

# Later Poems

Alice Meynell



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**Alice Meynell**

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## THE SHEPHERDESS

She walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.  
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;  
She guards them from the steep.  
She feeds them on the fragrant height,  
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,  
Dark valleys safe and deep.  
Into that tender breast at night  
The chastest stars may peep.  
She walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,  
Though gay they run and leap.  
She is so circumspect and right;  
She has her soul to keep.  
She walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.

Later Poems

**“I AM THE WAY”**

Thou art the Way.  
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,  
I cannot say  
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

I cannot see—  
I, child of process—if there lies  
An end for me,  
Full of repose, full of replies.

I'll not reproach  
The way that goes, my feet that stir.  
Access, approach,  
Art Thou, time, way, and wayfarer.

**VIA, ET VERITAS, ET VITA**

“You never attained to Him?” “If to attain  
Be to abide, then that may be.”  
“Endless the way, followed with how much pain!”  
“The way was He.”

**“WHY WILT THOU CHIDE?”**

Why wilt thou chide,  
Who hast attained to be denied?  
Oh learn, above  
All price is my refusal, Love.  
My sacred Nay  
Was never cheapened by the way.  
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord  
Of an unpurchasable word.

Oh strong, Oh pure!  
As Yea makes happier loves secure,  
I vow thee this  
Unique rejection of a kiss.  
I guard for thee  
This jealous sad monopoly.  
I seal this honour thine. None dare  
Hope for a part in thy despair.

## THE LADY POVERTY

The Lady Poverty was fair:  
But she has lost her looks of late,  
With change of times and change of air.  
Ah slattern, she neglects her hair,  
Her gown, her shoes. She keeps no state  
As once when her pure feet were bare.

Or—almost worse, if worse can be—  
She scolds in parlours; dusts and trims,  
Watches and counts. Oh, is this she  
Whom Francis met, whose step was free,  
Who with Obedience carolled hymns,  
In Umbria walked with Chastity?

Where is her ladyhood? Not here,  
Not among modern kinds of men;  
But in the stony fields, where clear  
Through the thin trees the skies appear;  
In delicate spare soil and fen,  
And slender landscape and austere.

**THE FOLD**

BEHOLD,  
The time is now! Bring back, bring back  
Thy flocks of fancies, wild of whim.  
Oh lead them from the mountain-track—  
Thy frolic thoughts untold.  
Oh bring them in—the fields grow dim—  
And let me be the fold.

Behold,  
The time is now! Call in, O call  
Thy posturing kisses gone astray  
For scattered sweets. Gather them all  
To shelter from the cold.  
Throng them together, close and gay,  
And let me be the fold!

## CRADLE-SONG AT TWILIGHT

The child not yet is lulled to rest.  
Too young a nurse, the slender Night  
So laxly holds him to her breast  
That throbs with flight.

He plays with her and will not sleep.  
For other playfellows she sighs;  
An unmaternal fondness keep  
Her alien eyes.

## THE ROARING FROST

A flock of winds came winging from the North,  
Strong birds with fighting pinions driving forth  
With a resounding call!

Where will they close their wings and cease their cries—  
Between what warming seas and conquering skies—  
And fold, and fall?

## PARENTAGE

“When Augustus Caesar legislated against the unmarried citizens of Rome, he declared them to be, in some sort, slayers of the people.”

Ah no, not these!  
These, who were childless, are not they who gave  
So many dead unto the journeying wave,  
The helpless nurslings of the cradling seas;  
Not they who doomed by infallible decrees  
Unnumbered man to the innumerable grave.  
But those who slay  
Are fathers. Theirs are armies. Death is theirs,  
The death of innocences and despairs;  
The dying of the golden and the grey.  
The sentence, when these speak it, has no Nay.  
And she who slays is she who bears, who bears.

## THE MODERN MOTHER

Oh what a kiss  
With filial passion overcharged is this!  
To this misgiving breast  
The child runs, as a child ne'er ran to rest  
Upon the light heart and the unoppressed.

Unhoped, unsought!  
A little tenderness, this mother thought  
The utmost of her meed  
She looked for gratitude; content indeed  
With thus much that her nine years' love had bought.

Nay, even with less.  
This mother, giver of life, death, peace, distress,  
Desired ah! not so much  
Thanks as forgiveness; and the passing touch  
Expected, and the slight, the brief caress.

Oh filial light  
Strong in these childish eyes, these new, these bright  
Intelligible stars! Their rays  
Are near the constant earth, guides in the maze,  
Natural, true, keen in this dusk of days.

