Ode to the Lake of B——

by Alphonse de Lamartine

Translated by Katharine Hillard
THUS sailing, sailing on forevermore,
Still borne along, to winds and waves a prey,
Can we not, on life’s sea without a shore,
Cast anchor for a day?

Dear lake! one little year has scarcely flown,
And near thy waves she longed once more to see,
Behold I sit alone upon this stone,
Where once she sat with me.

As now, thy restless waves were moaning through
The creviced rocks, where they their death did meet;
And flecks of foam from off thy billows blew
Over my dear one’s feet.

One night we rowed in silence,—dost recall
That night? When under all the starry sky
Was heard alone the beat of oars that fall
In cadenced harmony.

When suddenly, upon the startled ear
Accents unknown to earth melodious break;
And with these mournful words, a voice most dear
Charms all the listening lake:—

“O Time, pause in thy flight! and you, propitious hours,
Pause on your rapid ways!
Let us enjoy the springtime of our powers,
The fairest of all days!

“So many wretched souls would speed your flight,
Urge on the lingering suns,
Take with their days the canker and the blight;
Forget the happy ones!

“But all in vain I try to stay its course:
Time slips away and flies.
I say to night, Pass slowly! and the dawn
Breaks on my startled eyes.

“Let us love, then, and love forevermore!
Enjoy life while we may;
Man has no port, nor has time any shore;
It flees, we pass away!”

She paused: our hearts speak through our ardent eyes,
Half-uttered phrases tremble on the air;
And in that ecstasy our spirits rise
Up to a world more fair.

And now we cease to speak; in sweet eclipse
Our senses lie, weighed down with all love’s store;
Our hearts are beating, and our clinging lips
Murmur, “Forevermore!”

Great Heaven! can then these moments of delight,
When love all happiness upon us showers,
    Vanish away as swiftly in their flight
    As our unhappy hours?

Eternity, the Darkness, and the Past,
What have you done with all you’ve made your prey?
    Answer us! will you render back at last
    What you have snatched away?

O lake, O silent rocks, O verdurous green!—
    You that time spares, or knows how to renew,—
Keep of this night, set in this lovely scene,
    At least a memory true!

A memory in thy storms and thy repose,
    O lake! and where thy smiling waters lave
The sunny shore, or where the dark fir grows,
    And hangs above the wave.

In the soft breeze that sighs and then is gone,
    In thy shores’ song, by thy shores echoed still;
In the pale star whose silvery radiance shone
    Above thy wooded hill!

That moaning winds, and reeds that clashing strike,
    And perfumes that on balmy breezes moved,
With all we hear, we see, we breathe, alike
    May say, “They loved!”
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