



THE SENSITIVE PLANT.

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

PART I.



SENSITIVE Plant in a garden grew,
And the young winds fed it with silver dew;
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light,
And closed them beneath the kisses of night.

And the spring arose on the garden fair,
Like the spirit of love, felt everywhere!
And each flower and herb on earth's dark
breast

Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

The Snowdrop, and then the Violet,
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet;
And their breath was mixed with fresh odor,
sent

From the turf, like the voice to the instru-
ment.

Then the pied Wind-flowers, and the Tulip tall,
And Narcissi, the fairest among them all—
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess,
Till they die of their own dear loveliness.

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And the naiad-like Lily of the Vale,
Whom youth makes so fair, and passions so pale,
That the light of its tremulous bells is seen
Through their pavilions of tender green.

And the Hyacinth, purple, and white, and blue,
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
It was felt like an odor within the sense.

And the Rose, like a nymph to the bath address,
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare.

And the wand-like Lily, which lifted up,
As a Mænad, its moonlight-colored cup,
Till the fiery star, which is its eye,
Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky.

And the Jessamine faint, and the sweet Tuberose,
The sweetest flower for scent that blows!
And all rare blossoms, from every clime,
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.

And on the stream, whose inconstant bosom
Was pranked under boughs of embowering blossom,
With golden and green light, and, starting through
Their heaven of many a tangled hue,

Broad Water-lilies lay tremulously,
And starry River-buds glimmered by,
And around them the soft stream did glide and dance
With a motion of sweet sound and radiance.

And the sinuous paths of lawn and moss,
Which led through the garden along and across—
Some open at once to the sun and the breeze,
Some lost among bowers of blossoming trees—

Were all paved with Daisies and delicate bells,
As fair as the fabulous Asphodels,
And flow'rets, drooping as day drooped too,
Fell into pavilions white, purple, and blue,
To roof the glow-worm from the evening dew.

And from this undefiled paradise
The flowers (as an infant's awakening eyes
Smile on its mother, whose singing sweet
Can first lull, and at last must awaken it).

When heaven's blithe winds had unfolded them,
As mine-lamps enkindle a hidden gem,
Shone smiling to heaven, and every one
Shared joy in the light of the gentle sun;

For each one was interpenetrated
With the light and the odor its neighbor shed,
Like young lovers, whom youth and love make dear,
Wrapped and filled by their mutual atmosphere.

But the Sensitive Plant, which could give small fruit
Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root,
Received more than all, it loved more than ever,
Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver.

For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;
Radiance and odor are not its dower;
It loves, even like Love; its deep heart is full;
It desires what it has not—the beautiful!



The light winds which, from unsustaining
wings,
Shed the music of many murmurings;
The beams which dart from many a star
Of the flowers whose hues they bear afar;—

The plumed insects, swift and free,
Like golden boats on a sunny sea,
Laden with light and odor, which pass
Over the gleam of the living grass;—

The unseen clouds of the dew, which lie
Like fire in the flowers till the sun rides
high,
Then wander like spirits among the spheres,
Each cloud faint with the fragrance it
bears;—

The quivering vapors of dim noon-tide,
Which, like a sea, o'er the warm earth glide,
In which every sound, and odor, and beam,
Move as reeds in a single stream;—

Each and all like ministering angels were,
For the Sensitive Plant sweet joy to bear;
Whilst the lagging hours of the day went by,
Like windless clouds o'er a tender sky.

And when evening descended from heaven above,
And the earth was all rest, and the air was all love,
And delight, though less bright, was far more deep,
And the day's veil fell from the world of sleep;

And the beasts and the birds and the insects were drowned
In an ocean of dreams without a sound;
Whose waves never mark, though they ever impress,
The light sand which paves it—consciousness.

Only overhead the sweet nightingale
 Ever sang more sweet as the day might fail,
 And snatches of its Elysian chant
 Were mixed with the dreams of the Sensitive Plant;

The Sensitive Plant was the earliest
 Upgathered into the bosom of rest—
 A sweet child, weary of its delight,
 The feeblest, and yet the favorite,
 Cradled within the embrace of night.



PART II.

THERE was a power in that sweet place—
 An Eve in this Eden—a ruling grace,
 Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
 Was as God is to the starry scheme.

A lady—the wonder of her kind,
 Whose form was upborne by a lovely mind,
 Which, dilating, had moulded her mien and motion,
 Like a sea-flower unfolded beneath the ocean—

Tended the garden from morn to even;
 And the meteors of that sublunar heaven,
 Like the lamps of the air when night walks forth,
 Laughed round her footsteps up from the earth!

She had no companion of mortal race,
 But her tremulous breath and her flushing face
 Told, whilst the morn kissed the sleep from her eyes,
 That her dreams were less slumber than paradise.

As if some bright spirit for her sweet sake
 Had deserted heaven while the stars were awake;
 As if yet around her he lingering were,
 Though the veil of daylight concealed him from her.

Her step seemed to pity the grass it prest;
 You might hear by the heaving of her breast,
 That the coming and the going of the wind
 Brought pleasure there, and left passion behind.

And wherever her airy footstep trod,
 Her trailing hair from the grassy sod
 Erased its light vestige, with shadowy sweep,
 Like a sunny storm o'er the dark green deep.

I doubt not the flowers of that garden sweet
 Rejoiced in the sound of her gentle feet;
 I doubt not they felt the spirit that came
 From her glowing fingers through all their frame.

She sprinkled bright water from the stream
 On those that were faint with the sunny beam;
 And out of the cups of the heavy flowers
 She emptied the rain of the thunder-showers.

