



***CHARLOTTE  
BRONTË, ANNE  
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BRONTË***

***POEMS  
BY CURRER,  
ELLIS,  
AND ACTON  
BELL***

**Charlotte Brontë, Anne Brontë, Emily Brontë**

# **Poems by Curren, Ellis, and Acton Bell**

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# **POEMS BY CURRER BELL**

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# **PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM.**

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I've quench'd my lamp, I struck it in that start  
Which every limb convulsed, I heard it fall—  
The crash blent with my sleep, I saw depart  
Its light, even as I woke, on yonder wall;  
Over against my bed, there shone a gleam  
Strange, faint, and mingling also with my dream.

It sank, and I am wrapt in utter gloom;  
How far is night advanced, and when will day  
Retinge the dusk and livid air with bloom,  
And fill this void with warm, creative ray?  
Would I could sleep again till, clear and red,  
Morning shall on the mountain-tops be spread!

I'd call my women, but to break their sleep,  
Because my own is broken, were unjust;  
They've wrought all day, and well-earn'd slumbers steep  
Their labours in forgetfulness, I trust;  
Let me my feverish watch with patience bear,  
Thankful that none with me its sufferings share.

Yet, oh, for light! one ray would tranquillize  
My nerves, my pulses, more than effort can;  
I'll draw my curtain and consult the skies:  
These trembling stars at dead of night look wan,  
Wild, restless, strange, yet cannot be more drear  
Than this my couch, shared by a nameless fear.

All black—one great cloud, drawn from east to west,  
Conceals the heavens, but there are lights below;  
Torches burn in Jerusalem, and cast  
On yonder stony mount a lurid glow.  
I see men station'd there, and gleaming spears;  
A sound, too, from afar, invades my ears.

Dull, measured strokes of axe and hammer ring  
From street to street, not loud, but through the night  
Distinctly heard—and some strange spectral thing  
Is now uprear'd—and, fix'd against the light  
Of the pale lamps, defined upon that sky,  
It stands up like a column, straight and high.

I see it all—I know the dusky sign—  
A cross on Calvary, which Jews uprear  
While Romans watch; and when the dawn shall shine  
Pilate, to judge the victim, will appear—  
Pass sentence—yield Him up to crucify;  
And on that cross the spotless Christ must die.

Dreams, then, are true—for thus my vision ran;  
Surely some oracle has been with me,  
The gods have chosen me to reveal their plan,  
To warn an unjust judge of destiny:  
I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,  
Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.

I do not weep for Pilate—who could prove  
Regret for him whose cold and crushing sway  
No prayer can soften, no appeal can move:  
Who tramples hearts as others trample clay,  
Yet with a faltering, an uncertain tread,  
That might stir up reprisal in the dead.

Forced to sit by his side and see his deeds;  
Forced to behold that visage, hour by hour,  
In whose gaunt lines the abhorrent gazer reads  
A triple lust of gold, and blood, and power;  
A soul whom motives fierce, yet abject, urge—  
Rome's servile slave, and Judah's tyrant scourge.

How can I love, or mourn, or pity him?  
I, who so long my fetter'd hands have wrung;  
I, who for grief have wept my eyesight dim;  
Because, while life for me was bright and young,  
He robb'd my youth—he quench'd my life's fair ray—  
He crush'd my mind, and did my freedom slay.

And at this hour-although I be his wife—  
He has no more of tenderness from me  
Than any other wretch of guilty life;  
Less, for I know his household privacy—  
I see him as he is—without a screen;  
And, by the gods, my soul abhors his mien!

Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood—  
Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly?  
And have I not his red salute withstood?  
Ay, when, as erst, he plunged all Galilee  
In dark bereavement—in affliction sore,  
Mingling their very offerings with their gore.

Then came he—in his eyes a serpent-smile,  
Upon his lips some false, endearing word,  
And through the streets of Salem clang'd the while  
His slaughtering, hacking, sacrilegious sword—  
And I, to see a man cause men such woe,  
Trembled with ire—I did not fear to show.

