

Poems eBook

Poems by Denis Florence MacCarthy

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CROWS.

They stream across the fading western sky
A sable cloud, far o'er the lonely leas;
Now parting into scattered companies,
Now closing up the broken ranks, still high
And higher yet they mount, while, carelessly,
Trail slow behind, athwart the moving trees
A lingering few, 'round whom the evening breeze
Plays with sad whispered murmurs as they fly.

A lonely figure, ghostly in the dim
And darkening twilight, lingers in the shade
Of bending willows: "Surely God has laid
His curse on me," he moans, "my strength of limb
And old heart-courage fail me, and I flee
Bowed with fell terror at this augury."

FUTURITY.

What of our life when this frail flesh lies low
A withered clod, and the free soul has burst
Through the world-fetters? Not of souls accursed
With cherished lusts that mar them, those who sow
Evil and reap the harvest, and who bow
At Mammon's golden shrine, but those who thirst
For Truth, and see not,—spirits deep immersed
In doubt and trouble,—hearts that fain would know?

The soul is satisfied. The spirit trained
For the divine, because the beautiful,
Now with the body gone, free and unstained,
Doubts swept away like clouds of scattering wool
Before a blast,—e'er Heaven's pure paths are trod
Is perfected to understand its God.

THERE IS NO GOD.

There is no God? If one should stand at noon
Where the glow rests, and the warm sunlight plays,
Where earth is gladdened by the cordial rays
And blossoms answering, where the calm lagoon



Gives back the brightness of the heart of June,
And he should say: "There is no sun"—the day's
Fair shew still round him,—should we lose the blaze
And warmth, and weep that day has gone so soon?

Nay, there would be one word, one only thought,
"The man is blind!" and throbs of pitying scorn
Would rouse the heart, and stir the wondering mind.
We *feel*, and see, and therefore *know*,—the morn
With blush of youth ne'er left us till it brought
Promise of full-grown day. "The man is blind!"

DISAPPOINTMENT.

The light has left the hill-side. Yesterday
These skies shewed blue against the dusky trees,
The leaves' soft murmur in the evening breeze
Was music, and the waves danced in the bay.
Then was my heart, as ever, far away
With you,—and I could see you as one sees
A mirrored face,—and happiness and ease
And hope were mine, in spite of long delay.



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After these months of waiting, this is all!
Hope, dead, lies confined, shrouded in despair,
With all the blessings of the outer air
Forgot, 'neath the black covering of a pall.
Only the darkening of the woodland ways,
A heart's low moaning over wasted days.

A SHADOW.

The world to-day is radiant, as I ne'er
Could picture it in wildest dreaming, when
For long, long hours I lay in flowery glen
Or wooded copse, and tried in vain to tear
The glamour from my eyes, and face the glare
And tumult of the busy world of men.
I staked my all, and won! and ne'er again
Can my blest spirit know a heart's despair.

And yet—and yet—why should it be that now,
When all my heart has longed for is at last
Within my grasp, and I should be at rest,
A ghostly Something rising in the glow
Of Love's own fire, an uninvited guest,
Taunts me with just one memory of the past!

TRIUMPH.

The sky, grown dull through many waiting days,
Flashed into crimson with the sunrise charm,
So all my love, aroused to vague alarm,
Flushed into fire and burned with eager blaze.
I saw thee not as suppliant, with still gaze
Of pleading, but as victor,—and thine arm
Gathered me fast into embraces warm,
And I was taught the light of Love's dear ways.

This day of triumph is no longer thine,
Oh conqueror, in calm exclusive power.—
As evermore, through storm, and shade, and shine,
Your woe my pain, your joy my ecstasy,
We breathe together,—so this blessed hour
Of self-surrender makes my jubilee!



RONDEAU.—I WILL FORGET.

I will forget those days of mingled bliss
And dear delicious pain,—will cast from me
All dreams of what I know can never be,
Even the remembrance of that parting kiss.
I knew that some day it would come to this
In spite of all our sworn fidelity,
That I must banish even memory,
And, sorrowing, learn to say, nor say amiss
I will forget.

I register this vow, and am content
That it be so. Ah me!—yet, if the door
Shut on our heaven might be asunder rent
Even now, and I could see the way we went,
I might retract my vow, and say no more
I will forget.

RONDEAU.—WHEN SUMMER COMES.

When summer comes, and when o'er hill and lea
The sun's strong wooing glow hath patiently
Shed o'er the earth long days his golden dower,
And then, by force of his own loving power,
Drawn the hard frost, and left it passive, free
To give forth all its sweets untiringly,
Shall not the day rise fair for thee and me,
And all life seem but as an opening flower
When summer comes?



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The days move slowly, young hearts yearn to be
Together always, cannot brook to see
 Their love-days pass, and void each sunny hour,
 Yet may we smile, e'en when fate's storm-clouds lower,
Waiting fulfilment of our hearts' decree
 When summer comes.

RONDEAU.—IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

It might have been so different a year
 To what *has* been; the summer's guileless play
 Not all a jest, comes back to me to-day
In added sweetness, and provokes a tear.
Strange pictures rise, pass on, and disappear.
 Drawn from your tender words of yesterday
 When, looking in my eyes in the old way
You told me of your life, how passing dear
 It might have been.

Useless to dream, more useless to regret!
 We might have lived and loved, nor lost the glow
Of Love's first sweet intensity;—to let
These foolish fancies die I strive,—and yet
 I still must count it happiness to know
 It might have been.

RONDEAU.—BROTHER AND FRIEND.

Brother and friend I found thee in the hour
 Of need and day of trouble, strong and true.—
 In June's fair mirth, and when the sunrise hue
Shewed bright where joy had built his thoughtless bower,
Thou wert a child to sport with, something lower
 Than a friend's need. I gave, methought, thy due,—
 An elder sister's gentleness, nor knew
That ere Spring dawned my soul would feel thy power.
 Brother and Friend!

A man, with a man's strength, and will, and fire,
 I know thee, my Alcides; thus a god
For some fair soul to reverence, and desire
 To own and worship. / can place thee higher



To-day, in naming thee,—pain's paths just trod—
Brother and Friend.

RONDEAU.—POURQUOI?

"Pourquoi," she breathed, then drooped her head,
(Pure snow-drifts to the sunset wed)
As all my weakness I confessed.
I shewed how I had done my best,
Though long ago I should have fled,
Knowing all hope, for me, was dead;
And now my heart would die, unfed.
She murmured low, (was it in jest?)
"Pourquoi?"

That winsome face, all rosy red,—
I turned towards me,—gone was dread!
She came as birdlings to their nest
At eventide; so was I blest
By that one precious, softly-said
"Pourquoi?"

RONDEAU.—FOR OUR LOVE'S SAKE.

**For our Love's sake I bid thee stay, Sweet, ere the hours flee away, Beneath the
old acacia tree That waves its blossoms quiveringly, And think awhile of early
May:**

Of how the months have fled away,
And sunrise hour turned twilight gray,
While we have suffered smilingly
For our Love's sake.



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It may not be—that which we pray
For tearfully—but dare not say.
And yet if, Sweet, it may not be,
We still may suffer silently,
Watching our sunlight fade away,
For our Love's sake.

ECHOES.

A breath | A breath
And a sigh,— | And a sigh,—
How we fly | How we fly
From Death! | From Death!—
|
A palm | Sing on
Warm pressed, | O our bird!
As we guessed | Thou art heard
Love's psalm. | Alone.
|
A word | We know
Breathed close, | No life,
And then rose | Neither strife,
The bird | Nor woe,
|
That cowers | Nor aught
In the wood | But this hour,—
'Mid a flood | Love's dower
Of flowers, | Dear bought.—
|
Till Love's | Death's voice
Heart sighs, | Is away,
Like the cries | And we may
Of doves,— | Rejoice.
|
Then sings | The bird
His song, | Of our song
Beating strong | May be long
White wings,— | Unheard,
|
Heart clear | But, Dear,
Though faint, | Bend low;
Like a saint | It is now
In prayer.— | We hear.



Forget | A breath
For a day | And a sigh,—
All his sway, | How we fly
Life's fret. | From Death!

No ripple stirs the water,
No song-bird wakes the grove,
Calm noon-tide sways his sceptre,
And hushes even love.

