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Psyche.

A POEM.

By Rev. M. B. BROWN, Poet for '73.

Read before the Associated Alumni of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana,

JUNE 25, 1873.

AVE MARIA STEAM PRESS.

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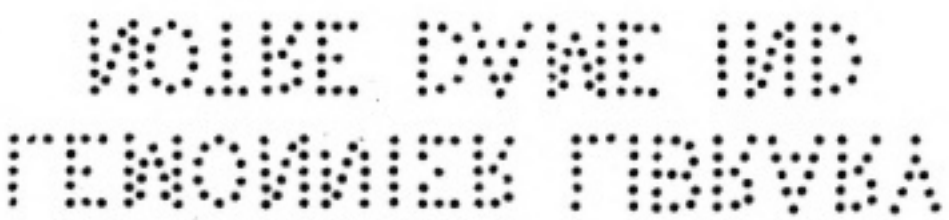

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Psyche.

I.

Bright was the morn when Psyché softly woke
To consciousness of all her varied charms!
Delightful visions of the future broke
In lustre o'er her, as with outstretched arms
She hailed the new-born joys; no vain alarms,
Born of experience and heartless strife,
Disturbed the rapture of that early glimpse of life.

II.

She saw bright Honor waiting at the door
Of opulence and fame, with friendly mien
Beck'ning her onward, while aloft she bore
A crown of fadeless laurel, fresh and green,
To place upon fair Psyché's brow serene,
The meet reward of deeds that heroes prize,
Yet seemed but pleasures to her inexperienced eyes.

III.

Thousands of friends admiring stood around
To cheer her on to glory's golden fane,
Each seemed to wait the slightest cause to bound
To Psyché's aid, that brilliant crown to gain,
While she yet stood on life's untrodden plain
Enraptured at the visioned prospect grand
That seemed to woo the grasp of her resistless hand.

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IV.

The path was bright:—the fragrant flowers of youth
And virtuous ambition, rich in bloom,
Adorned the scene; the look of love and truth
Which met her gaze, led Psyché to assume,
As others had before, that grief and gloom,
Deceit and falsehood, malice and despair,
Lived but in minds made weak with too much fancied care.

V.

Her heart beat wildly to the strains of joy
Awakened by this view of cloudless bliss;
The star of hope shone brilliant in the sky,
And told of joys to come, more bright than this;
For then secure possession would replace
What yet was but the image of that fame
Which Psyché vowed to wreathe around her deathless name.

VI.

'Twas grand to see what majesty of mien
Distinguished Psyché, as in youthful pride
And confidence she gazed upon the scene
That lay, in beauty decked, on every side;
Her heart felt bráve and strong, as life's rich tide
Bounded in youthful freedom, unrestrained
By fears, unknown till disappointment's cup is drained.

VII.

Time called for action:—promptly she advanced,
With confidence and joy, to seize the prize—
Her countless friends obsequious mutely glanced,
In admiration, at those speaking eyes,
That vied in beauty with the azure skies;
And, standing ready with their willing aid,
Cheered on her way the lovely, inexperienced maid.

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VIII.

'Twas well! the first advance was full of cheer,
And hope's bright star grew brighter to her gaze;
The pathway still was flowery, straight and clear,
And glory shone ahead with richer blaze.
But ah! what was fair Psyché's blank amaze,
One early morn, to find her path o'erspread
With thorns and brambles, that inspired her heart with dread!

IX.

Whence came those thorns? They were not of the soil,
For scattered loosely o'er the path they lay:
Ah! could fair Psyché then have seen the toil
With which her *seeming* friends thus barred her way
To glory's temple, envious of that ray
Which even then illumed her lofty brow,
She would have learned what merit soon or late must know.

X.

But no: she saw it not—her guileless mind
Ne'er dreamt that envy thus could seek to mar
The life of one by nature's self inclined
To strive for fame, led by the brilliant star
Of just ambition, never known to jar
With virtue's strictest laws. She saw it not,
And, suffering less, was still the victim of a plot.

XI.

She gazed around; her friends seemed yet as true
As when she first appeared on life's great stage;
So, nothing daunted, she advanced and drew
A murmur of applause, that might assuage
A deeper grief, from even those whose rage
Was ill concealed to see the spirit high
With which she braved the thorns that in her pathway lie.

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XII.

Her march was bold and stately, though at times
Her bloom was changed into an ashy pale
Like to an Autumn morn when crispy rimes
Whiten the bloom and verdure of the vale—
So with her wound did Psyché's beauty fail;
Yet onward still she pressed with firm resolve
To win the prize, whatever pain it might involve.

XIII.

She still believed her friends were firm and true,
For still they hailed her with a cheering smile;
She counted light the toils and pains which drew
The tears unbidden from her eyes the while;
But soon she saw base treachery and guile
Lurking beneath the smile of friendship bland,
And, wounded deep, she swooned upon the thorn-strewn sand.

XIV.

Slyly those friends, 'mid smiles and loud applause,
Had cast new thorns in Psyché's thorny path,
While falsely seeming to remove the cause
Of her great suffering—yes, their fiendish wrath
Prompted them still to hope that pain or *death*
Would stop her midway in her bright career,
And they the fruits of all their previous toil should share.

