

Classic Poetry Series

Grace Hazard Conkling
- poems -

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Grace Hazard Conkling(7 February 1878 - 15 November 1958)

Grace Hazard was born on February 7, 1878 in New York to Christopher Grant Hazard and Frances Post Hazard. Having cultivated a skill and love for music from a young age, Conkling dreamed of devoting her life to music. After receiving a B.L. from Smith College in 1899, she spent a year teaching at the Graham School in New York before traveling to Europe where she studied music and languages in Germany and France, studying the organ with the illustrious Charles-Marie Widor. However, in her second year she fell ill from overwork and was forced to abandon the idea of music as a profession. She returned to the United States where she married Roscoe Platt Conkling in 1905 and moved to a remote ranch near Tampico, Mexico. Conkling cherished the time she spent there and Mexico is referred to in many of her poems.

After the birth of her second child, her husband deserted her and the children, and in 1914 she sued for divorce and accepted a teaching position at Smith College. During her lifetime, Conkling published numerous collections of poetry, including *Afternoons of April* (1915), *Wilderness Songs* (1920), *Ships Log and Other Poems* (1924), *Flying Fish: A Book of Songs and Sonnets* (1926), and *Witch and Other Poems* (1928). In addition to poetry, Conkling also wrote essays, including the monograph "Imagination and Children's Reading" (1921). She also transcribed her daughter Hilda's early childhood poems, which were published as the collection *Poems by a Little Girl* (1920). She was also a member of the Poetry Society of America, the N.E. Poetry Society, the Author's Club of Boston, and the Women's University Club of New York. In 1930, Conkling was awarded an honorary MA from Smith College. She died on November 15, 1958 and was survived by her two daughters and three grandchildren.

Smith College awards a poetry residency in her name, and a selection of her papers is housed in the archives of their library.

After Sunset

I have an understanding with the hills
At evening when the slanted radiance fills
Their hollows, and the great winds let them be,
And they are quiet and look down at me.
Oh, then I see the patience in their eyes
Out of the centuries that made them wise.
They lend me hoarded memory and I learn
Their thoughts of granite and their whims of fern,
And why a dream of forests must endure
Though every tree be slain: and how the pure,
Invisible beauty has a word so brief
A flower can say it or a shaken leaf,
But few may ever snare it in a song,
Though for the quest a life is not too long.
When the blue hills grow tender, when they pull
The twilight close with gesture beautiful,
And shadows are their garments, and the air
Deepens, and the wild veery is at prayer, --
Their arms are strong around me; and I know
That somehow I shall follow when you go
To the still land beyond the evening star,
Where everlasting hills and valleys are:
And silence may not hurt us any more,
And terror shall be past, and grief, and war.

Grace Hazard Conkling

April In The Huasteca

Dark on the gold west,
Mexico hung inscrutable like a curtain of heavy velvet
Before a lighted shrine.
Black on the west
All Mexico stood up from the Gulf,
Colossal, perpendicular, superb;
Mexico secretly veined with metals,
Mexico preoccupied with volcanoes, palm forests,
Deserts, cities, jungles,
Plantations of coffee and maguey,
Unknown valleys, hills of iron,
Orchids.
I heard the river flash down the canyon between the rosewoods,
And the scream of parrots going to roost above the water.
Through the tracery of bamboo plumes against the afterglow,
I saw mystery flicker along the sky-line
And vanish over Yucatan.
Exotic the thought of northern trees,
Oaks, maples, beeches,
Elms still unfledged in the early April.
For April here was wild white lilac,
Jargon of mocking-birds,
Air that glittered with the voice of a river,
Heaped shell-pink of rosewood blooms,
Bamboo feathers etched on the sunset,
And below the sunset, hanging hills like a weighted curtain of velvet
Before the shrine of an indifferent god.

Grace Hazard Conkling

Cretonne Tropics

The cretonne in your willow chair
Shows through a zone of rosy air,
A tree of parrots, agate-eyed,
With blue-green crests and plumes of pride
And beaks most formidably curved.
I hear the river, silver-nerved,
To their shrill protests make reply,
And the palm forest stir and sigh.

Curious, the spell that colors cast,
Binding the fancy coweb-fast,
And you would smile if you could know
I like your cretonne parrots so!
But I have seen them sail toward night
Superbly homeward, the last light
Lifting them like a purple sea
Scorned and made use of arrogantly;
And I have heard them cry aloud
From out a tall palm's emerald cloud;
And I brought home a brilliant feather,
Lost like a flake of sunset weather.

Here in the north the sea is white
And mother-of-pearl in morning light,
Quite lovely, but there is a glare
That daunts me.
Now the willow chair
Suggests a more perplexing sea,
Till my heart aches with memory
And parrots dye the air around,
And I forget the pallid Sound.

Grace Hazard Conkling

Francis Ledwidge

(Killed in action July 31, 1917)

Nevermore singing
Will you go now,
Wearing wild moonlight
On your brow.
The moon's white mood
In your silver mind
Is all forgotten.
Words of wind
From off the hedgerow
After rain,
You do not hear them;
They are vain.
There is a linnet
Craves a song,
And you returning
Before long.
Now who will tell her,
Who can say
On what great errand
You are away?
You whose kindred
Were hills of Meath,
Who sang the lane-rose
From her sheath,
What voice will cry them
The grief at dawn
Or say to the blackbird
You are gone?

