

Fame, that coy goddess



Fame is a coy goddess that rarely bestows her favours on him who seeks her
— a phantom that many pursue and but few overtake.

She delights to hover for a time, like a ghost, over the graves of dead men
who know not and care not: to the living she is a veritable Ignis Fatuus.

But every man owes something to his fellow men.¹

Nor Fame I slight, nor for her favours call;
She comes unlooked for if she comes at all.²

Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil.³

Folly loves the martyrdom of fame.⁴

The rest were vulgar deaths, unknown to fame.⁵



¹ Hanford Lennox Gordon, *Indian Legends & Other Poems*, Preface, p. viii

² Alexander Pope, *The Temple of Fame*, line 513

³ John Milton, *Lycidas*, line 78

⁴ George Gordon Noel Byron, *Monody on the Death of Sheridan*, line 68

⁵ Alexander Pope, *The Iliad of Homer*, Bk. xi, line 394

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From Hanford Lennox Gordon's *Indian Legends & Other Poems*. Salem: Salem Press Co, 1910; pp. 186-88.

Dust of the desert are thy walls
And temple-towers, O Babylon!
O'er crumbled halls the lizard crawls,
And serpents bask in blaze of sun.

In vain kings piled the Pyramids;
Their tombs were robbed by ruthless hands.
Who now shall sing their fame and deeds,
Or sift their ashes from the sands?

Deep in the drift of ages hoar
Lie nations lost and kings forgot;
Above their graves the oceans roar,
Or desert sands drift o'er the spot.

A thousand years are but a day
When reckoned on the wrinkled earth;
And who among the wise shall say
What cycle saw the primal birth

Of man, who lords on sea and land,
And builds his monuments to-day,
Like Syrian on the desert sand,
To crumble and be blown away.

Proud chiefs of pageant armies led
To fame and death their followers forth,
Ere Helen sinned and Hector bled,
Or Odin ruled the rugged North.

And poets sang immortal praise
To mortal heroes ere the fire
Of Homer blazed in Ilion lays,
Or Bragè tuned the Northern lyre.

For fame men piled the Pyramids;
Their names have perished with their bones:
For fame men wrote their boasted deeds
On Babel bricks and Runic stones —

On Tyrian temples, gates of brass,
On Roman arch and Damask blades,
And perished like the desert grass
That springs to-day — to-morrow — fades.

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And still for fame men delve and die
In Afric heat and Arctic cold;
For fame on flood and field they vie,
Or gather in the shining gold.

Time, like the ocean, onward rolls
Relentless, burying men and deeds;
The brightest names, the bravest souls,
Float but an hour like ocean weeds

Then sink forever. In the slime —
Forgotten, lost forevermore,
Lies Fame from every age and clime;
Yet thousands clamour on the shore.

Immortal Fame! O dust and death!
The centuries as they pass proclaim
That Fame is but a mortal breath,
And man must perish — name and fame.

The earth is but a grain of sand —
An atom in a shoreless sea;
A million worlds lie in God's hand —
Yea, myriad millions — what are we?

O mortal man of bone and blood,
Then is there nothing left but dust?
God made us; He is wise and good,
And we may humbly hope and trust.