On earth the sun-god bending
 Poureth his wondrous store;
 The soft-tongued tide, advancing,
 Laps the unconscious shore.

The long, low isle of marsh-land
Stretches in weary waste,
By sloping sand-banks guarded,
By winding weeds embraced.

Comes clearly from the open
The splash of distant oars,—
Over the rocky headland
The snow-white sea-gull soars.



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I see as if through dream-clouds,
I hear from far away.
The scorched air breathes its opiate,
The drowsy fancies stay;

I have no hopes or longings,
I scarce can feel your kiss,—
For thought, and joy and worship,
Another hour than this!

PICTURES.

The full-orbed Paschal moon; dark shadows flung
On the brown Lenten earth; tall spectral trees
Stand in their huge and naked strength erect,
And stretch wild arms towards the gleaming sky.
A motionless girl-figure, face upraised
In the strong moonlight, cold and passionless.

* * * * *

A proud spring sunset; opal-tinted sky,
Save where the western purple, pale and faint
With longing for her fickle Love,—content
Had merged herself into his burning red.
A fair young maiden, clad in velvet robe
Of sombre green, stands in the golden glow,
One hand held up to shade her dazzled eyes,
A bunch of white Narcissus at her throat.

* * * * *

November's day, dark, leaden, lowering,—
Grey purple shadows fading on the hills;
Dreary and desolate the far expanse
And gloomy sameness of the open plain.
A peasant woman, in white wimpled hood,
White vest, and scarlet petticoat, surveys
The meadow, with rough hands crossed on her breast.

* * * * *

A shining, shimmering, gracious, golden day;
The sated summer's all-pervading hush;



Warm luscious tints, glowing in earth and sky.
On a low mossy bank, a little child,
His golden curls twined in the reedy grass,
Clutching within his tear-stained feverish hands
The yellow blossoms of the Celandine,
Sobs out his heart in passionate childish grief.

EURYDICE.

Oh come, Eurydice!
The Stygian deeps are past
Well-nigh; the light dawns fast.
Oh come, Eurydice!

The gods have heard my song!
My love's despairing cry
Filled hell with melody,—
And the gods heard my song.

I knew no life but thee;
Persephone was moved;
She, too, hath lived, hath loved;
She saw I lived for thee.

I may not look on thee,
Such was the gods' decree;—
Till sun and earth we see
No kiss, no smile for thee!

The way is rough, is hard;
I cannot hear thy feet
Swift following; speak, my Sweet,—
Is the way rough and hard?

"Oh come, Eurydice!"
I turn: "our woe is o'er,
I will not lose thee more!"
I cry: "Eurydice!"

O father Hermes, help!
I see her fade away
Back from the dawning ray;
Dear Father Hermes, help!

One swift look,—all is lost!
Wild heaven-arousing cries

Pierce to the dull dead skies;
My heaven, my all is lost!



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The unrelenting gods
Refuse me. "No," say they,
"Thy chance is thrown away."
Fierce unrelenting gods!

The sky is blue no more,
The spring-tide airs are bleak,
I find not her I seek,
The earth is fair no more!

I loathe all earth, all life!
These Thracian women gaze
And whispering, go their ways,
Seeing I loathe my life.

Only my song remains.
I may not cease to sing,
Though hot tears start and sting,
The song that still remains,

Even—"Come Eurydice!"
The sea rolls on in pain,
Echoing the note again:
"Lost, lost Eurydice!"

And still the sea moves on,
The woods give back the thrill
"Eurydice!" and still
The quiet sea moves on.

The years, Eurydice,
The long unquiet years
Heed not or sighs or tears,
Oh Heart, Eurydice!

SLACK TIDE.

My boat is still in the reedy cove
Where the rushes hinder its onward course,
For I care not now if we rest or move
O'er the slumberous tide to the river's source.

My boat is fast in the tall dank weeds
And I lay my oars in silence by,



And lean, and draw the slippery reeds
Through my listless fingers carelessly.

The babbling froth of the surface foam
Clings close to the side of my moveless boat,
Like endless meshes of honeycomb,—
And I break it off, and send it afloat.

A faint wind stirs, and I drift along
Far down the stream to its utmost bound,
And the thick white foam-flakes gathering strong
Still cling, and follow, and fold around.

