

Frost at midnight

-Samuel Coleridge

The poem 'Frost at Midnight' was written in the honour of the poet's son Hartley Coleridge and it gives us the picture of an evening spent by the poet by his fireside on a frosty night. In a deeply contemplative and reflective mood, the poet observes the frost falling noiselessly 'Unhelped by any wind'. There is an all pervading silence in the atmosphere which is occasionally broken by the shrill cry of the owl, only heightening the grim silence of the nature by contrast.

*The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings;*

The poet alone is left to his solitary musings as all the members of his family have gone to bed. The poet's only awareness is that of his son sleeping peacefully in the cradle beside him. The oppressive silence seemed to be a hindrance to his meditation as the mind is accustomed to working in the din and bustle of the normal surroundings.

*Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams!*

The poet sits still and thinks about the nature and everything around him – the sea, hill, forests, and the populous village with the pulsations of life and the daily grind, of which he is a part of – seem to become a shadowy vision and appear before him like the silent pictures of a dream.

*By its own moods interprets, everywhere
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.*

The fire on the hearth too burns steadily-only the film on the fire flutters and seems to the poet a welcome companion. It is indeed the tendency of the idle mind to search for the echoes and resemblances of its own moods in the range of natural objects of the surroundings and it does make a 'toy of thoughts', seamlessly flowing into a world of fancies. The bliss of solitude enables the poet's mind to drift into the lofty realm of imagination.

*With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birthplace.*

The tiny flickering film over the flame connects the present to the past and the poet is reminded of the monotonous life he lived in his school days as he sat dreamily watching the fire in the hearth. Often did he weave dreams about his birthplace and its old church tower. The peal of the bells of the church was the only music that the poor parishioners could afford to enjoy. The poet fondly remembers how the

soulful music of the bells on the hot-fair days filled him with excitement and ecstasy and awakened a strange excess of joy in him that seemed to communicate to him the diverse future happenings.

*With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most articulate sounds of things to come!*

All these warm memories of his native place stirred a strange pleasure in him with a lingering sensation and filled him with a thrill of uncontrollable joy that was singular, rare and unrestrained.

As a child, the pleasant things he dreamt of soon lulled him off to sleep and his 'sleep prolonged his dreams'. Even the next morning, they remained with him and he grew quite indifferent to the class work. However, intimidated by the stern glance of the headmaster, he would continue to fix his look upon the book, but the letters would make no meaning to him. As soon as the door half opened, he would snatch a hasty glance to catch a familiar face appearing at the door-

*Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My playmate when we both were clothed alike!*

The poet vows that his son's childhood will be spent in far happier surroundings than his, intensely aware as he is of the gentle breathing of his child sleeping beside him, in the momentary pauses of his thought.

He recalls how he had been brought up in the great city, 'amid cloister dim, and saw nought lovely but the sky and stars' and had spent his childhood in the confines of the college corridors. It gives him great joy to think that his son shall 'wander like a breeze' with uncontrolled joy by the lakes and the sandy shores, beneath the crags of ancient mountains and beneath the clouds. He will thereby comprehend the language of God in the nature's sound and melody.

'God utters, who from eternity doth teach; Himself in all and all in Himself.'

The poet feels that God, the universal teacher who manifests his grace in the bounty and beauty of nature. The poet's son shall imbibe a natural curiosity for the lovely objects of nature and the craving to learn more shall enable him to acquire greater knowledge, thereby also enriching the soul and gaining a spiritual growth.

*Whether summer clothe the general earth
With greenness or the redbreast sit and sing.*

Thus all seasons with their characteristic charms and delights will be dear to his son. Summer with its green foliage will have for him as great an appeal as winter when the red-breast bird sits on the bare branches of the mossy apple tree and sings.

*Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the Moon.*



While the accumulated snow on the 'night thatch' falls and thaw. He will equally appreciate the 'eve drops fall', distinctly audible in the lull of the storm or the frost silently freezing the water droplets into crystals of ice that shine to the quiet moonlight.

Message: Like Wordsworth, Coleridge too believed that God pervades all objects of nature and the divine power manifests itself in all things of universe, just as all things have their being in Him.

The Companionship of nature brings real joy and solace to the human mind and nature indeed exercises a moral and educative influence on man's mind. Thus it is the poet's earnest desire that his son grows up in close communion with nature and treasure his childhood memories forever.