

Pearl

translated by

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In parentheses Publications
Middle English Series
Cambridge, Ontario 1999

- I 1 PEARL, full pleasant for prince's pay
To cleanly set in gold so clear,
From Orient lands, I dare to say,
Found I never its precious peer.
So round, so choice, the pearl alway,
So small, so smooth, a shining sphere,
Wherever I judged of jewels gay
I set it singly, without compeer.
 Alas! I lost my pearl in a bower,
 From grass to ground I let it slide,
 And I pine, sore wounded by Love's fierce power,
 For that spotless pearl that was once my pride!
- 2 Since then in that spot have I lingered long
Where it fell from my hand, and with many a sigh,
Have I mourned the joy that had cured my wrong
And lifted my hope and my bliss on high.
Yet the dart of sorrow is over strong;
My heart for sadness is parched and dry,
Yet heard I never so sweet a song
As woke that still hour with its melody.
 Forsooth, I have thought full many a thought
 Of how its fairness the clay doth hide;
 Earth, on a gem hast thou ruin wrought,
 O, spotless pearl that was once my pride!
- 3 Forth from that spot shall spices flow
Where such a treasure to ruin hath run,
White, blue, and red, shall the blossoms blow
Their hues shine fairly beneath the sun.
The earth where my pearl now lieth low
Nor flower nor fruit shall for ever shun,
He who wisheth grass must the dead seed sow
Else never the wheat to the ear were won.
 Good seed I ween, shall bear good fruit,
 Nor seed so seemly in vain hath died,
 But spices fragrant shall find their root
 In that spotless pearl that was once my pride!

4 It chanced that I came to that spot one day
Whereof I tell, to that bower so green,
'T was August, the year's high holiday
When the corn it falleth 'neath sickle keen.
Where erstwhile my pearl from my hold did stray
The flowerets flourished so bright and sheen,
Gilly-flower, ginger, gromwell grey,
With peonies blushing in between.
 Fair was that bower in summer glow
 Yet a fairer fragrance was wafted wide
 From that place where she dwells, as well I know,
 That spotless pearl, that was once my pride!

5 I clasped my hands then for sorrow cold,
On that spot I found me in fetters caught,
A doleful dirge in my heart it tolled
Though Reason peace to my soul had taught.
I mourned my pearl that was there in hold,
Within me doubt with doubt fast fought,
Through comfort of Christ had I fain been bold,
Yet my will was to sorrow in bondage brought.
 Prostrate I fell on that flowery mead,
 Fragrance o'ercame me at that tide,
 And slumber still'd me to better rede
 Of that spotless pearl, that was once my pride!

II 6 From that spot my spirit sprang forth in space,
My body enwrapped in dream did lie,
My soul it had fared, by God's good grace,
To behold adventures and marvels high.
I wist not whither my way to trace
But cloven cliffs rose before mine eye,
Towards a forest I set my face,
Radiant the rocks I might there descry!
 No heart of man can conceive the light,
 The gleaming glory, that glittered there,
 No web e'er woven by dexterous wight
 In fashion, I ween, was half so fair!

- 7 Girdled about was all the down
 With crystal cliffs, so clear of hue,
 Bright woods and holts the hill did crown
 Their boles as azure as Indian blue.
 As burnished silver they floated down,
 The leaves, that a quivering shadow threw,
 When the gleam of the glades was against them thrown
 With shimmering sheen they shone anew.
 And the gravel all that the ground o'er-lay
 Was of Orient pearl, beyond compare,
 The sun's own beams waxed pale away
 Beholding that fashion, so wondrous fair!
- 8 The fashioning of those downs so bright
 They bade my spirit all grief forswear,
 Food to refresh me I found aright
 So sweet a savour of fruits was there.
 In peace the birdlings took their flight,
 Of flaming hues, great and small they were,
 Nor citole, nor viol, though touched aright
 With their mirthful music might aye compare!
 For when they sang in such sweet accord
 And softly beat with their wings the air
 Naught might such rapture to heart afford
 As hearkening their fashion, so wondrous fair!
- 9 In sooth 't was fashioned in fairest wise
 That forest, where fate led my feet that day,
 Its glory I know not to devise
 Nor tongue of man may its praise essay.
 But ever I walked in gladsome wise,
 No hill so steep that my steps might stay,
 The further I journeyed, in fairer guise
 Bloomed flowers, and foliage, and fruit alway.
 Hedgerows, and border, and rivers' sheen
 As threads of fine gold that hillside bare,
 I won to a water those shores between,
 Christ, but the fashion thereof was fair!

10 Oh, the fashioning of that goodly stream!
The banks were fair with beryl bright
Swooning sweet was the water's theme,
A murmuring music that rang aright.
Down in the deep as gems they gleam
The stones, that glow as thro' glass the light.
Or e'en as the stars, while the weary dream,
Shine in the welkin in winter's night.

For every pebble within that pool
Was emerald, sapphire, or gem so rare,
And all alight was that water cool,
Ah, never was fashion half so fair!

III 11 The fashioning of the down and dale,
Of wood and water, and field so fair,
It bred in me bliss, and it banished bale,
Freed from distress, and destroyed my care.
Down on a sluggard streamlet's trail
Wandering in bliss did I thoughtful fare,
The further I followed that watery vale
The greater the joy that constrained me there.

Fortune dealeth as Fortune still,
Sends she solace or sorrow sore;
The man on whom she doth work her will
Of either measure hath more and more.

12 More of bliss was there in that wise
Than I might tell, had I time always
Tongue of mortal might ne'er suffice
The tithe of that gladness glad to say.
For truly I deemed that Paradise
Were beyond the banks of the stream that day,
And I hoped that the water, by some devise,
Betwixt two joys, as a lakelet, lay.

Beyond the brook, or by glen or glade,
I hoped by the moat to get me o'er,
But the water was deep, I durst not wade,
And longing beset me more and more.

- 13 More and more, and yet ever more
The yearning to pass that brooklet's band,
For if it were fair on the nearer shore
Far lovelier was the distant land.
Mine eyes they hasted my feet before,
In search of a ford my way they scanned,
But the way had ever more woes in store
The further I wandered beside the strand.
 But for never a woe I thought to turn
 From a way that so fair a semblance wore.
 Then lo! a new note was it mine to learn
 That moved my spirit aye more and more.
- 14 More marvels arose my soul to daze;
I saw, beyond that streamlet fair,
A cliff of crystal, all ablaze,
A glory of royal light it bare.
A child sat beneath those gleaming rays,
A gracious maiden, full debonaire,
Glistening white was her robe always
I knew her well, I had seen her ere!
 As gleaming gold from the finer's fire
 So shone that light on the further shore,
 Mine eyes were fettered with fond desire,
 And gazing, I knew her more and more.
- 15 Yet more I longed to behold her face
When that gentle form I had found again,
Such glory glad did my soul embrace
As aforetime to sorrow it aye was fain.
Longing to speak with her waxed apace,
But for wonder from words must I needs refrain,
Beholding her in so strange a place
The marvel my spirit might well constrain!
 Then lifted she up her face so fair
 As ivory white, mine eyes before,
 My senses for gladness were scattered there
 I looked, and I wondered more and more!

- IV 16 Ah, then my joy was by fear surpassed!
I stood stock-still, I durst not call,
Mine eyes were open, my lips shut fast,
I stood as steady as hawk in hall!
In hope that that vision fair might last,
In dread that, by hap, it should so befall
That she I had chosen should 'scape my cast
Ere yet my speech might her flight forestall.
 That guileless maiden, of winsome grace,
 So fair, so small, so seemly slight,
 In royal array rose before my face,
 A precious jewel, with pearls bedight.
- 17 Pearls that a king had dearly bought
By grace were vouchsafed to my sight that day,
As down the bank her way she sought,
Fresh as a fleur-de-lys in May.
Her amise was glistening white, methought,
Slashed at the sides, and it bare alway
A broidery bright, with pearls inwrought,
Mine eyes ne'er beheld such fair array!
 Wide were her sleeves, I wot, and ween,
 With a two-fold row of pearls a-light,
 Her kirtle shone with the self-same sheen,
 With precious pearls was she all bedight!
- 18 With crown bedight was that gracious maid,
Of pearls and never another stone,
Pure white pearls on each point displayed
And floretted patterns wrought thereon.
No fillet else on her head was laid,
But her hair lay softly her neck upon,
Noble her bearing was, and staid,
Whiter her skin than walrus bone.
 As gold bright-burnished her shining hair,
 The waves round her shoulders lay loose and light,
 And the sheen thereof, it was e'en as fair
 As those precious pearls that her robe bedight.

19 Bedight, and broidered was every seam
Of the sleeves, of the sides of each aperture
With pearls, and no other gem, I ween,
All burnished white was that maid's vesture.
But a wondrous pearl, of spotless gleam,
At her midmost breast was set so sure
That the soul of man were set adream,
An he sought to appraise that pearl so pure.
 I trow that no tongue of man hath skill
 In wisdom's wise to declare aright
 How pure, how clear, and how spotless still
 Was the precious pearl, on her robe bedight.

20 A precious treasure, all pearl-bedight
Beyond the stream she stept down the strand.
From here to Greece was no heart so light
As mine, when that maid on the brink did stand.
Nor aunt, nor niece, were so glad a sight;
Closer betwixt us I trow, the band;
Speech did she proffer, that being bright,
With such gesture as courtesy doth command.
 Her precious crown she doffed that morn
 And bowed her low, as a maiden might,
 Ah, well is me that I e'er were born
 To speak with that sweet one, with pearls bedight!

V 21 "O, Pearl," I quoth, "with pearls bedight,
Art thou the pearl I must sore bemoan?
Lamenting oft, through the weary night
In secret sorrow I wept alone.
Since into the grass didst slip from sight,
Pensive, forlorn, am I moody grown,
But thou, thou dost live in love and light,
In Paradise' peace, where no strife is known!
 What fate hath hither my jewel borne
 And in dole and in danger hath set me e'er?
 For since that we twain were asunder torn
 I have been but a joyless jeweller!"

- 22 Lifted her face, with eyes of grey,
Set on her crown of pearly beam
And gravely thereafter she spake alway:
“Sir, ye have sure mistook your theme
An ye say that your pearl is gone astray,
’T is safely in coffer kept, I ween,
In this gracious garden that gleameth gay!
 Where one may linger for ever more
 Nor loss nor sorrow draw ever near,
 Methinks thou should’st hold it for treasure store
 An thou wert a gentle jeweller!
- 23 “But jeweller gentle, an thou shalt lose
Thy joy for a gem that hath seemed thee fair,
Methinks thou the worsen way doth choose
And doth weary o’er much for but little care.
That which thou lost, it was but a rose,
That blossomed and faded – so all flowers fare,
By grace of the casket that held it close
To a pearl of price hath it waxen there.
 And thou hast called thy fate a thief
 Altho’ of naught hath it robbed thee e’er,
 Thou blamest the cure of thy bitter grief,
 Thou art not a grateful jeweller!”
- 24 A jewel to me that rebuke so meet,
As pearls her gentle words that day,
“I wis,” quoth I, “my blissful Sweet
My sore distress thou dost charm away.
Forgiveness of thee I would fain entreat,
I deemed my pearl reft of life alway,
I will hold her fast since once more we meet
And dwell with her in those groves so gay,
 I will love my Lord, and His laws so good,
 Who hath brought me e’en to such bliss anear,
 Were I now with thee beyond this flood
 Then were I a joyful jeweller!”

25 "Jeweller," quoth that gem of sheen,
"Why jest ye men? So mad ye be.
Three words hast thou spoken here, I ween,
All unadvised, for sooth, the three.
Thou knowest naught of what one may mean,
Swifter than wit thy words they flee,
Since thou with thine eyes this form hath seen
My dwelling thou deemest this dale to be!
 Again, thou sayest, in this fair land
 Wilt abide henceforth, beside me here;
 The third, thou thinkest to pass this strand,
 That may no joyful jeweller!

