From 1816 onwards he lived in the household of a supportive doctor, James Gillman. Although his greatest poetical works were already written, he continued to write literary criticism and philosophy; his *Biographia Literaria* is a notable autobiographical work. He died in 1834.

Coleridge's verse and prose works continued to be widely read and hugely influential in the twentieth century and after. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a haunting ballad, is nowadays Coleridge's best-known poem, along with the shorter but no less visionary *Kubla Khan*. Other major works include the unfinished narrative poem *Christabel*, and what are known as the 'conservation poems' such as *Dejection: an Ode* and *This Lime Tree Bower my Prison*. In these Coleridge, following a train of thought, seems to speak directly to a friend – or, in the case of *Frost at Midnight*, to his sleeping son.

This selection contains all of Coleridge's best-known poems in full, as well as a number of less famous poems and extracts. The versions here conform to the *Poetical Works* edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford University Press, 1912). Poems are arranged in chronological order of their publication; some are followed by brief explanatory notes.

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## **Pain**

Once could the Morn's first beams, the healthful breeze,  
All Nature charm, and gay was every hour:—  
But ah! not Music's self, nor fragrant bower  
Can glad the trembling sense of wan Disease.  
Now that the frequent pangs my frame assail,  
Now that my sleepless eyes are sunk and dim,  
And seas of Pain seem waving through each limb—  
Ah what can all Life's gilded scenes avail?  
I view the crowd, whom Youth and Health inspire,  
Hear the loud laugh, and catch the sportive lay,  
Then sigh and think – I too could laugh and play  
And gaily sport it on the Muse's lyre,  
Ere Tyrant Pain had chas'd away delight,  
Ere the wild pulse throbb'd anguish thro' the night!

[↑](#)

## **Sonnet: To the River Otter**

Dear native Brook! wild Streamlet of the West!  
How many various-fated years have past,  
What happy and what mournful hours, since last  
I skimm'd the smooth thin stone along thy breast,  
Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep imprest  
Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes  
I never shut amid the sunny ray,  
But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,  
Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,  
And bedded sand that vein'd with various dyes  
Gleam'd through thy bright transparence! On my way,  
Visions of childhood! oft have ye beguil'd  
Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs:  
Ah! that once more I were a careless child!

### ***Note***

The River Otter flows through the countryside of Somerset and Devon.

↑

### Domestic Peace

Tell me, on what holy ground  
May Domestic Peace be found?  
Halcyon daughter of the skies,  
Far on fearful wing she flies,  
From the pomp of Sceptered State,  
From the Rebel's noisy hate.  
In a cottag'd vale She dwells,  
Listening to the Sabbath bells!  
Still around her steps are seen  
Spotless Honour's meeker mien,  
Love, the sire of pleasing fears,  
Sorrow smiling through her tears,  
And conscious of the past employ  
Memory, bosom-spring of joy.

↑

### Melancholy – A Fragment

Stretched on a mouldered Abbey's broadest wall,  
Where ruining ivies propp'd the ruins steep—  
Her folded arms wrapping her tatter'd pall,  
Had Melancholy mus'd herself to sleep.

The fern was press'd beneath her hair,  
The dark green Adder's Tongue was there;  
And still as pass'd the flagging sea-gale weak,  
The long lank leaf bow'd fluttering o'er her cheek.

That pallid cheek was flush'd: her eager look  
Beam'd eloquent in slumber! Inly wrought,  
Imperfect sounds her moving lips forsook,  
And her bent forehead work'd with troubled thought.  
Strange was the dream—....

#### **Note**

*Adder's Tongue* – Coleridge later wrote that he meant Hart's Tongue, a type of fern, 'but this would unluckily spoil the poetical effect.'

↑

**To A Young Ass  
Its Mother Being Tethered Near It**

Poor little Foal of an oppressèd race!  
I love the languid patience of thy face:  
And oft with gentle hand I give thee bread,  
And clap thy ragged coat, and pat thy head.  
But what thy dulled spirits hath dismay'd,  
That never thou dost sport along the glade?  
And (most unlike the nature of things young)  
That earthward still thy moveless head is hung?  
Do thy prophetic fears anticipate,  
Meek Child of Misery! thy future fate?  
The starving meal, and all the thousand aches  
'Which patient Merit of the Unworthy takes'?  
Or is thy sad heart thrill'd with filial pain  
To see thy wretched mother's shorten'd chain?  
And truly, very piteous is *her* lot—  
Chain'd to a log within a narrow spot,  
Where the close-eaten grass is scarcely seen,  
While sweet around her waves the tempting green!

Poor Ass! thy master should have learnt to show  
Pity – best taught by fellowship of Woe!  
For much I fear me that *He* lives like thee,  
Half famish'd in a land of Luxury!  
How *askingly* its footsteps hither bend?  
It seems to say, 'And have I then *one* friend?'  
Innocent foal! thou poor despis'd forlorn!  
I hail thee *Brother* – spite of the fool's scorn!  
And fain would take thee with me, in the Dell  
Of Peace and mild Equality to dwell,  
Where Toil shall call the charmer Health his bride,  
And Laughter tickle Plenty's ribless side!  
How thou wouldst toss thy heels in gamesome play,  
And frisk about, as lamb or kitten gay!  
Yea! and more musically sweet to me  
Thy dissonant harsh bray of joy would be,  
Than warbled melodies that soothe to rest  
The aching of pale Fashion's vacant breast!

**Note**

'*The thousand aches / Which patient merit of the unworthy takes*' – this is a near-quote from Shakespeare: in his famous soliloquy beginning 'To be or not to be,' Hamlet speaks of 'the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes.'

↑

*From Lines On A Friend*  
**Who Died Of A Frenzy Fever, Induced By Calumnious Reports**

Rest, injur'd shade! the poor man's grateful prayer  
On heaven-ward wing thy wounded soul shall bear.

As oft at twilight gloom thy grave I pass,  
And oft sit down upon its recent grass,  
With introverted eye I contemplate  
Similitude of soul, perhaps of – Fate!  
To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assign'd  
Energic Reason and a shaping mind,  
The daring ken of Truth, the Patriot's part,  
And Pity's sigh, that breathes the gentle heart–  
Sloth-jaundic'd all! and from my graspless hand  
Drop Friendship's precious pearls, like hour-glass sand.  
I weep, yet stoop not! the faint anguish flows,  
A dreamy pang in Morning's feverous doze.

Is this piled earth our Being's passless mound?  
Tell me, cold grave! is Death with poppies crown'd?  
Tired Sentinel! mid fitful starts I nod,  
And fain would sleep, though pillowed on a clod!

↑

**Mrs. Siddons**  
**(Sonnets on Eminent Characters, VIII)**

As when a child on some long Winter's night  
Affrighted clinging to its Grandam's knees  
With eager wond'ring and perturb'd delight  
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees

Muttered to wretch by necromantic spell;  
Or of those hags, who at the witching time  
Of murky Midnight ride the air sublime,  
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of Hell:

Cold Horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear  
More gentle starts, to hear the Beldame tell  
Of pretty Babes, that lov'd each other dear.  
Murder'd by cruel Uncle's mandate fell:

Even such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,  
Even so thou, SIDDONS! meltest my sad heart!

*Note*

Mrs. Sarah Siddons (1755 – 1831) was an actress renowned for her performance as Lady Macbeth.

*beldame* = an old woman or hag

↑

**To An Infant**

Ah! cease thy tears and sobs, my little Life!  
I did but snatch away the unclasp'd knife:  
Some safer toy will soon arrest thine eye,  
And to quick laughter change this peevish cry!  
Poor stumbler on the rocky coast of Woe,  
Tutor'd by Pain each source of pain to know!  
Alike the foodful fruit and scorching fire  
Awake thy eager grasp and young desire;  
Alike the Good, the Ill offend thy sight,  
And rouse the stormy sense of shrill Affright!  
Untaught, yet wise! mid all thy brief alarms  
Thou closely clingest to thy Mother's arms,  
Nestling thy little face in that fond breast  
Whose anxious heavings lull thee to thy rest!  
Man's breathing Miniature! thou mak'st me sigh—  
A Babe art thou – and such a Thing am I!  
To anger rapid and as soon appeas'd,  
For trifles mourning and by trifles pleas'd,  
Break Friendship's mirror with a tetchy blow,  
Yet snatch what coals of fire on Pleasure's altar glow!

O thou that rearest with celestial aim  
The future Seraph in my mortal frame,  
Thrice holy Faith! whatever thorns I meet  
As on I totter with unpractis'd feet,  
Still let me stretch my arms and cling to thee,  
Meek nurse of souls through their long Infancy!

↑

**To the Nightingale**

Sister of love-lorn Poets, Philomel!  
How many Bards in city garret pent,  
While at their window they with downward eye  
Mark the faint lamp-beam on the kennell'd mud,  
And listen to the drowsy cry of Watchmen  
(Those hoarse unfeather'd Nightingales of Time!),  
How many wretched Bards address *thy* name,  
And hers, the full-orb'd Queen that shines above.



But I *do* hear thee, and the high bough mark,  
 Within whose mild moon-mellow'd foliage hid  
 Thou warblest sad thy pity-pleading strains.  
 O! I have listen'd, till my working soul,  
 Waked by those strains to thousand phantasies,  
 Absorb'd hath ceas'd to listen! Therefore oft,  
 I hymn thy name: and with a proud delight  
 Oft will I tell thee, Minstrel of the Moon!  
 'Most musical, most melancholy' Bird!  
 That all thy soft diversities of tone,  
 Tho' sweeter far than the delicious airs  
 That vibrate from a white-arm'd Lady's harp,  
 What time the languishment of lonely love  
 Melts in her eye, and heaves her breast of snow,  
 Are not so sweet as is the voice of her,  
 My Sara – best beloved of human kind!  
 When breathing the pure soul of tenderness,  
 She thrills me with the Husband's promis'd name!

**Note**

*Philomel* (or *Philomela*) – a mythical princess who was turned into a nightingale.

'Most musical, most melancholy' – a quote from Milton's *Il Penseroso*; Coleridge used the same phrase in his later poem *The Nightingale – a Conversation Poem*.

↑

**The Eolian Harp**  
**Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire**

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined  
 Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is  
 To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown  
 With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,  
 (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)  
 And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,  
 Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve  
 Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)  
 Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents  
 Snatch'd from yon bean-field! and the world so hush'd!  
 The stilly murmur of the distant Sea  
 Tells us of silence.

And that simplest Lute,  
 Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!  
 How by the desultory breeze caress'd,  
 Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,  
 It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs  
 Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings

Boldier swept, the long sequacious notes  
Over delicious surges sink and rise,  
Such a soft floating witchery of sound  
As twilight Elfin make, when they at eve  
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,  
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,  
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,  
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam'd wing!  
O! the one Life within us and abroad,  
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,  
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,  
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—  
Methinks, it should have been impossible  
Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;  
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air  
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope  
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,  
Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold  
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,  
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;  
Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,  
And many idle flitting phantasies,  
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,  
As wild and various as the random gales  
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!

And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,  
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof  
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts  
Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,  
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.  
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!  
Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd  
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;  
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break  
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.  
For never guiltless may I speak of him,  
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe  
I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*;  
Who with his saving mercies heal'd me,  
A sinful and most miserable man,  
Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess  
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!

### *Notes*

An Eolian (or Aeolian) harp is a musical instrument played by the wind; it is named after the Greek god of the wind, Aeolus.

*cot* = cottage

*casement* = window

*the main* = the ocean

↑

## **Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement**

Low was our pretty Cot: our tallest Rose  
Peep'd at the chamber-window. We could hear  
At silent noon, and eve, and early morn,  
The Sea's faint murmur. In the open air  
Our Myrtles blossom'd; and across the porch  
Thick Jasmins twined: the little landscape round  
Was green and woody, and refresh'd the eye.  
It was a spot which you might aptly call  
The Valley of Seclusion! Once I saw  
(Hallowing his Sabbath-day by quietness)  
A wealthy son of Commerce saunter by,  
Bristowa's citizen: methought, it calm'd  
His thirst of idle gold, and made him muse  
With wiser feelings: for he paus'd, and look'd  
With a pleas'd sadness, and gaz'd all around,  
Then eyed our Cottage, and gaz'd round again,  
And sigh'd, and said, it was a Blessèd Place.  
And we *were* bless'd. Oft with patient ear  
Long-listening to the viewless sky-lark's note  
(Viewless, or haply for a moment seen  
Gleaming on sunny wings) in whisper'd tones  
I've said to my Belovèd, 'Such, sweet Girl!  
The inobtrusive song of Happiness,  
Unearthly minstrelsy! then only heard  
When the Soul seeks to hear; when all is hush'd,  
And the Heart listens!'

But the time, when first  
From that low Dell, steep up the stony Mount  
I climb'd with perilous toil and reach'd the top,  
Oh! what a goodly scene! *Here* the bleak mount,  
The bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;  
Grey clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;  
And river, now with bushy rocks o'er-brow'd,  
Now winding bright and full, with naked banks;  
And seats, and lawns, the Abbey and the wood,  
And cots, and hamlets, and faint city-spire;  
The Channel *there*, the Islands and white sails,

Dim coasts, and cloud-like hills, and shoreless Ocean—  
It seem'd like Omnipresence! God, methought,  
Had built him there a Temple: the whole World  
Seem'd *imag'd* in its vast circumference:  
No *wish* profan'd my overwhelmèd heart.  
Blest hour! It was a luxury, – to be!

Ah! quiet Dell! dear Cot, and Mount sublime!  
I was constrain'd to quit you. Was it right,  
While my unnumber'd brethren toil'd and bled,  
That I should dream away the entrusted hours  
On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart  
With feelings all too delicate for use?  
Sweet is the tear that from some Howard's eye  
Drops on the cheek of one he lifts from earth:  
And he that works me good with unmov'd face,  
Does it but half: he chills me while he aids,  
My benefactor, not my brother man!  
Yet even this, this cold beneficence  
Praise, praise it, O my Soul! oft as thou scann'st  
The sluggard Pity's vision-weaving tribe!  
Who sigh for Wretchedness, yet shun the Wretched,  
Nursing in some delicious solitude  
Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies!  
I therefore go, and join head, heart, and hand,  
Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight  
Of Science, Freedom, and the Truth in Christ.

Yet oft when after honourable toil  
Rests the tir'd mind, and waking loves to dream,  
My spirit shall revisit thee, dear Cot!  
Thy Jasmin and thy window-peeping Rose,  
And Myrtles fearless of the mild sea-air.  
And I shall sigh fond wishes – sweet Abode!  
Ah! – had none greater! And that all had such!  
It might be so – but the time is not yet.  
Speed it, O Father! Let thy Kingdom come!

### **Notes**

*Bristowa's citizen*: a man of Bristol, a city and port in South-West England.  
channel = the Bristol Channel (between South-West England and Wales)

*cot* = cottage

*some Howard's eye*; John Howard (1726 – 1790) was a prison reformer and philanthropist.

***From Monody on the Death of Chatterton***

Is this the land of song-ennobled line?  
 Is this the land, where Genius ne'er in vain  
     Pour'd forth his lofty strain?  
 Ah me! yet Spenser, gentlest bard divine,  
 Beneath chill Disappointment's shade,  
 His weary limbs in lonely anguish lay'd.  
     And o'er her darling dead  
     Pity hopeless hung her head,  
 While "mid the pelting of that merciless storm,"  
 Sunk to the cold earth Otway's famish'd form!  
 Sublime of thought, and confident of fame,  
 From vales where Avon winds the Minstrel came.  
     Light-hearted youth! aye, as he hastes along,  
     He meditates the future song,  
 How dauntless Ælla fray'd the Dacyan foe;  
     And while the numbers flowing strong  
 In eddies whirl, in surges throng,  
 Exulting in the spirits' genial throe  
 In tides of power his life-blood seems to flow.