XV.

Aye, so it is, when merit seeks to rise,
A thousand satellites around it throng,
Seeming as anxious to secure the prize
Of golden fame, to whom it should belong,
As if their own repute from others' spring;
Yet secretly they strive to ruin all
And their own puny fame preserve by others' fall.

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XVI.

So when fair Psyché swooned from pain and grief,
Her faithless friends rejoiced with dark delight;
And, far from seeking to afford relief,
They gladly saw her in that painful plight,
And turned away in base and heartless flight,
Leaving her seeming lifeless. "Now," they said,
"She will advance no more,—her spirit brave is dead."

XVII.

But Psyché woke and sadly looked around;
She was alone, save that one timid maid,
Before scarce noticed, knelt upon the ground
And bathed with gentle hand her throbbing head
(Whose pain made Psyché wish that she were dead),
Resting it softly on her bosom true,
Aye, on that bosom which no faithless envy knew!

XVIII.

Life's consciousness returned, and Psyché spoke,
But oh! how sadly feeble:—"'Tis in vain
To strive for glory's palm when such a stroke
May fall at any moment, like that pain
Which strikes the heart when joy and pleasure reign,
Causing the frame to tremble 'neath the blow,
The soul to shriek and writhe in agonies of woe."

XIX.

"O speak not thus!" the gentle maid replied;
"Be brave!—arouse thee in thy native power!—
The friends on whom thy guileless heart relied
Prove false, and bring thee anguish for the hour;
But this will pass, and like the leaguered tower,
Made strong with guards to meet the present needs—
So should you arm your heart with knowledge of such deeds."

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XX.

Then Psyché raised her head and in amaze
Read with piercing glance the maiden's eye.
'Twas calm, and truthful, giving back a gaze
Not insolently bold, but boldly shy,
That with an angel's look might aptly vie.
The heart-sore victim felt that *there* was truth,
And hailed it as the promise of returning youth.

XXI.

Her heart grew strong again:—she stood erect,
And gazed with steady eye upon the scene;
All nature seemed again in beauty decked;
Again her form resumed its regal mien;
She soon forgot what she so late had been—
And with a firm, though still more cautious tread,
Advanced to win the laurel to her queenly head.

XXII.

Holding the hand of her whose words of cheer
Had chased away that sense of utter woe
Which seized her heart when disappointment drear
Had crushed her with an unexpected blow,
She fixed her anxious gaze upon the glow
Of glory shining brightly to her eye
And vowed again to win the prize or nobly die.

XXIII.

Forward she now advanced with firm resolve
To trust no more unproven friendship's smile;
Her heart those trait'rous friends doth still absolve
Of wilful evil, though her will, the while,
Is fixed, that, ere the crown be gained, no wile
Shall turn her from that earnest, watchful care
That baffles treachery, detecting every snare.

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XXIV.

But what avail resolves, however strong,
To the young heart unused to life's deceit?
That heart, 'tis true, can deeply feel a wrong,
But then a smile will cool all angry heat
And charm it back to confidence complete.
'Tis but a toy with which the wily play
As does the playful kitten with its captive prey.

XXV.

The strong and weak, the genius and the drone,
Are all alike the toys of cunning wiles,
Till oft-repeated wounds their work have done
And taught them how t'appreciate those smiles
Which hidden malice but too oft defiles,—
But he who would be great, or truly wise,
Must by experience win or learn—*and pay the price.*

XXVI.

Thus Psyché still had much to learn *and bear;*
But life's first lesson o'er, her noble heart
Forgot the wounds endured—the crafty snare—
And ceased to dread that more than fiendish art
That winged with friendship's smile its venomed dart;
And buoyed with new-born hope she kept her way
In joy and confidence, cheered on by glory's ray.

XXVII.

Betimes her faithless friends, or rather *foes,*
Returned with seeming penitential mien;
And while her cheek with joy expectant glows,
They smile, and hail her as their chosen queen,
Concealing all the while their bitter spleen,
Till, confidence regained by false pretence,
They ply again their trade with cautious diligence.

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XXVIII.

Aye, 'tis a *trade*, whose end is to destroy
The budding prospects of each noble soul,
That, left to bloom, might give unbounded joy
To many hearts. But such is merit's dole,
As Psyché learned before she reached the goal
Of her desires:—it may attain its aim,
But suffering keen the pleasure of success must maim.

XXIX.

Thronging around, those vampires still essay
To mar the pleasures of fair Psyché's life,
Determined, if they may not bar her way
To glory's heights, to throw into the strife
Such bitterness—such toil with dangers rife—
That should success be hers, her sense of pain
Would stifle still the joy and pleasure of her gain.

XXX.

They saw with bitterness the gentle maid,
Guiding the youthful Psyché on her way
In safety, through the snares their craft had laid,
And, lest blank failure should their toils repay
They now resolved to quench that single ray
Of confidence that cheers their victim's mind,
In feeling that she has one true and faithful friend.

XXXI.

Then artfully they manage to conceal
New snares in Psyché's path, and with surprise
Discover them, ere she had time to feel
Their inconvenience:—when with tearful eyes
They mimic joy, and wear the specious guise
Of sympathy, while with a fiendish art
They plant grave doubts of Psyché's friend in Psyché's heart.

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XXXII.

At first these doubts were like the flitting shade
Of some lone cloudlet flying through the sky,
That casts its transient shadow o'er the glade,
While twixt the sun and earth its course doth lie;
Yet, brightness follows this obscurity;
So did suspicion fly through Psyché's mind,
Leaving her trust still firm in her one faithful friend.

XXXIII.

But clouds accumulate when vapors rise,
And meet the cloudlet in its lone career;
So, when foul envy falsehood multiplies,
Does dark suspicion grow into fear,
And fear develop into darkness drear!
Till some fierce struggle rend base falsehood's shrouds
As when a mighty storm dispels the murky clouds.

XXXIV.

'Twas thus wronged Psyché's crafty foes now strive
To cast a shade of dark suspicion o'er
That friendship, which alone had kept alive
The spark of high ambition when, before,
Discouragement her tender heart-strings tore;
For with such cheering sympathy, success
Could scarcely fail with victory her toils to bless.

XXXV.

For in the contest for life's richest prize
'Tis lack of courage most begets defeat;
But who can with courageous spirit rise
To lofty deeds, unless he *somewhere* meet
A smile of approbation? Who the heat
Of life's great struggle can sustain alone?
That man lives not, unless his heart be made of stone.

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XXXVI.

'Twas nature, then, that Psyché's bitter foes
Should seek to plant dissension's treach'rous seed
In that great heart that only candor knows,
And trust in her who was a friend in need;
For if in this their malice but succeed,
She is their victim; since th'approving smile
They may exchange for scorn whene'er it suits their guile.

XXXVII.

'Twas nature,—and they laid their plans with skill;
At first they dared no accusation bring;
But doubting looks, suspicious thoughts instil
More surely than when words together string
A tale of falsehood. Aye, the hidden sting
Of smooth-faced malice ever wounds more deep
Than open truth:—a look is safer than a peep.

XXXVIII.

Time wore along, their work was slow but sure,
They shook their heads when dangers new appeared,
And cast a look suspicious, yet obscure,
On Psyché's friend, as they the pathway cleared
Of dangers, which their own deceit prepared,
Till stung with doubt, instilled with artful care,
Fair Psyché ceased to trust that friend so true and rare.

XXXIX.

But oh! the sense of loneliness that came
To pierce her heart when friendship's joy was dead!
What now could urge her to her lofty aim?
What now could cheer her when some danger dread
Should bar her path? With trust her spirit fled,
And left her weak and nerveless on her way;
For life was robbed of all that effort could repay.

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XL.

Her watchful foes now hail with secret sneers
The sadness which weighs heavy on her heart;
They see with joy her friend depart in tears—
Tears for the helpless victim of their art,
Who now, in anguish lonely, sits apart
In indecision whether to pursue
Her first great aim, or bid success a sad adieu.

XLI.

But sadness cannot long enthral a mind
That feels its power to win a lofty prize;
Hence Psyché soon cast sadness to the wind,
Resolved, in spite of failure, still to rise
In glory's scale. Was this her purpose wise?
It may have been; yet had she known the cost,
She might for further effort have all courage lost.

XLII.

She knew it not, and still pursued her way;
Her foes redoubled all their former wiles,
Filling her path with danger and dismay,
Yet hiding malice 'neath deceitful smiles
Till weary and depressed her heart recoils,
And oft she must have yielded to their craft,
Had not her friend, unseen, averted ruin's shaft.

XLIII.

That friend, though spurned, suspected without cause,
Still knows she is the victim of deceit,
And, faithfully a friend, she oft doth pause
To mark what struggles Psyché still must meet,
And, seeing the snares set for her fearless feet,
She secretly removes them, glad to feel
That she may still contribute to fair Psyché's weal.

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XLIV.

But why repeat the story to its close?
The hopes and fears, the vict'ries and defeats,
That robbed fair Psyché's life of all repose,
And made high honors seem but gilded cheats?—
'Tis ever thus—true merit always meets
The thorns of envy in its onward way,
And he who wins the prize, the rigid price must pay.

XLV.

'Twas thus with Psyché:—after many toils
And many dangers, fought with grief and pain,
She passed the charméd circle, when the coils
Of envy's snake-like form relaxed their strain,
And, *free*, she stood in glory's golden fane,
Admired by all, e'en worshipped by a few,
Yet she was sad,—for now the price of fame she knew.

XLVI.

Gladly would she resign that laurel crown
Which graced her noble brow, could she recall
Those early days, alas! forever gone!
When confidence and childlike trust in all
Rendered her heart a paradise withal.
But 'tis too late:—she sought and won the prize,
Her life henceforth must be less joyous, if more wise.

XLVII.

And there indeed is wisdom in that law
Which rigidly exacts this price of fame;
For, were the joys of life without a flaw,
Our hearts might rest contented with a dream,
Forgetting e'en the all important aim.
So let us think, when hap or malice stings,
The only solid joy is that which virtue brings.

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