

**Richard Rolle (1300-1349), *The Fire of Love***

When I was prospering unhappily, and to youth of wakeful age had now come, the grace of my Maker was near, the which restrained the lust for temporal shape and turned it into unbodily halsing [embrace] to be desired; and lifting my soul from low things has borne it to heaven, so that I might truly burn in desire for the everlasting mirth, more than ever I was gladdened before by any fleshly company, or else by worldly softness.

Forsooth three years, except three or four months, were run from the beginning of the change in my life, and of my mind, to the opening of the heavenly door; so that, the Face being shown, the eyes of the heart might behold and see by what way they might seek my Love, and unto Him continually desire. The door forsooth yet biding open, nearly a year passed until the time in which the heat of everlasting love was verily felt in my heart.

I was sitting forsooth in a chapel, and whiles I was mickle delighted with sweetness of prayer or meditation, suddenly I felt within me a merry and unknown heat. But first I wavered, for a long time doubting what it could be. I was expert that it was not from a creature but from my Maker, because I found it grow hotter and more glad.

Truly in this unhopod for, sensible and sweet-smelling heat, half a year, three months and some weeks have out run, until the inshedding and receiving of this heavenly and ghostly sound; the which belongs to the songs of everlasting praise and the sweetness of unseen melody; because it may not be known or heard but of him that receives it, whom it behoves to be clean and departed from the earth.

Whiles truly I sat in this same chapel, and in the night before supper, as I could, I sang psalms, I beheld above me the noise as it were of readers, or rather singers. Whiles also I took heed praying to heaven with my whole desire, suddenly, I wot not in what manner, I felt in me the noise of song, and received the most liking heavenly melody which dwelt with me in my mind. For my thought was forsooth changed to continual song of mirth, and I had as it were praises in my meditation, and in my prayers and psalm saying I uttered the same sound, and henceforth, for plenteousness of inward sweetness, I burst out singing what before I said, but forsooth privily, because alone before my Maker. I was not known by them that saw me as, peradventure, if they had known me, they would have honoured me above measure, and so I should have lost part of the most fair flower, and should have fallen into desolation.

Wherefore from the beginning of my changed soul unto the high degree of Christ's love, the which, God granting, I was able to attain—in which degree I might sing God's praises with joyful song—I was four years and about three months. Here forsooth, with the first disposition of love gathered into this degree, she bides to the very end; and also after death she shall be more perfect: because here the joy of love or burning of charity is begun, and in the heavenly kingdom it shall receive its most glorious ending. And forsooth she profits not a little, set in these degrees in this life, but she ascends not into another degree; but, as it were confirmed in grace, as far as mortal man can, she rests.

Continually with joy shall I give thanks because He has made my soul in clearness of conscience like to singers clearly burning in endless love; and whiles she loves and seethes in burning, the changed mind, resting and being warmed by heat, and greatly enlarged by desire and the true beauty of lovely virtue, blossoms without vice or strife in the sight of our Maker; and thus beating praise within herself, gladdens the longer with merry song and refreshes labours.

As I forsooth, seeking in scripture, might find and know, the high love of Christ soothly stands in three things: in heat; in song; in sweetness. Whence truly in these three that are tokens of most perfect love, the highest perfection of Christian religion without all doubt is found; and I have now, Jesu granting, received these three after the littleness of my capacity. Yet shall I be busy in virtue that I may more burningly love, more sweetly sing, and more plenteously feel the sweetness of love.

Soothly, heat I call it when the mind is truly kindled in love everlasting; and the heart in the same manner, not hopefully but verily, is felt to burn. For the heart turned into fire gives the feeling of burning love.

Song I call it when in a soul the sweetness of everlasting praise is received with plenteous burning, and thought is turned into song; and the mind is changed into full sweet sound. These two are not gotten in idleness, but in high devotion; to the which the third is near, that is to say sweetness untrowed. For heat and song truly cause a marvellous sweetness in the soul; and also they may be caused by full great sweetness. Truly there is not any deceit in this plenteousness, but rather it is the most perfect ending of all deeds. But the soul in which the foresaid three things run together, bides altogether unable to be thirled [pierced] with the arrows of our enemy, whiles she is continually thinking of the lover; for with mind unsmitten she raises herself to heaven and stirs herself to love.

And marvel not if melody be sent to the soul thus ordinate in love, and though she continually receives comfortable songs from the Beloved; for she lives not as if under vanity, but as it were clad with the heavenly, yea so that she may burn withouten end in unwrought heat and never fall. When she also loves unceasingly and burningly, and as it was before said, feels this most happy heat in her soul, and knows herself subtly burnt with the fire of endless love, plainly feeling her most beloved in desired sweetness, meditation is turned into songs of joy, and nature is renewed and umbelapped [wrapped] in heavenly mirth. Wherefore her Maker whom she has desired with all her heart, has granted her to pass without dread and heaviness from the corruptible body, that without heaviness of death she may forsake the world; the which being the friend of light and enemy of darkness has loved nothing but life.

In this life truly [the solitary] is busy to burn in the fire of the Holy Ghost; and into the joy of love to be taken and, comforted by God, to be glad. For the perfect lonely [solitary] man hugely burns in God's love; and whiles in surpassing of mind he is rapt above himself by contemplation, he is lift up joying unto that sweet sound and heavenly noise. And such a one, forsooth, is likened to the seraphim, burning within himself anchorite without comparison and most steadfast, whose heart is figured to godly fire; and in full light and burning he is borne up into his love. For so great is the burning of love and more than can be shown to him that has sought only the glory of his Maker, and who, going meekly, has not raised himself above sinners.