

Classic Poetry Series

**Mary Elizabeth Coleridge**  
**- poems -**

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# Mary Elizabeth Coleridge(23 September 1861 – 25 August 1907)

She was a British novelist and poet, who also wrote essays and reviews. She taught at the London Working Women's College for twelve years from 1895 to 1907. She wrote poetry under the pseudonym Anodos, taken from George MacDonald; other influences on her were Richard Watson Dixon and Christina Rossetti. Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, described her poems as 'wonderously beautiful..but mystical rather and enigmatic'

Coleridge published five novels, the best known of those being *The King with Two Faces*, which earned her £900 in royalties in 1897. She travelled widely throughout her life, although her home was in London, where she lived with her family. Her father was Arthur Duke Coleridge who, along with the singer Jenny Lind, was responsible for the formation of the London Bach Choir in 1875. Other family friends included Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, John Millais and Fanny Kemble.

Mary Coleridge was the great-grandniece of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the great niece of Sara Coleridge, the author of *Phantasmion*. She died from complications arising from appendicitis while on holiday in Harrogate in 1907, leaving an unfinished manuscript for her next novel, and hundreds of unpublished poems.

One of her poems, "The Blue Bird," was set to music by Charles Villiers Stanford. A family friend, the composer Hubert Parry, also set several of her poems to music.

# 'He Came Unto His Own, And His Own Received Him Not'

As Christ the Lord was passing by,  
He came, one night, to a cottage door.  
He came, a poor man, to the poor;  
He had no bed whereon to lie.

He asked in vain for a crust of bread,  
Standing there in the frozen blast.  
The door was locked and bolted fast.  
'Only a beggar!' the poor man said.

Christ the Lord went further on,  
Until He came to a palace gate.  
There a king was keeping his state,  
In every window the candles shone.

The king beheld Him out in the cold.  
He left his guests in the banquet-hall.  
He bade his servants tend them all.  
'I wait on a Guest I know of old.'

'Tis only a beggar-man!' they said.  
'Yes,' he said; 'it is Christ the Lord.'  
He spoke to Him a kindly word,  
He gave Him wine and he gave Him bread.

Now Christ is Lord of Heaven and Hell,  
And all the words of Christ are true.  
He touched the cottage, and it grew;  
He touched the palace, and it fell.

The poor man is become a king.  
Never was man so sad as he.  
Sorrow and Sin on the throne make three,  
He has no joy in mortal thing.

But the sun streams in at the cottage door  
That stands where once the palace stood.

And the workman, toiling to earn his food,  
Was never a king before.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# A Huguenot

Oh, a gallant set were they,  
As they charged on us that day,  
A thousand riding like one!  
Their trumpets crying,  
And their white plumes flying,  
And their sabres flashing in the sun.

Oh a sorry lot were we,  
As we stood beside the sea,  
Each man for himself as he stood!  
We were scattered and lonely-  
A little force only  
Of the good men fighting for the good.

But I never loved more  
On sea or on shore  
The ringing of my own true blade.  
Like lightening it quivered,  
And the hand helms shivered,  
As I sang, "None maketh me afraid!"

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# A Moment

The clouds had made a crimson crown  
Above the mountains high.  
The stormy sun was going down  
In a stormy sky.

Why did you let your eyes so rest on me,  
And hold your breath between?  
In all the ages this can never be  
As if it had not been.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Affection

The earth that made the rose,  
She also is thy mother, and not I.  
The flame wherewith thy maiden spirit glows  
Was lighted at no hearth that I sit by.  
I am as far below as heaven above thee.  
Were I thine angel, more I could not love thee.

Bid me defend thee!  
Thy danger over-human strength shall lend me,  
A hand of iron and a heart of steel,  
To strike, to wound, to slay, and not to feel.  
But if you chide me,  
I am a weak, defenceless child beside thee.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# After St. Augustine

Sunshine let it be or frost,  
Storm or calm, as Thou shalt choose;  
Though Thine every gift were lost,  
Thee Thyself we could not lose.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# An Insincere Wish Addressed To A Beggar

We are not near enough to love,  
I can but pity all your woe;  
For wealth has lifted me above,  
And falsehood set you down below.