And now his cheeks with deeper ardors flame,  
 His eyes have glorious meanings, that declare  
 More than the light of outward day shines there,  
 A holier triumph and a sterner aim!  
 Wings grow within him; and he soars above  
 Or Bard's or Minstrel's lay of war or love.  
 Friend to the friendless, to the sufferer health,  
 He hears the widow's prayer, the good man's praise;  
 To scenes of bliss transmutes his fancied wealth,  
 And young and old shall now see happy days.  
 On many a waste he bids trim gardens rise,  
 Gives the blue sky to many a prisoner's eyes;  
 And now in wrath he grasps the patriot steel,  
 And her own iron rod he makes Oppression feel.  
 Sweet Flower of Hope! free Nature's genial child!  
 That didst so fair disclose thy early bloom,  
 Filling the wide air with a rich perfume!  
 For thee in vain all heavenly aspects smil'd;  
 From the hard world brief respite could they win—  
 The frost nipp'd sharp without, the canker prey'd within!  
 Ah! where are fled the charms of vernal Grace,  
 And Joy's wild gleams that lighten'd o'er thy face?  
 Youth of tumultuous soul, and haggard eye!  
 Thy wasted form, thy hurried steps I view,  
 On thy wan forehead starts the lethal dew,  
 And oh! the anguish of that shuddering sigh!

Such were the struggles of the gloomy hour,  
 When Care, of wither'd brow,  
 Prepar'd the poison's death-cold power:  
 Already to thy lips was rais'd the bowl,  
 When near thee stood Affection meek  
 (Her bosom bare, and wildly pale her cheek)  
 Thy sullen gaze she bade thee roll  
 On scenes that well might melt thy soul;  
 Thy native cot she flash'd upon thy view.  
 Thy native cot, where still, at close of day,  
 Peace smiling sate, and listen'd to thy lay;  
 Thy Sister's shrieks she bade thee hear,  
 And mark thy Mother's thrilling tear;  
     See, see her breast's convulsive throe,  
     Her silent agony of woe!  
 Ah! dash the poison'd chalice from thy hand!...

### **Notes**

Thomas Chatterton, born in Bristol in 1752, was a talented and prolific poet. Impoverished, he committed suicide in 1770 at the age of 17. This poem is a later (1794) version of a work first composed in 1790.

*Spenser*: Edmund Spenser (1552 – 1599), the poet and author of *The Faerie Queene*, supposedly died in poverty.

“*mid the pelting of that merciless storm*” – this seems to be a reference to lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

“Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm...”

*Otway*: Thomas Otway (1652 – 1685) was a dramatist who also died in poverty. *Avon* – river flowing through Bristol, Chatterton's birth-place.

‘*dauntless Ælla*’ refers to one of Chatterton's poems, *Ælla: a Tragycal Enterlude*, written in 15<sup>th</sup> century English under the pseudonym Thomas Rowley.

↑

### ***From The Destiny of Nations***

..... Fancy is the power  
 That first unsensualises the dark mind,  
 Giving it new delights; and bids it swell  
 With wild activity; and peopling air,  
 By obscure fears of Beings invisible,  
 Emancipates it from the grosser thrall  
 Of the present impulse, teaching Self-control,  
 Till Superstition with unconscious hand  
 Seat Reason on her throne. Wherefore not vain,  
 Nor yet without permitted power impressed,  
 I deem those legends terrible, with which  
 The polar ancient thrills his uncouth throng:  
 Whether of pitying Spirits that make their moan

O'er slaughter'd infants, or that Giant Bird  
Vuokho, of whose rushing wings the noise  
Is Tempest, when the unutterable Shape  
Speeds from the mother of Death, and utters once  
That shriek, which never murderer heard, and lived.

Or if the Greenland Wizard in strange trance  
Pierces the untravelled realms of Ocean's bed  
Over the abysm, even to that uttermost cave  
By mis-shaped prodigies beleaguered, such  
As Earth ne'er bred, nor Air, nor the upper Sea:  
Where dwells the Fury Form, whose unheard name  
With eager eye, pale cheek, suspended breath,  
And lips half-opening with the dread of sound,  
Unsleping Silence guards, worn out with fear  
Lest haply 'scaping on some treacherous blast  
The fateful word let slip the Elements  
And frenzy Nature. Yet the wizard her,  
Arm'd with Torngarsuck's power, the Spirit of Good,  
Forces to unchain the foodful progeny  
Of the Ocean stream;— thence thro' the realm of Souls,  
Where live the Innocent, as far from cares  
As from the storms and overwhelming waves  
That tumble on the surface of the Deep,  
Returns with far-heard pant, hotly pursued  
By the fierce Warders of the Sea, once more,  
Ere by the frost foreclosed, to repossess  
His fleshly mansion, that had staid the while  
In the dark tent within a cow'ring group  
Untenanted. — Wild phantasies! yet wise,  
On the victorious goodness of high God  
Teaching reliance, and medicinal hope,  
Till from Bethabra northward, heavenly Truth  
With gradual steps, winning her difficult way,  
Transfer their rude Faith perfected and pure.

If there be Beings of higher class than Man,  
I deem no nobler province they possess,  
Than by disposal of apt circumstance  
To rear up kingdoms: and the deeds they prompt,  
Distinguishing from mortal agency,  
They choose their human ministers from such states  
As still the Epic song half fears to name,  
Repelled from all the minstrelsies that strike  
The palace-roof and soothe the monarch's pride.  
And such, perhaps, the Spirit, who (if words  
Witnessed by answering deeds may claim our faith)  
Held commune with that warrior-maid of France  
Who scourged the Invader. From her infant days,  
With Wisdom, mother of retired thoughts,

Her soul had dwelt; and she was quick to mark  
The good and evil thing, in human lore  
Undisciplined. For lowly was her birth,  
And Heaven had doomed her early years to toil  
That pure from Tyranny's least deed, herself  
Unfeared by Fellow-natures, she might wait  
On the poor labouring man with kindly looks,  
And minister refreshment to the tired  
Way-wanderer, when along the rough-hewn bench  
The sweltry man had stretched him, and aloft  
Vacantly watched the rudely-pictured board  
Which on the Mulberry-bough with welcome creak  
Swung to the pleasant breeze. Here, too, the Maid  
Learnt more than Schools could teach: Man's shifting mind,  
His vices and his sorrows! And full oft  
At tales of cruel wrong and strange distress  
Had wept and shivered. To the tottering Eld  
Still as a daughter would she run: she placed  
His cold limbs at the sunny door, and loved  
To hear him story, in his garrulous sort,  
Of his eventful years, all come and gone. ...

### **Notes**

*Giant bird Vuokho*: in Lapland legend, a giant bird of evil omen.

*Tordgarsuck* (or *Tongarsuk*): a good spirit in Greenland legend, sometimes described as a one-armed giant or a huge white bear. His wife (or mother) was an evil spirit who lived at the bottom of the ocean.

*Bethabra* (or *Bethabara*) – where Christ was baptised by John the Baptist.

*Warrior-maid of France*: Joan of Arc. The poem goes on to tell the story of her spiritual awakening to her mission to fight for France.

↑

### **To a Primrose The First Seen in the Season**

Thy smiles I note, sweet early Flower,  
That peeping from thy rustic bower  
The festive news to earth dost bring,  
A fragrant messenger of Spring.

But, tender blossom, why so pale?  
Dost hear stern Winter in the gale?  
And didst thou tempt the ungentle sky  
To catch one vernal glance and die?

Such the wan lustre Sickness wears  
When Health's first feeble beam appears;  
So languid are the smiles that seek  
To settle on the care-worn cheek,



When timorous Hope the head uprears,  
Still drooping and still moist with tears,  
If, through dispersing grief, be seen  
Of Bliss the heavenly spark serene.

And sweeter far the early blow,  
Fast following after storms of Woe,  
Than (Comfort's riper season come)  
Are full-blown joys and Pleasure's gaudy bloom.

↑

### **Sonnet**

**Composed on a Journey Homeward; the Author having Received  
Intelligence of the Birth of a Son, Sept. 20, 1796**

Oft o'er my brain does that strange fancy roll  
Which makes the present (while the flash doth last)  
Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,  
Mixed with such feelings, as perplex the soul  
Self-questioned in her sleep; and some have said  
We liv'd, ere yet this robe of flesh we wore.  
O my sweet baby! when I reach my door,  
If heavy looks should tell me thou art dead,  
(As sometimes, through excess of hope, I fear)  
I think that I should struggle to believe  
Thou wert a spirit, to this nether sphere  
Sentenc'd for some more venial crime to grieve;  
Did'st scream, then spring to meet Heaven's quick reprieve,  
While we wept idly o'er thy little bier!

↑

### **Sonnet**

**To a Friend who asked, How I felt when the Nurse first Presented my  
Infant to me**

Charles! my slow heart was only sad, when first  
I scann'd that face of feeble infancy:  
For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst  
All I had been, and all my child might be!  
But when I saw it on its mother's arm,  
And hanging at her bosom (she the while  
Bent o'er its features with a tearful smile)  
Then I was thrill'd and melted, and most warm  
Impress'd a father's kiss: and all beguil'd  
Of dark remembrance and presageful fear,  
I seem'd to see an angel-form appear—  
'Twas even thine, belovèd woman mild!  
So for the mother's sake the child was dear,  
And dearer was the mother for the child.

↑

## *From Ode to the Departing Year*

**I**

Spirit who sweepst the wild Harp of Time!  
It is most hard, with an untroubled ear  
Thy dark inwoven harmonies to hear!  
Yet, mine eye fix'd on Heaven's unchanging clime  
Long had I listen'd, free from mortal fear,  
With inward stillness, and a bowèd mind;  
When lo! its folds far waving on the wind,  
I saw the train of the Departing Year!  
Starting from my silent sadness  
Then with no unholy madness,  
Ere yet the enter'd cloud foreclos'd my sight,  
I rais'd the impetuous song, and solemniz'd his flight.

**II**

Hither, from the recent tomb,  
From the prison's direr gloom,  
From Distemper's midnight anguish;  
And thence, where Poverty doth waste and languish;  
Or where, his two bright torches blending,  
Love illumines Manhood's maze;  
Or where o'er cradled infants bending,  
Hope has fix'd her wishful gaze;

Hither, in perplexèd dance,  
Ye Woes! ye young-eyed Joys! advance!  
By Time's wild harp, and by the hand  
Whose indefatigable sweep  
Raises its fateful strings from sleep,  
I bid you haste, a mix'd tumultuous band!  
From every private bower,  
And each domestic hearth,  
Haste for one solemn hour;  
And with a loud and yet a louder voice,  
O'er Nature struggling in portentous birth,  
Weep and rejoice!

Still echoes the dread Name that o'er the earth  
Let slip the storm, and woke the brood of Hell:  
And now advance in saintly Jubilee  
Justice and Truth! They too have heard thy spell,  
They too obey thy name, divinest Liberty!

↑

**To the Rev. George Coleridge  
Of Ottery St. Mary, Devon  
With Some Poems**

A blessèd lot hath he, who having passed  
His youth and early manhood in the stir  
And turmoil of the world, retreats at length,  
With cares that move, not agitate the heart,  
To the same dwelling where his father dwelt;  
And haply views his tottering little ones  
Embrace those agèd knees and climb that lap,  
On which first kneeling his own infancy  
Lisp'd its brief prayer. Such, O my earliest Friend!  
Thy lot, and such thy brothers too enjoy.  
At distance did ye climb Life's upland road,  
Yet cheer'd and cheering: now fraternal love  
Hath drawn you to one centre. Be your days  
Holy, and blest and blessing may ye live!

To me the Eternal Wisdom hath dispens'd  
A different fortune and more different mind—  
Me from the spot where first I sprang to light  
Too soon transplanted, ere my soul had fix'd  
Its first domestic loves; and hence through life  
Chasing chance-started friendships. A brief while  
Some have preserv'd me from life's pelting ills;  
But, like a tree with leaves of feeble stem,  
If the clouds lasted, and a sudden breeze

Ruffled the boughs, they on my head at once  
Dropped the collected shower; and some most false,  
False and fair-foliag'd as the Manchineel,  
Have tempted me to slumber in their shade  
E'en mid the storm; then breathing subtlest damps,  
Mix'd their own venom with the rain from Heaven,  
That I woke poison'd! But, all praise to Him  
Who gives us all things, more have yielded me  
Permanent shelter; and beside one Friend,  
Beneath the impervious covert of one oak,  
I've rais'd a lowly shed, and know the names  
Of Husband and of Father; not unhearing  
Of that divine and nightly-whispering Voice,  
Which from my childhood to maturer years  
Spake to me of predestinated wreaths,  
Bright with no fading colours!

Yet at times

My soul is sad, that I have roam'd through life  
Still most a stranger, most with naked heart  
At mine own home and birth-place: chiefly then,  
When I remember thee, my earliest Friend!  
Thee, who didst watch my boyhood and my youth;  
Didst trace my wanderings with a father's eye;  
And boding evil yet still hoping good,  
Rebuk'd each fault, and over all my woes  
Sorrow'd in silence! He who counts alone  
The beatings of the solitary heart,  
That Being knows, how I have lov'd thee ever,  
Lov'd as a brother, as a son rever'd thee!  
Oh! 'tis to me an ever new delight,  
To talk of thee and thine: or when the blast  
Of the shrill winter, rattling our rude sash,  
Endears the cleanly hearth and social bowl;  
Or when, as now, on some delicious eve,  
We in our sweet sequester'd orchard-plot  
Sit on the tree crook'd earth-ward; whose old boughs,  
That hang above us in an arborous roof,  
Stirr'd by the faint gale of departing May,  
Send their loose blossoms slanting o'er our heads!

Nor dost not thou sometimes recall those hours,  
When with the joy of hope thou gavest thine ear  
To my wild firstling-lays. Since then my song  
Hath sounded deeper notes, such as beseem  
Or that sad wisdom folly leaves behind,  
Or such as, tuned to these tumultuous times,  
Cope with the tempest's swell!

Those various strains,  
Which I have fram'd in many a various mood,  
Accept, my Brother! and (for some perchance  
Will strike discordant on thy milder mind)  
If aught of error or intemperate truth  
Should meet thine ear, think thou that riper Age  
Will calm it down, and let thy love forgive it!

**Notes**

George Coleridge (1764 – 1828) was the poet's brother, older than him by eight years.

*Manchineel* or Poison Guava is a tree of Central America; both its apple-like fruits and its sap are highly poisonous.

↑

**This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison**  
[Addressed to Charles Lamb, of the India House, London]

In the June of 1797 some long-expected friends paid a visit to the author's cottage; and on the morning of their arrival, he met with an accident, which disabled him from walking during the whole time of their stay. One evening, when they had left him for a few hours, he composed the following lines in the garden-bower. (Coleridge's own note)

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,  
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost  
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been  
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age  
Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,  
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,  
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,  
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,  
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;  
The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,  
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;  
Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock  
Flings arching like a bridge;— that branchless ash,  
Unsun'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves  
Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,  
Fann'd by the water-fall! and there my friends  
Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,  
That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)  
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge  
Of the blue clay-stone.

Now, my friends emerge  
Beneath the wide wide Heaven – and view again  
The many-steeped tract magnificent  
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,  
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up  
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles  
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on  
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,  
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined  
And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,  
In the great City pent, winning thy way  
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain  
And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink  
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!  
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,  
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!  
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!  
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend

Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,  
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round  
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues  
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
Spirits perceive his presence.

A delight

Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad  
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,  
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd  
Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze  
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd  
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see  
The shadow of the leaf and stem above  
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree  
Was richly ting'd, and a deep radiance lay  
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps  
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass  
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue  
Through the late twilight: and though now the bat  
Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,  
Yet still the solitary humble-bee  
Sings in the bean-flower! Henceforth I shall know  
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;  
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,  
No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes  
'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,  
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate  
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.  
My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook  
Beat its straight path along the dusky air  
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing  
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)  
Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,  
While thou stood'st gazing; or, when all was still,  
Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm  
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom  
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

**Notes**

Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834) was an author and essayist who met Coleridge at school and became a lifelong friend.

**THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER**  
**In Seven Parts**

How a ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

**PART I**

**An ancient Mariner  
meeteth three Gallants  
bidden to a wedding-  
feast, and detaineth one.**

It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,  
And I am next of kin;  
The guests are met, the feast is set:  
May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,  
'There was a ship,' quoth he.  
'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!'  
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

**The Wedding-Guest is  
spellbound by the eye of  
the old seafaring man,  
and constrained to hear  
his tale.**

He holds him with his glittering eye—  
The Wedding-Guest stood still,  
And listens like a three years' child:  
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:  
He cannot choose but hear;  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner.

**The Mariner tells how  
the ship sailed  
southward with a good  
wind and fair weather,  
till it reached the Line.**

'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
Merrily did we drop  
Below the kirk, below the hill,  
Below the lighthouse top.

The Sun came up upon the left,  
Out of the sea came he!  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,  
Till over the mast at noon—'  
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,  
For he heard the loud bassoon.

**The Wedding-Guest  
heareth the bridal  
music; but the Mariner  
continueth his tale.**

The bride hath paced into the hall,  
Red as a rose is she;  
Nodding their heads before her goes  
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,  
Yet he cannot choose but hear;  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner.

**The ship driven by a  
storm toward the south  
pole.**

'And now the Storm-blast came, and he  
Was tyrannous and strong:  
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,  
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,  
As who pursued with yell and blow  
Still treads the shadow of his foe,  
And forward bends his head,  
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,  
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,  
And it grew wondrous cold:  
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
As green as emerald.

**The land of ice, and of  
fearful sounds where no  
living thing was to be  
seen.**

And through the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen:  
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—  
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound!



**Till a great sea-bird,  
called the Albatross,  
came through the snow-  
fog, and was received  
with great joy and  
hospitality.**

**And lo! the Albatross  
proveth a bird of good  
omen, and followeth the  
ship as it returned  
northward through fog  
and floating ice.**

**The ancient Mariner  
inhospitably killeth the  
pious bird of good omen.**

**His shipmates cry out  
against the ancient  
Mariner, for killing the  
bird of good luck.**

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
And round and round it flew.  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
The Albatross did follow,  
And every day, for food or play,  
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
It perched for vespers nine;  
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—  
Why look'st thou so?' – 'With my cross-bow  
I shot the Albatross.

## **PART II**

The Sun now rose upon the right:  
Out of the sea came he,  
Still hid in mist, and on the left  
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,  
But no sweet bird did follow,  
Nor any day for food or play  
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,  
And it would work 'em woe:  
For all averred, I had killed the bird  
That made the breeze to blow.  
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,  
That made the breeze to blow!

**But when the fog cleared  
off, they justify the same,  
and thus make  
themselves accomplices  
in the crime.**

**The fair breeze  
continues; the ship  
enters the Pacific Ocean,  
and sails northward,  
even till it reaches the  
Line.**

**The ship hath been  
suddenly becalmed.**

**And the Albatross begins  
to be avenged.**

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,  
The glorious Sun uprist:  
Then all averred, I had killed the bird  
That brought the fog and mist.  
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,  
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free;  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,  
'Twas sad as sad could be;  
And we did speak only to break  
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, every where,  
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires danced at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green, and blue and white.

**A Spirit had followed them:  
one of the invisible inhabi-  
tants of this planet, neither  
departed souls nor angels,  
concerning whom the learned  
Jew, Josephus, and the  
Platonic Constantinopolitan,  
Michael Psellus, may be  
consulted. They are very  
numerous, and there is no  
climate or element without  
one or more.**

**The shipmates, in their  
sore distress, would fain  
throw the whole guilt on  
the ancient Mariner: in  
sign whereof they hang the  
dead sea-bird round his  
neck.**

**The ancient Mariner  
beholdeth a sign in the  
element afar off.**

**At its nearer approach,  
it seemeth him to be a  
ship; and at a dear  
ransom he freeth his  
speech from the bonds of  
thirst.**

**A flash of joy;**

And some in dreams assurèd were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;  
Nine fathom deep he had followed us  
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,  
Was withered at the root;  
We could not speak, no more than if  
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks  
Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.

### **PART III**

There passed a weary time. Each throat  
Was parched, and glazed each eye.  
A weary time! a weary time!  
How glazed each weary eye,  
When looking westward, I beheld  
A something in the sky.

At first it seemed a little speck,  
And then it seemed a mist;  
It moved and moved, and took at last  
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
As if it dodged a water-sprite,  
It plunged and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
We could nor laugh nor wail;  
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!  
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
Agape they heard me call:  
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,  
And all at once their breath drew in,  
As they were drinking all.

**And horror follows. For  
can it be a ship that  
comes onward without  
wind or tide?**

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!  
Hither to work us weal;  
Without a breeze, without a tide,  
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all a-flame.  
The day was well nigh done!  
Almost upon the western wave  
Rested the broad bright Sun;  
When that strange shape drove suddenly  
Betwixt us and the Sun.

**It seemeth him but the  
skeleton of a ship.**

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,  
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)  
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered  
With broad and burning face.

**And its ribs are seen as  
bars on the face of the  
setting Sun. The Spectre-  
Woman and her  
Deathmate, and no other  
on board the skeleton  
ship.**

Alas (thought I, and my heart beat loud)  
How fast she nears and nears!  
Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,  
Like restless gossameres?

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun  
Did peer, as through a grate?  
And is that Woman all her crew?  
Is that a Death? and are there two?  
Is Death that woman's mate?

**Like vessel, like crew!**

**Death and Life-in-Death  
have diced for the ship's  
crew, and she (the latter)  
winneth the ancient  
Mariner.**

*Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,  
And the twain were casting dice;  
'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'  
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

**No twilight within the  
courts of the Sun.**

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;  
At one stride comes the dark;  
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,  
Off shot the spectre-bark.

**At the rising of the moon,**

We listened and looked sideways up!  
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,  
My life-blood seemed to sip!  
The stars were dim, and thick the night,  
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;  
From the sails the dew did drip—  
Till clomb above the eastern bar  
The hornèd Moon, with one bright star  
Within the nether tip.

**One after another,**

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,  
Too quick for groan or sigh,  
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,  
And cursed me with his eye.

**His shipmates drop down dead.**

Four times fifty living men,  
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)  
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,  
They dropped down one by one.

**But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner.**

The souls did from their bodies fly,—  
They fled to bliss or woe!  
And every soul, it passed me by,  
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

#### **PART IV**

**The Wedding-Guest feareth that a Spirit is talking to him;**

'I Fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
I fear thy skinny hand!  
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,  
As is the ribbed sea-sand.

**But the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.**

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,  
And thy skinny hand, so brown.'—  
'Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!  
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on the wide, wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

**He despiseth the  
creatures of the calm,**

The many men, so beautiful!  
And they all dead did lie:  
And a thousand thousand slimy things  
Lived on; and so did I.

**And envieth that they  
should live, and so many  
lie dead.**

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.

**But the curse liveth for  
him in the eye of the  
dead men.**

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they:  
The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
A spirit from on high;  
But oh! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.

**In his loneliness and  
fixedness he yearneth  
towards the journeying  
Moon, and the stars that  
still sojourn, yet still  
move onward; and every  
where the blue sky  
belongs to them, and is  
their appointed rest, and  
their native country and  
their own natural homes,  
which they enter  
unannounced, as lords  
that are certainly  
expected and yet there is  
a silent joy at their  
arrival.**

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And nowhere did abide:  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,  
Like April hoar-frost spread;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt away  
A still and awful red.

**By the light of the Moon  
he beholdeth God's  
creatures of the great  
calm.**

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watched the water-snakes:  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
They coiled and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

**Their beauty and their  
happiness.**

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware:  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

**He blesseth them in his  
heart.**

The selfsame moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

**The spell begins to  
break.**

## **PART V**

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,  
Beloved from pole to pole!  
To Mary Queen the praise be given!  
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,  
That slid into my soul.

**By grace of the holy  
Mother, the ancient  
Mariner is refreshed  
with rain.**

The silly buckets on the deck,  
That had so long remained,  
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;  
And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,  
My garments all were dank;  
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,  
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:  
I was so light – almost  
I thought that I had died in sleep,  
And was a blessèd ghost.

**He heareth sounds and  
seeth strange sights and  
commotions in the sky  
and the element.**

And soon I heard a roaring wind:  
It did not come anear;  
But with its sound it shook the sails,  
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life!  
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,  
To and fro they were hurried about!  
And to and fro, and in and out,  
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,  
And the sails did sigh like sedge;  
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;  
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still  
The Moon was at its side:  
Like waters shot from some high crag,  
The lightning fell with never a jag,  
A river steep and wide.

**The bodies of the ship's  
crew are inspired, and  
the ship moves on;**

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
Yet now the ship moved on!  
Beneath the lightning and the Moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,  
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;  
It had been strange, even in a dream,  
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;  
Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
Where they were wont to do;  
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—  
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son  
Stood by me, knee to knee:  
The body and I pulled at one rope,  
But he said nought to me.



**But not by the souls of  
the men, nor by daemons  
of earth or middle air,  
but by a blessed troop of  
angelic spirits, sent down  
by the invocation of the  
guardian saint.**

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!  
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,  
Which to their corpses came again,  
But a troop of spirits blest:

For when it dawned – they dropped their arms,  
And clustered round the mast;  
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,  
And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
Then darted to the Sun;  
Slowly the sounds came back again,  
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
I heard the sky-lark sing;  
Sometimes all little birds that are,  
How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
Now like a lonely flute;  
And now it is an angel's song,  
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,  
Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,  
Moved onward from beneath.

**The lonesome Spirit  
from the south-pole  
carries on the ship as far  
as the Line, in obedience  
to the angelic troop, but  
still requireth vengeance.**

Under the keel nine fathom deep,  
From the land of mist and snow,  
The spirit slid: and it was he  
That made the ship to go.  
The sails at noon left off their tune,  
And the ship stood still also.

**The Polar Spirit's  
fellow-daemons, the  
invisible inhabitants of  
the element, take part in  
his wrong; and two of  
them relate, one to the  
other, that penance long  
and heavy for the  
ancient Mariner hath  
been accorded to the  
Polar Spirit, who  
returneth southward.**

The Sun, right up above the mast,  
Had fixed her to the ocean:  
But in a minute she 'gan stir,  
With a short uneasy motion—  
Backwards and forwards half her length  
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,  
She made a sudden bound:  
It flung the blood into my head,  
And I fell down in a swoond.

How long in that same fit I lay,  
I have not to declare;  
But ere my living life returned,  
I heard and in my soul discerned  
Two voices in the air.

'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?  
By him who died on cross,  
With his cruel bow he laid full low  
The harmless Albatross.

The spirit who bideth by himself  
In the land of mist and snow,  
He loved the bird that loved the man  
Who shot him with his bow.'

The other was a softer voice,  
As soft as honey-dew:  
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,  
And penance more will do.'

## PART VI

### FIRST VOICE

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
Thy soft response renewing—  
What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
What is the ocean doing?'

SECOND VOICE

‘Still as a slave before his lord,  
The ocean hath no blast;  
His great bright eye most silently  
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;  
For she guides him smooth or grim.  
See, brother, see! how graciously  
She looketh down on him.’

FIRST VOICE

**The Mariner hath been  
cast into a trance; for the  
angelic power causeth  
the vessel to drive  
northward faster than  
human life could endure.**

‘But why drives on that ship so fast,  
Without or wave or wind?’

SECOND VOICE

‘The air is cut away before,  
And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!  
Or we shall be belated:  
For slow and slow that ship will go,  
When the Mariner’s trance is abated.

**The supernatural motion  
is retarded; the Mariner  
awakes, and his penance  
begins anew.**

I woke, and we were sailing on  
As in a gentle weather:  
’Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;  
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,  
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
All fixed on me their stony eyes,  
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
Had never passed away:  
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,  
Nor turn them up to pray.

**The curse is finally  
expiated.**

And now this spell was snapt: once more  
I viewed the ocean green,  
And looked far forth, yet little saw  
Of what had else been seen—

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,  
Nor sound nor motion made:  
Its path was not upon the sea,  
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek  
Like a meadow-gale of spring—  
It mingled strangely with my fears,  
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,  
Yet she sailed softly too:  
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—  
On me alone it blew.

**And the ancient Mariner  
beholdeth his native  
country.**

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed  
The light-house top I see?  
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?  
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,  
And I with sobs did pray—  
O let me be awake, my God!  
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,  
So smoothly it was strewn!  
And on the bay the moonlight lay,  
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,  
That stands above the rock:  
The moonlight steeped in silentness  
The steady weathercock.

**The angelic spirits leave  
the dead bodies,**

And the bay was white with silent light,  
Till rising from the same,  
Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
In crimson colours came.

**And appear in their own  
forms of light.**

A little distance from the prow  
Those crimson shadows were:  
I turned my eyes upon the deck—  
Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,  
And, by the holy rood!  
A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:  
It was a heavenly sight!  
They stood as signals to the land,  
Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,  
No voice did they impart—  
No voice; but oh! the silence sank  
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,  
I heard the Pilot's cheer;  
My head was turned perforce away,  
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,  
I heard them coming fast:  
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy  
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third – I heard his voice:  
It is the Hermit good!  
He singeth loud his godly hymns  
That he makes in the wood.  
He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

## PART VII

### **The Hermit of the Wood,**

This Hermit good lives in that wood  
Which slopes down to the sea.  
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!  
He loves to talk with marineres  
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—  
He hath a cushion plump:  
It is the moss that wholly hides  
The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,  
'Why, this is strange, I trow!  
Where are those lights, so many and fair,  
That signal made but now?'

### **Approacheth the ship with wonder.**

'Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said—  
'And they answered not our cheer!  
The planks looked warped! and see those sails,  
How thin they are and sere!  
I never saw aught like to them,  
Unless perchance it were

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag  
My forest-brook along;  
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,  
That eats the she-wolf's young.'

'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—  
(The Pilot made reply)  
I am a-feared' — 'Push on, push on!  
Said the Hermit cheerily.

The boat came closer to the ship,  
But I nor spake nor stirred;  
The boat came close beneath the ship,  
And straight a sound was heard.

### **The ship suddenly sinketh.**

Under the water it rumbled on,  
Still louder and more dread:  
It reached the ship, it split the bay;  
The ship went down like lead.

**The ancient Mariner is  
saved in the Pilot's boat.**

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,  
Which sky and ocean smote,  
Like one that hath been seven days drowned  
My body lay afloat;  
But swift as dreams, myself I found  
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,  
The boat spun round and round;  
And all was still, save that the hill  
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips – the Pilot shrieked  
And fell down in a fit;  
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,  
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,  
Who now doth crazy go,  
Laughed loud and long, and all the while  
His eyes went to and fro.  
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,  
The Devil knows how to row.'

And now, all in my own countree,  
I stood on the firm land!  
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,  
And scarcely he could stand.

**The ancient Mariner  
earnestly entreateth the  
Hermit to shrieve him;  
and the penance of life  
falls on him.**

'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'  
The Hermit crossed his brow.  
'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say—  
What manner of man art thou?'

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
With a woful agony,  
Which forced me to begin my tale;  
And then it left me free.

**And ever and anon  
throughout his future  
life an agony  
constraineth him to  
travel from land to land,**

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
That agony returns:  
And till my ghastly tale is told,  
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me:  
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!  
The wedding-guests are there:  
But in the garden-bower the bride  
And bride-maids singing are:  
And hark the little vesper bell,  
Which biddeth me to prayer!

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea:  
So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
Scarce seemèd there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,  
'Tis sweeter far to me,  
To walk together to the kirk  
With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,  
And all together pray,  
While each to his great Father bends,  
Old men, and babes, and loving friends  
And youths and maidens gay!

**And to teach, by his own  
example, love and  
reverence to all things  
that God made and  
loveth.**

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell  
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!  
He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,  
Whose beard with age is hoar,  
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest  
Turned from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man,  
He rose the morrow morn.



### **Notes**

The marginal notes in this poem are Coleridge's own. They were absent from the poem's first publication in *Lyrical Ballads*, and were added in 1817 when Coleridge revised the poem for a collection called *Sybilline Leaves*. Images of pages from both volumes can be viewed on the [British Library website](#), which also has an introduction to the poem.

### **Part I.**

*The Line* – the Equator

*kirk* = church

*swound* = swoon

### **Part III**

*work us weal* = do us good

### **Part IV**

*the sultry main* = the warm ocean

### **Part V**

*the silly buckets*: an archaic meaning of *silly* is plain or rustic

*sere* = threadbare, withered

*sedge* = reeds

*corses* = corpses

### **Part VI**

*charnel-dungeon* = place where bodies or bones are kept

*shrieve* = shrive, give absolution or forgiveness

### **Part VII**

*ivy-tod* = clump of ivy

## Christabel

### Part I

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,  
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;  
Tu – whit! – Tu – whoo!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew.  
Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,  
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;  
From her kennel beneath the rock  
She maketh answer to the clock,  
Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour;  
Ever and aye, by shine and shower,  
Sixteen short howls, not over loud;  
Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

Is the night chilly and dark?  
The night is chilly, but not dark.  
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,  
It covers but not hides the sky.  
The moon is behind, and at the full;  
And yet she looks both small and dull.  
The night is chill, the cloud is gray:  
'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,  
Whom her father loves so well,  
What makes her in the wood so late,  
A furlong from the castle gate?  
She had dreams all yesternight  
Of her own betrothèd knight;  
And she in the midnight wood will pray  
For the weal of her lover that's far away.

She stole along, she nothing spoke,  
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,  
And naught was green upon the oak  
But moss and rarest mistletoe:  
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,  
And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely lady, Christabel!  
It moaned as near, as near can be,  
But what it is she cannot tell.—  
On the other side it seems to be,  
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

The night is chill; the forest bare;  
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?  
There is not wind enough in the air  
To move away the ringlet curl  
From the lovely lady's cheek—  
There is not wind enough to twirl  
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,  
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!  
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,  
And stole to the other side of the oak.  
    What sees she there?

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair.  
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady so richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly!

Mary mother, save me now!  
(Said Christabel,) And who art thou?

The lady strange made answer meet,  
And her voice was faint and sweet:—  
Have pity on my sore distress,  
I scarce can speak for weariness:  
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!  
Said Christabel, How camest thou here?  
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,  
Did thus pursue her answer meet:—

My sire is of a noble line,  
And my name is Geraldine:  
Five warriors seized me yesternorn,  
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:  
They choked my cries with force and fright,  
And tied me on a palfrey white.  
The palfrey was as fleet as wind,  
And they rode furiously behind.  
They spurred amain, their steeds were white:  
And once we crossed the shade of night.  
As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,  
I have no thought what men they be;  
Nor do I know how long it is  
(For I have lain entranced I wis)  
Since one, the tallest of the five,  
Took me from the palfrey's back,  
A weary woman, scarce alive.  
Some muttered words his comrades spoke:  
He placed me underneath this oak;  
He swore they would return with haste;  
Whither they went I cannot tell—  
I thought I heard, some minutes past,  
Sounds as of a castle bell.  
Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she),  
And help a wretched maid to flee.

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,  
And comforted fair Geraldine:  
O well, bright dame! may you command  
The service of Sir Leoline;  
And gladly our stout chivalry  
Will he send forth and friends withal  
To guide and guard you safe and free  
Home to your noble father's hall.

She rose: and forth with steps they passed  
That strove to be, and were not, fast.  
Her gracious stars the lady blest,  
And thus spake on sweet Christabel:  
All our household are at rest,  
The hall as silent as the cell;  
Sir Leoline is weak in health,  
And may not well awakened be,  
But we will move as if in stealth,  
And I beseech your courtesy,  
This night, to share your couch with me.

They crossed the moat, and Christabel  
Took the key that fitted well;  
A little door she opened straight,  
All in the middle of the gate;  
The gate that was ironed within and without,  
Where an army in battle array had marched out.  
The lady sank, belike through pain,  
And Christabel with might and main  
Lifted her up, a weary weight,  
Over the threshold of the gate:  
Then the lady rose again,  
And moved, as she were not in pain.

So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.  
And Christabel devoutly cried  
To the lady by her side,  
Praise we the Virgin all divine  
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!  
Alas, alas! said Geraldine,  
I cannot speak for weariness.  
So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.

Outside her kennel, the mastiff old  
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.  
The mastiff old did not awake,  
Yet she an angry moan did make!  
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?  
Never till now she uttered yell  
Beneath the eye of Christabel.  
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:  
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,  
Pass as lightly as you will!  
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,  
Amid their own white ashes lying;  
But when the lady passed, there came  
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;  
And Christabel saw the lady's eye,  
And nothing else saw she thereby,  
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,  
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.  
O softly tread, said Christabel,  
My father seldom sleepeth well.

Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,  
And jealous of the listening air  
They steal their way from stair to stair,

Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,  
And now they pass the Baron's room,  
As still as death, with stifled breath!  
And now have reached her chamber door;  
And now doth Geraldine press down  
The rushes of the chamber floor.

The moon shines dim in the open air,  
And not a moonbeam enters here.  
But they without its light can see  
The chamber carved so curiously,  
Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
All made out of the carver's brain,  
For a lady's chamber meet:  
The lamp with twofold silver chain  
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The silver lamp burns dead and dim;  
But Christabel the lamp will trim.  
She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,  
And left it swinging to and fro,  
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,  
Sank down upon the floor below.

O weary lady, Geraldine,  
I pray you, drink this cordial wine!  
It is a wine of virtuous powers;  
My mother made it of wild flowers.

And will your mother pity me,  
Who am a maiden most forlorn?  
Christabel answered – Woe is me!  
She died the hour that I was born.  
I have heard the gray-haired friar tell  
How on her death-bed she did say,  
That she should hear the castle-bell  
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.  
O mother dear! that thou wert here!  
I would, said Geraldine, she were!

But soon with altered voice, said she—  
'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!  
I have power to bid thee flee.'  
Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?  
Why stares she with unsettled eye?  
Can she the bodiless dead espy?  
And why with hollow voice cries she,  
'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—  
Though thou her guardian spirit be,  
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.'

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,  
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue—  
Alas! said she, this ghastly ride—  
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!  
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,  
And faintly said, 'Tis over now!

Again the wild-flower wine she drank:  
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,  
And from the floor whereon she sank,  
The lofty lady stood upright:  
She was most beautiful to see,  
Like a lady of a far countree.

And thus the lofty lady spake—  
'All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel!  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befell,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.  
But now unrobe yourself; for I  
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'

Quoth Christabel, So let it be!  
And as the lady bade, did she.  
Her gentle limbs did she undress,  
And lay down in her loveliness.

But through her brain of weal and woe  
So many thoughts moved to and fro,  
That vain it were her lids to close;  
So half-way from the bed she rose,  
And on her elbow did recline  
To look at the Lady Geraldine.

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side—  
A sight to dream of, not to tell!  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;  
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!

Deep from within she seems half-way  
To lift some weight with sick assay,  
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;  
Then suddenly, as one defied,  
Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
And lay down by the Maiden's side!—  
And in her arms the maid she took,  
    Ah wel-a-day!  
And with low voice and doleful look  
These words did say:  
'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;  
    But vainly thou warrest,  
    For this is alone in  
    Thy power to declare,  
    That in the dim forest  
    Thou heard'st a low moaning,  
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;  
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,  
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'

### **The Conclusion to Part I**

It was a lovely sight to see  
The lady Christabel, when she  
Was praying at the old oak tree.  
    Amid the jagged shadows  
    Of mossy leafless boughs,  
    Kneeling in the moonlight,  
    To make her gentle vows;  
Her slender palms together prest,  
Heaving sometimes on her breast;  
Her face resigned to bliss or bale—  
Her face, oh call it fair not pale,  
And both blue eyes more bright than clear,  
Each about to have a tear.

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)  
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,  
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,  
Dreaming that alone, which is—  
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,  
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?  
And lo! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild,  
As a mother with her child.



A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison.  
O Geraldine! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu – whoo! tu – whoo!  
Tu – whoo! tu – whoo! from wood and fell!

And see! the lady Christabel  
Gathers herself from out her trance;  
Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!  
And oft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light!

Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,  
Like a youthful hermitess,  
Beauteous in a wilderness,  
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.  
And, if she move unquietly,  
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free  
Comes back and tingles in her feet.  
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.  
What if her guardian spirit 'twere,  
What if she knew her mother near?  
But this she knows, in joys and woes,  
That saints will aid if men will call:  
For the blue sky bends over all!

## Part II

Each matin bell, the Baron saith,  
Knells us back to a world of death.  
These words Sir Leoline first said,  
When he rose and found his lady dead:  
These words Sir Leoline will say  
Many a morn to his dying day!

And hence the custom and law began  
That still at dawn the sacristan,  
Who duly pulls the heavy bell,  
Five and forty beads must tell  
Between each stroke – a warning knell,

Which not a soul can choose but hear  
From Bratha Head to Wyndermere.

Saith Bracy the bard, So let it knell!  
And let the drowsy sacristan  
Still count as slowly as he can!  
There is no lack of such, I ween,  
As well fill up the space between.  
In Langdale Pike and Witch's Lair,  
And Dungeon-ghyll so foully rent,  
With ropes of rock and bells of air  
Three sinful sextons' ghosts are pent,  
Who all give back, one after t' other,  
The death-note to their living brother;  
And oft too, by the knell offended,  
Just as their one! two! three! is ended,  
The devil mocks the doleful tale  
With a merry peal from Borrowdale.

The air is still! through mist and cloud  
That merry peal comes ringing loud;  
And Geraldine shakes off her dread,  
And rises lightly from the bed;  
Puts on her silken vestments white,  
And tricks her hair in lovely plight,  
And nothing doubting of her spell  
Awakens the lady Christabel.  
'Sleep you, sweet lady Christabel?  
I trust that you have rested well.'

And Christabel awoke and spied  
The same who lay down by her side—  
O rather say, the same whom she  
Raised up beneath the old oak tree!  
Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!  
For she belike hath drunken deep  
Of all the blessedness of sleep!  
And while she spake, her looks, her air,  
Such gentle thankfulness declare,  
That (so it seemed) her girded vests  
Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts.  
'Sure I have sinn'd!' said Christabel,  
'Now heaven be praised if all be well!'  
And in low faltering tones, yet sweet,  
Did she the lofty lady greet  
With such perplexity of mind  
As dreams too lively leave behind.

So quickly she rose, and quickly arrayed  
Her maiden limbs, and having prayed  
That He, who on the cross did groan,  
Might wash away her sins unknown,  
She forthwith led fair Geraldine  
To meet her sire, Sir Leoline.

The lovely maid and the lady tall  
Are pacing both into the hall,  
And pacing on through page and groom,  
Enter the Baron's presence-room.

The Baron rose, and while he prest  
His gentle daughter to his breast,  
With cheerful wonder in his eyes  
The lady Geraldine espies,  
And gave such welcome to the same,  
As might beseem so bright a dame!

But when he heard the lady's tale,  
And when she told her father's name,  
Why waxed Sir Leoline so pale,  
Murmuring o'er the name again,  
Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine?  
Alas! they had been friends in youth;  
But whispering tongues can poison truth;  
And constancy lives in realms above;  
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.  
And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
With Roland and Sir Leoline.  
Each spake words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother:  
They parted – ne'er to meet again!  
But never either found another  
To free the hollow heart from paining—  
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;  
A dreary sea now flows between;—  
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,  
Stood gazing on the damsel's face:  
And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine  
Came back upon his heart again.

O then the Baron forgot his age,  
His noble heart swelled high with rage;  
He swore by the wounds in Jesu's side  
He would proclaim it far and wide,  
With trump and solemn heraldry,  
That they, who thus had wronged the dame  
Were base as spotted infamy!  
'And if they dare deny the same,  
My herald shall appoint a week,  
And let the recreant traitors seek  
My tourney court – that there and then  
I may dislodge their reptile souls  
From the bodies and forms of men!'  
He spake: his eye in lightning rolls!  
For the lady was ruthlessly seized; and he kenned  
In the beautiful lady the child of his friend!

And now the tears were on his face,  
And fondly in his arms he took  
Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace,  
Prolonging it with joyous look.  
Which when she viewed, a vision fell  
Upon the soul of Christabel,  
The vision of fear, the touch and pain!  
She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again—  
(Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee,  
Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?)

Again she saw that bosom old,  
Again she felt that bosom cold,  
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:  
Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,  
And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid  
With eyes upraised, as one that prayed.

The touch, the sight, had passed away,  
And in its stead that vision blest,  
Which comforted her after-rest,  
While in the lady's arms she lay,  
Had put a rapture in her breast,  
And on her lips and o'er her eyes  
Spread smiles like light!

With new surprise,  
'What ails then my beloved child?'  
The Baron said – His daughter mild  
Made answer, 'All will yet be well!'  
I ween, she had no power to tell  
Aught else: so mighty was the spell.

Yet he, who saw this Geraldine,  
Had deemed her sure a thing divine.  
Such sorrow with such grace she blended,  
As if she feared she had offended  
Sweet Christabel, that gentle maid!  
And with such lowly tones she prayed  
She might be sent without delay  
Home to her father's mansion.

‘Nay!

Nay, by my soul!’ said Leoline.  
‘Ho! Bracy the bard, the charge be thine!  
Go thou, with music sweet and loud,  
And take two steeds with trappings proud,  
And take the youth whom thou lov'st best  
To bear thy harp, and learn thy song,  
And clothe you both in solemn vest,  
And over the mountains haste along,  
Lest wandering folk, that are abroad,  
Detain you on the valley road.

