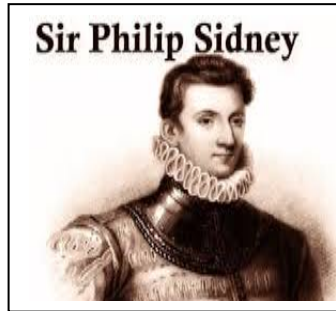


## Sir Philip Sidney



**Sir Philip Sidney** was born on November 30, 1554, at Penshurst, Kent. He was the eldest son of [Sir Henry Sidney](#), Lord Deputy of Ireland, and nephew of [Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester](#). In 1577, he was sent as ambassador to the [German Emperor](#) and the Prince of Orange. Officially, he had been sent to condole the princes on the deaths of their fathers. His real mission was to feel out the chances for the creation of a Protestant league. Yet, the budding diplomatic career was cut short because [Queen Elizabeth I](#) found Sidney to be perhaps too ardent in his Protestantism, the Queen preferring a more cautious approach.

Upon his return, Sidney attended the court of [Elizabeth I](#), and was considered "the flower of chivalry." He was also a patron of the arts, actively encouraging such authors as Edward Dyer, [Greville](#), and most importantly, the young poet [Edmund Spenser](#), who dedicated *The Shepherdes Calender* to him. In 1580, he incurred the Queen Elizabeth's displeasure by opposing her projected marriage to the Duke of Anjou, Roman Catholic heir to the French throne, and was dismissed from court for a time. He left the court for the estate of his cherished sister [Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke](#). During his stay, he wrote the long pastoral romance *Arcadia*.

Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* ("Starlover and Star") was begun probably around 1576, during his courtship with [Penelope Devereux](#). *Astrophil and Stella*, which includes 108 sonnets and 11 songs, is the first in the long line of Elizabethan sonnet cycles. Most of the sonnets are influenced by Petrarchan conventions — the abject lover laments the coldness of his beloved lady towards him, even though he is so true of love and her neglect causes him so much anguish. Lady Penelope was married to Lord Rich in 1581; Sidney married Frances Walsingham, daughter of [Sir Francis Walsingham](#), in 1583. The Sidneys had one daughter, Elizabeth, later Countess of Rutland.

While Sidney's career as courtier ran smoothly, he was growing restless with lack of appointments. In 1585, he made a covert attempt to join [Sir Francis Drake's](#) expedition to Cadiz without Queen Elizabeth's permission. Elizabeth instead summoned Sidney to court, and appointed him governor of Flushing in the Netherlands. In 1586 Sidney, along with his younger brother [Robert Sidney](#), another poet in this family of poets, took part in a skirmish against the Spanish at Zutphen, and was [wounded of a musket shot](#) that shattered his thigh-bone. Some twenty-two days later Sidney died of the unhealed wound at not yet thirty-two years of age. His death occasioned much mourning in England as the Queen and her subjects grieved for the man who had come to exemplify the ideal courtier. It is said that Londoners, come out to see the funeral progression, cried out "Farewell, the worthiest knight that lived."

"Leave me, O Love "

BY SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

*from Certain Sonnets*

Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;  
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;  
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;  
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.  
Draw in thy beams and humble all thy might  
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;  
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,  
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.  
O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide  
In this small course which birth draws out to death,  
And think how evil becometh him to slide,  
Who seeketh heav'n, and comes of heav'nly breath.  
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:  
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.

**Words meaning:**

- which reachest -= which reaches
- but: only
- to dust: down to the earth
- higher things: virtue, knowledge, divine love, spiritual love, etc.
- rust: what happens to old iron;
- fade': go away or disappear
- thy: your
- draw in thy beams: bring the light of heaven
- humble all thy might: be modest
- yoke' here refers to the 'human body.
- this small course' here means 'life.
- becmneth: becomes
- slide: go down

### **The Theme**

Theme of this poem is not only about human love, but rather the divine love or the spiritual love. The first line shows a kind of familiarity between the poet and love as if they are friends.

### **Summary**

In his sonnet 'Leave Me O Love,' as in most of his work, Sidney does not use the Petrarchan form. He uses, instead, the 'Shakespearian' form of three quatrains rhyming alternately abab, ending with a rhymed couplet, a variation developed by Wyatt and Surrey. In the sonnet, 'Leave Me O Love,' Sidney begins by writing, 'Leave me O Love which reacheth but to dust.' This can be understood to mean that he is asking for the temporal loves that turn into nothingness and depart from his experiences during the course of his existence. Then in line two, 'And thou my mind aspire to higher things,' through his reference of his aspiration to 'higher things,' he affirms that he doesn't desire fleeting concepts, but, rather, seeks lasting concepts such as knowledge or religion. He then goes on in line three writing, 'Grow rich in that which never taketh rust, so we can derive by way of metaphor, that he doesn't seek the material wealth of gold or other valuable metals, but, rather, seeks the eternal values of soul. He continues with the theme that all temporal pleasures will fade, as all that fades does. We see this in his words: 'Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings'.

In the first quatrain the message Sidney conveys is very clear. Temporal love, fading pleasures, and material wealth are not worthy of his attentions. He would rather find a noble and divine pursuit that he will not carry with him to the grave. Sidney begins the second quatrain with 'Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might/ To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be. To my understanding, Sidney is referring to the love that is temporal, desires for material riches, and temporal pleasures mentioned in the first quatrain, asking that the forces of temporal and material things contract and nullify themselves to the yoke of the soul. With this contraction and nullification, accomplishing anything is possible, as he uses the metaphor of breaking through the clouds and shining, giving us a vision that transcends the temporal world and reveals to us eternity. This can be understood from what Sidney writes in lines seven and eight, 'Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light, That doth both shine and give us light to see.'

Sidney begins in the third quatrain by telling us how to achieve our desired goal. This is seen in the words of line nine 'O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide'. I understood this to tell us we must be strong and steadfast, holding ourselves true to the eternal, and allowing the pursuit of such to be our guide. The time we have in life is a short period in contrast to eternity. From the time of birth, it begins to draw to an end in what can be understood on the surface, in the words of line ten, 'In this small course which birth draws out to death.' After giving it some thought, the idea came to me that, if each cycle of birth and death were viewed as short courses of a larger cycle of life, one can connect to that what was before him and what will be after him. He can attach himself to eternity by holding strong in his pursuit of the soul. This is seen from what Sidney writes in line eleven 'And think how evil becometh him to slide.' Those that seek connection to the eternal soul must seek the way of heaven and that is through the words of heaven, as Sidney explains in line twelve, 'Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.' It seems, after reading line thirteen, 'Then farewell world; thy uttermost I see;' that Sidney is telling us that he has become aware of his own mortality. He is also saying that he has discovered the uttermost finding in the world. Realizing its value, he goes on and asks if he can take this love of God that he has found into his next small course of life and continue on, writing: 'Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.'

## Critical Appreciation

This poem is about physical love that leads to death, and earthly love vs the divine one. When the man's mind is corrupt, he becomes unable to see the light of God. Physical love leads to slavery through desires, but the divine love leads to freedom, because man's love for God is the only savior toward an eternal life. Our birth leads us to our grave, so we have to follow the light of God. Man can never be perfect because he is a sinner by nature; by we have to fight desires to live a transcendent life, and only God's love will save us from hell.

Though the Christian feeling of the poem has often been noticed, the Christian thought and Biblical allusions have not, so far as we know, been made clear. The poem has been associated with Petrarch's "solemn and impressive renunciation of love's empire" and more often with Renaissance Platonism. But these associations are vague and conjectural, while the Biblical background of the sonnet is unmistakable and the Christian meaning paramount. The contrast emphasized throughout the sonnet is between the brevity of the things of this world and the duration of things heavenly. In lines 1—2, the renunciation of Earthly Love is sufficiently contrasted with the aspiration toward Heavenly Love, despite the generality of "higher things," by the phrase "which reachest but to dust." All the things of this world must pass and return to the dust of which God made man even the love of a man for a woman. This thought is likewise suggested by the first quatrain of Sidney's poem. "Draw in thy beams....." The association in lines 1-4 of worldly love and its objects with the lustrelessness of that "which moth and rust doth corrupt", of that which "fades" and brings "fading pleasures", may suggest that the mind of the worldly man bent upon worldly pleasures tries to emit its own light (dark though this be in comparison with the light of God), to live by this false light, competing, as it were, with God's light. The true penitent will want to forsake the feeble "light" of his own mind (which is really the darkness of willfulness and sin) and will submit himself in all humility to God's light. The act of submission and the accompanying mood of humility are further enforced from two other texts. Jesus said: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light". And Jesus also said: "I the light of the world he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life". The reason for associating "that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be" with the breaking forth of light "that doth both shine and give us sight to see" in lines 6-8 is now clear and indeed compelling. Sidney has brought into conjunction two of the most memorable texts in the Gospels, and they are beautifully consistent with each other. We may then paraphrase lines 5-8 somewhat as follows: Cease to follow the pitiful illumination of your own mind in its worldness, for its light is but darkness. 'Submit humbly to the yoke that Jesus lays upon men for He has promised that by assuming this yoke you will find the only lasting freedom, freedom to follow the path that leads to eternal life by the light of Jesus who is the light of the world.

"O take fast hold....." Of what? The answer is, of Christian faith and eternal life. The image is a favourite of St. Paul's though it also occurs elsewhere in the scriptures. The imagery and allusions of the first two quatrains are all related to the Gospels. In the third quatrain the mood and imagery become predominantly Pauline. The concluding couplet is a prayer to the eternal God who is love; for it is by the grace of the Eternal Love that the Christian finds salvation. The sonnet is thus a very careful and beautiful expression of Christian doctrine and Christian feeling. It is an important commentary upon Sidney's Christian experience and attitude.