Poems

by John Clare

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POEMS

BY JOHN CLARE

PUBLISHER’S NOTICE.

The Publisher desires to express his regret that, owing to an oversight, the proofs of the Introduction were not submitted to the Editor, who is in no way responsible for the following

ERRATA (corrected in this etext)

Page xvii., line 6, for “been” read “being”; page xxii., first line, for “Reynerdson” read “Reynardson”; page xxiv., for “tête-á-tête” read “tête-à-tête”; page xxviii., 2nd line, for “compliments.” read “compliments,”; page xxx., line 11, for “Dick Suivelles” read “Dick Swiveller”; page xxxi., in the last line but two, for “to” read “of”; page xxxix., in line 6 of second paragraph for “widey” read “widely.”

POEMS by JOHN CLARE SELECTED AND INTRODUCED BY NORMAN GALE (AUTHOR OF “A COUNTRY MUSE,” &c. &c.) WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY by C. ERNEST SMITH

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BIOGRAPHY AND COMMENT

In tracing the origin of John Clare it is not necessary to go very far back, reference to his grandfather and grandmother being a sufficient acknowledgement of the claims of genealogy. Following the road at haphazard, trusting himself entirely to the guidance of fortune, and relying for provender upon his skill in drawing from a violin tunes of the battle and the dance, about thirty years before Helpstone heard the first wail of its infant poet, there arrived at the village the vagabond and truculent Parker. Born under a wandering star, this man had footed it through many a country of Europe, careless whether daily necessity required from him an act of bloodshed or the scraping of a harum-scarum reel designed to set frolic in the toes of man and maid. At the time of his reaching Helpstone, a Northamptonshire village, destined to come into prominence because of the lyrics of its chief son, it happened that the children were without a schoolmaster. In his time the adventurer had played many parts. Why should he not add to the list? Effrontery, backed up by an uncertain amount of superficial attainment, won the day, and this fiddling Odysseus obtained the vacant position. Of his boastings, his bowings, his drinkings, there is no need to make history, but his soft tongue demands a moment of attention. We may take it for granted that he picked out the fairest flower among the maids of Helpstone as the target for all the darts at his disposal, each of which, we may be sure, was polished by use. The daughter of the parish clerk was a fortress easy to capture. Depicted by himself, the rascal loomed as a hero; till at last the affair proceeded beyond a mere kiss, and the poor girl pleaded for the offices of a priest in order to save her child from the stain of illegitimacy. However, the schoolmaster proved glib of promises,

but fleet of foot, for on the day following his sweetheart's revelations he was nowhere to be found. In the course of time John Clare's father was born. In his turn, he grew into the want of a mate, found her, married her, and begot an honour for England.

John Clare was born at Helpstone, on the 13th day of July, 1793, and born into a heritage of handicaps. To say nothing of the fruits of exposure to rough weathers which were ripening in his father's system, the boy had the disadvantage of being one of twins, a sister accompanying him into the world. His mother suffered from dropsy, and we may well believe that what life the children sucked from her breast contained elements threatening their future health. Small and frail, the lad had the additional misfortune to open his eyes in the cottage of a pauper, instead of in some abode where his natural weakness could have been nourished by foods giving inward encouragement, and of a sort sure to result in the building up of hearty fibre. Despite all these early rebuffs, John Clare kept hold of life. When still very young he set out full of faith to explore the junction of earth and heaven, for on the horizon he could see the point of their meeting. In this incident, as well as in many another of his childhood, it is easy to detect signs of a spirit triumphantly unfitted for residence in a clay hovel at Helpstone. As luck would have it, a kind of rough-and-ready poetry was not altogether out of the boy's reach, for his father's head was stuffed with innumerable odds-and-ends of rhyme, some of which he was in the habit of reciting to his son. Entertainment of the same sort was obtainable from old Granny Bains, a weather-worn cow-herd, to whom the future poet was attracted by her store of ditties; whose especial cronies were the wind and rain. Under such illiterate tutors little John Clare moved closer and closer to the soul of poetry, musing while he put a limit to the vagrancy of the geese and sheep for which he had been appointed guardian as soon as the main part of his schooling was over. His departure from the scholastic bench took place when his years had reached a very unripe total, for with only seven birthdays entered in his book of life, at an age

when a child is usually at the commencement of historical and geographical perplexities, he was turned out into the fields as a wage-earner. Instead of feeling elated at his escape from the scholastic coils of Dame Bullimore, as many a lad would have done, John Clare, being aware of his budding wits, although unable to comprehend the motive force from within, looked round his small district in search of fresh educational territories to be conquered by his brain. Having saved a few pence he made overtures to Mr. James Merrishaw, the schoolmaster of Glinton, and in the duller months of the year, when days were short, he attended certain evening classes, notwithstanding the fact that the journeys involved taxed his boot-leather severely; for Glinton is nearly five miles away from Helpstone. Here he learned well, but not altogether wisely, if we may agree that the boy's struggles with the intricacies of algebra were conspicuous for mis-applied energy. But something more valuable than baffling equations resulted from John Clare's connection with the sage of Glinton, for Mr. Merrishaw made him free of his books, thus feeding more and more that desire for knowledge which sprang up in him not less rapidly than a mushroom grows in a meadow.

Even in such a loose piece of biography as this—an essay which has no other aim than to glance in passing at the salient features of Clare's career—a little space must be spared for mention of the boy's year of service as factotum at the "Blue Bell" at Helpstone, where he had almost as much leisure as work, because it was here that his hermitical notions and moods of dream increased at an extraordinary rate. Served by travelling pedlars, whose packs let him share in fancy the terror of Red Riding Hood, the adventures of Valentine and Orson, to say no word of Sinbad's amazements, the small student entered for the first time into the recesses of fairy land, there to lave his hands in its abundant jewels, while making extortionate demands upon the swiftness of genies. Little by little, algebra went to the wall, yielding as much to the boy's spreading passion for Nature's feast of grass and flowers, as for the limitless enchantments born of imagination, since at this period

the list of impulses communicated to him by wayside blossoms, by clouds, by winds, and by the easy ballads of thrushes, daily grew longer. The boy began to appreciate the largeness of God's school as compared with the limits reigned over by Dame Bullimore and the pedagogue of Glinton; and his increasing sense of hearing enabled him to receive into his understanding fragments of those sermons which are preached by stones. Hunger for expansion lived and lusted in his heart. No better example of this fury of craving could be adduced than the story of how the young poet entered into a combat with circumstances in order that he might obtain a copy of Thomson's "Seasons." Mental agony, as well as a superlative degree of hoarding, went to the purchase of that coveted volume, the history of which is fully set forth in Mr. Frederick Martin's stimulating "Life of John Clare." During these glowing months the boy of genius had not ceased from utilising every chance scrap of paper for the purpose of jotting down his exercises in rhyme. By means of a forgivable trick he secured the verbal patronage of his father and mother, who could not see any merit in his verses till he pretended that they were the compositions of others. As poem after poem was written their author stored them in a cranny in the wall, a retreat at last invaded by Mrs. Clare, with the result that she was wont to help the boiling of the kettle by burning underneath it the early pipings of her son.

At this point, the youth in whose story the interest lies being sixteen years old, Cupid, with no loss of his bright qualities after so many centuries of exercise, comes into the recital. To John Clare, who was moving rapidly towards the full worship of all things lovely, Mary Joyce appeared to be nobody less bewildering and enchanting than a stray from heaven; and though he was prevented from wearing her, the dice of Fortune falling adverse from the box, he never ceased to regard her as his ideal. Of the many pathetic incidents of his life not the least touching is the fact that in his years of a broken brain he cherished as a chief delusion the belief that Mary Joyce was indeed his wife. What the feelings of a nature so intense were when the father of his sweetheart intervened as the proverbial slip between the cup and the