‘And when he has crossed the Irthing flood,  
My merry bard! he hastes, he hastes  
Up Knorren Moor, through Halegarth Wood,  
And reaches soon that castle good  
Which stands and threatens Scotland's wastes.

‘Bard Bracy! bard Bracy! your horses are fleet,  
Ye must ride up the hall, your music so sweet,  
More loud than your horses' echoing feet!  
And loud and loud to Lord Roland call,  
Thy daughter is safe in Langdale hall!  
Thy beautiful daughter is safe and free—  
Sir Leoline greets thee thus through me!  
He bids thee come without delay  
With all thy numerous array  
And take thy lovely daughter home:  
And he will meet thee on the way  
With all his numerous array  
White with their panting palfreys' foam:  
And, by mine honour! I will say,  
That I repent me of the day  
When I spake words of fierce disdain  
To Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine!—  
—For since that evil hour hath flown,  
Many a summer's sun hath shone;  
Yet ne'er found I a friend again  
Like Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine.

The lady fell, and clasped his knees,  
Her face upraised, her eyes o'erflowing;  
And Bracy replied, with faltering voice,  
His gracious Hail on all bestowing!—  
'Thy words, thou sire of Christabel,  
Are sweeter than my harp can tell;  
Yet might I gain a boon of thee,  
This day my journey should not be,  
So strange a dream hath come to me;  
That I had vowed with music loud  
To clear yon wood from thing unblest,  
Warned by a vision in my rest!  
For in my sleep I saw that dove,  
That gentle bird, whom thou dost love,  
And call'st by thy own daughter's name—  
Sir Leoline! I saw the same,  
Fluttering, and uttering fearful moan,  
Among the green herbs in the forest alone.  
Which when I saw and when I heard,  
I wonder'd what might ail the bird;  
For nothing near it could I see,  
Save the grass and green herbs underneath the old tree.

'And in my dream, methought, I went  
To search out what might there be found;  
And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,  
That thus lay fluttering on the ground.  
I went and peered, and could descry  
No cause for her distressful cry;  
But yet for her dear lady's sake  
I stooped, methought, the dove to take,  
When lo! I saw a bright green snake  
Coiled around its wings and neck.  
Green as the herbs on which it couched,  
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;  
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,  
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!  
I woke; it was the midnight hour,  
The clock was echoing in the tower;  
But though my slumber was gone by,  
This dream it would not pass away—  
It seems to live upon my eye!  
And thence I vowed this self-same day  
With music strong and saintly song  
To wander through the forest bare,  
Lest aught unholy loiter there.'

Thus Bracy said: the Baron, the while,  
Half-listening heard him with a smile;  
Then turned to Lady Geraldine,  
His eyes made up of wonder and love;  
And said in courtly accents fine,  
‘Sweet maid, Lord Roland’s beauteous dove,  
With arms more strong than harp or song,  
Thy sire and I will crush the snake!’”  
He kissed her forehead as he spake,  
And Geraldine in maiden wise  
Casting down her large bright eyes,  
With blushing cheek and courtesy fine  
She turned her from Sir Leoline;  
Softly gathering up her train,  
That o’er her right arm fell again;  
And folded her arms across her chest,  
And couched her head upon her breast,  
And looked askance at Christabel—  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!

A snake’s small eye blinks dull and shy,  
And the lady’s eyes they shrunk in her head,  
Each shrunk up to a serpent’s eye,  
And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,  
At Christabel she looked askance!—  
One moment – and the sight was fled!  
But Christabel in dizzy trance  
Stumbling on the unsteady ground  
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound;  
And Geraldine again turned round,  
And like a thing, that sought relief,  
Full of wonder and full of grief,  
She rolled her large bright eyes divine  
Wildly on Sir Leoline.

The maid, alas! her thoughts are gone,  
She nothing sees – no sight but one!  
The maid, devoid of guile and sin,  
I know not how, in fearful wise,  
So deeply had she drunken in  
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,  
That all her features were resigned  
To this sole image in her mind:  
And passively did imitate  
That look of dull and treacherous hate!  
And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,  
Still picturing that look askance  
With forced unconscious sympathy  
Full before her father’s view—

As far as such a look could be  
In eyes so innocent and blue!

And when the trance was o'er, the maid  
Paused awhile, and inly prayed:  
Then falling at the Baron's feet,  
'By my mother's soul, do I entreat  
That thou this woman send away!'  
She said: and more she could not say:  
For what she knew she could not tell,  
O'er-mastered by the mighty spell.

Why is thy cheek so wan and wild,  
Sir Leoline? Thy only child  
Lies at thy feet, thy joy, thy pride,  
So fair, so innocent, so mild;  
The same, for whom thy lady died!  
O, by the pangs of her dear mother  
Think thou no evil of thy child!  
For her, and thee, and for no other,  
She prayed the moment ere she died:  
Prayed that the babe for whom she died,  
Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!  
That prayer her deadly pangs beguiled,  
Sir Leoline!  
And wouldst thou wrong thy only child,  
Her child and thine?

Within the Baron's heart and brain  
If thoughts, like these, had any share,  
They only swelled his rage and pain,  
And did but work confusion there.  
His heart was cleft with pain and rage,  
His cheeks they quivered, his eyes were wild,  
Dishonoured thus in his old age;  
Dishonour'd by his only child,  
And all his hospitality  
To the wronged daughter of his friend  
By more than woman's jealousy  
Brought thus to a disgraceful end—  
He rolled his eye with stern regard  
Upon the gentle minstrel bard,  
And said in tones abrupt, austere—  
'Why, Bracy! dost thou loiter here?  
I bade thee hence!' The bard obeyed;  
And turning from his own sweet maid,  
The aged knight, Sir Leoline,  
Led forth the lady Geraldine!



## The Conclusion to Part II

A little child, a limber elf,  
Singing, dancing to itself,  
A fairy thing with red round cheeks,  
That always finds, and never seeks,  
Makes such a vision to the sight  
As fills a father's eyes with light;  
And pleasures flow in so thick and fast  
Upon his heart, that he at last  
Must needs express his love's excess  
With words of unmeant bitterness.  
Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together  
Thoughts so all unlike each other;  
To mutter and mock a broken charm,  
To dally with wrong that does no harm.  
Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty  
At each wild word to feel within  
A sweet recoil of love and pity.  
And what, if in a world of sin  
(O sorrow and shame should this be true!)  
Such giddiness of heart and brain  
Comes seldom save from rage and pain,  
So talks as it's most used to do.

### *Notes*

The first part of *Christabel* was written in 1797, and the second part in 1800. Coleridge apparently planned to write a further three parts, but the poem was never finished.

#### **Part I**

*weal* = welfare, good fortune

*palfrey* = a lady's horse

*I wis* = certainly

*cincture* = belt, girdle

#### **Concl. To Part I**

*bale* = evil, misery

*tairn* = tarn, a small mountain lake

#### **Part II**

*Sacristan* – church sexton

*Bratha Head to Wyndermere* – these and the other place names refer to places in the Lake District of NW England, where Coleridge was living while writing Part II of the poem. Part I was written in Somerset.

## Frost At Midnight

The Frost performs its secret ministry,  
 Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry  
 Came loud – and hark, again! loud as before.  
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,  
 Have left me to that solitude, which suits  
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm that it disturbs  
 And vexes meditation with its strange  
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,  
 This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,  
 With all the numberless goings-on of life,  
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame  
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;  
 Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,  
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.  
 Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature  
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,  
 Making it a companionable form,  
 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit  
 By its own moods interprets, every where  
 Echo or mirror seeking of itself,  
 And makes a toy of Thought.

But O! how oft,  
 How oft, at school, with most believing mind,  
 Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,  
 To watch that fluttering *stranger*! and as oft  
 With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt  
 Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,  
 Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang  
 From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,  
 So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me  
 With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear  
 Most like articulate sounds of things to come!  
 So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,  
 Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!  
 And so I brooded all the following morn,  
 Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye  
 Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:  
 Save if the door half opened, and I snatched  
 A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,  
 For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,  
 Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved,  
 My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
Fill up the interspersèd vacancies  
And momentary pauses of the thought!  
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,  
And in far other scenes! For I was reared  
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,  
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.  
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,  
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould  
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch  
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall  
Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
Or if the secret ministry of frost  
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

**Note**

*Only that film, which fluttered on the grate* – Coleridge wrote: ‘In all parts of the kingdom these films are called strangers and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend.’

The film might have been a shred of ash.

↑

## Fears in Solitude

Written in April 1798, during the Alarm of an Invasion

A green and silent spot, amid the hills,  
A small and silent dell! O'er stiller place  
No singing sky-lark ever poised himself.  
The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope,  
Which hath a gay and gorgeous covering on,  
All golden with the never-bloomless furze,  
Which now blooms most profusely: but the dell,  
Bathed by the mist, is fresh and delicate  
As vernal corn-field, or the unripe flax,  
When, through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,  
The level sunshine glimmers with green light.  
Oh! 'tis a quiet spirit-healing nook!  
Which all, methinks, would love; but chiefly he,  
The humble man, who, in his youthful years,  
Knew just so much of folly, as had made  
His early manhood more securely wise!  
Here he might lie on fern or withered heath,  
While from the singing lark (that sings unseen  
The minstrelsy that solitude loves best),  
And from the sun, and from the breezy air,  
Sweet influences trembled o'er his frame;  
And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,  
Made up a meditative joy, and found  
Religious meanings in the forms of Nature!  
And so, his senses gradually wrapt  
In a half sleep, he dreams of better worlds,  
And dreaming hears thee still, O singing lark,  
That singest like an angel in the clouds!

My God! it is a melancholy thing  
For such a man, who would full fain preserve  
His soul in calmness, yet perforce must feel  
For all his human brethren – O my God!  
It weighs upon the heart, that he must think  
What uproar and what strife may now be stirring  
This way or that way o'er these silent hills—  
Invasion, and the thunder and the shout,  
And all the crash of onset; fear and rage,  
And undetermined conflict – even now,  
Even now, perchance, and in his native isle:  
Carnage and groans beneath this blessed sun!  
We have offended, Oh! my countrymen!  
We have offended very grievously,  
And been most tyrannous. From east to west  
A groan of accusation pierces Heaven!

The wretched plead against us; multitudes  
Countless and vehement, the sons of God,  
Our brethren! Like a cloud that travels on.  
Steamed up from Cairo's swamps of pestilence,  
Even so, my countrymen! have we gone forth  
And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs,  
And, deadlier far, our vices, whose deep taint  
With slow perdition murders the whole man,  
His body and his soul! Meanwhile, at home,  
All individual dignity and power  
Engulfed in Courts, Committees, Institutions,  
Associations and Societies,  
A vain, speech-mouthing, speech-reporting Guild,  
One Benefit-Club for mutual flattery,  
We have drunk up, demure as at a grace,  
Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth;  
Contemptuous of all honourable rule,  
Yet bartering freedom and the poor man's life  
For gold, as at a market! The sweet words  
Of Christian promise, words that even yet  
Might stem destruction, were they wisely preached,  
Are muttered o'er by men, whose tones proclaim  
How flat and wearisome they feel their trade:  
Rank scoffers some, but most too indolent  
To deem them falsehoods or to know their truth.  
Oh! blasphemous! the Book of Life is made  
A superstitious instrument, on which  
We gabble o'er the oaths we mean to break;  
For all must swear – all and in every place,  
College and wharf, council and justice-court;  
All, all must swear, the briber and the bribed,  
Merchant and lawyer, senator and priest,  
The rich, the poor, the old man and the young;  
All, all make up one scheme of perjury,  
That faith doth reel; the very name of God  
Sounds like a juggler's charm; and, bold with joy,  
Forth from his dark and lonely hiding-place,  
(Portentous sight!) the owlet Atheism,  
Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,  
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,  
And hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,  
Cries out, 'Where is it?'

Thankless too for peace,  
(Peace long preserved by fleets and perilous seas)  
Secure from actual warfare, we have loved  
To swell the war-whoop, passionate for war!  
Alas! for ages ignorant of all  
Its ghastlier workings, (famine or blue plague,  
Battle, or siege, or flight through wintry snows,)

We, this whole people, have been clamorous  
For war and bloodshed; animating sports,  
The which we pay for as a thing to talk of,  
Spectators and not combatants! No guess  
Anticipative of a wrong unfelt,  
No speculation on contingency,  
However dim and vague, too vague and dim  
To yield a justifying cause; and forth,  
(Stuffed out with big preamble, holy names.  
And adjurations of the God in Heaven,)  
We send our mandates for the certain death  
Of thousands and ten thousands! Boys and girls,  
And women, that would groan to see a child  
Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,  
The best amusement for our morning meal!  
The poor wretch, who has learnt his only prayers  
From curses, who knows scarcely words enough  
To ask a blessing from his Heavenly Father,  
Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute  
And technical in victories and defeats,  
And all our dainty terms for fratricide;  
Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues  
Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which  
We join no feeling and attach no form!  
As if the soldier died without a wound;  
As if the fibres of this godlike frame  
Were gored without a pang; as if the wretch,  
Who fell in battle, doing bloody deeds,  
Passed off to Heaven, translated and not killed;  
As though he had no wife to pine for him,  
No God to judge him! Therefore, evil days  
Are coming on us, O my countrymen!  
And what if all-avenging Providence,  
Strong and retributive, should make us know  
The meaning of our words, force us to feel  
The desolation and the agony  
Of our fierce doings?

Spare us yet awhile,  
Father and God! O! spare us yet awhile!  
Oh! let not English women drag their flight  
Fainting beneath the burthen of their babes,  
Of the sweet infants, that but yesterday  
Laughed at the breast! Sons, brothers, husbands, all  
Who ever gazed with fondness on the forms  
Which grew up with you round the same fire-side,  
And all who ever heard the sabbath-bells  
Without the infidel's scorn, make yourselves pure!  
Stand forth! be men! repel an impious foe,  
Impious and false, a light yet cruel race,

Who laugh away all virtue, mingling mirth  
With deeds of murder; and still promising  
Freedom, themselves too sensual to be free,  
Poison life's amities, and cheat the heart  
Of faith and quiet hope, and all that soothes,  
And all that lifts the spirit! Stand we forth;  
Render them back upon the insulted ocean,  
And let them toss as idly on its waves  
As the vile sea-weed, which some mountain-blast  
Swept from our shores! And oh! may we return  
Not with a drunken triumph, but with fear,  
Repenting of the wrongs with which we stung  
So fierce a foe to frenzy!

I have told,  
O Britons! O my brethren! I have told  
Most bitter truth, but without bitterness.  
Nor deem my zeal or factious or mistimed;  
For never can true courage dwell with them,  
Who, playing tricks with conscience, dare not look  
At their own vices. We have been too long  
Dupes of a deep delusion! Some, belike,  
Groaning with restless enmity, expect  
All change from change of constituted power;  
As if a Government had been a robe,  
On which our vice and wretchedness were tagged  
Like fancy-points and fringes, with the robe  
Pulled off at pleasure. Fondly these attach  
A radical causation to a few  
Poor drudges of chastising Providence,  
Who borrow all their hues and qualities  
From our own folly and rank wickedness,  
Which gave them birth and nursed them. Others, meanwhile,  
Dote with a mad idolatry; and all  
Who will not fall before their images,  
And yield them worship, they are enemies  
Even of their country!