If you were true, we still might be  
Brothers in something more than name;  
And were I poor, your love to me  
Would make our differing bonds the same.

But golden gates between us stretch,  
Truth opens her forbidding eyes;  
You can't forget that I am rich,  
Nor I that you are telling lies.

Love never comes but at love's call,  
And pity asks for him in vain;  
Because I cannot give you all,  
You give me nothing back again.

And you are right with all your wrong,  
For less than all is nothing too;  
May Heaven beggar me ere long,  
And Truth reveal herself to you!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Blue And White

BLUE is Our Lady's colour,  
White is Our Lord's.  
To-morrow I will wear a knot  
Of blue and white cords,  
That you may see it, where you ride  
Among the flashing swords.

O banner, white and sunny blue,  
With prayer I wove thee!  
For love the white, for faith the heavenly hue,  
And both for him, so tender-true,  
Him that doth love me!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Chillingham

I

Through the sunny garden  
The humming bees are still;  
The fir climbs the heather,  
The heather climbs the hill.

The low clouds have riven  
A little rift through.  
The hill climbs to heaven,  
Far away and blue.

II

O the high valley, the little low hill,  
And the cornfield over the sea,  
The wind that rages and then lies still,  
And the clouds that rest and flee!

O the gray island in the rainbow haze,  
And the long thin spits of land,  
The roughening pastures and the stony ways,  
And the golden flash of the sand!

O the red heather on the moss-wrought rock,  
And the fir-tree stiff and straight,  
The shaggy old sheep-dog barking at the flock,  
And the rotten old five-barred gate!

O the brown bracken, the blackberry bough,  
The scent of the gorse in the air!  
I shall love them ever as I love them now,  
I shall weary in Heaven to be there!

III

Strike, Life, a happy hour, and let me live  
But in that grace!  
I shall have gathered all the world can give,

Unending Time and Space!

Bring light and air--the thin and shining air  
Of the North land,  
The light that falls on tower and garden there,  
Close to the gold sea-sand.

Bring flowers, the latest colours of the earth,  
Ere nun-like frost  
Lay her hard hand upon this rainbow mirth,  
With twinkling emerald crossed.

The white star of the traveller's joy, the deep  
Empurpled rays that hide the smoky stone,  
The dahlia rooted in Egyptian sleep,  
The last frail rose alone.

Let music whisper from a casement set  
By them of old,  
Where the light smell of lavender may yet  
Rise from the soft loose mould.

Then shall I know, with eyes and ears awake,  
Not in bright gleams,  
The joy my Heavenly Father joys to make  
For men who grieve, in dreams!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Come Home!

When wintry winds are no more heard,  
    And joy's in every bosom,  
When summer sings in every bird,  
    And shines in every blossom,  
When happy twilight hours are long,  
Come home, my love, and think no wrong!

When berries gleam above the stream  
    And half the fields are yellow,  
Come back to me, my joyous dream,  
    The world hath not thy fellow!  
And I will make thee Queen among  
The Queens of summer and of song.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Death And The Lady

TURN in, my lord, she said ;  
As it were the Father of Sin  
I have hated the Father of the Dead,  
The slayer of my kin ;  
By the Father of the Living led,  
Turn in, my lord, turn in.

We were foes of old ; thy touch was cold,  
But mine is warm as life ;  
I have struggled and made thee loose thy hold,  
I have turned aside the knife.  
Despair itself in me was bold,  
I have striven, and won the strife.

But that which conquered thee and rose  
Again to earth descends ;  
For the last time we have come to blows.  
And the long combat ends.  
The worst and secretest of foes,  
Be now my friend of friends.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Gibberish

Many a flower have I seen blossom,  
Many a bird for me will sing.  
Never heard I so sweet a singer,  
Never saw I so fair a thing.

She is a bird, a bird that blossoms,  
She is a flower, a flower that sings;  
And I a flower when I behold her,  
And when I hear her, I have wings.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Good Friday In My Heart

GOOD FRIDAY in my heart! Fear and affright!  
My thoughts are the Disciples when they fled,  
My words the words that priest and soldier said,  
My deed the spear to desecrate the dead.  
And day, Thy death therein, is changed to night.