lip, we can only conjecture, though the tracing of results is easy enough. After leaving the tankards and the horses of the “Blue Bell,” John Clare cast about him for some other form of employment. Escaping the pains of stone-cutting and cobbling, he succeeded in becoming a gardener’s apprentice at Burghley Park, the seat of the Marquis of Exeter. Parker Clare began to think that his son was born with an invisible silver spoon in his mouth, while to John eight shillings a week, with lodging free, smacked of the robbers’ cave in the “Arabian Nights.” In reality, this position was altogether undesirable, for the head gardener, not content to degrade himself alone by an excessive swallowing of stimulants, actually devoted his best efforts to make drunkards of his pupils. Unfortunately temptation loomed large at the very moment when Clare was ripe for mischief. Romance was worsted by swipes (the indignity of the episode may be held to excuse the slang); by means of such thin nepenthe, regret for the loss of Mary Joyce grew less and less; and it not infrequently occurred that the new apprentice slept off his potations by the hedge-side, with no better blanket than a mist, and with the damp turf for sole mattress, thus unconsciously taking in a cargo of ague and fever for future unloading. At last Clare, in company with another lad who was anxious to show a clean pair of heels to the abstract and concrete brutalities of his master, fled to Grantham, and thence to Newark-upon-Trent, where both the runaways obtained work under a nurseryman. But Clare was homesick; his mother’s face was as a magnet pulling him to the familiar hovel at Helpstone; no longer could he obey that decree of divorce from his native scenes pronounced against him by the impalpable judge and jury of circumstance. One day, after a terrible journey on foot, he burst into the hut of his parents, weeping for joy to gain for his body the residence which his spirit had occupied so long.

No sooner had Clare returned his muscles to the various tasks of a farm labourer than he harked back with a love greater than ever to Thomson’s “Seasons,” reading it as he went to and from his work. The chief part of his leisure he used for the

composition of verses, an occupation which served to fix upon him habits of timidity and shyness, especially as he was without a single sympathiser. Because of his strange manners, his fits of abstraction as well as of uttered enthusiasm, his appetite for solitude, the neighbours passed from mere mockery to whispers of a mind diseased, and even of a nature beset by the black ministers of magic. The fact that about this time his mother, for the purposes of fuel, made a clean sweep of his poetic accumulations did its share to loosen his moral control; and when his attempts at gaining encouragement from Mr. Thomas Porter, and patronage from Lord Milton, to whom the parish clerk of Helpstone displayed the rustic poet, failed, he betook himself, this time of his own accord, to the drunken company of the worst livers in the village. Much of Clare's future misery proceeded from this lapse. Before bad example had done its utmost to ruin him, Providence, in the somewhat unusual disguise of a recruiting sergeant, came to the rescue. John's period of military service was brief, for after being instructed at Oundle in the goose-step—that foundation of a glorious career under arms—the corps of which he was a member was disbanded, and he was enabled once more to assume the civilian smock at Helpstone. For all booty he had a second-rate copy of "Paradise Lost" and "The Tempest." A matter of more importance, however, was the fact that he had departed from the pernicious influence of the roysterers who were leading him to destruction. A number of small adventures were not slow to follow his short intimacy with the clothes and tools of war, what with his trial of a gipsy's life, and his courting of several girls, one of whom, Elizabeth Newton by name, drove him into a fit of melancholy by playing the part of a jilt. In this state of mind nothing could have suited him better than change of scene, and his departure to Bridge Casterton, there to learn the details of a lime-burner's trade, happened at a moment fortunate for heart and head alike. It was while he resided in this neighbourhood that he confided to Mr. Henson, a bookseller of Market Deeping, the fact of his colloquy with the Muse, following the avowal by a display of his powers. This confession was the

germ of a wide circulation.