And now, the envious Jewish priests have brought

Jesus—whom they in mock'ry call their king—  
To have, by this grim power, their vengeance wrought;  
By this mean reptile, innocence to sting.  
Oh! could I but the purposed doom avert,  
And shield the blameless head from cruel hurt!

Accessible is Pilate's heart to fear,  
Omens will shake his soul, like autumn leaf;  
Could he this night's appalling vision hear,  
This just man's bonds were loosed, his life were safe,  
Unless that bitter priesthood should prevail,  
And make even terror to their malice quail.

Yet if I tell the dream—but let me pause.  
What dream? Erewhile the characters were clear,  
Graved on my brain—at once some unknown cause  
Has dimm'd and razed the thoughts, which now appear,  
Like a vague remnant of some by-past scene;—  
Not what will be, but what, long since, has been.

I suffer'd many things—I heard foretold  
A dreadful doom for Pilate,—lingering woes,  
In far, barbarian climes, where mountains cold  
Built up a solitude of trackless snows,  
There he and grisly wolves prowl'd side by side,  
There he lived famish'd—there, methought, he died;

But not of hunger, nor by malady;  
I saw the snow around him, stain'd with gore;  
I said I had no tears for such as he,  
And, lo! my cheek is wet—mine eyes run o'er;  
I weep for mortal suffering, mortal guilt,  
I weep the impious deed, the blood self-spilt.

More I recall not, yet the vision spread  
Into a world remote, an age to come—

And still the illumined name of Jesus shed  
A light, a clearness, through the unfolding gloom—  
And still I saw that sign, which now I see,  
That cross on yonder brow of Calvary.

What is this Hebrew Christ?-to me unknown  
His lineage—doctrine—mission; yet how clear  
Is God-like goodness in his actions shown,  
How straight and stainless is his life's career!  
The ray of Deity that rests on him,  
In my eyes makes Olympian glory dim.

The world advances; Greek or Roman rite  
Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;  
The searching soul demands a purer light  
To guide it on its upward, onward way;  
Ashamed of sculptured gods, Religion turns  
To where the unseen Jehovah's altar burns.

Our faith is rotten, all our rites defiled,  
Our temples sullied, and, methinks, this man,  
With his new ordinance, so wise and mild,  
Is come, even as He says, the chaff to fan  
And sever from the wheat; but will his faith  
Survive the terrors of to-morrow's death?

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I feel a firmer trust—a higher hope  
Rise in my soul—it dawns with dawning day;  
Lo! on the Temple's roof—on Moriah's slope  
Appears at length that clear and crimson ray  
Which I so wished for when shut in by night;  
Oh, opening skies, I hail, I bless pour light!

Part, clouds and shadows! Glorious Sun appear!

Part, mental gloom! Come insight from on high!  
Dusk dawn in heaven still strives with daylight clear  
The longing soul doth still uncertain sigh.  
Oh! to behold the truth—that sun divine,  
How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine!

This day, Time travails with a mighty birth;  
This day, Truth stoops from heaven and visits earth;  
Ere night descends I shall more surely know  
What guide to follow, in what path to go;  
I wait in hope—I wait in solemn fear,  
The oracle of God—the sole—true God—to hear.

## **MEMENTOS.**

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Arranging long-locked drawers and shelves  
Of cabinets, shut up for years,  
What a strange task we've set ourselves!  
How still the lonely room appears!  
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,  
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;  
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,  
With print all faded, gilding gone;

These fans of leaves from Indian trees—  
These crimson shells, from Indian seas—  
These tiny portraits, set in rings—  
Once, doubtless, deemed such precious things;  
Keepsakes bestowed by Love on Faith,  
And worn till the receiver's death,

Now stored with cameos, china, shells,  
In this old closet's dusty cells.

I scarcely think, for ten long years,  
A hand has touched these relics old;  
And, coating each, slow-formed, appears  
The growth of green and antique mould.

All in this house is mossaing over;  
All is unused, and dim, and damp;  
Nor light, nor warmth, the rooms discover—  
Bereft for years of fire and lamp.

The sun, sometimes in summer, enters  
The casements, with reviving ray;  
But the long rains of many winters  
Moulder the very walls away.