Oh! the weary green of the weedy waste,
The thickening scum of the frothy foam,
And the torpid heart by the reeds embraced
And shrouded and held in its cheerless home.

The fearful stillness of wearied calm,
The tired quiet of ended strife,
The echoed note of a heart's sad psalm,
The sighing end of a wasted life.—

The reeds cling close, and my cradle sways,
And the white gull dips in the waters' barm,
And the heart asleep in the twilight haze
Feels not its earth-bonds, knows not alarm.

AN EVENING IN OCTOBER

Evening has thrown her hushing garment round
This little world; no harsh or jarring sound
Disturbs my reverie. The room is dark,
And kneeling at the window I can mark
Each light and shadow of the scene below.
The placid glistening pools, the streams that flow
Through the red earth, left by the hurrying tide;
The ridge of mountain on the farther side
Shewing more black for many twinkling lights
That come and go about the gathering heights.
Below me lie great wharves, dreary and dim,
And lumber houses crowding close and grim
Like giant shadowed guardians of the port,

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With towering chimneys outlined tall and swart
Against the silver pools. Two figures pace
The wharf in ghostly silence, face from face.
O'er the black line of mountain, silver-clear
In faint rose-tint of vaporous evening air,
Sinketh the bright suspicion of a wing,
The slim curved moon, who in shy triumphing
Hideth her face. Above, the rose-tint pales
Into a silver opal, hills and dales
Of cloudy glory, fading high alone
Into a tender blue-grey monotone.—
And then I thought: "ere that fair, slender moon
Has rounded grown and full, (so soon, so soon!)
Our hearts' desire accomplished we shall see
Dear one, all light, and joy, and ecstasy!"

PARTED.

My spirit holds you, Dear,
Though worlds away,"—
This to their absent ones
Many can say.

"Thoughts, fancies, hopes, desires,
All must be yours;
Sweetest my memories still
Of our past hours."

I can say more than this
Now, lover mine,—
Here can I feel your kiss
Warmer than wine,

Feel your arms folding me,
Know that quick breath
That aye my soul would stir
Even in death.



'Tis not a memory, Love,
Thoughts of the past,
Fleeting remembrances
Which may not last,—

But, as I shut my eyes
Know I the sign
That you are here, yourself,
Bodily, mine.—

So, Love, I cannot say
“My spirit flies
Over the widening space,
Under dull skies,

To where *your* spirit is,”—
Though I may know
Seas part us, earth divides,
It is not so

Here to me, now, for you
Lean on my heart.
Who says that you and I
Ever can part?—

TOUT POUR L'AMOUR.

The world may rage without,
Quiet is here;
Statesmen may toil and shout,
Cynics may sneer;
The great world,—let it go,—
June warmth be March's snow,
I care not,—be it so
Since I am here.

Time was when war's alarm
Called for a fear,
When sorrow's seeming harm
Hastened a tear.
Naught care I now what foe
Threatens, for scarce I know
How the year's seasons go
Since I am here.

This is my resting-place
Holy and dear,



Where pain's dejected face
May not appear;
This is the world to me,
Earth's woes I will not see,
But rest contentedly
Since I am here.

Is't your voice chiding, Love,
My mild career,
My meek abiding, Love,
Daily so near?—
“Danger and loss,” to me?
Ah, Sweet, I fear to see
No loss but loss of *thee*,
And I am here.

SOOTHING.



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I aimless wandered thro' the woods, and flung
My idle limbs upon a soft brown bank,
Where, thickly strewn, the worn-out russet leaves
Rustled a faint remonstrance at my tread.
The yellow fungi, shewing pallid stems,
The mossy lichen creeping o'er the stones
And making green the whitened hemlock-bark,
The dull wax of the woodland lily-bud,
On these my eye could rest, and I was still.
No sound was there save a low murmured cheep
From an ambitious nestling, and the slow
And oft-recurring splash of myriad waves
That spent their strength against the unheeding shore.
Over and through a spreading undergrowth
I saw the gleaming of the tranquil sea.
The woody scent of mosses and sweet ferns,
Mingled with the fresh brine, and came to me,
Bringing a laudanum to my ceaseless pain;
A quietness stole in upon me then,
And o'er my soul there passed a wave of peace.