

1882
A Tale of Paraguay.

—
Dedication.
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To Edith May Southey. 1814.

1

Ten years are past since that auspicious day
Which usher in the merry month of May
Gave birth to thee, my own dear Edithling!
And thou my child thine other name dost take
Fitty from that glad festival of spring;
But fittier was it given thee for the sake
Of a good man, thy father's friend long tried,
Who at the font did answer in thy name.
Thy love & reverence rightly may he claim,
In friendships holy bonds with me allied
Since in our youth we met on Fajó's side,
And fain would I in some enduring song
Honour the worth which I have loved so long.

Quoted 18 July 1983

A child more welcome, by indulgent Heaven
Never to parents tears & prayers was given ;
For eight months only ere thy happy birth
Had past, since of thy sister we were left,
Our first-born & our only babe, bereft.
Too fair a flower was she for this rude earth !
The features of her beauteous infancy
Have faded from me, like a passing cloud,
Or like the glories of an evening sky.
Scarce have my lips lent utterance to her name
Since she was summoned to a happier sphere,
But that dear love so deeply wounded then
I in my soul with silent faith sincere
Devoutly cherish till we meet again.

3

I saw thee first with trembling thankfulness,
O daughter of my hopes & of my fears!
Prest on thy scrawled cheek a troubled kiss,
And breathed my blessing over thee with tears.
But memory did not long our bliss alloy,
For gentle nature who had given relief
Weaned with new loves the chartered heart from grief,
And the sweet reason ministered to joy.

4

It was a season when their leaves & flowers
The trees as to an Arctic summer spread;
For chilling wintry winds & snowy showers
Which had too long usurped the vernal hours,
Like spectres from the right of morning fled
Before the coming of that general May;

And groves & gardens thro' the live long day
Rung with the birds loud love-songs. Over all
One thrush was heard from morn till even-fall;
Thy mother well remembers when she lay
The happy prisoner of the genial bed,
How from yon lofty poplars topmost spray
At earliest dawn his thrilling pipe was heard;
And when the light of evening died away
That blithe & indefatigable bird
Still his redundant song of joy & love preferred.

5.

How I have doted on thine infant smiles
At morning when thine eyes unclosed on mine;
How as the months in swift succession rolled,
I marked thy human faculties unfold,
And watched the dawning of the light divine;

And with what artifice of playful guiles
Won from thy lips with still-repeated wiles
Keeps after keirs, a reckoning after-told, ...
Something I ween thou know'st; for thou hast seen
Thy sisters in their turn such fondness prove;
And felt how childhood in its winning years
To tenderness like this the soul can move.
This thou canst tell: but not the hopes & fears
With which a parent's heart doth overflow,
The thoughts & cares enwoven with that love,
Its nature & its depth, thou dost not, canst not know.

6

The years which since thy birth have past away
May well to thy young retrospect appear
Of measureless extent; ... like yesterday

To me, so soon they fill'd their short career.
To thee discourse of reason have they brought
With sense of time & change; & something too
Of their precarious state of things have taught,
Where man abideth never in one stay;
And of mortality a mournful thought.
And I have seen thine eyes suffus'd in grief
When I have said that with autumnal grey
The touch of old hath mark'd thy fathers head;
That even the longest day of life is brief
And mine is falling fast into the sere... the yellow leaf.

7

Try happy nature from the painful thought
With instant turn, & scarcely e'erst thou bear
To hear me name the Grave: Thou knowest not

How large a portion of my heart is there!
The faces which I loved in infancy
Are gone; & bosom friends of riper age
With whom I fondly talked of years to come,
Summoned before me to their heritage
Are in that better world beyond the tomb.
And I have brethren there & sisters dear,
And dearer babes; I therefore needs must dwell
Often in thought with those whom still I love so well.

D.

Thus wilt thou feel in thy maturer mind,
When grief shall be thy portion, thou wilt find
Thy consolation in such thoughts as these,
A present refuge in affliction's hour:
And if indulgent Heaven thy lot should bless

With all imaginable happiness.

Here shalt thou have my child, beyond all power
Of chance, thy holiest, surest, best delight.
Fear then my song! vain feelings to excite
No strains of morbid sentiment I sing,
Nor tell of idle loves with ill-spent breath;
A reverent offering to the Grace I bring,
And turn a perland for the brow of Death.