Then Easter in my heart sends up the sun.  
My thoughts are Mary, when she turned to see.  
My words are Peter, answering, 'Lov'st thou Me?'  
My deeds are all Thine own drawn close to Thee,  
And night and day, since Thou dost rise, are one.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# I Ask Of Thee, Love, Nothing But Relief

I ask of thee, love, nothing but relief.

Thou canst not bring the old days back again;

For I was happy then,

Not knowing heavenly joy, not knowing grief.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Larghetto

Grant me but a day, love,  
    But a day,  
Ere I give my heart,  
    My heart away,  
Ere I say the word  
    I'll ne'er unsay.

Is it earnest with me?  
    Is it play?  
Did the world in arms  
    Cry to me, "Stay!"  
Not a moment then  
    Would I delay.

Yet, for very love,  
    I say thee nay.  
Ere I give my heart,  
    My heart away,  
Grant me but a day, love,  
    But a day!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# L'Oiseau Bleu

The lake lay blue below the hill.  
O'er it, as I looked, there flew  
Across the waters, cold and still,  
A bird whose wings were palest blue.

The sky above was blue at last,  
The sky beneath me blue in blue.  
A moment, ere the bird had passed,  
It caught his image as he flew.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# 'My True Love Hath My Heart And I Have His'

None ever was in love with me but grief.

She wooed me from the day that I was born;  
She stole my playthings first, the jealous thief,  
And left me there forlorn.

The birds that in my garden would have sung,  
She scared away with her unending moan;  
She slew my lovers too when I was young,  
And left me there alone.

Grief, I have cursed thee often—now at last  
To hate thy name I am no longer free;  
Caught in thy bony arms and prisoned fast,  
I love no love but thee.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# On Such A Day

Some hang above the tombs,  
Some weep in empty rooms,  
I, when the iris blooms,  
Remember.

I, when the cyclamen  
Opens her buds again,  
Rejoice a moment-then  
Remember.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Our Lady

MOTHER of God! no lady thou:  
Common woman of common earth  
Our Lady ladies call thee now,  
But Christ was never of gentle birth;  
A common man of the common earth.

For God's ways are not as our ways:  
The noblest lady in the land  
Would have given up half her days,  
Would have cut off her right hand,  
To bear the child that was God of the land.

Never a lady did He choose,  
Only a maid of low degree,  
So humble she might not refuse  
The carpenter of Galilee:  
A daughter of the people, she.

Out she sang the song of her heart.  
Never a lady so had sung.  
She knew no letters, had no art;  
To all mankind, in woman's tongue,  
Hath Israelitish Mary sung.

And still for men to come she sings,  
Nor shall her singing pass away.  
'He hath fill'd the hungry with good things'—  
O listen, lords and ladies gay!—  
'And the rich He hath sent empty away.'

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Punctilio

O LET me be in loving nice,  
Dainty, fine, and o'er precise,  
That I may charm my charmèd dear  
As tho' I felt a secret fear  
To lose what never can be lost,—  
Her faith who still delights me most!  
So shall I be more than true,  
Ever in my ageing new.  
So dull habit shall not be  
Wrongly call'd Fidelity.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Street Lanterns

Country roads are yellow and brown.  
We mend the roads in London town.

Never a hansom dare come nigh,  
Never a cart goes rolling by.

An unwonted silence steals  
In between the turning wheels.

Quickly ends the autumn day,  
And the workman goes his way,

Leaving, midst the traffic rude,  
One small isle of solitude,

Lit, throughout the lengthy night,  
By the little lantern's light.

Jewels of the dark have we,  
Brighter than the rustic's be.

Over the dull earth are thrown  
Topaz, and the ruby stone.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# The Buddhist

There never was a face as fair as yours,  
A heart as true, a love as pure and keen.  
These things endure, if anything endures.  
But, in this jungle, what high heaven immures  
Us in its silence, the supreme serene  
Crowning the dagoba, what destined die  
Rings on the table, what resistless dart  
Strike me I love you; can you satisfy  
The hunger of my heart!