VI 26 "I give that jeweller scanty praise
Who believeth that which he seeth with eye;
Discourteous, and meet for all blame his ways
Who deemeth Our Lord would speak a lie.
Leal promise He made your life to raise
Tho' Fortune doomed your flesh to die,
A-wrong do ye read His words always
Who only trust what ye may descry.
 In sooth, 't is a token true of pride
 Which a righteous man doth ill beseem,
 To believe no tale may be true and tried
 Save that which his reason may fitting deem."

27 "Now arraign thyself, hast thou spoken well
And words such as God would from man receive?
Thou sayest that thou in this burg wilt dwell –
Methinks it behoves thee to first ask leave!
It might chance that refusal thee befell –
Thou canst cross this stream, so dost thou believe,
Thou must seek other counsel, I rede thee well,
First shalt thou thy corse in the cold clay leave!
 Forfeit the ford at Paradise' tree,
 Our forefather guarded full ill the stream,
 Thro' dreary death man his weird must dree
 Ere Christ him meet for the crossing deem."

- 28 “Dost think to doom me,” quoth I, my Sweet,
 To mourn again as I mourned of yore?
 To keep what I find would I now entreat
 Must I needs forego it, ere speech be o’er?
 Why should I thus both miss and meet?
 My precious jewel dealeth sorrow sore—
 What availeth treasure but to gar man greet
 If he needs must lose it in grief once more?
 Now what care I if I droop and dwine,
 Or if banished afar I weave my theme?
 An I have no part in this pearl of mine
 A dole enduring, such grief I deem.”
- 29 “Thou deemest dole shall avail distress,”
 Thus spake the maiden, “why dost thou so?
 By loud lament over loss the less
 A greater good must man oft forego!
 Thou oughtest rather thy lot to bless,
 And praise thy God in weal and woe,
 Anger availeth not at this stress
 Wax not wroth, if thou grief must know.
 For tho’ thou dost chafe as any deer,
 With rush, and wrestle, and angry scream,
 Yet thou mayest not come to me anear,
 But must needs abide till He fitting deem!
- 30 “Leave God to judge, let Him aye decree,
 From His path He swerveth no foot aside,
 Thy moaning no whit shall profit thee
 Tho’ Sorrow as comrade with thee abide.
 Ask thou His blessing right speedily,
 Leaving thy strife, and cease to chide,
 His pity to prayer may the answer be,
 And Mercy her skill may make known this tide.
 Comfort He may to thy sorrow deal,
 And thus shall thy loss the lighter seem;
 For marred, or made, or for woe or weal,
 All lieth in Him, as He fitting deem!

- VII 31 Then answered I straight that demoiselle
“I pray that He be not wroth, my Lord,
If e’en as water springs forth from well
I pour forth, raving, a witless word!
My heart with sorrow doth in me swell,
I put me in His miséricorde,
Rebuke me not with words so fell
Tho’ I transgress, O thou child adored!
 But comfort me kindly, O, gentle maid!
 In piteous wise think thou aye on this,
 Sorrow and me hast thou comrades made
 Who erewhile wast the source of all my bliss!”
- 32 “Both hast thou been, my bliss, my bane,
Yet much the greater, I ween, my moan,
Since thou hast banished from field and fane
I wist not whither my pearl had gone.
Now that I see her, my grief doth wane,
But when we parted we were at one,
God forbid we should now be twain
Who meet so seldom by stock or stone!
 Tho’ thou canst rede me such courteous rede
 But mortal am I, and my joy I miss,
 Christ, Mary, and John, help me at my need,
 For they are the ground of all my bliss!”
- 33 “In bliss I see thee wrapt so fair,
And I a man who be Sorrow’s mate,
Methinks it doth cause thee little care
That oft I suffer both harm and hate.
But since in thy presence once more I fare
I here beseech thee, nor make debate,
That thou should’st tell me, nor longer spare,
The life thou dost early lead, and late.
 For I am well pleaséd that thine estate
 Be changed to worship and weal, I wis,
 Of my joy, ’t is henceforth the entrance gate,
 And steadfast groundwork of all my bliss!”

34 "Fair Sir, may bliss thee now betide,"
So spake that maiden of lovesome cheer,
"Thou art welcome here to walk and bide
For now thy speech is to me right dear.
A masterful mood, and o'erweening pride
I tell thee are heartily hated here,
My Lord hath no liking His folk to chide,
Meek be the dwellers His throne anear!
And when in His palace thou shalt appear
Worship Him well, in all humbleness,
For my Lord, the Lamb, loveth aye such cheer,
And He is the ground of all my bliss!"

35 "A blissful life, thou sayest, have I,
The manner thereof thou art fain to hear,—
When thy pearl was lost thus grievously
Short was the tale of my childhood's year.
But my Lord, the Lamb, thro' His Godhead high,
He drew me in marriage Himself anear,
In length of days that endureth aye
Hath He crowned me queen, in blissful cheer.
And each Belovéd doth hold in fee
All His heritage—I am wholly His,
His praise, His glory, His worth, they be
The root, and the groundwork of all my bliss!"

VIII 36 "Blest Maid," quoth I, "can this be true?
(Be not displeased if amiss I speak).
Art thou the queen of the Heavens blue
Whose honour the whole round world doth seek?
We believe in Mary, from whom Grace grew,
Who bare a Babe, while yet Maiden meek,
Who her coronal fair may aye undo
Save one who may higher honour seek?
Yet for her sweetness beyond compare
We call her the Phoenix of Araby;
That bird, so faultless of form, and fair,
Is like to the Queen of Courtesy!"

