

A Vision of Repentance

I saw a famous fountain in my dream,  
Where shady pathways to a Valley led;  
A weeping willow lay upon that stream,  
And all around the fountain brink were spread  
Wide branching trees, with dark green leaf rich clad,  
Forming a doubtful twilight desolate & sad.

The place was such, that whoe enter'd in  
Disrobed was of every earthly thought,  
and strait became as one that knew not sin,  
or to the world's first innocence was brought.  
Enscend' d it now, he stood on holy ground,  
In sweet & tender melancholy wrapt around.

A most strange calm stole o'er my soothed sprite:  
Long time I stood, I longer had I staid,  
When lo! I saw, saw by the sweet moon light,  
Which came in silence o'er that silent shade,  
where near the fountain something like Despair  
made of that weeping willow garlands for her hair  
And eke with painful fingers she inwove

"Many an uncouth stem of savage thorn -  
The willow-garland - that was for her Love,"  
"And these her bleeding temples would adorn.  
with sighs her heart might burst - salt tears fast of fell,  
as mournfully she bended o'er that sacred well.

To whom when I address'd myself to speak,  
She lifted up her eyes, & nothing said,  
The delicate red came mantling o'er her cheek,  
and, gathering up her loose attire, she fled  
To the dark covert of that woody shade,  
and in her goings seem'd a timid gentle maid.

Revolving in my mind what this should mean,  
and why that lonely Lady plain'd so;  
Perplex'd in thought at that mysterious scene,  
and doubting if 'twere best to stay or go,  
I cast mine Eyes in wistful gaze around,  
When from the shades came I shew a small plaintive sound.

†  
The Soul

†  
Psyche am I, who love to dwell  
In these brown shades, this woody dell,  
Where never busy mortal came,  
Till now, to pry upon my shame."



" At thy feet what thou dost see  
The Waters of Repentance be,  
Which, night & day, I must augment  
With tears, like a true Penitent,  
If haply so my day of Grace  
Be not yet past - In this lone place,  
Overadown, dark, excludeth hence  
All thoughts but grief & penitence."

" Why dost thou weep, thou gentle maid  
And wherefore in this barren shade  
Thy hidden thought with sorrow feed?  
Can thing so fair repentance need?"

The lines mean  
to mark Italics - to  
mark the change  
of persons in the  
dialogue

" O! I have done a deed of shame,  
and tainted is my virgin fame,  
and stain'd the beauteous maiden white,<sup>†</sup>  
In which my bridal robes were dight."

† Jeremy Taylor  
speaks of the soul  
"staining the whiteness  
of her baptismal robes."

" And who the promised spouse declare,  
and what those bridal garments were?"

Italics again

" Severe & saintly righteousness  
Composed the clear white bridal dress:  
Jesus, the Son of Heaven's high King  
Bought with his blood the marriage ring"

" A wretched sinful Creature I  
Deem'd lightly of that sacred tie,  
Gave to a treacherous World my heart,  
and plaid the foolish wanton part."

" Soon to these murky shades I came  
To hide from the Sun's light my shame -  
and still I haunt this woody dell  
and bathe me in that healing well,  
Whose waters clear have influence  
From sin's foul stains the soul to cleanse;  
and, night & day, I them augment  
with tears, like a true Penitent,  
Until, due expiation made,  
and fit atonement fully paid,  
The Lord & Bridegroom me present  
Where in sweet strains of high concert,  
God's throne before, the Seraphim  
shalt chant the extatic marriage hymn."

" Now Christ restore thee soon" - I said,  
And thenceforth all my dream was fled

Italics again



The above you will please to print immediately before the  
blank verse fragments - tell me if you like it - I fear the  
latter half is unequal to the former, in parts of which I think you  
will discover a delicacy of pencilling not quite Wm-spencer like -  
The latter half aims at the measures, but has failed to  
attain the poetry, of Milton in his Comus, & Fletcher in that  
exquisite thing of clefted the Faithful shepherds, where they both  
use 8 syllable ~~for~~ lines - But this latter half was finished  
in great haste, & as a task, not from that impulse which  
affects the name of inspiration

By the way I have lit upon Fairfax's Godfrey of Bullen  
for half a crown. Rejoice with me.

Poor dear Aloys, I had a letter from him  
yesterday - his state of mind is truly alarming - he has,  
by his own confession, kept a letter of mine unopened 3  
weeks! afraid, he says, to open it, lest I should  
speak upbraidingly to him. I get this very letter of mine  
was in answer to one, wherein he informed me, that an  
alarming illness had alone prevented him from writing -  
You will pray with me, I know, for his recovery -  
for surely, coleridge, a <sup>exquisite</sup> delicacy of feeling like this  
must border on derangement. But I love him more &  
more, - & will not give up the hope of his speedy recovery,  
as he tells me he is under Dr Darwin's regimen

God bless us all, & shield us from insanity,  
which is "the sorest malady of all"

My kind love to your wife & child

To S. T. Coleridge

Lamb

(see over)

Pray write now.



London the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1797

J. J. Coleridge

Stowey  
near Bridgewater

Somersetshire

Single

Price of the Postage  
This is Coleridge  
making 2000

S  
P  
M

CHARLES LAMB, MS. "A Vision of Repentance" and A. L. S.,  
15 April 1797, to SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

A Vision of Repentance

I saw a famous fountain in my dream,  
Where shady pathways to a valley led;

Transcription from:

Kendall, Lyle H., Jr. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the W.L. Lewis Collection--Part One*.  
Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1970.

A weeping willow lay upon that stream,  
And all around the fountain brink were spread  
Wide branching trees, with dark green leaf rich clad,  
Forming a doubtful twilight desolate & sad.

The place was such, that whoso enter'd in  
Disrobed was of every earthly thought,  
And strait became as one that knew not sin,  
Or to the world's first innocence was brought.  
Enseem'd it now, he stood on holy ground,  
In sweet & tender melancholy wrapt around.

A most strange calm stole o'er my soothed sprite:  
Long time I stood, and longer had I staid,  
When lo! I saw, saw by the sweet moon light,  
Which came in silence o'er that silent shade,  
Where near the fountain Something like Despair  
Made of that weeping willow garlands for her hair

And eke with painful fingers she inwove  
Many an uncouth stem of savage thorn—  
“The willow garland—*that* was for her Love,”  
“And *these* her bleeding temples would adorn.”  
With sighs her heart nigh burst—salt tears fast fell,  
As mournfully she bended oer that sacred well.

To whom when I addrest myself to speak,  
She lifted up her eyes, & nothing said,  
The delicate red came mantling oer her cheek,  
And gathering up her loose attire, she fled  
To the dark covert of that woody shade,  
And in her goings seem'd a timid gentle maid.

Revolving in my mind what this should mean,  
And why that lovely Lady plained so;  
Perplex'd in thought at that mysterious scene,  
And doubting if 'twere best to stay or go,  
I cast mine Eyes in wistful gaze around,  
When from the shades came slow a small & plaintive Sound;

“Psyche am I, who love to dwell  
In these brown shades, this woody dell,  
Where never busy mortal came,  
Till now, to pry upon my shame.”

[p. 2] “At thy feet what thou dost see  
The Waters of Repentance be,  
Which, night and day, I must augment  
With tears, like a true Penitent,  
If haply so my day of Grace  
Be not yet past; & this lone place,  
Oershadowy, dark, excludeth hence  
All thoughts but grief & penitence.”

*“Why dost thou weep, thou gentle maid  
And wherefore in this barren shade  
Thy hidden thoughts with sorrow feed?  
Can thing so fair repentance need?”*

“O! I have done a deed of shame,  
And tainted is my virgin fame,  
And stain’d the beauteous maiden white  
In which my bridal robes were dight.”

*“And who the promis’d spouse declare,  
And what those bridal garments were?”*

“Severe & saintly righteousness  
Composed the clear white bridal dress:  
Jesus, the Son of Heaven’s high King  
Bought with his blood the marriage ring”

“A wretched sinful creature I  
Deem’d lightly of that sacred tye,  
Gave to a treachrous World my heart,  
And plaid the foolish wanton’s part.”

“Soon to these murky shades I came  
To hide from the Sun’s light my shame—



And still I haunt this woody dell  
 And bathe me in that healing well,  
 Whose waters clear have influence  
 From sin's foul stains the soul to cleanse;  
 And, night & day I them augment  
 With tears, like a true Penitent,  
 Until, due expiation made,  
 And fit atonement fully paid,  
 The Lord & Bridegroom me present  
 Where in sweet strains of high consent,  
 God's throne before, the Seraphim  
 Shall chant the extatic marriage hymn."

"*Now Christ restore thee soon*"—I said,  
 And thenceforth all my dream was fled. [flourish]

[p. 3] The above you will please to print immediately before the blank verse fragments—Tell me if you like it—I fear the latter half is unequal to the former, in parts of which I think you will discover a delicacy of pencilling not quite un-Spenser like—The latter half aims at the *measure*, but has failed to [word deleted] attain the *poetry*, of Milton in his *Comus* & Fletcher in that exquisite thing ycleped the Faithful Shepherdess, where they both use 8 syllable [3 letters of word deleted] lines—But this latter half was finish'd in great haste, & as a task, not from that impulse which affects the name of inspiration [long dash]

By the way I have lit upon Fairfax's Godfrey of Bullen for half a crown. Rejoice with me.