She lifted their heads with her tender hands,
 And sustained them with rods and osier bands;
 If the flowers had been her own infants, she
 Could never have nursed them more tenderly.

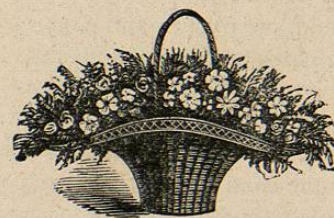
And all killing insects and gnawing worms,
 And things of obscene and unlovely forms
 She bore in a basket of Indian woof
 Into the rough woods far aloof—

In a basket of grasses and wild flowers full,
 The freshest her gentle hands could pull,
 For the poor banished insects, whose intent,
 Although they did ill, was innocent.

But the bee and the beam-like ephemeris,
 Whose path is the lightning's, and the soft moths that kiss
 The sweet lips of the flowers, and harm not, did she
 Make her attendant angels be.

And many an antehatal tomb,
 Where butterflies dream of the life to come,
 She left clinging round the smooth and dark
 Edge of the odorous cedar bark.

This fairest creature, from earliest spring,
 Thus moved through the garden, ministering,
 All the sweet season of the summer-tide,
 And ere the first leaf looked brown—she died.





PART III.

THREE days the flowers of the garden fair,
Like stars when the moon is awakened, were;
Or the waves of the Baiæ, ere, luminous,
She floats up through the smoke of Vesuvius.

And on the fourth, the Sensitive Plant
Felt the sound of the funeral chant,
And the steps of the bearers, heavy and slow,
And the sobs of the mourners, deep and low;

The weary sound and the heavy breath,
And the silent motions of passing death,
And the smell, cold, oppressive, and dank,
Sent through the pores of the coffin plank.

The dark grass, and the flowers among the grass,
Were bright with tears as the crowds did pass;
From their sighs the wind caught a mournful tone,
And sate in the pines, and gave groan for groan.

The garden, once fair, became cold and foul,
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul;
Which at first was lovely, as if in sleep,
Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap
To make men tremble who never weep.

Swift summer into the autumn flowed,
And frost in the mist of the morning rode,
Though the noonday sun looked clear and bright,
Mocking the spoil of the secret night.

The rose-leaves, like flakes of crimson snow,
Paved the turf and the moss below;
The Lilies were drooping, and white and wan,
Like the head and skin of a dying man.

And the Indian plants, of scent and hue,
The sweetest that ever were fed on dew,
Leaf after leaf, day by day,
Were massed into the common clay.

And the leaves, brown, yellow, and grey, and red,
And white with the whiteness of what is dead,
Like troops of ghosts on the dry wind passed;
Their whistling noise made the birds aghast.

And the gusty winds waked the winged seeds
Out of their birthplace of ugly weeds,
Till they clung round many a sweet flower's stem,
Which rotted into earth with them.

The water-blooms under the rivulet
Fell from the stalks on which they were set;
And the eddies drove them here and there,
As the winds did those of the upper air.

Then the rain came down, and the broken stalks
Were bent and tangled across the walks;
And the leafless network of parasite bowers
Massed into ruin, and all sweet flowers.

Between the time of the wind and the snow,
 All loathliest weeds began to grow,
 Whose coarse leaves were splashed with many a speck,
 Like the water-snake's belly and the toad's back.

The Sensitive Plant, like one forbid,
 Wept, and the tears within each lid
 Of its folded leaves which together grew,
 Were changed to a blight of frozen glue.

For the leaves soon fell, and the branches soon
 By the heavy axe of the blast were hewn;
 The sap shrank to the root through every pore,
 As blood to a heart that will beat no more.

For winter came: the wind was his whip,
 One choppy finger was on his lip;
 He had torn the cataracts from the hills,
 And they clanked at his girdle like manacles.

His breath was a chain, which, without a sound,
 The earth, and the air, and the water bound;
 He came, fiercely driven in his chariot throne
 By the tenfold blasts of the Arctic zone.

Then the weeds, which were forms of living death,
 Fled from the frosts to the earth beneath;
 Their decay and sudden flight from frost
 Was but like the vanishing of a ghost!

And under the roots of the Sensitive Plant
 The moles and the dormice died for want;
 And the birds dropped stiff from the frozen air,
 And were caught in the branches naked and bare.

First there came down a thawing rain,
 And its dull drops froze on the boughs again;
 Then there steamed up a freezing dew,
 Which to the drops of the thaw-rain grew;

And a northern whirlwind, wandering about
 Like a wolf that had smelt a dead child out,
 Shook the boughs thus laden and heavy and stiff,
 And snapped them off with his rigid griff.

When winter had gone and spring came back,
 The Sensitive Plant was a leafless wreck;
 But the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and darnels,
 Rose, like the dead, from their buried charnels.



CONCLUSION.

WHETHER the Sensitive Plant, or that
Which within its boughs like a spirit sat,
Ere its outward form had known decay,
Now felt this change, I cannot say.

Whether that lady's gentle mind,
No longer with the form combined,
Which scattered love, as stars do light,
Found sadness where it left delight,

I dare not guess; but in this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seen,
And we the shadows of the dream.

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant, if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odors there,
In truth, have never passed away;
'Tis we, 'tis ours are changed—not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death, nor change; their might
Exceeds our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure.



A CHILD'S EVENING PRAYER.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.



GIRED I am, I'll go to rest,
Safe folded in my little nest,
Heavenly Father, may Thine eye
Above my bed watch very nigh.

Forgive the wrong this day I've done
For Jesus' sake, Thine only Son;
And may His blood, once shed for me,
From all that's sinful make me free.