Frances Maria Cowper, â??My Retired Hoursâ?•

Description

FRANCES MARIA COWPER

â??My Retired Hoursâ?•

Ye gentle days that once were mine,
In every charm of life arrayâ??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 manâ??s delivâ??rance found,
The sacrifice, the cleansing blood,
That for his bleeding guilt atonâ??d:

Of manâ??s estate in Paradise,
Of endless mercyâ??s wide display,
Of covâ??nant love, and Gospel grace,
That point to Heaven thâ?? unerring way:

Such themes as these, in early years,
My secret hours have oft inspirâ??d,
My infant hands with wonder raisâ??d,
My infant heart with rapture firâ??d.

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

Witnessâ??for ye have oft beheldâ??
How (for superior joys designâ??d)
My humble steps retirement sought,
Leaving the busy world behind:

How, in the sweet sequesterâ??d shade,
Where â??â??â??s fair meandâ??ring flood

Pours its rich streams around the plains,
And gurgles near the favourite wood,

At morn, at noon, at dewy eve,
Oft by the moonâ??s soft-glancing ray,
In search of Wisdomâ??s rare delights
My feet unwearied lovâ??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?

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

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

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

How dim foeâ??er the eye of sense,
How faint foeâ??er each mental power,
There we shall trace Omniscience,
And all his sovâ??reign will explore;

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

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,
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,
Compassionates the senseless world,
And languishesâ??to be with God;

To see the â??very Paschal Lamb,â?•
In everlasting bliss enthronâ??d,
And mingle with those blessed saints,
That live with endless glory crownâ??d.

O! how with â??ever-tuned harpsâ?•
They sing â??the Lambâ??s mysterious song;â?•
Myriads of cherubs catch the sound,
Echoing from each celestial tongue.

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,
Their pleasing toil they still pursue,
And spread around thâ?? ethereal space
The glorious theme, for ever new.

NOTES:

10 *fallen manâ??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; *delivâ??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 Christâ??s crucifixion and forgiveness of humanityâ??s sinfulness (*EDT*, pp. 113-114).

12 *bleeding guilt* Mortal sin, damnation; *atonâ??d* â??To bargain for exemptionâ?• (Johnson), here a reference to Christiansâ?? reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (*EDT*, pp. 113-114).

13 *estate* â??Circumstances in general; conditions of life; possibly also in reference to possessions in land, rank, or qualityâ?• (Johnson).

15 *covâ??nant* â??A contract between two partiesâ?• (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 Christâ??s life and teachings in the first four books of the new testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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

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

25 *oft* Often.

26 *designâ??d* â??To devote intentionallyâ?• (Johnson).

27 *retirement* â??Private way of life, state of being withdrawnâ?• (Johnson).

41 *swift-wingâ??d messengers* Angels.

53 *foe-er* Forever.

53 *eye of sense â??*Perception by intellectâ?• (Johnson).

63 *pilgrim* â??A traveler, wanderer, particularly one who travels on a religious accountâ?• (Johnson).

67 *glittering gates* The entrance to heaven.

71 *Compassionates* â??Pityâ?• (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, â??the Lamb of God,â?• who redeemed the world by the shedding of his blood (*EDT*, pp. 893-895).

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

78 *the Lambâ??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