

Pearl: Section Summary

- I. The narrator mourning his lost pearl falls asleep on a mound in the garden where it was lost.
- II. He dreams that he is in a wonderful landscape, the trees have leaves of silver, the ground is pearls; he then comes to a deep river.
- III. He realizes this is Paradise, the river a boundary he cannot cross. As he follows it, he sees a cliff rising on the other side, with a young woman sitting there, and the sight of her fills him with sudden joy.
- IV. He describes how she is dressed all in pearls, with one pure pearl of great price on her breast; she takes off her crown and greets him.
- V. He asks if she is his lost pearl come back to him, contrasting his sorrow and her bliss. She scolds him for thinking she is in the earth when she is here, no longer caught in time and mortality. He thinks he has regained her for ever now, but this too she tells him is wrong thinking.
- VI. She instructs him, explaining that God has ordained that the river may only be crossed at death; he is upset at the thought of loosing her again. She says that he must learn to accept God's will and not complain, but pray.
- VII. He apologizes, explaining that he had been very sad. He asks her to explain her present high position. She tells how, though young when she first came here, she is now married to the Lord the Lamb, as queen.
- VIII. The dreamer proves foolish, saying that he had thought Mary to be Queen of Heaven. The maiden kneels on hearing Mary's name, and then explains that everyone in heaven is king or queen, while Mary is 'Queen of Courtesy'. But the dreamer finds it hard to believe, because she had no time to do any good works in her life.
- IX. He continues to object that she lived for less than two years, and died too young even to know the 'Our Father', so it's not right she should be so rewarded for so little. She replies by summarizing the Parable of the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) in which various workers are set to work at different times of the day.
- X. (The parable continues) When evening comes the workers are paid, all get the same amount! Those who worked all day get angry. But Christ explains that 'the last (the least, the very small and weak) shall be first' in his Kingdom. She explains that all is mercy, not reward. The dreamer objects that the Bible promises rewards.
- XI. She explains that the gifts of God are enough for all. She then argues that she was lucky, since she was spared all the possibilities of a life filled with sin. She was baptized, and that is enough, because Christ died to redeem all.

XII. She explains the virtues of innocence, with many quotations from the Bible, ending with Jesus welcoming and blessing the little children.

XIII. She recalls the Parable of the Pearl (Matthew 13:45-6) and explains that it means the peace of the Lamb offered to all. She encourages him to purchase his own. He turns to her beauty and asks her functions. She replies that she is bride of the Lamb. Again he foolishly objects that there were many better women.

XIV. She refers to the Apocalypse's 144,000 virgin brides and to Isaiah's mention of the Lamb slaughtered, identified with Jesus dying in Jerusalem, then with the royal Lamb of the Apocalypse.

XV. She quotes the Bible to show that all of them are equally his brides, united in endless praise. The dreamer apologizes, and asks a favor.

XVI. He wants to know where they live, he cannot see any houses. She explains that there is heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. He asks to enter it and see. She replies that he may see, but not enter.

XVII. He expounds what he saw, quoting the visions of John's Apocalypse, beginning with the walls of gemstone.

XVIII. (Paraphrasing the Apocalypse) Then he sees the gateways, the streets, the Lamb as the city's light, and the throne of God, he is filled with perfect bliss.

XIX. He sees the brides of the Lamb in procession, all with their pearls and sees the great worship of heaven, before the wounded Lamb. Suddenly he realizes that his 'little queen' is up there, making mirth among her friends. He longs to be there.

XX. As he moves towards the river, he wakes, back in the garden again. He regrets that he had been greedy, but realizes that he has learned a great lesson

Adapted from the homepage of Brother Anthony, Professor of English at Sogang University, South Korea. Note the highly biblical allusions in his summary.
<http://www.sogang.ac.kr/~anthony/>