Nathaniel Evans, â??A Riddleâ?•

Description

NATHANIEL EVANS

â??A Riddleâ?•

Barrcadoâ??d with white bone,
Labâ??ring under many a groan,
Curtainâ??d in my room with red,
And smoothly laid in crimson bed;
â??Tis I dissolve the stony heart,
And comfortâ??s balmy joys impart;
â??Tis I can rule the wavâ??ring croud,
Or tame the haughty and the proud;
â??Tis I oâ??er beauty oft prevail,
That queen of lifeâ??s capricious vale;
â??Tis I can fire the warriorâ??s soul,
Or passionâ??s giddy voice control;
Senates have felt my lordly sway,
And kings my magic powâ??r obey;
â??Tis I, so garrulously gay,
That rouze the dames whose heads are grey;
Gilded oâ??er with truth and lies,
Under many a mixt disguise,
I dress to cheat unpractisâ??d youth,
With falsehoodâ??s garb for honest truth;
XANTHIPPE bold, in dead of night,
Taught SOCRATES to own my might!

Strange enchantress, motely creature,
Oddest prodigy of nature!
As raging billows, now Iâ??m wild,
And now as warbling fountains mild;
Now religionâ??s laws proclaiming,
And now the good and just defaming;
Now cementing patriotism,
And now in church provoking schism.
Enough, O muse!â?? kind reason cries,
The man who has this monster dies!

Expound my *riddle*, if youâ??re able,
For â??twas this confounded BABEL!

NOTES:

6 *balmy* â??Delicately and deliciously fragrantâ?• (*OED*).

10 *capricious* â??Characterized by play of wit or fancy; humorous, fantastic, â??conceitedâ??â?• (*OED*).

15 *garrulously* â??Given to much talking; fond of indulging in talk or chatter; loquacious, talkativeâ?• (*OED*).

16 *rouze* â??To tussle with (a person) in a sexual or flirtatious mannerâ?• (*OED*).

17 G*ilded* â??To cover entirely or partially with a thin layer of gold, either laid on in the form of gold-leaf or applied by other processesâ?• (*OED*).

20 *Garb*-â??Grace, elegance, stylishness of manners or appearanceâ?• (*OED*).

21 *Xanthippe* (435 BCE- ???) â??Athenian wife of Socrates whose name, thanks to the philosopherâ??s disciples, has for centuries been a byword for a sharp-tongued shrewâ?• (*Encyclopedia.com*).

22 *Socrates* (469-399 BCE) â??Greek philosopher whose way of life, character, and thought exerted a profound influence on ancient and modern philosophyâ?• (*Encyclopedia Brittanica*).

31 *Muse* The source of poetic inspiration.

34 *Babel* Another name for the ancient city of Babylon; a reference here to the Biblical story in Genesis 11:1-9 that describes the human race united under one language building the city and tower, but God intervenes to â??confuse their language so they will not understand each otherâ?• (11:6), thus destroying the city and dispersing humanity around the world speaking different languages (*OCB*).

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions* (Philadelphia, 1759), pp. 19-20. [Google Books]

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