Nay; not in love, or faith, or hope is hidden  
The drug that heals my life; I know too well  
How all things lawful, and all things forbidden  
Alike disclose no pearl upon the midden,  
Offer no key to unlock the gate of Hell.  
There is no escape from the eternal round,  
No hope in love, or victory, or art.  
There is no plumb-line long enough to sound  
The abysses of my heart!

There no dawn breaks; no sunlight penetrates  
Its blackness; no moon shines, nor any star.  
For its own horror of itself creates  
Malignant fate from all benignant fates,  
Of its own spite drives its own angel afar.  
Nay; this is the great import of the curse  
That the whole world is sick, and not a part.  
Conterminous with its own universe  
The horror of my heart!

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# The Deserted House

There's no smoke in the chimney,  
And the rain beats on the floor;  
There's no glass in the window,  
There's no wood in the door;  
The heather grows behind the house,  
And the sand lies before.

No hand hath trained the ivy,  
The walls are grey and bare;  
The boats upon the sea sail by,  
Nor ever tarry there.  
No beast of the field comes nigh,  
Nor any bird of the air

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# The Other Side Of A Mirror

I sat before my glass one day,  
And conjured up a vision bare,  
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,  
That erst were found reflected there -  
The vision of a woman, wild  
With more than womanly despair.  
Her hair stood back on either side  
A face bereft of loveliness.  
It had no envy now to hide  
What once no man on earth could guess.  
It formed the thorny aureole  
Of hard, unsanctified distress.

Her lips were open - not a sound  
Came though the parted lines of red,  
Whate'er it was, the hideous wound  
In silence and secret bled.  
No sigh relieved her speechless woe,  
She had no voice to speak her dread.

And in her lurid eyes there shone  
The dying flame of life's desire,  
Made mad because its hope was gone,  
And kindled at the leaping fire  
Of jealousy and fierce revenge,  
And strength that could not change nor tire.

Shade of a shadow in the glass,  
O set the crystal surface free!  
Pass - as the fairer visions pass -  
Nor ever more return, to be  
The ghost of a distracted hour,  
That heard me whisper: - 'I am she!'

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# The Train

A green eye-and a red-in the dark.  
Thunder-smoke-and a spark.

It is there-it is here-flashed by.  
Whither will the wild thing fly?

It is rushing, tearing thro' the night,  
Rending her gloom in its flight/

It shatters her silence with shrieks,  
Where is it the wild thing seeks?

Alas! For it hurries away  
Them that are fain to stay.

Hurrah! For it carries home  
Lovers and friends that roam.

Where are you, Time and Space?  
The world is a little place.

Your reign is over and done,  
You are one.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# The Twins

[Dedicated to Austin Osman Spare]

Have pity ! show no pity !  
Those eyes that send such shivers  
Into my brain and spine : oh let them  
Flame like the ancient city  
Swallowed up by the sulphurous rivers  
When men let angels fret them !

Yea ! let the south wind blow,  
And the Turkish banner advance,  
And the word go out : No quarter !  
But I shall hod thee -so !  
While the boys and maidens dance  
About the shambles of slaughter !

I know thee who thou art,  
The inmost fiend that curlest  
Thy vampire tounge about  
Earth's corybantic heart,  
Hell's warrior that whirlest  
The darts of horror and doubt !

Thou knowest me who I am  
The inmost soul and saviour  
Of man ; what hieroglyph  
Of the dragon and the lamb  
Shall thou and I engrave here  
On Time's inscandescable cliff ?

Look ! in the plished granite,  
Black as thy cartouche is with sins,  
I read the searing sentence  
That blasts the eyes that scan it :  
'HOOR and SET be TWINS.'  
A fico for repentance !

Ay ! O Son of my mother

That snarled and clawed in her womb  
As now we rave in our rapture,  
I know thee, I love thee, brother !  
Incestuous males that consumes  
The light and the life that we capture.

Starve thou the soul of the world,  
Brother, as I the body !  
Shall we not glut our lust  
On these wretches whom Fate hath hurled  
To a hell of jesus and shoddy,  
Dung and ethics and dust ?

Thou as I art Fate.  
Coe then, conquer and kiss me !  
Come ! what hinders? Believe me :  
This is the thought we await.  
The mark is fair ; can you miss me ?

