Ann Yearsley, â??Address to Friendshipâ?•

Description

ANN YEARSLEY

â??Address To Friendshipâ?•

Friendship! thou noblest ardor of the soul!
Immortal essence! languorâ??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. Loveâ??s soft flame,
Bewildering, leads thâ?? infatuated soul;
Levels, depresses, wraps in endless mists,
Contracts, dissolves, enervates and enslaves,
Relaxes, sinks, distracts, while Fancy fills
Thâ?? inflaming draught, and aids the calenture.
Intoxicating charm! yet well refinâ??d
By Virtueâ??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! wooâ??d with eager hope,
As clowns the nightly vapour swift pursue,
And fain wouâ??d grasp to cheer their lonely way;
Vain the wide stretch, and vain the shortenâ??d breath,
For, ah! the bright delusion onward flies,
While the sad swain deceivâ??d, now cautious treads
The common beaten track, nor quits it more.

Not unexisting art thou, but so rare,
That delving souls neâ??er find thee; â??tis to thee,
When found, if ever found, sweet fugitive,
The noble mind opes 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.

Etherial 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,
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,
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.

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,
Wind round in wily folds, and sinking deep
Explore her sacred treasure, basely heave
Her hoard of woes to an unpitying world;
First sooths, ensnares, exposes and betrays.
What art thou, fiend, who thus usurpâ??st the form
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,
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??er its beams illume,
My grateful spirit had recorded here
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, unmixâ??d with self;
Why, â??twere to be immortal, â??twere to own
No part but spirit in this chilling gloom.

My soulâ??s ambitious, and its utmost stretch
Wouâ??d be, to own a friend â?? but thatâ??s denyâ??d.
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 Friendshipâ??s name;
That name which never yet couâ??d dare exist
But in equality.

NOTES:

7 *Dregs* â??The most worthless part or partsâ?• (*OED*).

12 *calenture* â??Burning passion, ardour, zealâ?• (*OED*).

41 *Stoic* Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded in Athens in the third century BC by Zeno of Citium.

56 *Cherub* An imaginary â??being of a celestial or angelic orderâ?• (*OED*).

62 *THERON* â??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 childbirthâ?• (Kerri Andrews, ed., *The Collected Works of Ann Yearsley*, vol. I, p. 388).

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

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