

Ann Yearsley, "Address to Friendship"

Description

ANN YEARSLEY

• Address To Friendship •

Friendship! thou noblest ardor of the soul!
 Immortal essence! languor's best support!
 Chief dignifying proof of glorious man!
 Firm cement of the world! endearing tie,
 Which binds the willing soul, and brings along
 Her chastest, strongest, and sublimest powers!

All else the dregs of spirit. Love's soft flame,
 Bewildering, leads the infatuated soul;
 Levels, depresses, wraps in endless mists,
 Contracts, dissolves, enervates and enslaves,
 Relaxes, sinks, distracts, while Fancy fills
 The inflaming draught, and aids the calenture.
 Intoxicating charm! yet well refined
 By Virtue's brightening flame, pure it ascends,
 As incense in its grateful circles mounts,
 Till, mixt and lost, with Thee it boasts thy name.

Thou unfound blessing! woo'd with eager hope,
 As clowns the nightly vapour swift pursue,
 And fain would grasp to cheer their lonely way;
 Vain the wide stretch, and vain the shorten'd breath,
 For, ah! the bright delusion onward flies,
 While the sad swain deceiv'd, now cautious treads
 The common beaten track, nor quits it more.

Not unexisting art thou, but so rare,
 That delving souls ne'er find thee; 'tis to thee,
 When found, if ever found, sweet fugitive,
 The noble mind opens all her richest stores;
 Thy firm, strong hold suits the courageous breast,
 Where stubborn virtues dwell in secret league,
 And each conspires to fortify the rest.

Ethereal spirits alone may hope to prove
 Thy strong, yet softenâ€™d rapture; softenâ€™d more
 When penitence succeeds to injury;
 When, doubting pardon, the meek, pleading eye
 On which the soul had once with pleasure dwelt,
 35

Swims in the tear of sorrow and repentance.
 The faultless mind with treble pity views
 The tarnishâ€™d friend, who feels the sting of shame;
 â€™Tis then too little barely to forgive;
 Nor can the soul rest on that frigid thought,
 40

But rushing swiftly from her Stoic heights,
 With all her frozen feelings melted down
 By Pityâ€™s genial beams, she sinks, distrest,
 Shares the contagion, and with lenient hand
 Lifts the warm chalice fillâ€™d with consolation.
 45

Yet Friendshipâ€™s name oft decks the crafty lip,
 With seeming virtue clothes the ruthless soul;
 Grief-soothing notes, well feignâ€™d to look like Truth,
 Like an insidious serpent softly creep
 To the poor, guileless, unsuspecting heart,
 50

Wind round in wily folds, and sinking deep
 Explore her sacred treasure, basely heave
 Her hoard of woes to an unpitying world;
 First soothes, ensnares, exposes and betrays.
 What art thou, fiend, who thus usurpâ€™st the form
 55

Of the soft Cherub? Tell me, by what name
 The ostentatious call thee, thou who wreckâ€™st
 The gloomy peace of sorrow-loving souls?
 Why thou art Vanity, ungenerous sprite,
 Who tarnishest the action deemâ€™d so great,
 60

And of soul-saving essence. But for thee,
 How pure, how bright wouâ€™d THERONâ€™s virtues shine;
 And, but that Thou art incorpâ€™rate with the flame,
 Which else wouâ€™d bless whereâ€™t its beams illumine,
 My grateful spirit had recorded here
 65

Thy splendid seemings. Long Iâ€™ve known their worth.

O, â€™tis the deepest error man can prove,

To fancy joys disinterested can live,
 Indissoluble, pure, unmix'd with self;
 Why, were to be immortal, were to own
 No part but spirit in this chilling gloom.

My soul's ambitious, and its utmost stretch
 Would be, to own a friend, but that denies.
 Now, at this bold avowal, gaze, ye eyes,
 Which kindly melted at my woe-fraught tale;
 Start back, Benevolence, and shun the charge;
 Soft bending Pity, fly the sullen phrase,
 Ungrateful as it seems. My abject fate
 Excites the willing hand of Charity,
 The momentary sigh, the pitying tear,
 And instantaneous act of bounty bland,
 To Misery so kind; yet not to you,
 Bounty, or Charity, or Mercy mild,
 The pensive thought applies fair Friendship's name;
 That name which never yet could dare exist
 But in equality.

NOTES:

- 7 *Dregs* – The most worthless part or parts (QED).
- 12 *calenture* – Burning passion, ardour, zeal (QED).
- 41 *Stoic* Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded in Athens in the third century BC by Zeno of Citium.
- 56 *Cherub* An imaginary being of a celestial or angelic order (QED).
- 62 *THERON* – In Greek mythology, another name for the goddess Artemis. According to legend, Theron/Artemis made a wish in childhood to always remain a virgin and to assist women in childbirth (Kerri Andrews, ed., *The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, vol. I, p. 388).

Â SOURCE: Â *Poems, on Several Occasions, 3rd edition (London, 1785), pp. 60-65. [HathiTrust]*

Edited by Rafe Kassim