Such have I been deemed.—  
But, O dear Britain! O my Mother Isle!  
Needs must thou prove a name most dear and holy  
To me, a son, a brother, and a friend,  
A husband, and a father! who revere  
All bonds of natural love, and find them all  
Within the limits of thy rocky shores.  
O native Britain! O my Mother Isle!  
How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy  
To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,  
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,  
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,

All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,  
All adoration of the God in nature,  
All lovely and all honourable things,  
Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel  
The joy and greatness of its future being?  
There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul  
Unborrowed from my country! O divine  
And beauteous island! thou hast been my sole  
And most magnificent temple, in the which  
I walk with awe, and sing my stately songs,  
Loving the God that made me!—

May my fears,  
My filial fears, be vain! and may the vaunts  
And menace of the vengeful enemy  
Pass like the gust, that roared and died away  
In the distant tree: which heard, and only heard  
In this low dell, bowed not the delicate grass.

But now the gentle dew-fall sends abroad  
The fruit-like perfume of the golden furze:  
The light has left the summit of the hill,  
Though still a sunny gleam lies beautiful,  
Aslant the ivied beacon. Now farewell,  
Farewell, awhile, O soft and silent spot!  
On the green sheep-track, up the heathy hill,  
Homeward I wind my way; and lo! recalled  
From bodings that have well-nigh wearied me,  
I find myself upon the brow, and pause  
Startled! And after lonely sojourning  
In such a quiet and surrounded nook,  
This burst of prospect, here the shadowy main,  
Dim-tinted, there the mighty majesty  
Of that huge amphitheatre of rich  
And elmy fields, seems like society—  
Conversing with the mind, and giving it  
A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!  
And now, belovèd Stowey! I behold  
Thy church-tower, and, methinks, the four huge elms  
Clustering, which mark the mansion of my friend;  
And close behind them, hidden from my view,  
Is my own lowly cottage, where my babe  
And my babe's mother dwell in peace! With light  
And quickened footsteps thitherward I tend,  
Remembering thee, O green and silent dell!  
And grateful, that by nature's quietness  
And solitary musings, all my heart  
Is softened, and made worthy to indulge  
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.



### **Notes**

The 'invasion' of the subtitle refers to fears that French forces were about to invade Ireland (then part of Britain.) Although Coleridge had supported the French revolution ten years previously, he became disillusioned with the subsequent acts of the French government.

*furze* = gorse-bush

*main* = ocean

*Stowey* – Nether Stowey, the village in Somerset where Coleridge lived from 1797 to 1799.

↑

## **The Nightingale** **A Conversation Poem, April, 1798**

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day  
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip  
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.  
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!  
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,  
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently,  
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still,  
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,  
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers  
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find  
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.  
And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,  
'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!  
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!  
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.  
But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced  
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,  
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,  
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,  
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale  
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,  
First named these notes a melancholy strain.  
And many a poet echoes the conceit;  
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme  
When he had better far have stretched his limbs  
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,  
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes  
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements  
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song  
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame  
Should share in Nature's immortality,

A venerable thing! and so his song  
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself  
Be loved like Nature! But 'twill not be so;  
And youths and maidens most poetical,  
Who lose the deepening twilights of the spring  
In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still  
Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs  
O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.

My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt  
A different lore: we may not thus profane  
Nature's sweet voices, always full of love  
And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale  
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates  
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,  
As he were fearful that an April night  
Would be too short for him to utter forth  
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul  
Of all its music!

And I know a grove  
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,  
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so  
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,  
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,  
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.  
But never elsewhere in one place I knew  
So many nightingales; and far and near,  
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,  
They answer and provoke each other's song,  
With skirmish and capricious passagings,  
And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,  
And one low piping sound more sweet than all—  
Stirring the air with such a harmony,  
That should you close your eyes, you might almost  
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,  
Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed,  
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,  
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,  
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade  
Lights up her love-torch.

A most gentle Maid,  
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home  
Hard by the castle, and at latest eve  
(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate  
To something more than Nature in the grove)  
Glides through the pathways; she knows all their notes,  
That gentle Maid! and oft, a moment's space,  
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,  
Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon

Emerging, hath awakened earth and sky  
With one sensation, and those wakeful birds  
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,  
As if some sudden gale had swept at once  
A hundred airy harps! And she hath watched  
Many a nightingale perch giddily  
On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze,  
And to that motion tune his wanton song  
Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head.

Farewell, O Warbler! till to-morrow eve,  
And you, my friends! farewell, a short farewell!  
We have been loitering long and pleasantly,  
And now for our dear homes. – That strain again!  
Full fain it would delay me! My dear babe,  
Who, capable of no articulate sound,  
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,  
How he would place his hand beside his ear,  
His little hand, the small forefinger up,  
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise  
To make him Nature's play-mate. He knows well  
The evening-star; and once, when he awoke  
In most distressful mood (some inward pain  
Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream—)  
I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,  
And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,  
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,  
While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,  
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well!—  
It is a father's tale: But if that Heaven  
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
Familiar with these songs, that with the night  
He may associate joy. – Once more, farewell,  
Sweet Nightingale! once more, my friends! farewell.

**Notes**

'most musical, most melancholy' – a quote from Milton's *Il Penseroso*.

*Philomela*: a princess in Greek myth; after her brother-in-law King Tereus raped her and cut out her tongue, she was transformed into a nightingale (or in some versions, a swallow.)

↑

***From The Three Graves***  
**A Fragment of a Sexton's Tale**

Now ask you why the barren wife,  
    And why the maid forlorn,  
And why the ruthless mother lies  
    Beneath the flowery thorn?

Three times, three times this spade of mine,  
    In spite of bolt or bar,  
Did from beneath the belfry come,  
    When spirits wandering are.

And when the mother's soul to Hell  
    By howling fiends was borne,  
This spade was seen to mark her grave  
    Beneath the flowery thorn.

And when the death-knock at the door  
    Called home the maid forlorn,  
This spade was seen to mark her grave  
    Beneath the flowery thorn.

And 'tis a fearful, fearful tree;  
    The ghosts that round it meet,  
'Tis they that cut the rind at night,  
    Yet still it blossoms sweet.

***Note***

This is an extract from a long unfinished poem in ballad form, telling the story of a wicked mother who tries to steal one daughter's husband, and curses her other daughter.

## The Ballad of the Dark Ladié A Fragment

Beneath yon birch with silver bark,  
And boughs so pendulous and fair,  
The brook falls scatter'd down the rock:  
    And all is mossy there!

And there upon the moss she sits,  
The Dark Ladié in silent pain;  
The heavy tear is in her eye,  
    And drops and swells again.

Three times she sends her little page  
Up the castled mountain's breast,  
If he might find the Knight that wears  
    The Griffin for his crest.

The sun was sloping down the sky,  
And she had linger'd there all day,  
Counting moments, dreaming fears—  
    Oh wherefore can he stay?

She hears a rustling o'er the brook,  
She sees far off a swinging bough!  
'Tis He! 'Tis my betrothéd Knight!  
    Lord Falkland, it is Thou!

She springs, she clasps him round the neck,  
She sobs a thousand hopes and fears,  
Her kisses glowing on his cheeks  
    She quenches with her tears.

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

'My friends with rude ungentle words  
They scoff and bid me fly to thee!  
O give me shelter in thy breast!  
    O shield and shelter me!

'My Henry, I have given thee much,  
I gave what I can ne'er recall,  
I gave my heart, I gave my peace,  
    O Heaven! I gave thee all.'

The Knight made answer to the Maid,  
While to his heart he held her hand,  
'Nine castles hath my noble sire,  
    None statelier in the land.

'The fairest one shall be my love's,  
The fairest castle of the nine!  
Wait only till the stars peep out,  
The fairest shall be thine:

'Wait only till the hand of eve  
Hath wholly closed yon western bars,  
And through the dark we two will steal  
Beneath the twinkling stars!'—

'The dark? the dark? No! not the dark?  
The twinkling stars? How, Henry? How?'  
O God! 'twas in the eye of noon  
He pledged his sacred vow!

And in the eye of noon my love  
Shall lead me from my mother's door,  
Sweet boys and girls all clothed in white  
Strewing flowers before:

But first the nodding minstrels go  
With music meet for lordly bowers,  
The children next in snow-white vests,  
Strewing buds and flowers!

And then my love and I shall pace.  
My jet black hair in pearly braids,  
Between our comely bachelors  
And blushing bridal maids.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Note**

It appears that Coleridge may have written another 30 or so stanzas, which were later lost.

↑

**Kubla Khan**  
**Or, A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment**

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
    Down to a sunless sea.  
So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round:  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!  
    The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
    Floated midway on the waves;  
    Where was heard the mingled measure  
    From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid,  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.  
Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,

To such a deep delight 'twould win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

### *Notes*

Coleridge wrote about the origin of this poem:

‘In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton...’ (After taking medicine, possibly containing opium) ‘...he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in *Purchas’s Pilgrimage*: “Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall.” The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time ... all the images rose up before him... On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away...’

*Purchas’s Pilgrimage* was a collection of travellers’ accounts of foreign countries published in 1625.

*Kubla* or *Kublai Khan*, grandson of Genghis Khan, was head of the vast Mongol empire that stretched across Asia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Kublai Khan’s life and palaces were described in detail by his contemporary Marco Polo in his *Travels*. Marco Polo wrote this about the city of Shang-tu (i.e. Xanadu):

‘In this city Kubilai Khan built a huge palace of marble and other ornamental stones. Its halls and chambers are all gilded, and the whole building is marvellously embellished and richly adorned... (A wall encloses) fully sixteen miles of parkland well watered with springs and streams...’

However, Marco Polo makes no mention of a sacred river Alph, pleasure-dome or caves of ice.

(Marco Polo, *The Travels*. trans. R.E. Latham. Penguin Books, 1958)



↑

**Something Childish, but Very Natural**  
**Written in Germany**

If I had but two little wings  
And were a little feathery bird,  
To you I'd fly, my dear!  
But thoughts like these are idle things,  
And I stay here.

But in my sleep to you I fly:  
I'm always with you in my sleep!  
The world is all one's own.  
But then one wakes, and where am I?  
All, all alone.

Sleep stays not, though a monarch bids:  
So I love to wake ere break of day:  
For though my sleep be gone,  
Yet while 'tis dark, one shuts one's lids,  
And still dreams on.

**Note**

This poem is an adaptation of a German folk-song, *Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär.*

↑

**Lines**  
**Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest**

I stood on Brocken's sovran height, and saw  
Woods crowding upon woods, hills over hills,  
A surging scene, and only limited  
By the blue distance. Heavily my way  
Downward I dragged through fir groves evermore,  
Where bright green moss heaves in sepulchral forms  
Speckled with sunshine; and, but seldom heard,  
The sweet bird's song became a hollow sound;  
And the breeze, murmuring indivisibly,  
Preserved its solemn murmur most distinct  
From many a note of many a waterfall,  
And the brook's chatter; 'mid whose islet-stones  
The dingy kidling with its tinkling bell  
Leaped frolicsome, or old romantic goat  
Sat, his white beard slow waving. I moved on  
In low and languid mood: for I had found  
That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive  
Their finer influence from the Life within;—

Fair cyphers else: fair, but of import vague  
Or unconcerning, where the heart not finds  
History or prophecy of friend, or child,  
Or gentle maid, our first and early love,  
Or father, or the venerable name  
Of our adorèd country! O thou Queen,  
Thou delegated Deity of Earth,  
O dear, dear England! how my longing eye  
Turned westward, shaping in the steady clouds  
Thy sands and high white cliffs!

My native Land!

Filled with the thought of thee this heart was proud,  
Yea, mine eye swam with tears: that all the view  
From sovran Brocken, woods and woody hills,  
Floated away, like a departing dream,  
Feeble and dim! Stranger, these impulses  
Blame thou not lightly; nor will I profane,  
With hasty judgment or injurious doubt,  
That man's sublimer spirit, who can feel  
That God is everywhere! the God who framed  
Mankind to be one mighty family,  
Himself our Father, and the World our Home.

**Note**

Brocken is the highest mountain in Northern Germany, now part of the Harz National Park.

↑

***From The Devil's Thoughts***

I  
From his brimstone bed at break of day  
A walking the Devil is gone,  
To visit his snug little farm the earth,  
And see how his stock goes on.

II  
Over the hill and over the dale,  
And he went over the plain,  
And backward and forward he switched his long tail  
As a gentleman switches his cane.

III  
And how then was the Devil drest?  
Oh! he was in his Sunday's best:  
His jacket was red and his breeches were blue,  
And there was a hole where the tail came through.

IV

He saw a Lawyer killing a Viper  
On a dunghill hard by his own stable;  
And the Devil smiled, for it put him in mind  
Of Cain and his brother, Abel.

V

He saw an Apothecary on a white horse  
Ride by on his vocations,  
And the Devil thought of his old Friend  
Death in the Revelations....

↑

## Love

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
All are but ministers of Love,  
And feed his sacred flame.

Oft in my waking dreams do I  
Live o'er again that happy hour,  
When midway on the mount I lay,  
Beside the ruined tower.

The moonshine, stealing o'er the scene  
Had blended with the lights of eve;  
And she was there, my hope, my joy,  
My own dear Genevieve!

She leant against the armèd man,  
The statue of the armèd knight;  
She stood and listened to my lay,  
Amid the lingering light.

Few sorrows hath she of her own,  
My hope! my joy! my Genevieve!  
She loves me best, whene'er I sing  
The songs that make her grieve.

I played a soft and doleful air,  
I sang an old and moving story—  
An old rude song, that suited well  
That ruin wild and hoary.

She listened with a flitting blush,  
With downcast eyes and modest grace;  
For well she knew, I could not choose  
    But gaze upon her face.

I told her of the Knight that wore  
Upon his shield a burning brand;  
And that for ten long years he wooed  
    The Lady of the Land.

I told her how he pined: and ah!  
The deep, the low, the pleading tone  
With which I sang another's love,  
    Interpreted my own.

She listened with a flitting blush,  
With downcast eyes, and modest grace;  
And she forgave me, that I gazed  
    Too fondly on her face!

But when I told the cruel scorn  
That crazed that bold and lovely Knight,  
And that he crossed the mountain-woods,  
    Nor rested day nor night;

That sometimes from the savage den,  
And sometimes from the darksome shade,  
And sometimes starting up at once  
    In green and sunny glade,—

There came and looked him in the face  
An angel beautiful and bright;  
And that he knew it was a Fiend,  
    This miserable Knight!

And that unknowing what he did,  
He leaped amid a murderous band,  
And saved from outrage worse than death  
    The Lady of the Land!

And how she wept, and clasped his knees;  
And how she tended him in vain—  
And ever strove to expiate  
    The scorn that crazed his brain;—

And that she nursed him in a cave;  
And how his madness went away,  
When on the yellow forest-leaves  
    A dying man he lay;—

His dying words – but when I reached  
That tenderest strain of all the ditty,  
My faltering voice and pausing harp  
    Disturbed her soul with pity!

All impulses of soul and sense  
Had thrilled my guileless Genevieve;  
The music and the doleful tale,  
    The rich and balmy eve;

And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,  
An undistinguishable throng,  
And gentle wishes long subdued,  
    Subdued and cherished long!

She wept with pity and delight,  
She blushed with love, and virgin-shame;  
And like the murmur of a dream,  
    I heard her breathe my name.

Her bosom heaved – she stepped aside,  
As conscious of my look she stepped—  
Then suddenly, with timorous eye  
    She fled to me and wept.

She half enclosed me with her arms,  
She pressed me with a meek embrace;  
And bending back her head, looked up,  
    And gazed upon my face.