- 37 "O, Courteous Queen!" so that blest one said,
Kneeling adown, with hidden face,
"Matchless Mother, and blissful Maid,
Blessed Beginner of all our grace," —
Then she rose again, and stood alway,
And turned to me in that space;
"Here many seekers their search may stay,
There is never usurper in all this place!
That Empress she ruleth at her behest,
Heaven, Earth, and Hell, 'neath her sway they be,
And none her heritage will contest
For she is the Queen of Courtesy!
- 38 "The living God, in His kingdom fair
And royal court, hath this ordering,
All who within those courts repair
Of all the realm are they queen or king.
Yet one taketh not his brother's share,
Each is fain of the other's prospering,
And would wish their crown five times as fair
If so they might greater honour bring.
But the Mother of Jesus, our Lady sweet,
She holdeth o'er all of us empire high,
And all our host do but find it meet
Since she is the Queen of Courtesy!
- 39 "By courtesy, so Saint Paul hath said,
Of the Body of Christ are we members all,
As arms and leg, and trunk, and head,
All limbs of this body ye truly call.
So each Christian soul is numberéd
As a member of Him who is Lord of all, —
Now think, were ye not full sore bestead
Did envy betwixt thy limbs befall?
Tho' thou deck with rings thine arm and hand
Thy head it doth neither carp nor cry;
So fare we with joy, a loving band,
To our King, and our Queen, by courtesy!"

40 Then quoth I, "Courtesy, I believe
And Charity true, dwell your ranks among,
Yet, tho' I fear such words may grieve,
Methinks what thou sayest must now be wrong;
Too high thy rank, so I now conceive,
For Queen art thou surely over young,
What greater honour might they achieve
Who in this world's strife had battled long,
Or lived in penance their live-long days
Thro' bodily bale their bliss to buy,
What greater honour their meed always
Than thus to be crowned in Courtesy?"

IX 41 "Too lavish that courtesy is, indeed,
If that be truth thou but now didst say,
Two years didst thou wear this mortal weed,
God couldst thou neither please nor pray.
Thou knew'st Paternoster not, nor Creed,
Yet Queen wast thou crowned that self-same day!
I may not trow, so God me speed,
That He hath wrought in so strange a way.
As Countess, Maiden, it seemeth me
Thy name were fair upon Heaven's high roll,
Or e'en as a lady of less degree,
But a Queen, that is sure too high a goal!"

42 "Never a bound shall God's favour know,"
Thus spake to me that maiden bright,
"For all is Truth that He ruleth so,
And He doeth nothing but what is right.
In your missal Matthew doth clearly shew
In the Gospel true of God, His Might,
How the faring of man in the world below
May well be likened to Heaven's delight.
For the Kingdom of Heaven is like to one
Who was fain of his vineyard to take the toll,
For the grapes were e'en to the ripening won
And 't was time of his labour to reach the goal.

- 43 “The hirelings know well the vintage date,
The lord, he ariseth betimes that day,
He would labourers seek for his fair estate
And some he findeth with small delay.
For the price betwixt them they make debate,
At a penny a day they go their way;
They toil, and they travail, with labour great
They cut, and they carry, and bind away.
 At undern the lord to the market goes,
 Yet men stand idle about the place;
 ‘Why stand ye idle?’ He asketh those,
 ‘Know ye not of the day the goal and grace?’
- 44 “‘Ere dawn of day were we hither won,’
Thus all together they answer brought,
‘Here have we stood since rose the sun
Yet never a man hath our labour sought.’
‘Go ye to my vineyard every one,’
So spake the lord, in this wise he wrought,
‘The hire that be due when the day is run
That will I pay ye, and stint ye naught.’
 To the vineyard they gat them, and laboured there,
 And all day the lord did new men enroll
 And ever anew to the vines they fare
 Till well-nigh the day had passed its goal.
- 45 “At close of the day, at evensong,
It lacked but an hour to sunset tide,
Yet there idle men he saw, and strong,
With grave voice gentle he thus did chide;
‘Why stand ye idle the whole day long?’
They quoth, ‘Our hiring we still abide;’
‘Go ye to my vineyard, yeomen young,
And labour, and do what may best betide.’
 The sun was down, it had waxed full late,
 And shadows dim o’er the world did roll,
 He bade the labourers their hire await,
 For the day, it had fully passed its goal.

- X 46 “The hour of the day doth the master know,
And he calleth his steward, ‘The time is past,
Give each man the hire that to him I owe,—
And that no reproach upon me be cast,
Range one and all of them in a row,
And give each one as he bargained fast,
Beginning with him who standeth low,—
To each man a penny, the first as last.’
 But then the first, they did thus complain,
 Saying, ‘The heat of the day we bore,
 These have felt but one hour the stress and strain,
 It seemeth to us we should have the more.’
- 47 “‘More we deserve, it doth seem us so,
Who have borne the heat of the live-long day,
Than these, who have wrought of hours scarce two,
Yet thou makest them equal to us alway!’
The master to answer was not slow,
‘Friend, what wrong have I done thee, say?
Take what is thine of the steward, and go,
That which thou bargained for will I pay.
 Was not a penny a day thy hire?
 Why should’st thou threaten and chafe thus sore;
 More than his bargain may none desire,
 Why thinkest thou then to ask me more?’
- 48 “‘Is it not fairer, my gift so free,
When I deal with mine own as doth seem me due?
Doth thine eye to evil turn willingly
Because I was righteous, nor trickery knew?
And thus,’ quoth Christ, ‘shall it ever be,
The last shall be first, so I tell ye true,
And the first the last, so swift he be,
For the called be many, the chosen few!
 Thus the poor in the Kingdom have their share,
 Tho’ they came but late, and but little bore,
 Their labour availed them but little there
 But the mercy of God was so much the more.’

49 “More have I of joy and of bliss herein
Of worship high, and of life’s fair bloom,
Than all the men in the world might win
Tho’ in righteous payment they claim such doom.
’T was well nigh night when I came within.
I won to the vineyard in twilight gloom,
Yet my Lord did His payment with me begin.
Full payment was mine, and that right soon.
 Yet to others a longer term is set,
 They have toiled and travailed, I ween, of yore,
 But naught of their hire have they touched as yet,
 And none may they have for a year or more.”

50 Then out I spake, and this word did say,
“I find all reasonless thy tale.
God’s law, it is fixed, and set alway,
Else Holy Writ be of small avail.
A verse in the Psalter doth clear away
Doubt from this point, did doubt assail,
’Each one as he merits thou shalt repay,
Thou high King, whose wisdom doth never fail!’
 Now, hath one laboured the whole day thro’
 And thou pass to thy payment that man before,
 Then he winneth the more who the less shall do,
 And ever the longer, the less hath more.”

