

Classic Poetry Series

Adelaide Anne Procter
- poems -

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Adelaide Anne Procter(30 October 1825 – 2 February 1864)

She was the eldest daughter of the poet Bryan Waller Procter ("Barry Cornwall") and Anne Benson Skepper. As a child Adelaide showed precocious intelligence. She attained considerable proficiency in French, German, and Italian, as well as in music and drawing, and she was a great reader. Brought up in surroundings favourable to the development of literary leanings, she began to write verses at an early age, and at eighteen contributed to the "Book of Beauty".

In 1851, she and two of her sisters became Catholics without, apparently, any disturbance of the harmonious relations of the domestic circle. In 1853, under the pseudonym of "Mary Berwick", she sent to "Household Words" a short poem, which so pleased the editor, <a href="

Miss Procter was of a charitable disposition: she visited the sick, befriended the destitute and home- less, taught the ignorant, and endeavored to raise up the fallen ones of her own sex. She was generous yet practical with the income derived from her works. In 1859 she served on a committee to consider fresh ways and means of providing employment for women; in 1861 she edited a miscellany, entitled "Victoria Regis", which had some of the leading litterateurs of the time as contributors and which was set up in type by women compositors; and in 1862 she published a slender volume of her own poems, "A Chaplet of Verses", mostly of a religious turn, for the benefit of the Providence Row night refuge for homeless women and children, which, as the first Catholic Refuge in the United Kingdom, had been opened on 7 October, 1860, and placed under the care of the Sisters of Mercy. In her charitable zeal she appears to have unduly taxed her strength, and her health, never robust, gave way under the strain. The cure at Malvern was tried in vain; and, after an illness of fifteen months, she died calmly, and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

A Lost Chord

SEATED one day at the Organ,
I was weary and ill at ease,
And my fingers wandered idly
Over the noisy keys.

I do not know what I was playing,
Or what I was dreaming then ;
But I struck one chord of music,
Like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight,
Like the close of an Angel's Psalm,
And it lay on my fevered spirit
With a touch of infinite calm.

It quieted pain and sorrow,
Like love overcoming strife ;
It seemed the harmonious echo
From our discordant life.

It linked all perplexed meanings
Into one perfect peace,
And trembled away into silence
As if it were loth to cease.

I have sought, but I seek it vainly,
That one lost chord divine,
Which came from the soul of the Organ,
And entered into mine.

It may be that Death's bright angel
Will speak in that chord again,
It may be that only in Heaven
I shall hear that grand Amen.

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A Woman's Question

BEFORE I trust my fate to thee,
Or place my hand in thine,
Before I let thy future give
Color and form to mine,
Before I peril all for thee, question thy soul to-night for me.

I break all slighter bonds, nor feel
A shadow of regret:
Is there one link within the Past
That holds thy spirit yet?
Or is thy faith as clear and free as that which I can pledge to thee?

Does there within thy dimmest dreams
A possible future shine,
Wherein thy life could henceforth breathe,
Untouch'd, unshar'd by mine?
If so, at any pain or cost, O, tell me before all is lost.

Look deeper still. If thou canst feel,
Within thy inmost soul,
That thou hast kept a portion back,
While I have stak'd the whole;
Let no false pity spare the blow, but in true mercy tell me so.

Is there within thy heart a need
That mine cannot fulfil?
One chord that any other hand
Could better wake or still?
Speak now—lest at some future day my whole life wither and decay.

Lives there within thy nature hid
The demon-spirit Change,
Shedding a passing glory still
On all things new and strange?
It may not be thy fault alone—but shield my heart against thy own.

Couldst thou withdraw thy hand one day
And answer to my claim,
That Fate, and that to-day's mistake—

Not thou—had been to blame?
Some soothe their conscience thus; but thou wilt surely warn and save me now.

Nay, answer not,—I dare not hear,
The words would come too late;
Yet I would spare thee all remorse,
So, comfort thee, my fate—
Whatever on my heart may fall—remember, I would risk it all!

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Doubting Heart

WHERE are the swallows fled?

Frozen and dead,
Perchance, upon some bleak and stormy shore.

O doubting heart!
Far over purple seas
They wait, in sunny ease,
The balmy southern breeze,
To bring them to their northern homes once more.

Why must the flowers die?

Prison'd they lie
In the cold tomb, heedless of tears or rain.

O doubting heart!
They only sleep below
The soft white ermine snow,
While winter winds shall blow,
To breathe and smile upon you soon again.

The sun has hid its rays

These many days;
Will dreary hours never leave the earth?

O doubting heart!
The stormy clouds on high
Veil the same sunny sky,
That soon (for spring is nigh)
Shall wake the summer into golden mirth.

Fair hope is dead, and light

Is quench'd in night.
What sound can break the silence of despair?

O doubting heart!
Thy sky is overcast,
Yet stars shall rise at last,
Brighter for darkness past,
And angels' silver voices stir the air.

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Envy

He was the first always: Fortune
Shone bright in his face.
I fought for years; with no effort
He conquered the place:
We ran; my feet were all beeding,
But he won the race.

Spite of his many successes,
Men loved him the same;
My one pale ray of good fortune
Met scoffing and blame.
When we erred, they gave him pity,
But me -- only shame.

