

Frances Maria Cowper, "My Retired Hours"

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FRANCES MARIA COWPER

"My Retired Hours"

Ye gentle days that once were mine,
In every charm of life array'd,
No more awaken my regret,
No more my settled peace invade.

Fresh hope of permanent delight
My meditating thoughts pursue;
Nor can the charms of time or sense
Obscure the bright, the heavenly view.

My convert heart delights to muse
On fallen man's deliv'rance found,
The sacrifice, the cleansing blood,
That for his bleeding guilt aton'd:

Of man's estate in Paradise,
Of endless mercy's wide display,
Of cov'nant love, and Gospel grace,
That point to Heaven th' unerring way:

Such themes as these, in early years,
My secret hours have oft inspir'd,
My infant hands with wonder rais'd,
My infant heart with rapture fir'd. 20

Witness ye saints invisible,
Ye guests unseen, whose guardian care
Preserves the soul from threat'ning ill,
And wafts to Heaven the pious tear:

Witness—for ye have oft beheld— 25
How (for superior joys design'd)
My humble steps retirement sought,

Leaving the busy world behind:

How, in the sweet sequester'd shade,
Where ——'s fair meand'ring flood 30
Pours its rich streams around the plains,
And gurgles near the favourite wood,

At morn, at noon, at dewy eve,
Oft by the moon's soft-glancing ray,
In search of Wisdom's rare delights 35
My feet unwearied lov'd to stray.

And are those transitory hours,
So sweet to my remembrance, gone?
Sunk in the deep abyss of time,
Beyond the reach of fancy flown? 40

Ye swift-wing'd messengers, farewell,
And all the pleasures that ye gave;
Sweet earnest of unfading joys
That wait my soul beyond the grave.

Loos'd from the vexing world below, 45
O! when shall I to these attain?
When to that blissful region go,
That yields no sorrow, tear, or pain?

There shall my disencumber'd soul
Distinctly view the grand design 50
Of each mysterious providence,
The gracious plan of love divine.

How dim foe'er the eye of sense,
How faint foe'er each mental power,
There we shall trace Omniscience, 55
And all his sov'reign will explore;

Companioning with angels bright,
Perhaps with kindred spirits join'd,
Adore the self-existent God,
That brought salvation to mankind. 60

Delightful Theme of endless bliss!
How little know the world of Thee!
Only the pilgrim hasting on,
And panting for eternity.

He joyful views, with steady eye, 65
Where faithful labourers abide;
Beholds the glittering gates on high,
On golden hinges opening wide.

There all his thoughts and wishes tend,
Anxious he marks the heavenly road, 70
Compassionates the senseless world,
And languishes—to be with God;

To see the “very Paschal Lamb,”
In everlasting bliss enthron’d,
And mingle with those blessed saints, 75
That live with endless glory crown’d.

O! how with “ever-tuned harps”
They sing “the Lamb’s mysterious song;”
Myriads of cherubs catch the sound,
Echoing from each celestial tongue. 80

Celestial tongues alone can reach
The height of that celestial strain,
Their tongues alone who see his face,
And with the Lamb for ever reign.

Unwearied through eternity, 85
Their pleasing toil they still pursue,
And spread around th’ ethereal space
The glorious theme, for ever new.

NOTES:

10 *fallen man’s* Adam, Eve, and their descendants, humanity after the transition from innocent obedience to God in the garden of Eden to guilt, disobedience, and sin; humanity that is viewed as naturally sinful and in need of salvation; *deliv’rance* Giving over into the possession or power of another, in particular reference to God, or an act of God whereby he rescues his people from danger or damnation (Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, pp. 434-436; 330-331).

11 *sacrifice* Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and forgiveness of humanity’s sinfulness (*EDT*, pp. 113-114).

12 *bleeding guilt* Mortal sin, damnation; *aton’d* “To bargain for exemption” (Johnson), here a reference to Christians’ reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (*EDT*, pp. 113-114).

13 *estate* “Circumstances in general; conditions of life; possibly also in reference to possessions in land, rank, or quality” (Johnson).

15 *cov'nant* "A contract between two parties" (Johnson), usually an agreement between God and his people, in which God makes promises to his people and, in return, requires certain types of conduct from them (*EDT*, pp. 299-301).

15 *Gospel* The records of Jesus Christ's life and teachings in the first four books of the new testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

19 *infant* "Immature, in a state of initial imperfection" (Johnson); also possibly referencing the spiritual rebirth of baptism (*EDT*, pp. 129-131).

20 *rapture* "Ecstasy, mental transportation to a sublime realm, a vigorous passion," particularly of the faith in God (Johnson).

25 *oft* Often.

26 *design'd* "To devote intentionally" (Johnson).

27 *retirement* "Private way of life, state of being withdrawn" (Johnson).

41 *swift-wing'd messengers* Angels.

53 *foe-er* Forever.

53 *eye of sense* "Perception by intellect" (Johnson).

63 *pilgrim* "A traveler, wanderer, particularly one who travels on a religious account" (Johnson).

67 *glittering gates* The entrance to heaven.

71 *Compassionates* "Pity" (Johnson).

73 *Paschal Lamb* A lamb with particular ritual significance, which the Israelites were commanded to eat as a part of the Passover celebration; the Paschal Lamb symbolized Christ, "the Lamb of God," who redeemed the world by the shedding of his blood (*EDT*, pp. 893-895).

77 *ever-tuned harps* Possibly an allusion to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and his descriptions of angels, particularly when the angels celebrate God's decision to allow his son, Jesus Christ, to sacrifice himself for mankind (Book III, line 366).

78 *the Lamb's mysterious song* Referencing a song of triumph over Babylon, which represented sin and idolatry; the biblical triumph over Babylon symbolizes a triumph over sin.

79 *cherubs* Angels who support the rule of God, especially connected with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden (*EDT*, pp. 60-61).

SOURCE: *Original Poems, on Various Occasions* (London, 1792), pp. 15-19. [Google Books]

Edited by Momo Wang

Frances Maria Cowper, religious verse, meditation, virtue, the sublime, ballad stanzas

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