HAVEPOETRY.COM

ALICE MEYNELL

THE POET TO HIS CHILDHOOD

In my thought I see you stand with a path on either hand,
—Hills that look into the sun, and there a river’d meadow-land.
And your lost voice with the things that it decreed across me thrills,
When you thought, and chose the hills.
‘If it prove a life of pain, greater have I judged the gain.
With a singing soul for music’s sake, I climb and meet the rain,
And I choose, whilst I am calm, my thought and labouring to be
Unconsoled by sympathy.’
But how dared you use me so? For you bring my ripe years low
To your child’s whim and a destiny your child-soul could not know.
And that small voice legislating I revolt against, with tears.
But you mark not, through the years.
‘To the mountain leads my way. If the plains are green to-day,
These my barren hills are flushing faintly, strangely, in the May,
With the presence of the Spring amongst the smallest flowers that grow.’
But the summer in the snow?
Do you know, who are so bold, how in sooth the rule will hold,
Settled by a wayward child’s ideal at some ten years old?
—How the human arms you slip from, thoughts and love you stay not for,
Will not open to you more?
You were rash then, little child, for the skies with storms are wild,
And you faced the dim horizon with its whirl of mists, and smiled,
Climbed a little higher, lonelier, in the solitary sun,
To feel how the winds came on.
But your sunny silence there, solitude so light to bear,
Will become a long dumb world up in the colder sadder air,
And the little mournful lonelinesses in the little hills
Wider wilderness fulfils.
And if e’er you should come down to the village or the town,
With the cold rain for your garland, and the wind for your renown,
You will stand upon the thresholds with a face or dumb desire,
Nor be known by any fire.
It is memory that shrinks. You were all too brave, methinks,
Climbing solitudes of flowering cistus and the thin wild pinks,
Musing, setting to a haunting air in one vague reverie
All the life that was to be.
With a smile do I complain in the safety of the pain,
Knowing that my feet can never quit their solitudes again;

But regret may turn with longing to that one hour’s choice you had,
When the silence broodeth sad.
I rebel not, child gone by, but obey you wonderingly,
For you knew not, young rash speaker, all you spoke, and now will I,
With the life, and all the loneliness revealed that you thought fit,
Sing the Amen, knowing it.