

Poetry by.....

**Elizabeth
(Bessie)
Craigmyle
(1863-1933)**

Elizabeth (Bessie) Craigmyle (1863-1933)

1. Schoolgirl Friendship – written in her early teens.

Eventide

Beloved and most beautiful I see

*With the violet depths of those dear eyes,
A clear soul-flame that burns all silently,
Like trembling stars it in them folded lies.*

When round us is the solemn eventide,

*And that small hand is clasped within my own
All other thoughts are hushed, and by thy side,
I feel the love I hardly dare to own.*

Fair saint! I lay before thine altar fair,

*A feeling from all earthly touches shriven,
Thy name may mingle in my purest prayer,
A love I need not blush to own to Heaven.*

2. Late teens. Dedicated to Maggie Laing, who married Rev H.E. Michie in 1881.

MY SAINT

M.L.

*Yes! in this life we all do find our saint,
We worship, each within his own heart-shrine,
Some face that, though in vision pale and faint,
Hath caught the reflex of the light divine,
And walketh ever in that light, as one
Knowing Heaven waiting when her work is done.*

*My Saint! She wears no halo round her head,
And bears no crucifix within her hand,
Walks not in convent alleys cloistered,
But in our common paths. I understand
The lessons that she liveth day by day –
A sweet Evangel in my sight alway.*

*I look upon her head down bent in prayer,
And almost think the sunshine on the walls
Casts a faint glory on the golden hair,
With loving touch upon the clasped hands falls.
Hearing her voice the daily prayer renew,
I, sometimes, half-believe its words are true.*

*What if they be? The old faith after all
Had visions lovelier than our loveliest dream.
Who knows? There may be answer when we call.
Even I, not all so careless as I seem,
If I had faith, would wish it like to thine-
Thy soul is far more near to God than mine.*

3. Early twenties. The heading “A Study in Style” presumably indicates this is a work of imagination.

*A Study in Style
That Night*

*On the dim seashore, where the night-winds roam,
Two burdens fell, and all two lives grew light,
A mist-pall shrouded the dead land in white,
And the sea shivered into lines of foam,
That happy night.*

*What mattered it if, in embrace that weds
The things that are, the things beyond earth's sight,
The long grey waves that, in the grey twilight,
Crashed on the sand, had closed above our heads,
We lived, that night.*

*One lightning-flash cleft air from sky to shore,
And showed two faces through great love grown white,
Fear panted on the lips of our delight,
Then – Fear and Shame fell slain for evermore.
That happy night.*

Bessie falls in love with Margaret (Maggie) Dale (1860-1887), a fellow schoolteacher.

4. Sexual advance by Bessie rejected by Maggie? Early twenties.

In The Morning

Love, I am here.

*Wild words passed yesterday 'twixt me and you,
My careless hands wrought the deep wrong I rue,
You swore I should repent it. Was it true?
Close, come more near.*

Shuddering and white?

*Why? Let your lips press close and warm to mine.
Ah, sweetheart! has my beauty lost its shine?
Was not this woman pledged for ever thine
Who died last night?*

So. Turn away.

*We did not think to meet again like this.
A lover's quarrel should end in after-bliss:
Last night our lips were hungering for a kiss,
Give it today!*

5. Poem about Maggie? Early twenties.

A Pretty Face

*Where in all this world of ours I wonder
Should I find a sweeter face than this:
Little white hand in my brown one lying,
Lovely mouth held up to meet my kiss.*

*Were I but a man! Then I should whisper
Words to bring the flush of faint surprise
Over brow and cheek, and set the lovelight
Shining in those great, divine, grey eyes.*

*True, no soul for mine to meet and mix with
Lies beneath those lashes upward curled,-
Well, despite of palm, and vine, and cypress,
There is room for roses in God's world.*

6. Maggie goes to teach in Argentina.

Valentine's Day
1884-1885

*The soft spring-wind blows on my brow,
I sit and muse all silently,
Wondering if, in thine autumn now,
Australian winds bring thoughts of me,
O Valentine beyond the sea!*

*If heedlessly I gave you pain,
Forgive. Your life from mine is free,
Yet take, from out an idle brain,
A woman's careless thought of thee,
O Valentine across the sea.*

7. Bessie dedicates her first book of poetry to Maggie.

*Friend, no longer are we together:
Now, in this sweet September weather,
You stand in the shade of the Pampas sunflowers,
My feet are crushing the Scottish heather.*

*Two years have passed of the dreary three.
If they strive to stay you across the sea,
It may be the love that breathes in my verses
Will bring you back to home and to me.*

*And if, in your distant Southern clime,
You care not for feeble and faulty rhyme,
You will care, at least, for the gift I bring you,
A love more strong than distance or time.*

8. Bessie receives news from Argentina of Maggie's engagement to be married.

Not Lovers

*We two shall never change one word of love,
We two shall never meet again on earth,
We two, faith-sundered, shall not meet in heaven.*

*And yet I know how much you are to me,
Know that you hold my soul of equal worth,
That parting does not mean forgetfulness.*

*For letters form a bond between us still,
Through whose strained words I hear a man's heart call –
"I love you. Therefore, help me to be strong."*

*Yes, I will help you. Never shall my hand
In weakness stretch to lift the funeral pall,
Shrouding dead dreams we buried out of sight.*

*And if no word comes through the weary days,
And day and night alike are blank of bliss,
Yet I can wait. I love you all the same.*

*And can be glad your life is sweet, and full
Of better things than I, well knowing this
If you are happy it is also well.*

*Yet in your grief I claim to take my part,
In your last loss, your uttermost despair
Call me, and I shall answer, and will come.*

9. Bessie receives news of Maggie's death in Argentina.

*Pansies and clematis, and scarlet hips,
And honey suckle branches did I break,
Upgather in my arms, and bear away,
Having the dream within my heart always,
That I should give them to you one sweet, near day,
And you would take with dainty finger-tips
The flowers I gave you, and for my poor sake,
Even in your bridal hour, would still heart ache
In me for ever, with the touch of lips.*

*But now I stand, with hands filled full thereof,
And sob-broke voice too sad for singing threne,
Mine are the words of Denmark's weeping queen,
Scattering white flowers o'er one she could not save:-
"I thought thy bride-bed to have decked." O Love!
Now let them wither, on thy Southern grave.*

10. Bessie falls in love again, but memories of Maggie cast a shadow over her new romance.

Re-Awakening

*Great trees stretch their arms above us
As we pass,
Like a priestly benediction
After mass,
And the poppies drop their hoodlets
On the grass.*

*Such a sleepy, slumberous silence
On the land,
As if some enchanter swayed it
With his wand!
On my arm, as on we wander,
Rests your hand.*

*And the holy quiet on us
Softly lies,
Over, round us, and between us,
Garment-wise.
While the tender light of evening
Slowly dies.*

*Still you say, as Love made perfect
Casts out fear,
It should cast out all past sorrow.
With you here
Life should burgeon into blossom.
Listen, dear.*

*When the seeming dead Life's boundary
Pass again,
And, through re-awakening anguish,
Life regain,
Some men hold it dearly purchased
By such pain.*

*All my dead heart thrills and shivers
At your breath,
And the grave-door shut upon it
Severeth.
Dead Love, confined cold in cerements,*

Wakeneth.

*Wakeneth, and with smile of scorning,
In his eyes,
Saith, "Aye, break that voice sob-broken
To love-sighs.
Well for thee no passion-phantoms
Shall arise.*

*Passion-phantoms? Yes. But love-ones
Can, and will;
At my side there walks a Presence
Cold and chill,
And the hands of a dead woman
Hold me still.*