

Poems of
Letitia Elizabeth Landon
(L. E. L.)
in
The Literary Souvenir, 1825
compiled
by
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THE LITERARY SOUVENIR;

OR,

CABINET OF POETRY AND ROMANCE.



THE DECISION OF THE FLOWER

THE
DECISION OF THE FLOWER.

. . . . 'Tis a history
Handed from ages down; a nurse's tale.
Southey's Thalaba.

THERE is a flower, a purple flower
SOWN by the wind, nursed by the shower,
O'er which Love has breathed a power and spell
The truth of whispering hope to tell.
Lightly the maiden's cheek has prest
The pillow of her dreaming rest,
Yet a crimson blush is over it spread
As her lover's lip had lighted its red.
Yes, sleep before her eyes has brought
The image of her waking thought,—
That one thought hidden from all the world,
Like the last sweet hue in the rose-bud curled.
The dew is yet on the grass and leaves,
The silver veil which the morning weaves.
To throw o'er the roses, those brides which the sun
Must woo and win ere the day be done.

She braided back her beautiful hair
O'er a brow like Italian marble fair.
She is gone to the fields where the corn uprears
Like an eastern army its golden spears.
The lark flew up as she passed along,
And poured from a cloud his sunny song ;
And many bright insects were on wing,
Or lay on the blossoms glistening ;
And with scarlet poppies around like a bower,
Found the maiden her mystic flower.
Now, gentle flower, I pray thee tell
If my lover loves me, and loves me well ;
So may the fall of the morning dew
Keep the sun from fading thy tender blue.
Now I number the leaves for my lot,
He loves not, he loves me, he loves me not,
He loves me,—yes, thou last leaf, yes,
I'll pluck thee not, for that last sweet guess !
“ He loves me,” “ YES,” a dear voice sighed :—
And her lover stands by Margaret's side.

L. E. L.

CHRISTINE.

Oh ! Love can take
What shape he pleases, and when once begun
His fiery inroad in the soul, how vain
The after knowledge which his presence gives :
We weep or rave, but still he lives,—he lives
Master and lord, 'midst pride and tears and pain.

Barry Cornwall.

I CANNOT, cannot change my tone,
My lute must breathe what is its own ;
It is my own heart that has taught
My constancy of mournful thought.
Tell me not of Spring's sunshine hour,
I have but known its blight and shower ;
And blame me not, that thus I dwell
On love's despair, and hope's farewell.
I know not what this life may be ;
I feel but what it is to me.
My gift of song, let others claim
The golden violets of fame,
I would but have it breathe to thee
My deep and lone fidelity ;

My unrequited tenderness
Living on its own sweet excess.
Oh! I have blushed to hear my song
Borne on the tide of praise along :
But deem not, dear one, only praise
The colour on my cheek could raise ;
I blushed to think that thou might'st hear
My song of passion's timid fear ;
That with the words a thought might steal
Of all I felt, of all I feel.

On to my tale : it tells of one
Who loved not more than I have done :
That deep and lonely faith which bears
With chance, and change, and lapse of years ;
Turns like the floweret to the sun,
Content with being shone upon ;
Although its gift of light and air
The meanest with itself may share.

The moon hath shed her gentlest light
On the Garonne's blue wave to-night,
No wind disturbs, no ripple jars
The mirror, over which the stars
Linger like beauties. O'er the tide,
But noiseless, all the white sails glide.
Around are the green hills, where cling
The Autumn's purple gathering ;

The various grapes, some like the stone
On which an Indian sky has shone,
And others like the amber streak
Pale on the fading twilight's cheek ;
And others glistening and green,
As yet by summer suns unseen.
And where the soft grass spreads, just meet
For the light tread of maiden's feet,
And where the chesnut's trunk seems made
For the musician's seat and shade,—
Are peasants dancing : one alone
Has stolen from the group, unknown,
To watch the hunter prince pass by :
Alas ! love's fond idolatry !
She sat down by the cypress tree,
And well it might her shadow be,
With its dark leaves, and lonely weeping,
As if some lovelorn secret keeping.
Just there the thicker boughs gave way,
And dale, wood, heath, before her lay ;
It came at last, the gallant train,
And hound, hawk, horseman, swept the plain.
There rode the leader of the band,
His hooded falcon on his hand ;
Which held the broidered rein beside,
Curbing his foam-white courser's pride ;
And carelessly on one side flung
The drooping heron feathers hung

