

Mrs. E.-G. Bayfield

(fl. 1803–1816)

Little is currently known about the woman who published under the name “Mrs. E.-G. Bayfield” and who may have been born Laura Cooper. Subscribers to her *Fugitive Poems* (1805) included Elizabeth Inchbald, Jane Porter, William Jerningham, and Elizabeth Cobbold, as well as many officers of the Twenty-third Regiment. The volume opens with a poetic “Address to the Subscribers” by her friend Mary Cockle, who confides that the poet has known “sorrow’s darkest hour” in her roles as wife and mother and that she patiently awaits the return of her husband, an army officer stationed overseas. Bayfield had at least three children, but, according to Cockle, “o’er the blossoms of maternal love / Th’ungenial gale of chill misfortune blows.” This may refer to economic hardship brought on by the absence of Bayfield’s husband or perhaps to the illness or death of some of her children.

In her dedication, Bayfield declares that “the qualities of a parasite were never those in which I have been accustomed to excel” but thanks her subscribers for their compassion. Though she describes her poems as products of her “infant muse,” the *Annual Review* declared that the subscribers to *Fugitive Poems* had “no reason to blush at this extension of their patronage” and that the poems “do credit to the feelings of the author as a mother and a wife.”¹ Longmans paid six guineas for the book.

In 1806 Bayfield published a selection from one of her favorite authors, Johann Georg Zimmermann, entitled *Gleanings from Zimmermann on Solitude; to Which are Added, Occasional Observations, and an Ode to Retirement*, dedicated to the Duchess of York and to the women of Great Britain.² Also attributed to Bayfield are nine anonymous novels dating from 1803 to 1814. She was apparently still living in 1816, but her later life is obscure.

1. *Annual Review* 4 (1805): 565.

2. See the review in *ibid.*, 5 (1806): 593; The book was also reviewed in the *Eclectic Review* (2 [December 1806]: 1038–39) and in the *Monthly Mirror* (22 [October 1806]: 253–54).

MAJOR WORKS: *Fugitive Poems* (London, 1805); *Gleanings from Zimmermann on Solitude; to Which are Added, Occasional Observations, and an Ode to Retirement* (London, 1806); and the following anonymous novels attributed to her, all probably published in London: *Light and Shade* (1803), by the author of *Federetta*; *The Aunt and the Niece* (1804); *Eversfield Abbey* (1806); *Love as It May Be, and Friendship as It Ought to Be*, later retitled *A Winter at Bath* (1807); *The Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade* (1808); *The Banks of the Wye* (1809); *The Woman of Colour, A Tale* (1809); *Black Rock House, or Dear Bought Experience* (1810); and *The Splendour of Adversity, a Domestic Story* (1814).

TEXT USED: Text of "The Danger of Discontent" from *Fugitive Poems*.

The Danger of Discontent

Mary exclaims— "Mama's severe,
 "And papa's conduct quite austere:
 "When to some darling wish inclin'd,
 "Or on some plan I fix my mind;
 "With grave advice I'm thwarted."—

"Oh, soon may that holiday period come
 When I shall be blest with my husband and home;
 When no cross papa nor mama more shall tease,
 And I live with the *man of my heart*, quite at ease."

The wishes of Mary were not long suspended, 10
 But tho' soon completed, her case was not mended;
 For tho' much she respected her conjugal vows,
 They were held very light by her profligate spouse
 And poor simple Mary was pained to discover
 The wonderful diff'rence 'twixt husband and *lover*;
 Of late he's so rude and tyrannical grown,
 That no longer she boasts of a *home of her own*;
 Tho' her pride scarce permits the plain truth to appear,
 Yet it speaks in the sigh and the silent-shed tear.
 In those hours of dejection, her mem'ry portrays 20
 The *now* cherish'd delights of her happier days,
 And *mama's grave advice*, which of late could not move,
 Now appears in the garb of affection and love.

“Dear parents,” she mentally cries, “oh! forgive
The ingrate, who would not your maxims receive;
Fain, fain would she now to your mansion repair,
And, press’d to your bosoms, forget ev’ry care—
But wishes are vain—and your child must remain,
While her aching heart whispers she forg’d her own chain.
30 Then this truth let us own, which experience will prove—
No affection’s so binding as filial love;
And no keener anguish can sorrow impart,
Than that which is caus’d by the *man of your heart.*”
(1805)