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Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
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Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
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**Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton
Bell**

Anne Brontë

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Anne Brontë

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-4503-1

www.tredition.com

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POEMS

by Currer, Ellis, And Acton Bell

(Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte)

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POEMS BY CURRER BELL

PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM.

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-yeild 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 hun-
 ger, 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 re-
 call 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 Olym-
 pian 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? * * * * * 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 de-
scends 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.

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 an-
cient treasures, Mementos of past pains and pleasures; These
volumes, clasped with costly stone, With print all faded, gild-
ing 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; Keep-
sakes 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 mousing 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 un-
clouded, 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 rever-
erie, Out on the lawn, or where the trees Let in the lustre fit-
fully, 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 guile-
ful tongue, She gave her hand, then suffered wrong; Op-
pressed, 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, That kindled on her cheek a flush, Warm as a red sky's passing blush And quick with energy. Her speech, too, was not common speech, No wish to shine, or aim to teach, Was in her words displayed: She still began with quiet sense, But oft the force of eloquence Came to her lips in aid; Language and voice unconscious changed, And thoughts, in other words arranged, Her fervid soul transfused Into the hearts of those who heard, And transient strength and ardour stirred, In minds to strength unused, Yet in gay crowd or festal glare, Grave and retiring was her air; 'Twas seldom, save with me alone, That fire of feeling freely shone; She loved not awe's nor wonder's gaze, Nor even exaggerated praise, Nor even notice, if too keen The curious gazer searched her mien. Nature's own green expanse revealed The world, the pleasures, she could prize; On free hill-side, in sunny field, In quiet spots by woods concealed, Grew wild and fresh her chosen

joys, Yet Nature's feelings deeply lay In that endowed and youthful frame; Shrined in her heart and hid from day, They burned unseen with silent flame. In youth's first search for mental light, She lived but to reflect and learn, But soon her mind's maturer might For stronger task did pant and yearn; And stronger task did fate assign, Task that a giant's strength might strain; To suffer long and ne'er repine, Be calm in frenzy, smile at pain. Pale with the secret war of feeling, Sustained with courage, mute, yet high; The wounds at which she bled, revealing Only by altered cheek and eye; She bore in silence – but when passion Surged in her soul with ceaseless foam, The storm at last brought desolation, And drove her exiled from her home. And silent still, she straight assembled The wrecks of strength her soul retained; For though the wasted body trembled, The unconquered mind, to quail, disdained. She crossed the sea – now lone she wanders By Seine's, or Rhine's, or Arno's flow; Fain would I know if distance renders Relief or comfort to her woe. Fain would I know if, henceforth, ever, These eyes shall read in hers again, That light of love which faded never, Though dimmed so long with secret pain. She will return, but cold and altered, Like all whose hopes too soon depart; Like all on whom have beat, unsheltered, The bitter blasts that blight the heart. No more shall I behold her lying Calm on a pillow, smoothed by me; No more that spirit, worn with sighing, Will know the rest of infancy. If still the paths of lore she follow, 'Twill be with tired and goaded will; She'll only toil, the aching hollow, The joyless blank of life to fill. And oh! full oft, quite spent and weary, Her hand will pause, her head decline; That labour seems so hard and dreary, On which no ray of hope may shine. Thus the pale blight of time and sorrow Will shade with grey her soft, dark hair; Then comes the day that knows no morrow, And death succeeds to long despair. So speaks experience, sage and hoary; I see it plainly, know it well, Like one who, having read a story, Each incident therein can tell. Touch not that ring; 'twas his, the sire Of that forsaken child; And nought his relics can inspire Save memories, sin-defiled. I, who sat by his wife's death-bed, I, who his daughter loved, Could almost curse the guilty dead, For

woes the guiltless proved. And heaven did curse — they found him laid, When crime for wrath was rife, Cold — with the suicidal blade Clutched in his desperate gripe. 'Twas near that long deserted hut, Which in the wood decays, Death's axe, self-wielded, struck his root, And lopped his desperate days. You know the spot, where three black trees, Lift up their branches fell, And moaning, ceaseless as the seas, Still seem, in every passing breeze, The deed of blood to tell. They named him mad, and laid his bones Where holier ashes lie; Yet doubt not that his spirit groans In hell's eternity. But, lo! night, closing o'er the earth, Infects our thoughts with gloom; Come, let us strive to rally mirth Where glows a clear and tranquil hearth In some more cheerful room.

THE WIFE'S WILL.

Sit still — a word — a breath may break (As light airs stir a sleeping lake) The glassy calm that soothes my woes — The sweet, the deep, the full repose. O leave me not! for ever be Thus, more than life itself to me! Yes, close beside thee let me kneel — Give me thy hand, that I may feel The friend so true — so tried — so dear, My heart's own chosen — indeed is near; And check me not — this hour divine Belongs to me — is fully mine. 'Tis thy own hearth thou sitt'st beside, After long absence — wandering wide; 'Tis thy own wife reads in thine eyes A promise clear of stormless skies; For faith and true love light the rays Which shine responsive to her gaze. Ay, — well that single tear may fall; Ten thousand might mine eyes recall, Which from their lids ran blinding fast, In hours of grief, yet scarcely past; Well mayst thou speak of love to me, For, oh! most truly — I love thee! Yet smile — for we are happy now. Whence, then, that sadness on thy brow? What sayst thou?" We muse once again, Ere long, be severed by the main!" I knew not this — I deemed no more Thy step would err from Britain's shore. "Duty commands!" 'Tis true — 'tis

just; Thy slightest word I wholly trust, Nor by request, nor faintest sigh, Would I to turn thy purpose try; But, William, hear my solemn vow — Hear and confirm! — with thee I go. "Distance and suffering," didst thou say? "Danger by night, and toil by day?" Oh, idle words and vain are these; Hear me! I cross with thee the seas. Such risk as thou must meet and dare, I — thy true wife — will duly share. Passive, at home, I will not pine; Thy toils, thy perils shall be mine; Grant this — and be hereafter paid By a warm heart's devoted aid: 'Tis granted — with that yielding kiss, Entered my soul unmingled bliss. Thanks, William, thanks! thy love has joy, Pure, undefiled with base alloy; 'Tis not a passion, false and blind, Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind; Worthy, I feel, art thou to be Loved with my perfect energy. This evening now shall sweetly flow, Lit by our clear fire's happy glow; And parting's peace-embittering fear, Is warned our hearts to come not near; For fate admits my soul's decree, In bliss or bale — to go with thee!

THE WOOD. But two miles more, and then we rest! Well, there is still an hour of day, And long the brightness of the West Will light us on our devious way; Sit then, awhile, here in this wood — So total is the solitude, We safely may delay. These massive roots afford a seat, Which seems for weary travellers made. There rest. The air is soft and sweet In this sequestered forest glade, And there are scents of flowers around, The evening dew draws from the ground; How soothingly they spread! Yes; I was tired, but not at heart; No — that beats full of sweet content, For now I have my natural part Of action with adventure blent; Cast forth on the wide world with thee, And all my once waste energy To weighty purpose bent. Yet — sayst thou, spies around us roam, Our aims are termed conspiracy? Haply, no more our English home An anchorage for us may be? That there is risk our mutual blood May redden in some lonely wood The knife of treachery? Sayst thou, that where we lodge each night, In each lone farm, or lonelier hall Of Norman Peer — ere morning light Suspicion must as duly fall, As day returns — such vigilance Presides and watches over France,

Such rigour governs all? I fear not, William; dost thou fear?
So that the knife does not divide, It may be ever hovering
near: I could not tremble at thy side, And strenuous love—
like mine for thee— Is buckler strong 'gainst treachery, And
turns its stab aside. I am resolved that thou shalt learn
To trust my strength as I trust thine; I am resolved our souls
shall burn With equal, steady, mingling shine; Part of the
field is conquered now, Our lives in the same channel flow,
Along the self-same line; And while no groaning storm is
heard, Thou seem'st content it should be so, But soon as
comes a warning word Of danger—straight thine anxious
brow Bends over me a mournful shade, As doubting if my
powers are made To ford the floods of woe. Know, then it is
my spirit swells, And drinks, with eager joy, the air Of free-
dom—where at last it dwells, Chartered, a common task to
share With thee, and then it stirs alert, And pants to learn
what menaced hurt Demands for thee its care. Remember, I
have crossed the deep, And stood with thee on deck, to gaze
On waves that rose in threatening heap, While stagnant lay a
heavy haze, Dimly confusing sea with sky, And baffling,
even, the pilot's eye, Intent to thread the maze— Of rocks, on
Bretagne's dangerous coast, And find a way to steer our band
To the one point obscure, which lost, Flung us, as victims, on
the strand;— All, elsewhere, gleamed the Gallic sword, And
not a wherry could be moored Along the guarded land. I
feared not then—I fear not now; The interest of each stirring
scene Wakes a new sense, a welcome glow, In every nerve
and bounding vein; Alike on turbid Channel sea, Or in still
wood of Normandy, I feel as born again. The rain descended
that wild morn When, anchoring in the cove at last, Our
band, all weary and forlorn Ashore, like wave-worn sailors,
cast— Sought for a sheltering roof in vain, And scarce could
scanty food obtain To break their morning fast. Thou didst
thy crust with me divide, Thou didst thy cloak around me
fold; And, sitting silent by thy side, I ate the bread in peace
untold: Given kindly from thy hand, 'twas sweet As costly
fare or princely treat On royal plate of gold. Sharp blew the
sleet upon my face, And, rising wild, the gusty wind Drove
on those thundering waves apace, Our crew so late had left