Poor dear Lloyd, I had a letter from him yesterday—his state of mind is truly alarming—he has, by his own confession, kept a letter of mine 'unopened' 3 weeks! afraid, he says, to open it, lest I should [letter deleted] speak upbraidingly to him: & yet this very letter of mine was in answer to one, wherein he informed me, that an alarming illness had alone prevented him from writing—You will pray with me, I know, for his recovery—for surely, Coleridge, a [*delicacy* deleted] exquisiteness of feeling like this must border on derangement. But I love him more & more,—& will not give up the hope of his speedy recovery, as he tells me he is under Dr Darwin's regimen [long dash]



God bless us all, & shield us from insanity, which is "the sorest malady of all" [long dash]

My kind love to your wife & child.

CLamb

Pray write now. [long dash]

[left margin opposite stanza 7: asterisks and The Soul]

[right margin opposite stanza 10: asterisk]

[right margin opposite stanza 9: the *lines* mean to mark Italics—to mark the change of persons in the dialogue]

[to right of stanza 10: [symbol] Jeremy Taylor speaks of the Soul "staining the whiteness of her *baptismal* robes."]

[to right of stanza 11: Italics again]

[to right of final stanza: Italics again]

MS poem and ALS, 3 pages. Double sheet, 33.5 x 21 cm.

Laid paper. Watermarks: knight in crowned oval; FLOYD & CO | 1796.

Seal removed.

Postmarks: three, all indistinguishable.

Address: (center panel of page 4) London the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1797  
[wide vertical space] | S. T. Coleridge | Stowey | near  
Bridgewater | Somersetshire | [lower left] Single [long dash].

Docket: (bottom part of center panel, upside down, in Coleridge's hand) Vision of Repentance. [penciled under this: This is Coleridge's | writing HBS]

Provenance: *Ex libris* Harry B. Smith; Gribbell sale, 23 Jan 1941 (no. 382). In a one-quarter blue morocco folio slipcase, numbered 2657 in pencil, gilt lettering on spine: THE | VISION | OF | REPENTANCE | CHARLES | LAMB | [rule] | THE | ORIGINAL | MANUSCRIPT | 1797.

Published, but not from the original MS (2 substantive and 59 accidental variations in the poem; 2 substantive and 50 accidental variations in the letter), in *The Letters of Charles Lamb, to Which Are Added Those of His Sister*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London and New Haven, 1935), I, 104–107 (no. 25).

Notes: 1. Lamb was writing from London, where he had been in the employ of the East India House since 5 April 1792.

2. The present poem Coleridge printed, without identifying the poet, on

pages 273–278 of POEMS | BY | S. T. COLERIDGE, | SECOND EDITION.  
| TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED | POEMS | By CHARLES LAMB, |  
AND | CHARLES LLOYD. | [motto] | PRINTED BY N. BIGGS, | FOR  
J. COTTLE, BRISTOL, AND MESSRS. | ROBINSON'S, LONDON. | 1797.

3. The Fairfax book was *Jerusalem Delivered*, 1600.

4. Lloyd has been sent to Erasmus Darwin's sanatorium at Lichfield. Lamb's sympathies were exacerbated by his own mental illness (1795) and his sister Mary's (beginning in violence, 22 September 1796).

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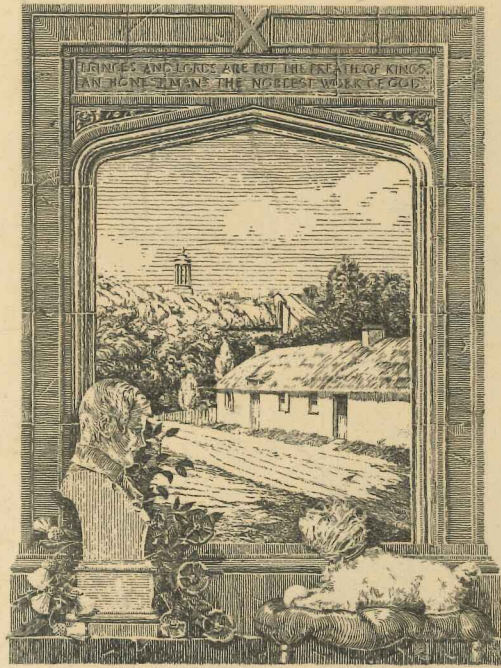
THE  
VISION  
OF  
REPENTANCE

CHARLES  
LAMB

—  
THE  
ORIGINAL  
MANUSCRIPT

1797

2659  
about 1000 words



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