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,  
And partly 'twas a bashful art,  
That I might rather feel, than see,  
    The swelling of her heart.

I calmed her fears, and she was calm,  
And told her love with virgin pride;  
And so I won my Genevieve,  
    My bright and beauteous Bride.

**Note**

*An old rude song* – ‘rude’ here means simple and plain, rather than offensive.

↑

## A Stranger Minstrel

Written [to Mrs. Robinson,] a Few Weeks Before her Death

As late on Skiddaw's mount I lay supine,  
Midway th' ascent, in that repose divine  
When the soul centred in the heart's recess  
Hath quaff'd its fill of Nature's loveliness,  
Yet still beside the fountain's marge will stay  
    And fain would thirst again, again to quaff;  
Then when the tear, slow travelling on its way,  
    Fills up the wrinkles of a silent laugh—  
In that sweet mood of sad and humorous thought  
A form within me rose, within me wrought  
With such strong magic, that I cried aloud,  
'Thou ancient Skiddaw by thy helm of cloud,  
And by thy many-colour'd chasms deep,  
And by their shadows that for ever sleep,  
By yon small flaky mists that love to creep  
Along the edges of those spots of light,  
Those sunny islands on thy smooth green height,  
    And by yon shepherds with their sheep,  
    And dogs and boys, a gladsome crowd,  
    That rush e'en now with clamour loud  
    Sudden from forth thy topmost cloud,  
    And by this laugh, and by this tear,  
I would, old Skiddaw, she were here!  
A lady of sweet song is she,  
Her soft blue eye was made for thee!  
O ancient Skiddaw, by this tear,  
I would, I would that she were here!'

Then ancient Skiddaw, stern and proud,  
    In sullen majesty replying,  
Thus spake from out his helm of cloud  
    (His voice was like an echo dying!):—  
'She dwells belike in scenes more fair,  
And scorns a mount so bleak and bare.'

I only sigh'd when this I heard,  
Such mournful thoughts within me stirr'd  
That all my heart was faint and weak,  
    So sorely was I troubled!  
No laughter wrinkled on my cheek,  
    But O the tears were doubled!  
But ancient Skiddaw green and high  
Heard and understood my sigh;  
And now, in tones less stern and rude,  
As if he wish'd to end the feud,

Spake he, the proud response renewing  
 (His voice was like a monarch wooing):—  
 ‘Nay, but thou dost not know her might,  
   The pinions of her soul how strong!  
 But many a stranger in my height  
   Hath sung to me her magic song,  
     Sending forth his ecstasy  
     In her divinest melody,  
 And hence I know her soul is free,  
 She is where'er she wills to be,  
 Unfetter'd by mortality!  
 Now to the “haunted beach” can fly,  
   Beside the threshold scourged with waves,  
   Now where the maniac wildly raves,  
 “*Pale moon, thou spectre of the sky!*”  
 No wind that hurries o'er my height  
 Can travel with so swift a flight.  
   I too, methinks, might merit  
   The presence of her spirit!  
   To me too might belong  
 The honour of her song and witching melody,  
   Which most resembles me,  
   Soft, various, and sublime,  
   Exempt from wrongs of Time!’

Thus spake the mighty Mount, and I  
 Made answer, with a deep-drawn sigh:—  
 ‘Thou ancient Skiddaw, by this tear,  
 I would, I would that she were here!’

**Notes**

Mary Robinson (c 1757 – 1800) was a fashionable actress, poet and novelist who was mistress of King George IV when he was Prince of Wales.

*Skiddaw* – a mountain in the Lake District

“*haunted beach*” and “*Pale moon, thou spectre of the sky*” – references to poems by Mary Robinson.

**Dejection: An Ode**  
**[Written April 4, 1802]**

*Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,  
 With the old Moon in her arms;  
 And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!  
 We shall have a deadly storm.*  
 Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence.

**I**

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made  
 The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,  
 This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence  
 Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade  
 Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,  
 Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes  
 Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,  
     Which better far were mute.  
 For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!  
 And overspread with phantom light,  
 (With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
 But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)  
 I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
 The coming-on of rain and squally blast.  
 And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,  
     And sent my soul abroad,  
 Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

**II**

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,  
 A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,  
 Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,  
     In word, or sigh, or tear—  
 O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,  
 To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,  
     All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
 Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
     And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
 And still I gaze – and with how blank an eye!  
 And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
 That give away their motion to the stars;  
 Those stars, that glide behind them or between,  
 Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:  
 Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew  
 In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;



I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

### III

My genial spirits fail;  
And what can these avail  
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?  
It were a vain endeavour,  
Though I should gaze for ever  
On that green light that lingers in the west:  
I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

### IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live:  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!  
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the Earth—  
And from the soul itself must there be sent  
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

### V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me  
What this strong music in the soul may be!  
What, and wherein it doth exist,  
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,  
This beautiful and beauty-making power.  
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,  
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,  
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,  
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,  
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower  
A new Earth and new Heaven,  
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—  
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—  
We in ourselves rejoice!  
And thence flows all that charms our ear or sight,  
All melodies the echoes of that voice,  
All colours a suffusion from that light.

### VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
This joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff

Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:  
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,  
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.  
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:  
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;  
    But oh! each visitation  
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,  
    My shaping spirit of Imagination.  
For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
    But to be still and patient, all I can;  
And haply by abstruse research to steal  
    From my own nature all the natural man—  
    This was my sole resource, my only plan:  
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,  
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

## VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,  
    Reality's dark dream!  
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,  
    Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream  
Of agony by torture lengthened out  
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,  
    Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,  
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,  
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,  
    Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,  
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,  
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,  
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,  
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.  
    Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!  
Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!  
    What tell'st thou now about?  
    'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,  
    With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds—  
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!  
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!  
    And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,  
With groans, and tremulous shudderings – all is over—  
    It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!  
    A tale of less affright,  
    And tempered with delight,  
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay,—  
    'Tis of a little child  
    Upon a lonesome wild,  
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:  
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,  
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

## VIII

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:  
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!  
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,  
    And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,  
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,  
    Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!  
    With light heart may she rise,  
    Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,  
    Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;  
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,  
Their life the eddying of her living soul!  
    O simple spirit, guided from above,  
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,  
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.

### *Notes*

*Aeolian lute*: instrument played by the wind

*mountain-tairn* = mountain tarn, or small lake

*Otway's self* - Thomas Otway (1652 – 1685) was a playwright whose works included *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserv'd*.

↑

### ***From The Picture Or The Lover's Resolution***

Through weeds and thorns, and matted underwood  
I force my way; now climb, and now descend  
O'er rocks, or bare or mossy, with wild foot  
Crushing the purple whorts; while oft unseen,  
Hurrying along the drifted forest-leaves,  
The scared snake rustles. Onward still I toil,  
I know not, ask not whither! A new joy,  
Lovely as light, sudden as summer gust,  
And gladsome as the first-born of the spring,  
Beckons me on, or follows from behind,  
Playmate, or guide! The master-passion quelled,  
I feel that I am free. With dun-red bark  
The fir-trees, and the unfrequent slender oak,  
Forth from this tangle wild of bush and brake  
Soar up, and form a melancholy vault  
High o'er me, murmuring like a distant sea.

Here Wisdom might resort, and here Remorse;  
Here too the love-lorn man, who, sick in soul,  
And of this busy human heart aweary,  
Worships the spirit of unconscious life

In tree or wild-flower. – Gentle lunatic!  
If so he might not wholly cease to be,  
He would far rather not be that he is;  
But would be something that he knows not of,  
In winds or waters, or among the rocks! ...

*Note*

*whorts* = whortleberries, wild blueberries

↑

**An Ode to the Rain**

**Composed Before Daylight, on the Morning Appointed for the Departure  
of a Very Worthy but Not Very Pleasant Visitor, Whom it was Feared the  
Rain Might Detain**

**I**

I know it is dark; and though I have lain,  
Awake, as I guess, an hour or twain,  
I have not once opened the lids of my eyes,  
But I lie in the dark, as a blind man lies.  
O Rain! that I lie listening to,  
You're but a doleful sound at best:  
I owe you little thanks, 'tis true,  
For breaking thus my needful rest!  
Yet if, as soon as it is light,  
O Rain! you will but take your flight,  
I'll neither rail, nor malice keep,  
Though sick and sore for want of sleep.  
But only now, for this one day,  
Do go, dear Rain! do go away!

**II**

O Rain! with your dull two-fold sound,  
The clash hard by, and the murmur all round!  
You know, if you know aught, that we,  
Both night and day, but ill agree:  
For days and months, and almost years,  
Have limped on through this vale of tears,  
Since body of mine, and rainy weather,  
Have lived on easy terms together.  
Yet if, as soon as it is light,  
O Rain! you will but take your flight,  
Though you should come again to-morrow,  
And bring with you both pain and sorrow;  
Though stomach should sicken and knees should swell—  
I'll nothing speak of you but well.  
But only now for this one day,  
Do go, dear Rain! do go away!

### III

Dear Rain! I ne'er refused to say  
You're a good creature in your way;  
Nay, I could write a book myself,  
Would fit a parson's lower shelf,  
Showing how very good you are.—  
What then? sometimes it must be fair  
And if sometimes, why not to-day?  
Do go, dear Rain! do go away!

### IV

Dear Rain! if I've been cold and shy,  
Take no offence! I'll tell you why.  
A dear old Friend e'en now is here,  
And with him came my sister dear;  
After long absence now first met,  
Long months by pain and grief beset—  
We three dear friends! in truth, we groan  
Impatiently to be alone.  
We three, you mark! and not one more!  
The strong wish makes my spirit sore.  
We have so much to talk about,  
So many sad things to let out;  
So many tears in our eye-corners,  
Sitting like little Jacky Horners—  
In short, as soon as it is day,  
Do go, dear Rain! do go away.

### V

And this I'll swear to you, dear Rain!  
Whenever you shall come again,  
Be you as dull as e'er you could  
(And by the bye 'tis understood,  
You're not so pleasant as you're good),  
Yet, knowing well your worth and place,  
I'll welcome you with cheerful face;  
And though you stayed a week or more,  
Were ten times duller than before;  
Yet with kind heart, and right good will,  
I'll sit and listen to you still;  
Nor should you go away, dear Rain!  
Uninvited to remain.  
But only now, for this one day,  
Do go, dear Rain! do go away.

### *Note*

*Little Jacky Horners* – a reference to the nursery rhyme, 'Little Jack Horner / Sat in a corner / Eating a Christmas pie'.

↑

## The Pains of Sleep

Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,  
It hath not been my use to pray  
With moving lips or bended knees;  
But silently, by slow degrees,  
My spirit I to Love compose,  
In humble trust mine eye-lids close,  
With reverential resignation,  
No wish conceived, no thought exprest,  
Only a sense of supplication;  
A sense o'er all my soul imprest  
That I am weak, yet not unblest,  
Since in me, round me, every where  
Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.

But yester-night I prayed aloud  
In anguish and in agony,  
Up-starting from the fiendish crowd  
Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:  
A lurid light, a trampling throng,  
Sense of intolerable wrong,  
And whom I scorned, those only strong!  
Thirst of revenge, the powerless will  
Still baffled, and yet burning still!  
Desire with loathing strangely mixed  
On wild or hateful objects fixed.  
Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!  
And shame and terror over all!  
Deeds to be hid which were not hid,  
Which all confused I could not know  
Whether I suffered, or I did:  
For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe,  
My own or others still the same  
Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame.

So two nights passed: the night's dismay  
Saddened and stunned the coming day.  
Sleep, the wide blessing, seemed to me  
Distemper's worst calamity.  
The third night, when my own loud scream  
Had waked me from the fiendish dream,  
O'ercome with sufferings strange and wild,  
I wept as I had been a child;  
And having thus by tears subdued  
My anguish to a milder mood,  
Such punishments, I said, were due  
To natures deepliest stained with sin,—

For aye entempesting anew  
The unfathomable hell within,  
The horror of their deeds to view,  
To know and loathe, yet wish and do!  
Such griefs with such men well agree,  
But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?  
To be beloved is all I need,  
And whom I love, I love indeed.

↑

### **A Sunset**

Upon the mountain's edge with light touch resting,  
There a brief while the globe of splendour sits  
And seems a creature of the earth; but soon  
More changeful than the Moon,  
To wane fantastic his great orb submits,  
Or cone or mow of fire: till sinking slowly  
Even to a star at length he lessens wholly.

Abrupt, as Spirits vanish, he is sunk!  
A soul-like breeze possesses all the wood.  
The boughs, the sprays have stood  
As motionless as stands the ancient trunk!  
But every leaf through all the forest flutters,  
And deep the cavern of the fountain mutters.

↑

### **To William Wordsworth**

**Composed on the Night after his Recitation of a Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind**

Friend of the wise! and Teacher of the Good!  
Into my heart have I received that Lay  
More than historic, that prophetic Lay  
Wherein (high theme by thee first sung aright)  
Of the foundations and the building up  
Of a Human Spirit thou hast dared to tell  
What may be told, to the understanding mind  
Revealable; and what within the mind  
By vital breathings secret as the soul  
Of vernal growth, oft quickens in the heart  
Thoughts all too deep for words!—

Theme hard as high!

Of smiles spontaneous, and mysterious fears  
(The first-born they of Reason and twin-birth),  
Of tides obedient to external force,

And currents self-determined, as might seem,  
Or by some inner Power; of moments awful,  
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,  
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received  
The light reflected, as a light bestowed—  
Of fancies fair, and milder hours of youth,  
Hyblean murmurs of poetic thought  
Industrious in its joy, in vales and glens  
Native or outland, lakes and famous hills!  
Or on the lonely high-road, when the stars  
Were rising; or by secret mountain-streams,  
The guides and the companions of thy way!

Of more than Fancy, of the Social Sense  
Distending wide, and man beloved as man,  
Where France in all her towns lay vibrating  
Like some becalmèd bark beneath the burst  
Of Heaven's immediate thunder, when no cloud  
Is visible, or shadow on the main.  
For thou wert there, thine own brows garlanded,  
Amid the tremor of a realm aglow,  
Amid a mighty nation jubilant,  
When from the general heart of human kind  
Hope sprang forth like a full-born Deity!  
—Of that dear Hope afflicted and struck down,  
So summoned homeward, thenceforth calm and sure  
From the dread watch-tower of man's absolute self,  
With light unwaning on her eyes, to look  
Far on – herself a glory to behold,  
The Angel of the vision! Then (last strain)  
Of Duty, chosen Laws controlling choice,  
Action and joy! – An Orphic song indeed,  
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts  
To their own music chaunted!

O great Bard!

Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,  
With stedfast eye I viewed thee in the choir  
Of ever-enduring men. The truly great  
Have all one age, and from one visible space  
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,  
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,  
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.  
Nor less a sacred Roll, than those of old,  
And to be placed, as they, with gradual fame  
Among the archives of mankind, thy work  
Makes audible a linkèd lay of Truth,  
Of Truth profound a sweet continuous lay,  
Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes!  
Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,



The pulses of my being beat anew:  
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,  
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—  
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe  
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;  
And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;  
And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;  
Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,  
And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain;  
And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,  
And all which patient toil had reared, and all,  
Commune with thee had opened out – but flowers  
Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,  
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!

That way no more! and ill beseems it me,  
Who came a welcomer in herald's guise,  
Singing of Glory, and Futurity,  
To wander back on such unhealthful road,  
Plucking the poisons of self-harm! And ill  
Such intertwine beseems triumphal wreaths  
Strew'd before thy advancing!

