

AMERICAN WOMEN POETS

of the Nineteenth Century



An Anthology

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Lucy Larcom

A sudden gush of light and odors bland,
And, lo,—the Rose! the Rose!

The birds break into canticles around;
The winds lift Jubilate to the skies;
For, twin-born with the rose on Eden-ground,
Love blooms in human eyes.

Life's marvelous queen-flower blossoms only so,
In dust of low ideals rooted fast:
Ever the Beautiful is moulded slow
From truth in errors past.

What fiery fields of Chaos must be won,
What battling Titans rear themselves a tomb,
What births and resurrections greet the sun
Before the Rose can bloom!

And of some wonder-blossom yet we dream
Whereof the time that is enfolds the seed;
Some flower of light, to which the Rose shall seem
A fair and fragile weed.

A LOYAL WOMAN'S NO

No! is my answer from this cold, bleak ridge,
Down to your valley: you may rest you there:
The gulf is wide, and none can build a bridge
That your gross weight would safely hither bear.

Pity me, if you will. I look at you
 With something that is kinder far than scorn,
 And think, "Ah, well! I might have grovelled, too;
 I might have walked there, fettered and forsworn."

I am of nature weak as others are;
 I might have chosen comfortable ways;
 Once from these heights I shrank, beheld afar,
 In the soft lap of quiet, easy days.

I might,—I will not hide it,—once I might
 Have lost, in the warm whirlpools of your voice,
 The sense of Evil, the stern cry of Right;
 But Truth has steered me free, and I rejoice.

Not with the triumph that looks back to jeer
 At the poor herd that call their misery bliss;
 But as a mortal speaks when God is near,
 I drop you down my answer: it is this:

I am not yours, because you prize in me
 What is the lowest in my own esteem:
 Only my flowery levels can you see,
 Nor of my heaven-smit summits do you dream.

I am not yours, because you love yourself:
 Your heart has scarcely room for me beside.
 I will not be shut in with name and pelf;
 I spurn the shelter of your narrow pride!

Not yours,—because you are not man enough
 To grasp your country's measure of a man.
 If such as you, when Freedom's ways are rough,
 Cannot walk in them, learn that women can!

Not yours,—because, in this the nation's need,¹
 You stoop to bend her losses to your gain,
 And do not feel the meanness of your deed:
 I touch no palm defiled with such a stain!

Whether man's thought can find too lofty steeps
 For woman's scaling, care not I to know;
 But when he falters by her side, or creeps,
 She must not clog her soul with him to go.

Who weds me, must at least with equal pace
 Sometimes move with me at my being's height:
 To follow him to his superior place,
 His rarer atmosphere, were keen delight.

You lure me to the valley: men should call
 Up to the mountains, where the air is clear.
 Win me and help me climbing, if at all!
 Beyond these peaks great harmonies I hear:—

The morning chant of Liberty and Law!
 The dawn pours in, to wash out Slavery's blot;
 Fairer than aught the bright sun ever saw,
 Rises a Nation without stain or spot!

The men and women mated for that time
 Tread not the soothing mosses of the plain;
 Their hands are joined in sacrifice sublime;
 Their feet firm set in upward paths of pain.

Sleep your thick sleep, and go your drowsy way!
 You cannot hear the voices in the air!

1. The "nation's need" refers to the Civil War.

Lucy Larcom

Ignoble souls will shrivel in that day;
The brightness of its coming can you bear?

For me, I do not walk these hills alone:
Heroes who poured their blood out for the truth,
Women whose hearts bled, martyrs all unknown,
Here catch the sunrise of immortal youth

On their pale cheeks and consecrated brows:—
It charms me not, your call to rest below.
I press their hands, my lips pronounce their vows:
Take my life's silence for your answer: No!

WEAVING

All day she stands before her loom;
The flying shuttles come and go;
By grassy fields, and trees in bloom,
She sees the winding river flow:
And fancy's shuttle flieth wide,
And faster than the waters glide.

Is she entangled in her dreams.
Like that fair weaver of Shalott.¹
Who left her mystic mirror's gleams,
To gaze on light Sir Lancelot?
Her heart, a mirror sadly true,
Brings gloomier visions into view.

1. The fair weaver of Shalott is Elaine, the maid of Shalott, and subject of a long poem by Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott."