

THE AEOLIAN HARP

1. My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
2. Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
3. To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown
4. With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,
5. (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
6. And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,
7. Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
8. Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)
9. Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
10. Snatch'd from yon bean-field! and the world so hushed!
11. The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
12. Tells us of silence.

And that simplest Lute,

13. Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
14. How by the desultory breeze caress'd,
15. Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
16. It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
17. Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
18. Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
19. Over delicious surges sink and rise,
20. Such a soft floating witchery of sound
21. As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
22. Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
23. Where Melodies round honey-dripping flowers,
24. Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
25. Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam'd wing!
26. O! the one Life within us and abroad,
27. Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
28. A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
29. Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—
30. Methinks, it should have been impossible
31. Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;
32. Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
33. Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

34. And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
35. Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
36. Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold
37. The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main.
38. And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
39. Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
40. And many idle flitting phantasies,
41. Traverse my indolent and passive brain,

42. As wild and various as the random gales
 43. That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
 44. And what if all of animated nature
 45. Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
 46. That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
 47. Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 48. At once the Soul of each, and God of all?
 49. But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
 50. Darts, O belovéd Woman! nor such thoughts
 51. Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,
 52. And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
 53. Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!
 54. Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd
 55. These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
 56. Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
 57. On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.
 58. For never guiltless may I speak of him,
 59. The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
 60. I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;
 61. Who with his saving mercies healéd me,
 62. A sinful and most miserable man,
 63. Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess
 64. Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!

Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight"

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
 Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
 Came loud, -and hark, again! loud as before.
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
 Have left me to that solitude, which suits
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
 With all the numberless goings-on of life,
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
 Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
 Methinks its motion in this hush of nature
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
 Making it a companionable form,
 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
 By its own moods interprets, every where

Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering stranger! and as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birthplace, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My playmate when we both were clothed alike!

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the interspersed vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought!
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes! For I was reared
In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Nightingale: A 'Conversation Poem,'" (April, 1798)

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently.
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still.
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.
And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.
But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain.
And many a poet echoes the conceit;
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme
When he had better far have stretched his limbs
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
Should share in Nature's immortality,

A venerable thing! and so his song
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
Be loved like Nature! But 'twill not be so;
And youths and maidens most poetical,
Who lose the deepening twilights of the spring
In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.

My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
A different lore: we may not thus profane
Nature's sweet voices, always full of love
And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music!

And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
But never elsewhere in one place I knew
So many nightingales; and far and near,
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,
They answer and provoke each other's song,
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,
And one low piping sound more sweet than all
Stirring the air with such a harmony,
That should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,
Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed,
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch.

A most gentle Maid,
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
Hard by the castle, and at latest eve
(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate
To something more than Nature in the grove)
Glides through the pathways; she knows all their notes,

That gentle Maid! and oft, a moment's space,
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,
Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon
Emerging, hath awakened earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
As if some sudden gale had swept at once
A hundred airy harps! And she hath watched
Many a nightingale perch giddily
On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze,
And to that motion tune his wanton song
Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head.

Farewell! O Warbler! till tomorrow eve,
And you, my friends! farewell, a short farewell!
We have been loitering long and pleasantly,
And now for our dear homes. That strain again!
Full fain it would delay me! My dear babe,
Who, capable of no articulate sound,
Mimes all things with his imitative lisp,
How he would place his hand beside his ear,
His little hand, the small forefinger up,
And bid us listen! And I deem it wise
To make him Nature's play-mate. He knows well
The evening-star; and once, when he awoke
In most distressful mood (some inward pain
Had made up that strange thing, an infant's dream)
I hurried with him to our orchard-plot,
And he beheld the moon, and, hushed at once,
Suspended his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes, that swam with undropped tears,
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! Well!
It is a father's tale: But if that Heaven
Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
Familiar with these songs, that with the night
He may associate joy. Once more, farewell,
Sweet Nightingale! once more, my friends! farewell.