Grace Hazard Conkling

I Will Not Give Thee All My Heart

I will not give thee all my heart
For that I need a place apart
To dream my dreams in, and I know
Few sheltered ways for dreams to go:
But when I shut the door upon
Some secret wonder-still, withdrawn-
Why does thou love me even more,
And hold me closer than before?
When I of love demand the least,
Thou biddest him to fire and feast:
When I am hungry and would eat,
There is no bread, though crusts were sweet.
If I with manna may be fed,
Shall I go all uncomforted?
Nay! Howsoever dear thou art,
I will not give thee all my heart.

Grace Hazard Conkling

On Arranging A Bowl Of Violets

I dip my hands in April among your faces tender,
O woven of blue air and ecstasies of light!
Breathed words of the Earth-Mother, although it is November,
You wing my soul with memories adorable and white.

I hear you call each other:

'Ah, Sweet, do you remember
The garden that we haunted—its spaces of delight?
The sound of running water—the day's long lapse of splendor,
The winds that begged our fragrance and loved us in the night?'

Grace Hazard Conkling

Rheims Cathedral -- 1914

A wingèd death has smitten dumb thy bells,
And poured them molten from thy tragic towers:
Now are the windows dust that were thy flowers
Patterned like frost, petalled like asphodels.
Gone are the angels and the archangels,
The saints, the little lamb above thy door,
The shepherd Christ! They are not, any more,
Save in the soul where exiled beauty dwells.

But who has heard within thy valuted gloom
That old divine insistence of the sea,
When music flows along the sculptured stone
In tides of prayer, for him thy windows bloom
Like faithful sunset, warm immortally!
Thy bells live on, and Heaven is in their tone!

Grace Hazard Conkling

The Flower

Over the ridge at last
There stood the sea, like a far blue tower
That held the sun, a great bell swung aloft
Under the hollow sky.

In a moment
Clang, I should hear its golden uproar,
Clang, I should feel the world shaking—

But the sun against the tall Pacific
Does not shine and triumph in my memory of that day
As do the leaf-shaped magenta petals
Of that flower you stole for me
From a roadside bougainvillea.

Grace Hazard Conkling

The Little Rose Is Dust, My Dear

The little rose is dust, my dear;
The elfin wind is gone
That sang a song of silver words
And cooled our hearts with dawn.

And what is left to hope, my dear,
Or what is left to say?
The rose, the little wind and you
Have gone so far away.

Grace Hazard Conkling

The Nightingale Of Flanders

'Le rossignol n'est pas mobilise.'

--A French Soldier

THE nightingales of Flanders,
They had not gone to war;
A soldier heard them singing
Where they had sung before.

The earth was torn and quaking,
The sky about to fall;
The nightingales of Flanders,
They minded not at all.

At intervals we heard them
Between the guns, he said,
Making a thrilling music
Above the listening dead.

Of woodland and of orchard
And roadside tree bereft,
The nightingales of Flanders
Were singing 'France is left!'

Grace Hazard Conkling

The Refugees

MOTHER, the poplars cross the moon;
The road runs on, so white and far,
We shall not reach the city soon:
Oh, tell me where we are!"

"Have patience, patience, little son,
And we shall find the way again:
(God show me the untraveled one!
God give me rest from men!)"

"Mother, you did not tell me why
You hurried so to come away.
I saw big soldiers riding by;
I should have liked to stay."

"Hush, little man, and I will sing
Just like a soldier, if I can—
They have a song for everything.
Listen, my little man!

"This is the soldiers' marching song:
We'll play this is the village street—"
"Yes, but this road is very long,
And stones have hurt my feet."

"Nay, little pilgrim, up with you!
And yonder field shall be the town.
I'll show you how the soldiers do
Who travel up and down.

"They march and sing and march again,
Not minding all the stones and dust:
They go, (God grant me rest from men!)
Forward, because they must."

Mother, I want to go to sleep."
"No, darling! Here is bread to eat!
(O God, if thou couldst let me weep,
Or heal my broken feet!)"

Grace Hazard Conkling

To A New-Born Baby Girl

And did thy sapphire shallop slip
Its moorings suddenly, to dip

A down the clear, ethereal sea
From star to star, all silently?
What tenderness of archangels
In silver, thrilling syllables
Pursued thee, or what dulcet hymn
Low-chanted by the cherubim?
And thou departing must have heard
The holy Mary's farewell word,
Who with deep eyes and wistful smile
Remembered Earth a little while.

Now from the coasts of morning pale
Comes safe to port thy tiny sail.
Now have we seen by early sun,
Thy miracle of life begun.
All breathing and aware thou art,
With beauty templed in thy heart
To let thee recognize the thrill
Of wings along far azure hill,
And hear within the hollow sky
Thy friends the angels rushing by.
These shall recall that thou hast known
Their distant country as thine own,
To spare thee word of vales and streams,
And publish heaven through thy dreams.
The human accents of the breeze
Through swaying star-acquainted trees
Shall seem a voice heard earlier,
Her voice, the adoring sigh of her,
When thou amid rosy cherub-play
Didst hear her call thee, far away,
And dream in very Paradise
The worship of thy mother's eyes.

Grace Hazard Conkling

To Hilda Of Her Roses

ENOUGH has been said about roses
To fill thirty thick volumes;
There are as many songs about roses
As there are roses in the world
That includes Mexico . . . the Azores... Oregon...

It is a pity your roses
Are too late for Omar . . .
It is a pity Keats has gone . . .

Yet there must be something left to say
Of flowers like these!
Adventurers,
They pushed their way
Through dewy tunnels of the June night
Now they confer.....
A little tremulous.....
Dazzled by the yellow sea-beach of morning

If Herrick would tiptoe back . . .
If Blake were to look this way
Ledwidge, even!

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