Nor do thou,  
Sage Bard! impair the memory of that hour  
Of thy communion with my nobler mind  
By pity or grief, already felt too long!  
Nor let my words import more blame than needs.  
The tumult rose and ceased: for Peace is nigh  
Where Wisdom's voice has found a listening heart.  
Amid the howl of more than wintry storms,  
The Halcyon hears the voice of vernal hours  
Already on the wing.

Eve following eve,  
Dear tranquil time, when the sweet sense of Home  
Is sweetest! moments for their own sake hailed  
And more desired, more precious, for thy song,  
In silence listening, like a devout child,  
My soul lay passive, by thy various strain  
Driven as in surges now beneath the stars,  
With momentary stars of my own birth,  
Fair constellated foam, still darting off  
Into the darkness; now a tranquil sea,  
Outspread and bright, yet swelling to the moon.

And when – O Friend! my comforter and guide!  
Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!—  
Thy long sustained Song finally closed,  
And thy deep voice had ceased – yet thou thyself

Wert still before my eyes, and round us both  
That happy vision of beloved faces—  
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close  
I sate, my being blended in one thought  
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)  
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—  
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer.

**Notes**

*That Lay* – this refers to Wordsworth’s long autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*.

*Hyblean* = honeyed (from Hybla in ancient Sicily, renowned for honey)

*Orphic song* – song of Orpheus, a musician in Greek mythology

↑

**Human Life**  
**On the Denial of Immortality**

If dead, we cease to be; if total gloom  
Swallow up life’s brief flash for aye, we fare  
As summer-gusts, of sudden birth and doom,  
Whose sound and motion not alone declare,  
But are their whole of being! If the breath  
Be Life itself, and not its task and tent,  
If even a soul like Milton’s can know death;  
O Man! thou vessel purposeless, unmeant,  
Yet drone-hive strange of phantom purposes!  
Surplus of Nature’s dread activity,  
Which, as she gazed on some nigh-finished vase,  
Retreating slow, with meditative pause,  
She formed with restless hands unconsciously.  
Blank accident! nothing’s anomaly!  
If rootless thus, thus substanceless thy state,  
Go, weigh thy dreams, and be thy hopes, thy fears,  
The counter-weights! – Thy laughter and thy tears  
Mean but themselves, each fittest to create  
And to repay the other! Why rejoices  
Thy heart with hollow joy for hollow good?  
Why cowl thy face beneath the mourner’s hood?  
Why waste thy sighs, and thy lamenting voices,  
Image of Image, Ghost of Ghostly Elf,  
That such a thing as thou feel’st warm or cold?  
Yet what and whence thy gain, if thou withhold  
These costless shadows of thy shadowy self?  
Be sad! be glad! be neither! seek, or shun!  
Thou hast no reason why! Thou canst have none;  
Thy being’s being is contradiction.

↑

## To Nature

It may indeed be phantasy, when I  
    Essay to draw from all created things  
    Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;  
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie  
Lessons of love and earnest piety.  
    So let it be; and if the wide world rings  
    In mock of this belief, it brings  
Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.  
So will I build my altar in the fields,  
    And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,  
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields  
    Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,  
Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise  
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.

↑

## Youth and Age

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,  
Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee—  
Both were mine! Life went a-maying  
    With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,  
    When I was young!

When I was young? – Ah, woful When!  
Ah! for the change 'twixt Now and Then!  
This breathing house not built with hands,  
This body that does me grievous wrong,  
O'er aery cliffs and glittering sands,  
How lightly then it flashed along:—  
Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,  
On winding lakes and rivers wide,  
That ask no aid of sail or oar,  
That fear no spite of wind or tide!  
Nought cared this body for wind or weather  
When Youth and I lived in't together.

Flowers are lovely; Love is flower-like;  
Friendship is a sheltering tree;  
O! the joys, that came down shower-like,  
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,  
    Ere I was old!

Ere I was old? Ah woful Ere,  
Which tells me, Youth's no longer here!  
O Youth! for years so many and sweet,  
'Tis known, that Thou and I were one,  
I'll think it but a fond conceit—  
It cannot be that Thou art gone!  
Thy vesper-bell hath not yet toll'd:—  
And thou wert aye a masker bold!  
What strange disguise hast now put on,  
To make believe, that thou art gone?  
I see these locks in silvery slips,  
This drooping gait, this altered size:  
But Spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,  
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes!  
Life is but thought: so think I will  
That Youth and I are house-mates still.

Dew-drops are the gems of morning,  
But the tears of mournful eve!  
Where no hope is, life's a warning  
That only serves to make us grieve,  
When we are old:

That only serves to make us grieve  
With oft and tedious taking-leave,  
Like some poor nigh-related guest,  
That may not rudely be dismiss;  
Yet hath outstay'd his welcome while,  
And tells the jest without the smile.

↑

**Work Without Hope**  
**Lines Composed 21<sup>st</sup> February 1827**

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—  
The bees are stirring – birds are on the wing—  
And Winter slumbering in the open air,  
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!  
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,  
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,  
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.  
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,  
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!  
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:  
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?  
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,  
And Hope without an object cannot live.

**Note**

*ken* = know

↑

**Constancy to an Ideal Object**

Since all that beat about in Nature's range,  
Or veer or vanish; why should'st thou remain  
The only constant in a world of change,  
O yearning Thought! that liv'st but in the brain?  
Call to the Hours, that in the distance play,  
The faery people of the future day—  
Fond Thought! not one of all that shining swarm  
Will breathe on thee with life-enkindling breath,  
Till when, like strangers shelt'ring from a storm,  
Hope and Despair meet in the porch of Death!  
Yet still thou haunt'st me; and though well I see,  
She is not thou, and only thou art she,  
Still, still as though some dear embodied Good,  
Some living Love before my eyes there stood  
With answering look a ready ear to lend,  
I mourn to thee and say – 'Ah! loveliest friend!  
That this the meed of all my toils might be,  
To have a home, an English home, and thee!  
Vain repetition! Home and Thou are one.  
The peacefull'st cot, the moon shall shine upon,  
Lulled by the thrush and wakened by the lark,  
Without thee were but a becalmèd bark,  
Whose Helmsman on an ocean waste and wide  
Sits mute and pale his mouldering helm beside.

And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when  
The woodman winding westward up the glen  
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze  
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,  
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,  
An image with a glory round its head;  
The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,  
Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!

**Notes**

*meed* = reward

*cot* = cottage

*An image with a glory round its head* – Coleridge seems to be describing the meteorological phenomenon called the Brocken Spectre, when an observer sees his own enlarged shadow cast on clouds and surrounded by a rainbow.

## The Garden of Boccaccio

Of late, in one of those most weary hours,  
 When life seems emptied of all genial powers,  
 A dreary mood, which he who ne'er has known  
 May bless his happy lot, I sate alone;  
 And, from the numbing spell to win relief,  
 Call'd on the Past for thought of glee or grief.  
 In vain! bereft alike of grief and glee,  
 I sate and cow'r'd o'er my own vacancy!  
 And as I watch'd the dull continuous ache,  
 Which, all else slumb'ring, seem'd alone to wake;  
 O Friend! long wont to notice yet conceal,  
 And soothe by silence what words cannot heal,  
 I but half saw that quiet hand of thine  
 Place on my desk this exquisite design.  
 Boccaccio's Garden and its faery,  
 The love, the joyaunce, and the gallantry!  
 An Idyll, with Boccaccio's spirit warm,  
 Framed in the silent poesy of form.

Like flocks adown a newly-bathèd steep  
     Emerging from a mist: or like a stream  
 Of music soft that not dispels the sleep,  
     But casts in happier moulds the slumberer's dream,  
 Gazed by an idle eye with silent might  
 The picture stole upon my inward sight.  
 A tremulous warmth crept gradual o'er my chest,  
 As though an infant's finger touch'd my breast.  
 And one by one (I know not whence) were brought  
 All spirits of power that most had stirr'd my thought  
 In selfless boyhood, on a new world tost  
 Of wonder, and in its own fancies lost;  
 Or charm'd my youth, that, kindled from above,  
 Loved ere it loved, and sought a form for love;  
 Or lent a lustre to the earnest scan  
 Of manhood, musing what and whence is man!  
 Wild strain of Scalds, that in the sea-worn caves  
 Rehearsed their war-spell to the winds and waves;  
 Or fateful hymn of those prophetic maids,  
 That call'd on Hertha in deep forest glades;  
 Or minstrel lay, that cheer'd the baron's feast;  
 Or rhyme of city pomp, of monk and priest,  
 Judge, mayor, and many a guild in long array,  
 To high-church pacing on the great saint's day:  
 And many a verse which to myself I sang,  
 That woke the tear, yet stole away the pang  
 Of hopes, which in lamenting I renew'd:  
 And last, a matron now, of sober mien,

Yet radiant still and with no earthly sheen,  
Whom as a faery child my childhood woo'd  
Even in my dawn of thought – Philosophy;  
Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,  
She bore no other name than Poesy;  
And, like a gift from heaven, in lifeful glee,  
That had but newly left a mother's knee,  
Prattled and play'd with bird and flower, and stone,  
As if with elfin playfellows well known,  
And life reveal'd to innocence alone.

Thanks, gentle artist! now I can descry  
Thy fair creation with a mastering eye,  
And all awake! And now in fix'd gaze stand,  
Now wander through the Eden of thy hand;  
Praise the green arches, on the fountain clear  
See fragment shadows of the crossing deer;  
And with that serviceable nymph I stoop,  
The crystal, from its restless pool, to scoop.  
I see no longer! I myself am there,  
Sit on the ground-sward, and the banquet share.  
'Tis I, that sweep that lute's love-echoing strings,  
And gaze upon the maid who gazing sings:  
Or pause and listen to the tinkling bells  
From the high tower, and think that there she dwells.  
With old Boccaccio's soul I stand possest,  
And breathe an air like life, that swells my chest.  
The brightness of the world, O thou once free,  
And always fair, rare land of courtesy!  
O Florence! with the Tuscan fields and hills  
And famous Arno, fed with all their rills;  
Thou brightest star of star-bright Italy!  
Rich, ornate, populous, – all treasures thine,  
The golden corn, the olive, and the vine.  
Fair cities, gallant mansions, castles old,  
And forests, where beside his leafy hold  
The sullen boar hath heard the distant horn,  
And whets his tusks against the gnarlèd thorn;  
Palladian palace with its storied halls;  
Fountains, where Love lies listening to their falls;  
Gardens, where flings the bridge its airy span,  
And Nature makes her happy home with man;  
Where many a gorgeous flower is duly fed  
With its own rill, on its own spangled bed,  
And wreathes the marble urn, or leans its head,  
A mimic mourner, that with veil withdrawn  
Weeps liquid gems, the presents of the dawn;—  
Thine all delights, and every muse is thine;  
And more than all, the embrace and intertwine  
Of all with all in gay and twinkling dance!

Mid gods of Greece and warriors of romance,  
See! Boccace sits, unfolding on his knees  
The new-found roll of old Maeonides;  
But from his mantle's fold, and near the heart,  
Peers Ovid's Holy Book of Love's sweet smart!  
O all-enjoying and all-blending sage,  
Long be it mine to con thy mazy page,  
Where, half conceal'd, the eye of fancy views  
Fauns, nymphs, and wingèd saints, all gracious to thy muse!

Still in thy garden let me watch their pranks,  
And see in Dian's vest between the ranks  
Of the trim vines, some maid that half believes  
The vestal fires, of which her lover grieves,  
With that sly satyr peeping through the leaves!

### **Notes**

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) was an Italian author whose best-known work was a collection of stories called the *Decameron*. An 1825 edition was illustrated by Thomas Stothard, whose work apparently inspired this poem.

*Scalds* – Viking minstrels

*Hertha* (or Nerthus) – a Norse goddess of nature and the Earth.

*Arno* – Italian river that flows through Florence

*Maeonides* – another name for Homer

*Ovid* – classical Roman poet who wrote *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*)

↑

## **Phantom or Fact A Dialogue in Verse**

### **AUTHOR**

A lovely form there sate beside my bed,  
And such a feeding calm its presence shed,  
A tender love so pure from earthly leaven,  
That I unnethe the fancy might control,  
'Twas my own spirit newly come from heaven,  
Wooing its gentle way into my soul!  
But ah! the change – It had not stirr'd, and yet—  
Alas! that change how fain would I forget!  
That shrinking back, like one that had mistook!  
That weary, wandering, disavowing look!  
'Twas all another, feature, look, and frame,  
And still, methought, I knew, it was the same!



FRIEND

This riddling tale, to what does it belong?  
Is't history? vision? or an idle song?  
Or rather say at once, within what space  
Of time this wild disastrous change took place?

AUTHOR

Call it a moment's work (and such it seems)  
This tale's a fragment from the life of dreams;  
But say, that years matur'd the silent strife,  
And 'tis a record from the dream of life.

*Note*

*unnethe* = with difficulty, scarcely

↑

### **Forbearance**

**Beareth all things.—1 Cor. xiii. 7.**

Gently I took that which ungently came,  
And without scorn forgave:— Do thou the same.  
A wrong done to thee think a cat's-eye spark  
Thou wouldst not see, were not thine own heart dark.  
Thine own keen sense of wrong that thirsts for sin,  
Fear that — the spark self-kindled from within,  
Which blown upon will blind thee with its glare,  
Or smother'd stifle thee with noisome air.  
Clap on the extinguisher, pull up the blinds,  
And soon the ventilated spirit finds  
Its natural daylight. If a foe have kenn'd,  
Or worse than foe, an alienated friend,  
A rib of dry rot in thy ship's stout side,  
Think it God's message, and in humble pride  
With heart of oak replace it;— thine the gains—  
Give him the rotten timber for his pains!

*Note*

*kenn'd* = recognised

↑

**Love's Apparition and Evanishment**  
**An Allegoric Romance**

Like a lone Arab, old and blind,  
Some caravan had left behind,  
Who sits beside a ruin'd well,  
Where the shy sand-asps bask and swell;  
And now he hangs his aged head aslant,  
And listens for a human sound – in vain!  
And now the aid, which Heaven alone can grant,  
Upturns his eyeless face from Heaven to gain;—  
Even thus, in vacant mood, one sultry hour,  
Resting my eye upon a drooping plant,  
With brow low-bent, within my garden-bower,  
I sate upon the couch of camomile;  
And – whether 'twas a transient sleep, perchance,  
Flitted across the idle brain, the while  
I watch'd the sickly calm with aimless scope,  
In my own heart; or that, indeed a trance,  
Turn'd my eye inward – thee, O genial Hope,  
Love's elder sister! thee did I behold,  
Drest as a bridesmaid, but all pale and cold,  
With roseless cheek, all pale and cold and dim,  
Lie lifeless at my feet!  
And then came Love, a sylph in bridal trim,  
And stood beside my seat;  
She bent, and kiss'd her sister's lips,  
As she was wont to do;—  
Alas! 'twas but a chilling breath  
Woke just enough of life in death  
To make Hope die anew.

*L'envoy*

In vain we supplicate the Powers above;  
There is no resurrection for the Love  
That, nursed in tenderest care, yet fades away  
In the chill'd heart by gradual self-decay.

## Epitaph

Stop, Christian passer-by! – Stop, child of God,  
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod  
A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he.  
O, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.;  
That he who many a year with toil of breath  
Found death in life, may here find life in death!  
Mercy for praise – to be forgiven for fame  
He ask'd, and hoped, through Christ. Do thou the same!

\* \* \*

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