Of the light cap, while the soft air
Ruffled the curls of raven hair,
And parted them enough to show
The forehead's height of mountain snow.
But he has left his train behind,—
A lover's step is on the wind;—
And he is by the maiden's side,
Whose eye is drooped, as if to hide
How joy has lighted it; she lent
Like one of those sweet visions sent
To the young bard, when tones that weep
From leaf to flower have lulled his sleep.
In that Italian gallery, where
The painter and the sculptor share
Their gift of beauty, stands a form
Just like hers, only not so warm
With blushes, but the same soft eye
Seeking the ground;—just such a sigh
Upon the parted lips;—so prest
The small hands on the throbbing breast.
The same bowed attitude, so meek!
Oh, misery, that love should seek
A temple made so pure, so fair,
To leave his wreck and ruin there!
“CHRISTINE, my own CHRISTINE;”—she felt
The words upon her flushed cheek melt:
She met his radiant eyes—to-night
Surely some cloud is on their light;—

And then she heard of his recall
From green woods to his father's hall.
But, not while yet still heart to heart,
Know we what pain it is to part !
Not while we list, the voice so dear,
Although it be Farewell we hear.
Not while on one fond breast reclining,—
Not while dear eyes are on us shining,—
Although we deem that hour must be
The depth of Fate's worst misery,—
Know we how much the heart can bear
Of lonely and of long despair.
And strove the royal youth to cheer
The sorrowing of his maiden's fear,
With all those gentle vows that prove
At least the eloquence of love.
But still she wept : Oh ! not for me
To wish or hope fidelity !
Tell me not RAYMOND will recall
His peasant love in lighted hall :
When the rich Eastern gems look dim
By the bright eyes that smile for him.
Go share, as man will ever share,
In love's delight, but not love's care ;
And leave me to my woman's part—
A rifled and a broken heart.
He took a gold chain from his neck,—
Such chains the fair Venetians deck,—

And threw it round her—" See how slight
The fragile links that here unite.
Yet try, CHRISTINE, and all in vain,—
You cannot break the slender chain ;
This be our emblem, sweet, farewell !
He kissed the teardrops as they fell.
They parted—he for festival
And beauty's lighted coronal,
And all the meteor spells that try
The strength of absent constancy ;
And even as all changed around,
The change in his own heart was found ;
The dance's gayest cavalier,
Who soonest won a lady's ear
With soft words, wandering amid many,
And true to none, yet vowed to any.
'Tis ever thus ;—alas ! there clings
The curse of change to earthly things ;—
The flower fades, the green leaf dies,
A cloud steals over April skies,—
Tides turn their course, stars fall, winds range,
But more than all these, love will change.
Not so CHRISTINE,—day after day,
She watched and wept o'er hope's decay :
At last hope died, she felt it vain
To hope or dream of hope again.
It was one noon she chanced to look
On the clear mirror of the brook,

Which ran beside the cypress tree,
Where their glad meetings wont to be.
She marked her eye's dim darkened blue,
The cheek which had forgot its hue
Of summer rose—the faded brow !
“ Alas! he would not love me now ! ”
And hope departed from that hour—
But not with hope declined love's power ;
It was changed to a mournful feeling,
The deeper from its deep concealing
Fond thoughts, and gentle prayers that strove
To make a piety of love.
And then there came a wish to die
Unknown, but still beneath his eye ;—
At first 'twas but a fear, a thought—
A dream of thousand fancies wrought ;
It haunted still—at last she gave
Her tresses to the wind and wave :
Then as a page she sought his train,
And looked on RAYMOND's face again.
There was a revel held that night
In honour of the lady bright,
Who was next day, by RAYMOND's side,
To wear the white veil of a bride ;
And from the gallery, CHRISTINE
Gazed with the crowd on that gay scene.
There were high dames, with raven curls
Falling from the snow wreath of pearls ;

Fair arms on which the emerald shone,
And silver robe and ruby zone ;
And feet that seemed but made to tread
Imprintless on the lily's head ;
Laughs like glad music, as their all
Of life had been a festival.
And CHRISTINE marvelled that such mirth
Could find a welcome upon earth.
She had been nursed 'mid forest trees,
And vineyards, birds, and flowers and bees ;
And little had she learnt the task
To turn the false lip to a mask
Of sunshine and of smiles, to hide
The heart of bitterness and pride,
Like those gay coloured plants that wreath
Their blossoms on the snake beneath.

And suddenly the gorgeous room
Was filled with music, light, and bloom ;
As the thrice fragrant air was filled
With waters from sweet leaves distilled ;
As lighted up the perfumed flame
Of woods that from Arabia came :
And a rich sweep of music blent
From every mingled instrument ;
And smile, and sigh, and bended brow,
Greeted the dame who entered now.

