Frances Greville, â??A Prayer for Indifferenceâ?•

Description

[FRANCES] GREVILLE

â??A Prayer for Indifferenceâ?•

Oft Iâ??ve implorâ??d the Gods in vain,
And prayâ??d till Iâ??ve been weary;
For once Iâ??ll try my wish to gain
Of Oberon the fairy.

Sweet airy being, wanton sprite,
That lurkâ??st in woods unseen;
And oft by Cynthiaâ??s silver light
Tripst gaily oâ??er the green!

If eâ??er thy pitying heart was movâ??d,
As ancient stories tell,
And for thâ?? Athenian maid, who lovâ??d,
Thou soughtâ??st a wondrous spell;

Oh! deign once more tâ?? exert thy power;
Haply some herb or tree,
Sovâ??reign as juice of western flower,
Conceals a balm for me.

I ask no kind return of love,
No tempting charm to please:
Far from the heart those gifts remove,
That sighs for peace and ease.

Nor peace nor ease the heart can know,
Which, like the needle true,
Turns at the touch of joy or woe,
But, turning, trembles too.

Far as distress the soul can wound,
â??Tis pain in each degree:
â??Tis bliss but to a certain bound;
Beyond is agony.

Take then this treacherous sense of mine,
Which dooms me still to smart;

Which pleasure can to pain refine,
To pain new pangs impart.

O, haste to shed the sacred balm!
My shatterâ??d nerves new-string;
And for my guest, serenely calm,
The nymph, Indifference, bring.

At her approach, see Hope, see Fear,
See Expectation fly;
And Disappointment in the rear,
That blasts the promisâ??d joy.

The tear, which pity taught to flow,
The eye shall then disown:
The heart that melts for otherâ??s woe,
Shall then scarce feel its own.

The wounds which now each moment bleed,
Each moment then shall close,
And tranquil days shall still succeed
To nights of calm repose.

O, fairy elf! but grant me this,
This one kind comfort send;
And so may never-fading bliss
Thy flowâ??ry paths attend!

So may the glow-wormâ??s glimmâ??ring light
Thy tiny footsteps lead
To some new region of delight,
Unknown to mortal tread.

And be thy acorn goblet fillâ??d
With heavâ??nâ??s ambrosial dew;
From sweetest, freshest flowâ??rs distillâ??d
That shed fresh sweets for you.

And what of life remains for me,
Iâ??ll pass in sober ease;
Half-pleasâ??d, contented will I be,
Content but half to please.

NOTES:

4 *Oberon* A mythological figure, referenced here as the king of fairies in William Shakespeareâ??s play *A Midsummer Nightâ??s Dream*. Sources indicate that Oberon has appeared in texts as a literary and mythological figure since at least the 13th century, including in the French medieval poem â??Huon de Bordeauxâ?• (*Britannica*).

5 w*anton* â??Of a person: playful; unrestrained in merriment, jovial; inclined to joking; carefreeâ?• (*OED*).

7 *Cynthia* â??A poetic name for the Moon personified as a goddessâ?• (*OED*).

11 *Athenian maid* Presumably, Helena, of William Shakespeareâ??s *A Midsummer Nightâ??s Dream*. In Act II of the play, Oberon witnesses a fight between Demetrius and the maid Helena, who loves him. He then instructs a sprite, Puck, to anoint the man in â??Athenian garments,â?• intending him to place a magical spell on Demetrius to ensure that he falls in love with the first person he sees (2.1.268-272).

15 w*estern flower* The magical, love-inducing flower referred to in *A Midsummer Nightâ??s Dream*: â??Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell. / It fell upon a little western flower, / Before, milk-white, now purple with loveâ??s wound, / And maidens call it â??love-in-idlenessâ??â?• (2.1.172-174).

30 s*mart* â??To feel sharp pain or distress (esp. with a stinging pain); to suffer acutely or severelyâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: *A Collection of the Most esteemed Pieces of Poetry, That have appeared for several Years* (London, 1770), pp. 87-89. [Sutro Library]

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