

Classic Poetry Series

George Frederick Cameron - poems -

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George Frederick Cameron(24 September 1854 – 17 September 1885)

George Frederick Cameron (24 Sept. 1854 – 17 Sept. 1885) was a Canadian poet, lawyer, and journalist, best known for the libretto for the operetta *Leo, the Royal Cadet*. He was born 24 Sept. 1854 in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. His parents were James Grant Cameron and Jessie Sutherland. He was educated in New Glasgow.

He moved to Boston in April 1869. He graduated from the Boston University School of Law in 1877. He worked for the law firm Dean, Butler and Abbot of Boston from 1877-1882. He contributed poetry to Boston periodicals, including the *Courier* and the *Transcript*. In fall 1882 he enrolled in Queen's College in Kingston, Ontario where he won a poetry prize in 1883 for "Adelphi." He was a member of the Confederation Poets who had a distinctive Canadian poetic style. He married Ella Amey on 22 Aug. 1883. He was the editor of the *Daily News* in Kingston, Ontario from March 1883 until his death of heart failure on 17 September 1885 at Millhaven, Ontario. The couple had had one daughter, Jessie Cameron Alison.

George Frederick Cameron was a war poet since he was a poet writing in time of and on the subject of the Anglo-Zulu War. He wrote *Leo, the Royal Cadet*. The latter achieved over 1,700 performances between its premiere in 1889 and 1925 and has recently been revived in a revised version. In 1887 his brother, Charles L. Cameron, edited and published a selection of Cameron's poems under the title *Lyrics on freedom, love and death* (Kingston, 1887).

Amoris Finis

AND now I go with the departing sun:
My day is dead and all my work is done.
No more for me the pleasant moon shall rise
To show the splendour in my dear one's eyes;
No more the stars shall see us meet; we part
Without a hope, or hope of hope, at heart;
For Love lies dead, and at his altar, lo,
Stands in his room, self-crowned and crested,—Woe!

George Frederick Cameron

An Answer

'CAN it be good to die?' you question, friend;
'Can it be good to die, and move along
Still circling round and round, unknowing end,
Still circling round and round amid the throng
Of golden orbs attended by their moons—
To catch the intonation of their song
As on they flash, and scatter nights, and noons,
To worlds like ours, where things like us belong?'

To me 'tis idle saying, 'He is dead.'
Or, 'Now he sleepeth and shall wake no more;
The little flickering, fluttering life is fled,
Forever fled, and all that was is o'er.'
I have a faith—that life and death are one,
That each depends upon the self-same thread,
And that the seen and unseen rivers run
To one calm sea, from one clear fountain head.

I have a faith—that man's most potent mind
May cross the willow-shaded stream nor sink;
I have a faith—when he has left behind
His earthly vesture on the river's brink,
When all his little fears are torn away,
His soul may beat a pathway through the tide,
And, disencumbered of its coward-clay,
Emerge immortal on the sunnier side.

So, say:—It must be good to die, my friend!
It must be good and more than good, I deem;
'Tis all the replication I may send—
For deeper swimming seek a deeper stream.

It must be good or reason is a cheat,
It must be good or life is all a lie,
It must be good and more than living sweet,
It must be good—or man would never die.

George Frederick Cameron

Anticipation

Anticipation is the oil that feeds
The flame of life. It is the Siren fair
That sings at twilight in the hollow reeds,
And drowns the moaning discord of despair.
Nay, now in darkest night it comes to me,-
It dulls the edge of every present care:
Blots from the tablets of the memory
What hath been ill, or is, inscribing there
In golden letters that which yet may be
Of earth's good things my individual share.
And should the days be drearier in age,
And disappointment part of mine estate,
With fortune I shall not a warfare wage,
But sing my song as now,-as now anticipate.

George Frederick Cameron

First Love

Ah, love is deathless! we do cheat
Ourselves who say that we forget
Old fancies: last love may be sweet,
First love is sweeter yet.

And day by day more sweet it grows
For evermore, like precious wine,
As Time's thick cobwebs o'er it close,
Until it is divine.

Grows dearer every day and year,
Let other loves come, go at will;
Although the last love may be dear,
First love is dearer still.

George Frederick Cameron

I Am Young

I AM young, and men
Who long ago have passed their prime
Would fain have what I have again,-
Youth, and it may be-time.

To gain these, and make
Life's end what it may not be now,
Monarchs of thought and song would shake
The laurels from their brow.

And each king of earth,
Whose life we deem a holiday,
For this would give his kingship's worth
Most joyously away!

George Frederick Cameron

In After Days

I WILL accomplish that and this,
And make myself a thorn to Things–
Lords, councillors and tyrant kings–
Who sit upon their thrones and kiss

The rod of Fortune; and are crowned
The sovereign masters of the earth
To scatter blight and death and dearth
Wherever mortal man is found.

I will do this and that, and break
The backbone of their large conceit,
And loose the sandals from their feet,
And show 'tis holy ground they shake.

So sang I in my earlier days,
Ere I had learned to look abroad
And see that more than monarchs trod
Upon the form I fain would raise.

Ere I, in looking toward the land
That broke a triple diadem,
That grasped at Freedom's garment hem,
Had seen her, sword and torch in hand,

A freedom-fool: ere I had grown
To know that Love is freedom's strength–
France taught the world that truth at length!–
And Peace her chief foundation stone.