XI 51 “’Twixt more and less in God’s Kingdom free,”
That maiden quoth, “is there full accord,
For there each man, he is paid in fee,
Or much or little be his reward.
Our gentle Chief is not niggardly,
Whether He dealeth soft or hard,
As deluge from dyke His gifts they be,
Or streams from a deep that may ne’er be stored!
 He winneth full freedom who serveth well
 Him, who wrought us a rescue from sin, I trow,
 No bliss shall be ever from him withheld,
 For the grace of God, it is great enow!

- 52 “But now thou would’st me here checkmate
In that I my penny have wrongly ta’en,
Thou sayest, in sooth, I came too late
Such reward I may not of right attain.
When knewest thou mortal, or soon, or late,
Who waxed so holy thro’ prayer and pain
But that he did in some wise abate
The measure meet of his heavenly gain?
 And aye the oftener as years wax late
 Do they leave the right, and the wrong allow,
 Mercy and Grace needs must steer them straight
 For the grace of God, it is great enow!”
- 53 But enough of grace have the innocent,
For even so soon as they see the light,
Thro’ the waters of Baptism, by consent,
Are they brought to the vineyard in morning bright.
But anon their day is with darkness blent,
They needs must bow them to Death’s fell might,
They had wrought no wrong ere hence they went
His servants the Master doth pay aright.
 They did His behest, in His will did stay,
 Why should He their labour not allow,
 And yield them freely their first day’s pay?
 Is the grace of God not great enow?
- 54 Full well we know that Mankind so great
Was fashioned in perfect bliss to dwell,
But our first father forfeited our estate
For the taste of an apple that pleased him well.
We all were doomed, in that Adam ate,
To die in dole, ’t was of joy the knell,
Sithen have we fared, or soon or late,
To dwell for ever in heat of Hell.
 But the cure for our sorrow, it came with speed
 When red Blood ran on the rood, I trow,
 And winsome Water – in our sore need
 The grace of God, it waxed great enow!

55 Enough gushed forth from out that well
Blood and Water from Wound so wide,
The Blood hath bought us from bale of Hell,
From the second death doth that stream divide.
The Water is Baptism, sooth to tell,
By the grim glaive freed from His stricken side,
It washeth away our guilt so fell,
'T was Adam had drowned us in Death's dark tide.
 'Twixt us and bliss, in this whole world round
 Never a barrier standeth now,
 All He withdrew in that bitter stound,
 The grace of God, it was great enow!

XII 56 Grace enow any man may have
Who sinneth anew, an he but repent,
But with sorrow and sigh he the boon must crave,
And abide the penance with pardon sent.
But reason, methinks, doth ever save
By right abiding, the innocent,
Forsooth God never such judgment gave
That any to doom all guiltless went!
 The guilty man, if of contrite heart
 Thro' mercy may aye with grace be dight,
 But he in whom guile had never part.
 As innocent, he is saved by right.

57 "Right thus, I know, doth stand the case
Two are the men whom God saveth still;
The righteous man, he shall see His face,
The harmless wight, he shall do His Will.
The Psalmist saith, by God His grace,
'Lord, who shall climb Thy holy hill,
Or dwell within Thy holy place?'
Himself hath he answered, as read ye will—
 'The hand that is set to no deed ill,
 The heart that abideth pure and white,
 His foot shall rest secure and still,
 The Innocent, he is saved by right!'

- 58 That goodly pile, and that temple court,
 Who useth not his life in vain,
 Nor e'er to deceive his neighbour thought.
 The righteous, Solomon sayeth plain,
 Shall with welcome fair to the king be brought
 His feet He doth in straight paths constrain,
 And sheweth him how God's realm be sought.
 As one who saith, 'Lo, yon isle so fair!
 Thou may'st win it, an thou be valiant wight,
 But none without peril may enter there' —
 The Innocent, he is saved by right!
- 59 "Anent the righteous we read alway
 How in the Psalter King David cried;
 'Condemn not thy servant, Lord, I pray,
 For no man living is justified!
 When to that court thou hast gone thy way
 Where all our causes at last be tried,
 Thy right, it shall profit no whit that day,
 By proof of the words ye have here descried;
 But He that on rood a sore death died,
 With piercéd hands, whom the spear did smite,
 Grant thee to pass when thou art tried
 By Innocence, and not by right!
- 60 "He who aright to read doth know
 Let him look in the Book, and be well aware,
 How Jesus aforetime walked below
 And folk their bairns to His presence bare.
 For the healing and health that from Him did flow
 To touch the children they prayed Him there,
 The disciples were fain they should from Him go,
 Through their words of blame many thence did fare.
 But Jesus thus sweetly spake His will,
 'Suffer the children within My sight,
 For such shall the Kingdom of Heaven fill' —
 The Innocent is aye safe by right!"

- XIII 61 Jesus, He called the meek and mild,
And said His Kingdom no wight might win
Save that he came as doth a child,
Nor otherwise might he enter in.
The harmless, the true, the undefiled,
Without spot or blemish of staining sin,
When they knock at that gate, they be not beguiled,
Swift shall be raised of that latch the pin!
 There is the bliss that shall last for aye
 That the jeweller thought to find for sure
 When he sold his goods and his garments gay
 To buy him a pearl all spotless pure.
- 62 This spotless pearl that was bought so dear,
The jeweller gave for it all his good,
'T is like to the Kingdom of Heaven clear
(So saith the Father of field and flood).
For it is flawless, a shining sphere,
Without end or beginning, and blithe of mood,
And free unto all that righteous were.
Lo! on my breast it long hath stood –
 My Lord, the Lamb, He who shed His blood
 As token of peace there hath set it sure
 I rede thee forsake the world's mad mood,
 And buy thee this pearl, so spotless pure!
- 63 "O spotless Pearl, in pearly sheen,
That bearest," quoth I, "the pearl of price!
Whence came thy form, thy gracious mien?
Who wrought thy robe, he was full wise!
Nature such beauty ne'er hath seen!
Pygmalion's skill wore not such guise,
Nor Aristotle, with wit so keen
Thy virtues varied might e'er devise –
 Thy colour passeth the lily white,
 Thy mien as an angel's, calm, demure,
 Tell me what troth, O, Maiden bright,
 Hath for token that pearl so spotless pure?"