## WEST WIND IN WINTER

Another day awakes. And who—  
Changing the world—is this?  
He comes at whiles, the Winter through,  
West Wind! I would not miss  
His sudden tryst: the long, the new  
Surprises of his kiss.

Vigilant, I make haste to close  
With him who comes my way.  
I go to meet him as he goes;  
I know his note, his lay,  
His colour and his morning rose;  
And I confess his day.

My window waits; at dawn I hark  
His call; at morn I meet  
His haste around the tossing park  
And down the softened street;  
The gentler light is his; the dark,  
The grey—he turns it sweet.

So too, so too, do I confess  
My poet when he sings.  
He rushes on my mortal guess  
With his immortal things.  
I feel, I know him. On I press—  
He finds me 'twixt his wings.

## NOVEMBER BLUE

The colour of the electric lights has a strange effect in giving a complementary tint to the air in the early evening.—ESSAY ON LONDON.

O, Heavenly colour! London town  
Has blurred it from her skies;  
And hooded in an earthly brown,  
Unheaven'd the city lies.  
No longer standard—like this hue  
Above the broad road flies;  
Nor does the narrow street the blue  
Wear, slender pennon—wise.

But when the gold and silver lamps  
Colour the London dew,  
And, misted by the winter damps,  
The shops shine bright anew—  
Blue comes to earth, it walks the street,  
It dyes the wide air through;  
A mimic sky about their feet,  
The throng go crowned with blue.

**CHIMES**

Brief, on a flying night,  
From the shaken tower,  
A flock of bells take flight,  
And go with the hour.

Like birds from the cote to the gales,  
Abrupt—O hark!  
A fleet of bells set sails,  
And go to the dark.

Sudden the cold airs swing.  
Alone, aloud,  
A verse of bells takes wing  
And flies with the cloud.

## UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

Given, not lent,  
And not withdrawn—once sent—  
This Infant of mankind, this One,  
Is still the little welcome Son.

New every year,  
New-born and newly dear,  
He comes with tidings and a song,  
The ages long, the ages long.

Even as the cold  
Keen winter grows not old;  
As childhood is so fresh, foreseen,  
And spring in the familiar green;

Sudden as sweet  
Come the expected feet.  
All joy is young, and new all art,  
And He, too, Whom we have by heart.

**A DEAD HARVEST [IN KENSINGTON GARDENS]**

Along the graceless grass of town  
They rake the rows of red and brown,  
Dead leaves, unlike the rows of hay,  
Delicate, neither gold nor grey,  
Raked long ago and far away.

A narrow silence in the park;  
Between the lights a narrow dark.  
One street rolls on the north, and one,  
Muffled, upon the south doth run.  
Amid the mist the work is done.

A futile crop; for it the fire  
Smoulders, and, for a stack, a pyre.  
So go the town's lives on the breeze,  
Even as the sheddings of the trees;  
Bosom nor barn is filled with these.

## THE TWO POETS

Whose is the speech  
That moves the voices of this lonely beech?  
Out of the long West did this wild wind come—  
Oh strong and silent! And the tree was dumb,  
Ready and dumb, until  
The dumb gale struck it on the darkened hill.

Two memories,  
Two powers, two promises, two silences  
Closed in this cry, closed in these thousand leaves  
Articulate. This sudden hour retrieves  
The purpose of the past,  
Separate, apart—embraced, embraced at last.

“Whose is the word?  
Is it I that spake? Is it thou? Is it I that heard?”  
“Thine earth was solitary; yet I found thee!”  
“Thy sky was pathless, but I caught, I bound thee,  
Thou visitant divine.”  
“O thou my Voice, the word was thine.”  
“Was thine.”

## A POET'S WIFE

I saw a tract of ocean locked in-land  
Within a field's embrace—  
The very sea! Afar it fled the strand  
And gave the seasons chase,  
And met the night alone, the tempest spanned,  
Saw sunrise face to face.

O Poet, more than ocean, lonelier!  
In inaccessible rest  
And storm remote, thou, sea of thoughts, dost stir,  
Scattered through east to west,—  
Now, while thou closest with the kiss of her  
Who locks thee to her breast.

## VENERATION OF IMAGES

Thou man, first-comer, whose wide arms entreat,  
Gather, clasp, welcome, bind,  
Lack, or remember! whose warm pulses beat  
With love of thine own kind;

Unlifted for a blessing on yon sea,  
Unshrined on this high-way,  
O flesh, O grief, thou too shalt have our knee,  
Thou rood of every day!

**AT NIGHT**

Home, home from the horizon far and clear,  
Hither the soft wings sweep;  
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near  
The dovecote doors of sleep.

O which are they that come through sweetest light  
Of all these homing birds?  
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?  
Your words to me, your words!