

**THE POEMS OF
CELIA THAXTER**

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The Poems of Celia Thaxter by Celia Thaxter

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1881



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In this new edition of the collected writings of Celia Thaxter, great care has been taken to keep to her own arrangement and to the order in which the poems were originally published. In this way they seem to make something like a journal of her daily life and thought, and to mark the constantly increasing power of observation which was so marked a trait in her character. As her eyes grew quicker to see the blooming of flowers and the flight of birds, the turn of the waves as they broke on the rocks of Appledore, so the eyes of her spirit read more and more clearly the inward significance of things, the mysterious sorrows and joys of human life. In the earliest of her poems there is much to be found of that strange insight and anticipation of experience which comes with such gifts of nature and gifts for writing as hers, but as life went on it seemed as if Sorrow were visible to her eyes, a shrouded figure walking in the daylight. *Here I and Sorrow sit* was often true to the sad vision of her imagination, yet she oftenest came hand in hand with some invisible dancing Joy to a friend's door.

Through the long list of these brief poems (beginning in the earliest book with *Land-locked* and follow-

ing through the volumes called *Driftweed* and *The Cruise of the Mystery*; all reprinted here with some later verses found together among her papers), one walks side by side in intimate companionship with this sometimes sad-hearted but sincerely glad and happy woman and poet, and knows the springs of her life and the power of her great love and hope. In another volume all her delightful verses and stories for children have been gathered; but one poem, *The Sandpiper*, seemed to belong to one book as much as to the other, and this has been reprinted in both.

In the volume of her *Letters* will be found the records of Celia Thaxter's life and so far as it could be told the history of her literary work, while some personal notes by the hand of one of her dearest and oldest friends leave little to be said here. Yet those who have known through her writings alone the islands she loved so much, may care to know how, just before she died, she paid, as if with dim foreboding, a last visit to the old familiar places of the tiny world that was so dear to her. Day after day she called those who were with her to walk or sail; once to spend a long afternoon among the high cliffs of Star Island where we sat in the shade behind the old church, and she spoke of the year that she spent in the Gosport parsonage, and went there with us, to find old memories waiting to surprise her in the worn doorways, and ghosts and fancies of her youth tenanting all the an-

cient rooms. Once we went to the lighthouse on White Island, where she walked lightly over the rough rocks with wonted feet, and showed us many a trace of her childhood, and sang some quaint old songs, as we sat on the cliff looking seaward, with a touching lovely cadence in her voice, an forgotten cadence to any one who ever heard her sing. We sat by the Spaniards' graves through a long summer twilight, and she repeated her poem as if its familiar words were new, and we talked of many things as we watched the sea. And on Appledore she showed us all the childish playgrounds dearest to her and to her brothers, — the cupboard in a crevice of rock, the old wells and cellars, the tiny stone-walled enclosures, the worn doorsteps of unremembered houses. We crept under the Sheep rock for shelter out of a sudden gust of rain, we found some of the rarer wild flowers in their secret places. In one of these it thrills me now to remember that she saw a new white flower, strange to her and to the island, which seemed to reach up to her hand. "This never bloomed on Appledore before," she said, and looked at it with grave wonder. "It has not quite bloomed yet," she said, standing before the flower; "I shall come here again;" and then we went our unreturning way up the footpath that led over the ledges, and left the new flower growing in its deep windless hollow on the soft green turf.

It was midsummer, and the bayberry bushes were all a bright and shining green, and we watched a sandpiper, and heard the plaintive cry that begged us not to find and trouble its nest. Under the very rocks and gray ledges, to the far nests of the wild sea birds, her love and knowledge seemed to go. She was made of that very dust, and set about with that sea, islanded indeed in the reserves of her lonely nature with its storms and calmness of high tides, but it seemed as if a little star dust must have been mixed with the ordinary dust of those coasts; there was something bright in her spirit that will forever shine, and light the hearts of those who loved her. It will pass on to a later time in these poems that she wrote of music, of spring and winter, of flowers and birds, and of that northern sea which was her friend and fellow.

S. O. J.

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