

*The little Love-God lying once asleep,  
Laid by his side his heart-inflaming brand,  
Whilst many nymphs that vowed chaste life to keep  
Came tripping by; but in her maiden hand,  
The fairest votary took up that fire,  
Which many legions of true hearts had warmed,  
And so the general of hot desire  
Was sleeping, by a virgin hand disarm'd.  
This brand she quenched in a cool well by,  
Which from love's fire took heat perpetual,  
Growing a bath and healthful remedy  
For men diseased; but I, my mistress' thrall,  
Came there for cure, and this by that I prove:  
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.*

*FINIS.*

The second Cupid sonnet tells what seems at first to be the same story as that in Sonnet 153. The sleeping "little Love-god" (l. 1) leaves his brand beside him when a band of "nymphs" who have vowed chastity (quite ironically) trip by. The purest of these seizes the torch and by her "virgin hand" (l. 8) disarms "the general of hot desire" (l. 7). The cool well in which she quenches the brand takes "heat perpetual" from the fire of love and turns the water into a bath, a "healthful remedy" (l. 11) for diseased men. So far, nearly the same, but the tone created by the phrases just cited seems lighter than that in the preceding poem. Quiet resignation supplants desperation and anger.

And there are key differences in the narrative. This time Cupid does not have his brand re-kindled by the mistress' eyes; there is no trial of the brand's power by touching it to the speaker's breast, and the mistress' eyes are not a potential cure. The speaker simply becomes the mistress' "thrall" (slave, l. 12) again. When the speaker goes to the bath there is no cure: "Love's fire heats water, water cools not love." (l. 14) The implication is that there will always be lust which no virgin hand can suppress. In the agon between Diana and Cupid, "the general of hot desire" (l. 7) with his "legions of true hearts" (l. 6) will always conquer and men will be his slaves.

The speaker has not learned his own lesson about appearances and so

manages to betray himself again. Cupid is not at fault. The love he kindles is, in Sonnet 153, "this holy fire of love" (l. 5), and the well in Sonnet 154 "from Love's fire [takes] heat perpetual" (l. 10). The sentiment shared by these two poems underscores the idea that the heart is more reliable than the eyes. (The "mistress' eyes" are the last words of Sonnet 153.)