Since then, I temper so my song
That it may never speak for blood;
May never say that ill is good;
Or say that right may spring from wrong:

Yet am what I have ever been–
A friend of Freedom, staunch and true,
Who hate a tyrant, be he–you–
A people,–sultan, czar, or queen!

And then the Freedom-haters came
And questioned of my former song,
If now I held it right, or wrong:
And still my answer was the same:—

The good still moveth towards the good:
The ill still moveth towards the ill:
But who affirmeth that we will
Not form a nobler brotherhood

When communists, fanatics, those
Who howl their 'vives' to Freedom's name
And yet betray her unto shame,
Are dead and confined with her foes.

George Frederick Cameron

June

O crimson-hearted, flower-producing June-
Dear month of love, and laughter, and light song!
Wherein our mother brings her choral throng
To hymn the hymns that sweetest are in tune:
Wherein all gaily goes gave soul of wrong
That takes to bed quite blinded by the light
Of that sweet, sober, gentle queen of night
That rules the tides of earth and men-the moon;
I love you! for it was beneath your skies
I first looked Love into her starry eyes;
I love you! for beneath your dome of blue
I heard her answer-'And I love you too!'
I hate you!-'mid your flowers it was my lot
To hear those same lips say-'I love you not!'

George Frederick Cameron

Standing On Tiptoe

STANDING on tiptoe ever since my youth
Striving to grasp the future just above,
I hold at length the only future—Truth,
And Truth is Love.

I feel as one who being awhile confined
Sees drop to dust about him all his bars:—
The clay grows less, and, leaving it, the mind
Dwells with the stars.

George Frederick Cameron

The Way Of The World

WE sneer and we laugh with the lip—the most of us do it,
Whenever a brother goes down like a weed with the tide;
We point with the finger and say—Oh, we knew it! we knew it!
But, see! we are better than he was, and we will abide.

He walked in the way of his will—the way of desire,
In the Appian way of his will without ever a bend;
He walked in it long, but it led him at last to the mire,—
But we who are stronger will stand and endure to the end.

His thoughts were all visions—all fabulous visions of flowers,
Of bird and of song and of soul which is only a song;
His eyes looked all at the stars in the firmament, ours
Were fixed on the earth at our feet, so we stand and are strong.

He hated the sight and the sound and the sob of the city;
He sought for his peace in the wood and the musical wave;
He fell, and we pity him never, and why should we pity—
Yea, why should we mourn for him—we who still stand, who are brave?

Thus speak we and think not, we censure unheeding, unknowing,—
Unkindly and blindly we utter the words of the brain;
We see not the goal of our brother, we see but his going,
And sneer at his fall if he fall, and laugh at his pain.

Ah, me! the sight of the sod on the coffin lid,
And the sound, and the sob, and the sigh of it as it falls!
Ah, me! the beautiful face forever hid
By four wild walls!

You hold it a matter for self-gratulation and praise
To have thrust to the dust to have trod on a heart that was true,—
To have ruined it there in the beauty and bloom of its days?
Very well! There is somewhere a Nemesis waiting for you.

George Frederick Cameron

To The West Wind

WEST wind, come from the west land
Fair and far!
Come from the fields of the best land
Upon our star!

Come, and go to my sister
Over the sea:
Tell her how much I have missed her,
Tell her for me!

Odours of lilies and roses—
Set them astir;
Cull them from gardens and closes,—
Give them to her!

Say I have loved her, and love her:
Say that I prize
Few on the earth here above her,
Few in the skies!

Bring her, if worth the bringing,
A brother's kiss:
Should she ask for a song of his singing,
Give her this!

George Frederick Cameron

What Matters It?

WHAT reck we of the creeds of men?–
We see them—we shall see again.
What reck we of the tempest's shock?
What reck we where our anchor lock?
On golden marl or mould—
In salt-sea flower or riven rock—
What matter—so it hold?

What matters it the spot we fill
On Earth's green sod when all is said?–
When feet and hands and heart are still
And all our pulses quieted?
When hate or love can kill nor thrill,—
When we are done with life and dead?

So we be haunted night nor day
By any sin that we have sinned,
What matter where we dream away
The ages?—In the isles of Ind,
In Tybee, Cuba, or Cathay,
Or in some world of winter wind?

It may be I would wish to sleep
Beneath the wan, white stars of June,
And hear the southern breezes creep
Between me and the mellow moon;
But so I do not wake to weep
At any night or any moon,

And so the generous gods allow
Repose and peace from evil dreams,
It matters little where or how
My couch is spread:—by moving streams,
Or on some eminent mountain's brow
Kist by the morn's or sunset's beams.

For we shall rest; the brain that planned,
That thought or wrought or well or ill,
At gaze like Joshua's moon shall stand,

Not working any work or will,
While eye and lip and heart and hand
Shall all be still—shall all be still!

George Frederick Cameron

Wisdom

Wisdom immortal from immortal Jove
Shadows more beauty with her virgin brows
Than is between the virgin breasts of Love
Who makes at will and breaks her random vows,
And hath a name all earthly names above:
The noblest are her offspring; she controls
The time and seasons-yea, all things that are-
The heads and hands of men, their hearts and souls,
And all that moves upon our mother star,
And all that pauses 'twixt the peaceful poles.
Nor is she dark and distant, coy and cold-
But all in all to all who seek her shrine
In utter truth, like to that king of old
Who wooed and won-yet by no right divine.

George Frederick Cameron