

"A Summer Evening's Meditation"

Anna Laetitia Barbauld
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'TIS past ! The sultry tyrant of the south
Has spent his short-liv'd rage ; more grateful hours
Move silent on; the skies no more repel
The dazzled sight, but with mild maiden beams
Of temper'd light, invite the cherish'd eye
To wander o'er their sphere ; where hung aloft
DIAN's bright crescent, like a silver bow
New strung in heaven, lifts high its beamy horns

Impatient for the night, and seems to push
Her brother down the sky. Fair VENUS shines
Even in the eye of day ; with sweetest beam
Propitious shines, and shakes a trembling flood
Of soften'd radiance from her dewy locks.
The shadows spread apace ; while meeken'd Eve
Her cheek yet warm with blushes, slow retires
Thro' the Hesperian gardens of the west,
And shuts the gates of day. 'Tis now the hour
When Contemplation, from her sunless haunts,
The cool damp grotto, or the lonely depth
Of unpierc'd woods, where wrapt in solid shade
She mused away the gaudy hours of noon,
And fed on thoughts unripen'd by the sun,
Moves forward ; and with radiant finger points
To yon blue concave swell'd by breath divine,
Where, one by one, the living eyes of heaven
Awake, quick kindling o'er the face of ether

One boundless blaze ; ten thousand trembling fires,
And dancing lustres, where th' unsteady eye
Restless, and dazzled wanders unconfin'd
O'er all this field of glories : spacious field !
And worthy of the master : he, whose hand
With hieroglyphics older than the Nile,
Inscrib'd the mystic tablet; hung on high
To public gaze, and said, adore, O man !
The finger of thy GOD. From what pure wells
Of milky light, what soft o'erflowing urn,
Are all these lamps so fill'd ? these friendly lamps,
For ever streaming o'er the azure deep
To point our path, and light us to our home.
How soft they slide along their lucid spheres !
And silent as the foot of time, fulfil
Their destin'd courses : Nature's self is hush'd,
And, but a scatter'd leaf, which rustles thro'
The thick-wove foliage, not a sound is heard

To break the midnight air ; tho' the rais'd ear,
Intensely listening, drinks in every breath.
How deep the silence, yet how loud the praise !
But are they silent all ? or is there not
A tongue in every star that talks with man,
And woos him to be wise ; nor woos in vain :
This dead of midnight is the noon of thought,
And wisdom mounts her zenith with the stars.
At this still hour the self-collected soul
Turns inward, and beholds a stranger there
Of high descent, and more than mortal rank ;
An embryo GOD ; a spark of fire divine,
Which must burn on for ages, when the sun,
(Fair transitory creature of a day !)
Has clos'd his golden eye, and wrapt in shades
Forgets his wonted journey thro' the east.

Ye citadels of light, and seats of GODS !
Perhaps my future home, from whence the soul

Revolving periods past, may oft look back
With recollected tenderness, on all
The various busy scenes she left below,
Its deep laid projects and its strange events,
As on some fond and doating tale that sooth'd
Her infant hours ; O be it lawful now
To tread the hallow'd circles of your courts,
And with mute wonder and delighted awe
Approach your burning confines. Seiz'd in thought
On fancy's wild and roving wing I sail,
From the green borders of the peopled earth,
And the pale moon, her duteous fair attendant;
From solitary Mars ; from the vast orb
Of Jupiter, whose huge gigantic bulk
Dances in ether like the lightest leaf;
To the dim verge, the suburbs of the system,
Where chearless Saturn 'midst her watry moons
Girt with a lucid zone, majestic sits

In gloomy grandeur ; like an exil'd queen
Amongst her weeping handmaids: fearless thence
I launch into the trackless deeps of space,
Where, burning round, ten thousand suns appear,
Of elder beam ; which ask no leave to shine
Of our terrestrial star, nor borrow light
From the proud regent of our scanty day ;
Sons of the morning, first born of creation,
And only less than him who marks their track,
And guides their fiery wheels. Here must I stop,
Or is there aught beyond ? What hand unseen

Impels me onward thro' the glowing orbs
Of inhabitable nature ; far remote,
To the dread confines of eternal night,
To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
The desarts of creation, wide and wild ;
Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
Sleep in the womb of chaos; fancy droops,

And thought astonish'd stops her bold career.
But oh thou mighty mind ! whose powerful word
Said, thus let all things be, and thus they were,
Where shall I seek thy presence ? how unblam'd
Invoke thy dread perfection ?
Have the broad eye-lids of the morn beheld thee ?
Or does the beamy shoulder of Orion
Support thy throne ? O look with pity down
On erring guilty man ; not in thy names
Of terrour clad ; not with those thunders arm'd
That conscious Sinai felt, when fear appall'd
The scatter'd tribes; thou hast a gentler voice,
That whispers comfort to the swelling heart,
Abash'd, yet longing to behold her Maker.

But now my soul unus'd to stretch her powers
In flight so daring, drops her weary wing,
And seeks again the known accustom'd spot,

Drest up with sun, and shade, and lawns, and streams,
A mansion fair and spacious for its guest,
And full replete with wonders. Let me here
Content and grateful, wait th' appointed time
And ripen for the skies: the hour will come
When all these splendours bursting on my sight
Shall stand unveil'd, and to my ravished sense
Unlock the glories of the world unknown.