And outside all is ivy, clinging  
To chimney, lattice, gable grey;  
Scarcely one little red rose springing  
Through the green moss can force its way.

Unscared, the daw and starling nestle,  
Where the tall turret rises high,  
And winds alone come near to rustle  
The thick leaves where their cradles lie,

I sometimes think, when late at even  
I climb the stair reluctantly,  
Some shape that should be well in heaven,  
Or ill elsewhere, will pass by me.

I fear to see the very faces,  
Familiar thirty years ago,  
Even in the old accustomed places



Which look so cold and gloomy now,

I've come, to close the window, hither,  
At twilight, when the sun was down,  
And Fear my very soul would wither,  
Lest something should be dimly shown,

Too much the buried form resembling,  
Of her who once was mistress here;  
Lest doubtful shade, or moonbeam trembling,  
Might take her aspect, once so dear.

Hers was this chamber; in her time  
It seemed to me a pleasant room,  
For then no cloud of grief or crime  
Had cursed it with a settled gloom;

I had not seen death's image laid  
In shroud and sheet, on yonder bed.  
Before she married, she was blest—  
Blest in her youth, blest in her worth;  
Her mind was calm, its sunny rest  
Shone in her eyes more clear than mirth.

And when attired in rich array,  
Light, lustrous hair about her brow,  
She yonder sat, a kind of day  
Lit up what seems so gloomy now.  
These grim oak walls even then were grim;  
That old carved chair was then antique;  
But what around looked dusk and dim  
Served as a foil to her fresh cheek;  
Her neck and arms, of hue so fair,  
Eyes of unclouded, smiling light;  
Her soft, and curled, and floating hair,  
Gems and attire, as rainbow bright.

Reclined in yonder deep recess,  
Ofttimes she would, at evening, lie  
Watching the sun; she seemed to bless  
With happy glance the glorious sky.  
She loved such scenes, and as she gazed,  
Her face evinced her spirit's mood;  
Beauty or grandeur ever raised  
In her, a deep-felt gratitude.  
But of all lovely things, she loved  
A cloudless moon, on summer night,  
Full oft have I impatience proved  
To see how long her still delight  
Would find a theme in reverie,  
Out on the lawn, or where the trees  
Let in the lustre fitfully,  
As their boughs parted momentarily,  
To the soft, languid, summer breeze.  
Alas! that she should e'er have flung  
Those pure, though lonely joys away—  
Deceived by false and guileful tongue,  
She gave her hand, then suffered wrong;  
Oppressed, ill-used, she faded young,  
And died of grief by slow decay.

Open that casket—look how bright  
Those jewels flash upon the sight;  
The brilliants have not lost a ray  
Of lustre, since her wedding day.  
But see—upon that pearly chain—  
How dim lies Time's discolouring stain!  
I've seen that by her daughter worn:  
For, ere she died, a child was born;—  
A child that ne'er its mother knew,  
That lone, and almost friendless grew;  
For, ever, when its step drew nigh,

Averted was the father's eye;  
And then, a life impure and wild  
Made him a stranger to his child:  
Absorbed in vice, he little cared  
On what she did, or how she fared.  
The love withheld she never sought,  
She grew uncherished—learnt untaught;  
To her the inward life of thought  
Full soon was open laid.  
I know not if her friendlessness  
Did sometimes on her spirit press,  
But plaint she never made.  
The book-shelves were her darling treasure,  
She rarely seemed the time to measure  
While she could read alone.  
And she too loved the twilight wood  
And often, in her mother's mood,  
Away to yonder hill would hie,  
Like her, to watch the setting sun,  
Or see the stars born, one by one,  
Out of the darkening sky.  
Nor would she leave that hill till night  
Trembled from pole to pole with light;  
Even then, upon her homeward way,  
Long—long her wandering steps delayed  
To quit the sombre forest shade,  
Through which her eerie pathway lay.  
You ask if she had beauty's grace?  
I know not—but a nobler face  
My eyes have seldom seen;  
A keen and fine intelligence,  
And, better still, the truest sense  
Were in her speaking mien.  
But bloom or lustre was there none,  
Only at moments, fitful shone  
An ardour in her eye,