'Twas RAYMOND's love: her braided hair
Was bright, for gems and gold were there.
CHRISTINE had sometimes feared to guess
Her rival's wealth of loveliness.
But now—oh, thus had RAYMOND sold
His heart, his once fond heart, for gold!
Oh! all but this she could have borne—
But not to feel for RAYMOND scorn.
She left the gallery; next day
A pilgrim at an altar lay.—
The chapel hung with silk and flower,
Meet for LORD RAYMOND's bridal hour.—
A boy so wan, so delicate,
No marvel at his early fate!
A chain of gold lay on the shrine,
And underneath a faltering line:
“An offering for the happiness
Of him whom my love could not bless.”
All felt it was a woman's prayer—
It was CHRISTINE had perished there!

L. E. L.

THE CRIMINAL.

His hand is red with blood, and life, aye, life
Must pay the forfeiture of his dark sin.

Ah ! woman's love is a night-scented flower,
Which yieldeth its most precious perfume forth
'Mid darkness and 'mid tears.

'Tis silence in that cell, and dim the light
Gleaming from the sunk lamp ; there is one stands
Fettered and motionless—so very pale,
That were he laid within his winding-sheet
And death were on him, yet his cheek could not
Wear ghastlier hues ; cold damps are on his brow ;
With intense passion the red veins are swelled ;
The white lip quivers with suppressed sobs,
And his dark eye is glazed with tears which still
He is too stern to shed. His countenance
Bears wild and fearful traces of the years
Which have passed on in guilt ; pride, headstrong ire
Have left their marks behind ; yet, mid this war
Of evil elements, some glimpses shine
Of better feelings, which, like clouded stars,
Soon set in night,—A sullen sound awakes

The silence of the cell. And up he starts,
Roused from his dizzy trance of wretchedness,
And gasps for breath, as that deep solemn toll
Sinks on his spirit, like a warning voice
Sent from eternity ; again it rolls—
Thy awful bell, St. Sepulchre, which tells
The criminal of death ;—his life-pulse stops,
As if in awe, and then beats rapidly :
Flushes a sudden crimson on his face,
Passes, and leaves it deadlier than before.
He is alone no longer ; one is there
Whose only language is her tears, and one
Whose words of anger on the sinful child,
His shame and sorrow, find no utterance now.

At first the look the murderer wore was stern,
And cold, and ghastly, for his pride had nerved
His spirit to its agony ; but when
He felt that pale girl's tears upon his hand,
And heard his father's words of penitence,
Of tenderness and pardon, then relaxed
His marble brow, and wild warm drops came down
He strove no more to quell. And there she lay,
His wretched Ellen, pillowed on a breast
Whose lightest beat to her was more than life,
All guilty as it was ;—her fair blue eyes
(How softly beautiful !) were filled with drops
They had no power to shed, but heavily

They hung upon the eyelash, which drooped o'er
A cheek whose summer colour had departed
With the sweet hopes that nourished its bloom.
His love had been destruction ; he had thrown
Shame and dishonour on the innocent one,
Whose fate was linked with his, who loved him yet
Most truly and most fondly. From the hour
When, a young bride, she dreamt of happiness,
She never had forsaken him, but still
Had been his better angel ;—his mad life
Had passed 'mid fearful passions, evil deeds,
And she had often wept in solitude :
Yet sometimes (for he loved her) he returned ;
Her patient smile then lighted up his home,
And never did that soft lip breathe reproach ;
Only her health-forsaken cheek, her brow
So wan, told of her wrongs, and she would sob
At times upon his bosom, till he swore
To leave his evil wanderings. At last
The thunderbolt came down, and crushed her heart—
He was a murderer. - - -
Still she forsook him not, and his lone cell
Was brightened by her presence—her soft voice
Breathed consolation in its gentle tones ;
She wept, she watched, she prayed with him ;—how
 deep
Is woman's memory of her first love-dream,
Though truth has chilled its sweet illusiveness !

Yet like the Indian, though severer light
Hath broken in upon his radiant faith
And shown its falsehood, still his spirit clings
With lingering homage to his early worship.
So Ellen's breast yearned to the guilty one,
'Mid crimes, 'mid darkness ; she could not forget
He was the chosen of her youth, that he
Had been her first, her only love. - - -

The morn had broken, and a dull red light
Streamed through the iron grating heavily :
The bell had ceased its summoning,—they leaned
In desperate hope to catch another toll
In vain—and loud and hurrying steps were heard—
The door was opened, and the chains were struck
From off his shackled hands. They led him forth.
He clasped his Ellen, and pressed one cold kiss
On lips as cold, and placed her as a child
Upon his father's bosom, and departed.
A shriek rang after him, and many there
To their last hour shall not forget that cry.
They led him on ; his step was firm, although
His face was very pale ; and when he reached
The scaffold, he knelt meekly down and prayed.
Silence was all around : his eyes were clothed :
This world one gasp concluded, and to him
Opened eternity.

L. E. L.

From autographs of the the living Poets of England

L. E. Landon