64 "My spotless Lamb, who makes all things meet,
With whom my appointed lot shall be,
Chose me as Bride, tho' all unmeet,
Long since doth seem that festivity!
When I passed from your world, when men sore greet,
He called me to His felicity,
'Come hither to Me, my lemman sweet,
For spot nor blemish is none in thee!'
Thus, dowered with beauty and dignity,
He washed my robe in His blood, for sure,
And crowning me fair in virginity,
He decked me with spotless pearls and pure!"

65 "O, spotless Bride, who so fair doth flame
In royal array with jewels rife!
Tell me, I pray, of this Lamb the name
Who was fain to take thee to Him as wife?
How above all others did win such fame
As to lead with Him this queenly life,
So many a maiden, free from blame,
For Christ hath lived in toil and strife?
Those dear ones all hast thou set aside?
That marriage bond is for none set sure
Save but for thyself, in thy virgin pride,
Thou peerless maiden, so spotless pure?"

XIV 66 "*Spotless, indeed,*" quoth that gladsome queen,
"Unblemished am I, without a blot,
This to maintain doth grace beseem,
But a *peerless* queen, that said I not!
Brides of the Lamb, in bliss serene,
Twelve times twelve thousand by count, I wot,
Thus in Apocalypse were they seen—
Saint John, he saw, and he hid it not.
On the hill of Sion, that mount so fair,
The Apostle in vision beheld them then,
Arrayed for the wedding feast they fare
To the city of New Jerusalem.

- 67 "Of Jerusalem will I speak the spell
If thou would'st know what He now shall be,
My Lamb, my Lord, my fair Jewel,
My joy, my Bliss, my Love, is He!
The prophet Isaiah of Him doth tell,
Of His meekness speaking full piteously,
Whom, guiltless, a traitor to Death did sell;
In Him was no taint of felony!
 As a Lamb to the slaughter was He brought,
 As Sheep to the shearer they led Him then,
 To all that they asked Him He answered naught,
 When judged by the Jews in Jerusalem!
- 68 "In Jerusalem was my True Love slain,
Rent on the Rood by ruffians bold,
Our bale to bear was He ever fain,
He took on Himself our cares so cold.
With blows and spitting His face they stain,
That erst was so comely to behold;
For Sin He counted Himself as vain
Tho' never a sin to His count were told!
 Bonds and scourging for us He bare,
 And stretched Himself on the rood's rough beam;
 Meek as a Lamb did He silent fare
 When He suffered for us in Jerusalem.
- 69 "Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee,
There John the Baptist his office wrought,
His words with Isaiah's did well agree
When Jesus anon for his laving sought.
For he spake of Him this prophesie,
'Lo, the Lamb of God, who faileth naught!
But from every sin will set ye free
That ye in this world have witless wrought!
 Never a sin to His count befell,
 Yet He to the guilt of all laid claim,
 His generations what tongue can tell
 Who suffered for us in Jerusalem?

70 "In Jerusalem thus my True Love sweet
Twice as a Lamb was accounted there,
By record of prophet true and meet,
In such meekness and gentleness did He fare!
A third time as Lamb we shall Him greet,
The Apocalypse here doth witness bear,
In the midst of the Throne He hath His seat,
As John the Apostle doth declare.
He opened the Book, and the seals He brake,
The seven seals, He hath broken them,
The boldest heart at that sight must quake
In Hell, in Earth, in Jerusalem!

XV 71 "This Lamb of Jerusalem hath no stain,
His hue, it is white beyond compare,
Blemish, or spot, would ye seek in vain
In that wool so shining, so rich, and rare!
Thus the soul that from sin doth here refrain
For that Lamb is a fitting mate, and fair,
Tho' each day He addeth unto His train
No envy doth one to the other bear.
Yea, we would that each one were waxen five
The more, the gladder, so God me bless,
Our love shall ever in concourse thrive,
Our honour wax greater, and never less!

72 "Less of bliss may we never win
Who bear this pearl upon our breast,
For they who have known no stain of sin
They carry this spotless pearl as crest.
Our bodies are wrapped cold clay within,
And for ruth and rue ye may find no rest,
But knowledge of all is ours herein,
And our Hope is all to one Death address.
The Lamb doth rejoice us, our care is past,
With Him do we feed in gladness,
Full measure of honour hath first and last,
And no one's bliss is one whit the less.

- 73 "Lest fantasy thou should'st deem my tale
Apocalypse doth the truth declare,
'I saw,' quoth Saint John, 'withouten fail,
The Lamb on Mount Sion stand free and fair.
And with Him were maidens, a goodly tale,
Twelve times twelve thousand, and each one ware
On her forehead the Name that shall aye avail,
To the Lamb, and His Father she witness bare.
 A Voice from Heaven I heard o'er all,
 Like streams o'erladen that run in stress,
 Or as thunder bolts mid the rocks that fall,
 That sound, I trow, was never the less!
- 74 "'Never-the-less tho' it rushed and rang
And struck full loudly upon mine ear,
A newer note those maidens sang
I wis that strain to my heart was dear!
As a harper harpeth the guests among,
So they sang that song, and I needs must hear
How in ringing notes a maiden young
Led the strain which they followed with voices clear;
 Yea, e'en as they stood before God's Throne
 With the elders grave in righteousness,
 And the wondrous Beasts who His lordship own,
 The sound of their song was ne'er the less!
- 75 "'Never a man should be found so wise,
For all the craft that he ever knew,
Of that song the burden to devise
Save they who the track of the Lamb pursue.
For they are redeemed from Earth's alloys,
As first-fruits to God are they wholly due,
And like to the gentle Lamb in guise
Are they joined unto Him in union true.
 For never a falsehood, or lying boast
 Have touched their tongue for strain or stress,
 The bonds that bind that spotless host
 To their Spotless Lord shall ne'er be less!"

76 "Never-the-less are my thanks," quoth I,
"My Pearl, if a query I still propose,
And be fain still thy knowledge deep to try,
'T was Christ who thee of His household chose.
'Midst dust and ashes my home have I,
And thou art so rich and so royal a rose,
Thou dwellest this blissful bank anigh
Where life's delights thou shalt never lose.
Oh, simple of heart, and of gracious tongue,
One wish would I fain to thee express,
And tho' I be churlish all churls among,
Let my prayer avail me, none the less!

XVI 77 "Never-the-less, I upon thee call,
An thou see it fitting, O, Maiden fairy
Glorious and spotless art thou withal,
Deny me not this piteous prayer!
Have ye no dwelling in castle wall?
No manor wherein ye meet, and fare?
Thou speak'st of Jerusalem's royal hall
Where David the crown as monarch ware,
Yet by these woods it may never be,
In Judaea that city doth stand, I wot,
Beneath the moon ye from stain are free
And your dwelling should be without a spot!

78 "Of a spotless throng thou tellest me,
Twelve times twelve thousand, a countless rout,
A city great, so many ye be,
Ye needs must have, without a doubt.
Fair cluster of precious jewels are ye,
'T were ill if any should lie without,
Yet I fare by these banks, and it seemeth me,
No dwelling standeth here about?
I trow thou but lingerest here a space
For the beauty Nature doth here allot,
If thou hast elsewhere an abiding place
I prithee lead me to that glad spot!"

- 79 "The spot thou speakest of in Judaea,"
 The fragrant fair, in this wise she spake,
 "Is the city to which the Lamb drew near,
 Therein did He suffer for all men's sake.
 Of the old Jerusalem speak we here
 Where Christ the chain of old guilt did break,
 But the New, which by God's grace shall appear
 The Apostle John for his theme doth take.
 Thither the Lamb, without dusky stain,
 Hath led His folk, and hath tarried not,
 And as that flock without flaw remain,
 So His city shall be without a spot —
- 80 "Certes, we speak of cities twain,
 Natheless Jerusalem both are hight,
 The meaning for thee doth aye remain,
 'The City of God,' or 'Of Peace the site.'
 In the first our peace was won again, —
 In pain to suffer the Lamb deemed right,
 In the other, I ween, Peace doth hold her reign,
 With never a check to her ceaseless might.
 'T is to that burg that we haste with speed
 When our flesh in clay is laid to rot,
 There glory and bliss shall aye exceed
 For that host that be ever without a spot!"
- 81 "O, spotless maiden, of gentle grace!"
 Thus I besought the winsome flower,
 "Bring me, I pray, to that goodly place,
 Let me behold thy blissful bower!"
 Spake that bright one, who ever beholds God's face,
 "Thou mayest not enter within this tower,
 But by grace of the Lamb, for a little space,
 With the sight of that city He will thee dower.
 The outward form of that cloister clean
 May'st thou see, but thy strength availeth not
 To set thy foot on its streets, I ween,
 Save thou be stainless, with ne'er a spot.

XVII82 If I this city to thee unveil
Then bend thou towards this streamlet's head
Till thou see'st a hill – I, without fail,
Will follow beyond this river bed."
I tarried not, but along the vale,
Thro' leafy thickets I swiftly sped,
Till lo, the burg did my sight assail
As it stood on a hill, fair fashionéd!
 Beyond the brook, and away from me,
 Than sunbeam brighter that city shone,
 In Apocalypse may ye its fashion see
 As well deviseth th' Apostle John.

83 As John, the Apostle, beheld with sight
So saw I that city of goodly fame,
Jerusalem, New, all royally dight,
As if from Heaven but now it came.
The burg was of burnished gold so bright,
As glittering glass was it all aflame,
Fair gems beneath it gave forth their light,
And pillars twelve did its groundwork frame.
 The foundations twelve, full rich they were,
 Each slab was wrought of a single stone,
 So well doth picture that city fair
 In Apocalypse, the Apostle John!

84 As John, he hath named them, those stones so fair
After his numbering their names I knew,
Jasper it hight, the first gem there,
On the first foundation 't was plain to view.
It glistened green on the lowest stair;
The second was held by Sapphire blue;
A spotless Chalcedony, and rare,
Gleamed on the third with purest hue.
 The fourth was Emerald, glowing green,
 Sardonyx shone the fifth upon,
 The sixth, a Ruby, as well hath seen
 In Apocalypse the Apostle John.

85 To these John added the Chrysolite,
The seventh gem in foundation stone;
The eighth, the Beryl, so softly bright,
The twin-hued Topaz, the ninth upon.
The tenth, it was Chrysopraseis hight,
The eleventh of Jacinth fair alone,
Then fairest, as blue of Ind its light,
The purple Amethyst gleamed and shone.
Of gleaming Jasper I saw the wall
As it stood those pillars twelve upon.
So well hath he drawn it, I knew it all,
In Apocalypse, the Apostle John!

86 As John had deviséd I saw the stair,
Broad and steep were its steps, I ween,
The city, it stood above, four square,
In length, breadth, and height was it equal seen.
The streets of gold, as glass they were,
The wall of jasper, with amber sheen,
The walls within, they were decked full fair
With every gem of ray serene.
And every side of this city good
Twelve furlongs full, ere its end were won,
In length, breadth, and height, it equal stood,
As he saw it measured, the Apostle John!

XVIII 87 As John hath written, I more might see,
Three gates had that city on every side,
Thus twelve I reckoned, in four times three,
And rich plates they decked each portal wide.
Each gate was a pearl of purity,
A perfect pearl, that shall aye abide,
On each one the name, in right degree,
Of Israel's sons might be there descried.
That is to say, as their birthright bade,
The eldest was writ the first upon,
Such light thro' the ways of that city played
The dwellers they needed nor moon, nor sun!

- 88 Of sun nor moon had they never need,
For God Himself was their lamp of light,
The Lamb a lantern, their steps to lead,
Thro' Him all that burg beamed fair and bright.
Thro' wall and dwelling my glance might speed,
So clear was it, naught might impede my sight,
The High Throne there ye well might heed,
With royal apparelling all bedight!
 As in the words of Saint John I read,
 The High God Himself sat upon that Throne,
 A river swift from beneath it sped,
 'T was brighter than either sun or moon!
- 89 Sun nor moon had so bright a ray
As that flood in the fulness of its flow,
Swift it surged thro' the city's way
Nor mud nor mire did its waters show.
Church therein was there none alway,
Chapel nor temple, raised arow,
The Lamb is their sacrifice night and day
And God for their temple and priest they know.
 Never the gates of that burg they close,
 To every lane may a way be won,
 But none may enter its fair repose
 Who beareth spot, 'neath moon or sun!
- 90 For there the moon may not wax in might,
Of substance dark, she yet spots doth bear,
And e'en as that burg ne'er knoweth night
What need for the moon on her course to fare, —
And to measure herself with that goodly light
That beyond the river shineth there?
The planets they be in too poor a plight,
And the sun itself may not make compare!
 By that water's course stand trees so fair,
 Twelve fruits of life do they bear eftsoon,
 Twelve times each year they blossom and bear,
 And their fruit waxeth new at every moon!

91 No spirit of man 'neath the moon's pale rays
So great a marvel might aye endure,
As when on that burg I fixed my gaze,
So wondrous its fashion, and fair allure!
I stood as still as quail a-daze
For wonder before that vision pure,
The glamour so ravished me with amaze
Nor rest, nor travail, I felt for sure!
 This I dare say in good conscience still,
 Had man in the body received that boon
 Tho' all clerks for his care had spent their skill
 His life had been forfeit beneath the moon!

XIX 92 E'en as when the moon at her full doth rise
Ere yet hath been lost the gleam of day,
So, sudden, I saw in a wondrous wise
A fair procession that took its way.
This noble city, of rich emprise,
With never summons, with no delay,
Was full of virgins in self-same guise
As my sweet one, in crown of pearly ray.
 And each was in self-same fashion crowned,
 Bedecked with pearls, in weeds of white,
 On each one's breast I saw it bound,
 That goodly pearl of fair delight!

93 They stepped all together in great delight
On the golden ways, by that living stream;
Hundred thousands, I ween, their might,
And their robes did all of one fashion seem.
Who was gladdest, none might discern aright –
With seven horns of red golden beam
The Lamb before them passed – all white
His robes, like precious pearls their gleam.
 Toward the Throne on their way they pass,
 Tho' many they were, they moved aright,
 And thronged not, but meekly as maids at mass
 They fared in order, with great delight!

- 94 Delight the more at His coming grew
Too great for tongue of man to tell,
The elders all when He nearer drew
Prostrate before the Throne they fell.
Legions of angels the summons knew,
Incense they scattered, of sweetest smell,
Glory and gladness were raised anew,
And joyous songs for that Jewel well.
 The strain might smite thro' Earth to Hell
 That Virtues, and Powers, in Heaven recite;
 To love the Lamb, and His praise to tell,
 Therefrom did I win a great delight!
- 95 Delight and wonder within me fought
When I fain would picture that Lamb so dear,
Best was He, blithest, most hardly sought,
That ever in words I think to hear.
His vesture of purest white was wrought,
Himself so gentle, His glance so clear;
But a bleeding Wound, and wide, methought,
Cleft thro' His Side, His Heart anear.
 Forth from that Wound the Blood flowed fast,
 Alas, I thought who did this despite?
 His breast of Hell-fires should feel the blast
 Ere that in such doing he found delight!
- 96 The Lamb's delight none might doubt, I ween,
Altho' He were hurt, and wounded sore,
In His countenance naught thereof was seen
Of glorious gladness the mien He wore.
I looked upon that host's fair sheen
Dowered with life for evermore,
And lo, I saw there my little queen,
Who, methought, stood e'en on that streamlet's shore.
 Ah, Christ! what gladness and mirth she made
 Among her companions she shone so white,
 The sight, it urged me the stream to wade
 For love, and longing, and great delight!

XX 97 Delight it smote me thro' ear and eye,
My mortal mind was in madness cast,
When I saw my fair one, I would be nigh
Tho' beyond the stream she were held full fast.
No power was there that I might descry
To check me, and hold, ere the stream be past,
And if none withheld me that flood to try
I would swim the rest, if I drowned at last!
 But from that counsel I soon was caught
 E'en as the water I would assay,
 To another mood was I swiftly brought,
 This were not fitting my Prince's pay!

98 It had pleased Him not myself to fling
By madness spurred, o'er that wondrous mere,
Tho' in rushing race I would make my spring
E'en as I came to that bank anear,
My steps to a halt I needs must bring –
My haste had shattered my vision sheer,
Where my form in grief to the earth did cling,
There I awoke, in that arbour dear!
 There, where my pearl to ground had strayed,
 I arose, and I fell, in great dismay,
 And sighing sore, to myself I said,
 "Now all shall be to that Prince's pay!"

99 Full ill it pleased me to be out cast
So suddenly, from that realm so fair,
From that blissful vision, so soon o'erpast
For longing I fell a-swooning there!
And with rueful voice made lament full fast.
"O, Pearl!" quoth I, "so rich and rare,
Fair was that vision I saw at last,
And dear those tidings thou didst declare.
 And if it be true of very sooth
 That thou farest thus, in garland gay,
 'T is well with me in this house of ruth,
 Since thou art fair to that Prince's pay!"

100 Had I to that Prince's pleasure bent,
And craved no more than to me was given,
And held me there with true intent
As my Pearl besought, who so fair hath thriven,
Then, drawn to God's presence, by His consent,
The veil of His mysteries had been riven;
But man with his bliss is ne'er content,
But asketh more than may well be given!
Therefore my joy was the sooner crost,
I was thrust from the realm of endless day,
Christ! They in madness their toil have lost
Who proffer thee aught save what be thy pay!

101 To please that Prince is a task full light
For the Christian soul, — to His peace they wend —
For I have found Him by day and night,
A God, a Lord, and a faithful Friend.
On a hill did this lot upon me light
When grief for my pearl I might not amend,
In the blessing of Christ, my gem so white
To God's good keeping I now commend.
Christ, who in form of Bread and Wine,
The priest shews forth to us day by day,
Keep us as household folk of Thine,
As precious pearls for our Prince's pay!

Amen, Amen.