My home was still in the shadow,
His lay in the sun:
I longed in vain: what he asked for
It straightway was done.
Once I staked all my heart's treasure,
We played -- and he won.

Yes, and just now I have seen him,
Cold, smiling, and blest,
Laid in his coffin. God help me!
While he is at rest,
I am cursed still to live: -- even
Death loved him the best.

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Fidelis

You have taken back the promise
That you spoke so long ago;
Taken back the heart you gave me-
I must even let it go.
Where Love once has breathed, Pride dieth,
So I struggled, but in vain,
First to keep the links together,
Then to piece the broken chain.

But it might not be-so freely
All your friendship I restore,
And the heart that I had taken
As my own forevermore.
No shade of reproach shall touch you,
Dread no more a claim from me-
But I will not have you fancy
That I count myself as free.

I am bound by the old promise;
What can break that golden chain?
Not even the words that you have spoken,
Or the sharpness of my pain:
Do you think, because you fail me
And draw back your hand today,
That from out the heart I gave you
My strong love can fade away?

It will live. No eyes may see it;
In my soul it will lie deep,
Hidden from all; but I shall feel it
Often stirring in its sleep.
So remember that the friendship
Which you now think poor and vain,
Will endure in hope and patience,
Till you ask for it again.

Perhaps in some long twilight hour,
Like those we have known of old,
When past shadows gather round you,

And your present friends grow cold,
You may stretch your hands out towards me-
Ah! You will-I know not when-
I shall nurse my love and keep it
Faithfully, for you, till then.

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My God, I Thank Thee Who Hast Made

My God, I thank Thee who hast made
The earth so bright;
So full of splendour and of joy,
Beauty and light;
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right!

I thank Thee, too, that Thou hast made
Joy to abound;
So many gentle thoughts and deeds
Circling us round,
That in the darkest spot of earth
Some love is found.

I thank Thee more that all our joy
Is touched with pain;
That shadows fall on brightest hours;
So that earth's bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain.

For Thou, who knowest, Lord, how soon
Our weak heart clings,
Hath given us joys, tender and true,
Yet all with wings;
So that we see, gleaming on high,
Diviner things.

I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept
The best in store:
We have enough, yet not too much
To long for more;
A yearning for a deeper peace,
Not known before.

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One By One The Sands Are Flowing

One by one the sands are flowing,
One by one the moments fall:
Some are coming, some are going;
Do not strive to grasp them all.

One by one thy duties wait thee;
Let thy whole strength go to each;
Let no future dreams elate thee;
Learn thou first what these can teach.

One by one, -bright gifts of heaven,-
Joys are sent thee here below;
Take them readily when given;
Ready be to let them go.

One by one thy griefs shall meet thee;
Do not fear an armed band;
One will fade as others greet thee,-
Shadows passing through the land.

Every hour that fleets so slowly
Has its task to do our bear:
Luminous the crown and holy,
When each gem is set with care.

Hours are golden links, God's token
Reaching heaven; but one by one
Take them, lest the chain be broken
Ere the pilgrimage be done.

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Per Pacem Ad Lucem

I DO not ask, O Lord, that life may be
A pleasant road;
I do not ask that Thou wouldst take from me
Aught of its load;

I do not ask that flowers should always spring
Beneath my feet;
I know too well the poison and the sting
Of things too sweet.

For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead,
Lead me aright—
Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed—
Through Peace to Light.

I do not ask, O Lord, that thou shouldst shed
Full radiance here;
Give but a ray of peace, that I may tread
Without a fear.

I do not ask my cross to understand,
My way to see;
Better in darkness just to feel Thy hand
And follow Thee.

Joy is like restless day; but peace divine
Like quiet night:
Lead me, O Lord,—till perfect Day shall shine,
Through Peace to Light.

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The Requital

LOUD roared the tempest,
Fast fell the sleet;
A little Child Angel
Passed down the street,
With trailing pinions
And weary feet.

The moon was hidden;
No stars were bright;
So she could not shelter
In heaven that night,
For the Angels' ladders
Are rays of light.

She beat her wings
At each windowpane,
And pleaded for shelter,
But all in vain;—
"Listen," they said,
"To the pelting rain!"

She sobb'd, as the laughter
And mirth grew higher,
"Give me rest and shelter
Beside your fire,
And I will give you
Your heart's desire."

The dreamer sat watching
His embers gleam,
While his heart was floating
Down hope's bright stream;
...So he wove her wailing
Into his dream.

The worker toil'd on,
For his time was brief;
The mourner was nursing
Her own pale grief;

They heard not the promise
That brought relief.

But fiercer the tempest
Rose than before,
When the Angel paus'd
At a humble door,
And ask'd for shelter
And help once more.

A weary woman,
Pale, worn, and thin,
With the brand upon her
Of want and sin,
Heard the Child Angel
And took her in:

Took her in gently,
And did her best
To dry her pinions;
And made her rest
With tender pity
Upon her breast.

When the eastern morning
Grew bright and red,
Up the first sunbeam
The Angel fled;
Having kiss'd the woman
And left her—dead.

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