See, how subtly I writhe !  
Strange runes and unknown sigils  
I trace in the trance that thrills us.  
Death ! how lithe, how blithe  
Are these male incestuous vigils !  
Ah ! this is the spasm that kills us !

Wherefore I solemnly affirm  
This twofold Oneness at the term.  
Asar on Asi did beget  
Horus twin brother unto Set.  
Now Set and Horus kiss, to call  
The Soul of the Unnatural  
Forth from the dusk ; then nature slain  
Lets the Beyond be born again.

This weird is of the tongue of Khem,  
The Conjuration used of them.  
Whoso shall speak it, let him die,  
His bowels rotting inwardly,  
Save he uncover and caress  
The God that lighteth his liesse.



# The Witch

I HAVE walked a great while over the snow,  
And I am not tall nor strong.  
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,  
And the way was hard and long.  
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,  
But I never came here before.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.  
I dare not stand in the blast.  
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,  
And the worst of death is past.  
I am but a little maiden still,  
My little white feet are sore.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,  
Who plead for their heart's desire.  
She came--she came--and the quivering flame  
Sunk and died in the fire.  
It never was lit again on my hearth  
Since I hurried across the floor,  
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# To Memory

Strange Power, I know not what thou art,  
Murderer or mistress of my heart.  
I know I'd rather meet the blow  
Of my most unrelenting foe  
Than live---as now I live---to be  
Slain twenty times a day by thee.

Yet, when I would command thee hence,  
Thou mockest at the vain pretence,  
Murmuring in mine ear a song  
Once loved, alas! forgotten long;  
And on my brow I feel a kiss  
That I would rather die than miss.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Unwelcome

|WE were young, we were merry, we were very very wise,  
And the door stood open at our feast,  
When there passed us a woman with the West in her eyes,  
And a man with his back to the East.

O, still grew the hearts that were beating so fast,  
The loudest voice was still.  
The jest died away on our lips as thy passed,  
And the rays of July struck chill.

The cups of red wine turned pale on the board,  
The white bread black as soot.  
The hound forgot the hand of her lord,  
She fell down at his foot.

Low let me lie, where the dead dog lies,  
Ere I sit me down again at a feast,  
When there passes a woman with the West in her eyes,  
And a man with his back to the East.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Vale` - Egypt's Might Is Tumbled Down

Egypt's might is tumbled down  
Down a-down the deeps of though;  
Greece is fallen and Troy town,  
Glorious Rome hath lost her crown,  
Venice' pride is nought.

But the dreams their children dreamed  
Fleeting, unsubstantial, vain,  
Shadowy as the shadows seemed,  
Airy nothing, as they deemed,  
These remain.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# We Never Said Farewell

WE never said farewell, nor even looked  
Our last upon each other, for no sign  
Was made when we the linkèd chain unhooked  
And broke the level line.

And here we dwell together, side by side,  
Our places fixed for life upon the chart.  
Two islands that the roaring seas divide  
Are not more far apart.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# When My Love Did What I Would Not, What I Would Not

When my love did what I would not, what I would not,  
I could hear his merry voice upon the wind,  
Crying, "e;Fairest, shut your eyes, for see you should not.  
Love is blind!"

When my love said what I say not, what I say not,  
With a joyous laugh he quieted my fears,  
Whispering, "Fairest, hearken not, for hear you may not.  
Hath Love ears?"

When my love said, "Will you longer let me seek it?  
Blind and deaf is she that doth not bid me come!"  
All my heart said murmuring, "Dearest, can I speak it?  
Love is dumb!"

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

# Where A Roman Villa Stood, Above Freiburg

On alien ground, breathing an alien air,  
A Roman stood, far from his ancient home,  
And gazing, murmured,  
'Ah, the hills are fair, &#8232;But not the hills of Rome!'

Descendant of a race to Romans-kin,  
Where the old son of Empire stood, I stand.  
The self-same rocks fold the same valley in,  
Untouched of human hand.

Over another shines the self-same star,  
Another heart with nameless longing fills,  
Crying aloud, 'How beautiful they are,  
But not our English hills!'

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge