

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 5  
Her chastest, strongest, and sublimest powers!

All else the dregs of spirit. Love’s soft flame,  
Bewildering, leads th’ infatuated soul;  
Levels, depresses, wraps in endless mists,  
Contracts, dissolves, enervates and enslaves, 10  
Relaxes, sinks, distracts, while Fancy fills  
Th’ inflaming draught, and aids the calenture.  
Intoxicating charm! yet well refin’d  
By Virtue’s brightening flame, pure it ascends,  
As incense in its grateful circles mounts, 15  
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 wou’d grasp to cheer their lonely way;  
Vain the wide stretch, and vain the shorten’d breath, 20  
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, 25  
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. 30

Ethereal spirits alone may hope to prove  
Thy strong, yet soften’d rapture; soften’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 tarnish'd friend, who feels the sting of shame;  
 '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 Pity's genial beams, she sinks, distrest,  
 Shares the contagion, and with lenient hand  
 Lifts the warm chalice fill'd with consolation. 45

Yet Friendship's name oft decks the crafty lip,  
 With seeming virtue clothes the ruthless soul;  
 Grief-soothing notes, well feign'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 sooths, ensnares, exposes and betrays.  
 What art thou, fiend, who thus usurp'st the form 55  
 Of the soft Cherub? Tell me, by what name  
 The ostentatious call thee, thou who wreck'st  
 The gloomy peace of sorrow-loving souls?  
 Why thou art Vanity, ungenerous sprite,  
 Who tarnishest the action deem'd so great, 60  
 And of soul-saving essence. But for thee,  
 How pure, how bright wou'd THERON's virtues shine;  
 And, but that *Thou* art incorp'rate with the flame,  
 Which else wou'd bless where'er its beams illumine,  
 My grateful spirit had recorded here 65  
*Thy* splendid seemings. Long I've known their worth.

O, 'tis the deepest error man can prove,  
 To fancy joys disinterested can live,  
 Indissoluble, pure, unmix'd with self;  
 Why, 'twere to be immortal, 'twere to own 70  
 No part but spirit in this chilling gloom.

My soul's ambitious, and its utmost stretch  
 Wou'd be, to own a friend — but that's deny'd.  
 Now, at this bold avowal, gaze, ye eyes,  
 Which kindly melted at my woe-fraught tale; 75  
 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, 80  
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 cou'd dare exist 85  
But in equality.

**NOTES:**

**7** *Dregs* "The most worthless part or parts" (*OED*).

**12** *calenture* "Burning passion, ardour, zeal" (*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 "being of a celestial or angelic order" (*OED*).

**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).

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

*Edited by Rafe Kassim*