And now we are arrived at a fresh, and, as far as matrimony is concerned, a final love. Clare being now twenty-four years of age, it was high time for him to nurse an established affection, and he was lucky to win the heart of Martha Turner, the "Patty" of several poems to be found in the collected works of the poet. To him Martha was another waif from the skies, even though she tortured her poetical admirer by the time-honoured practice of appearing to waver between two suitors. The conduct of this episode was made up of petty events prosaic enough to the onlooker, but sufficiently lethal for the parties most interested. Tiffs, sour looks from parents, despairs, showers, rainbows, were the constituents of Clare's courtship. A flat and always fortunate wooing would doubtless have been hostile to poetry. Because of his longing to supply two mouths with the necessaries of life, and because it was clearly proved that Cupid would not even be able to munch a satisfactory portion of crust if the lovers founded their faith solely on the wage of a lime-burner, Clare conceived the idea of publishing a volume of song, his mind appointing Mr. Henson, of Market Deeping, a comrade for his project. A month devoted to the base uses of the treadmill would not have cost the poet more labour than did the composition of his prospectus, three hundred copies of which the bookseller agreed to print, as well as a specimen sonnet, for one pound. But this trap for subscribers was baited with too much candour. If ever a poet met with a crushing response to his first appeal for a hearing, surely John Clare was that man. Seven patrons came forward, more, we may guess, in kindness than in hope of literary luxury. Clare, of course, experienced the superlatives of disgust; and when the printer of the artless prospectus wrote to inform him that the adventure must drop unless fifteen pounds appeared to back it up, he could not withhold himself from replying in a strain to the last degree impolitic. To add to his griefs, a rather wide gulf was at this time yawning between Martha Turner and himself, the bridging of which was a feat of engineering extremely hard to accomplish. Moreover, and here

is an illustration of the proverb that it never rains but it pours, the owner of the limekilns discharged his lyrical servant on the score of his inattention to business. The whole neighbourhood being somewhat scandalised at what was considered presumption, for labourers of Clare's type were not required to assert themselves in prose, much less in poetry, the disappointed lime-burner, with a heart given up to aching, returned once more to Helpstone, where he would have starved but for parochial relief. So genius sat down to eat the parish loaf.

However tightly twisted the rosebud may be, windy and sunny fingers will unpack it at last. At the very moment when Clare was reading himself as the peculiar prey of disaster, he was destined to behold the bright back of the cloud which had confronted him with such ominous persistence. By strange approaches the news of Clare's devotion to and production of poetry arrived at Mr. Drury, a bookseller who was on the point of taking over a business at Stamford from Mr. Thompson, of that town. In company with a friend, Mr. Drury proceeded to Helpstone, interviewed the astonished poet, glanced through some rhymed samples, and finally declared his intention to publish a volume at his own risk, hearing which intelligence Clare once more rose heavenward in the balloon of hope, forgetting how certain it was that impediments to free flight would make themselves manifest. Owing to the offices of Mr. Drury, Clare became acquainted with Mr. Gilchrist, of Stamford, a gentlemen with an Oxford education and a grocer's shop, who played the part of a true friend to the poet, if we except his action in making public some verses of Clare's which had more wine than inspiration in them. It has been contended that Mr. Gilchrist filled the post of patron with a want of reserve which made Clare feel his position acutely; for the eating of humble-pie has never been a really popular amusement. Be this as it may, lovers of "Poems descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery" have a great deal for which to thank Mr. Gilchrist. After promising Clare to undertake the publication of his first book, Mr. Drury experienced a few bad hours. To begin with, the ill-spelt, rope-tied, unpunctuated mass of manuscript entrusted to him by its author had a

most unpromising aspect. He tested it as best he could, but, as the glow of the adventure had already faded a little, found no particular reasons for comfort. In this strait he enlisted the acumen of an acquaintance, a clergyman, whose name was, somewhat appropriately, Twopenny, in order to see how the verses might strike a contemporary. The prophetic Twopenny, with brutal candour, described Clare's bundle of reeds to be so much twaddle. When Mr. Drury delivered this oracle, the grief of the poet was such that the bookseller was shocked. Had it not been for the anguish of the singer, it is quite possible that the bookseller of Stamford would have departed, with decent circuity, from his bargain; as it was, he determined to procure yet another opinion. He happened to be a relative of Mr. John Taylor, the London publisher, to whom he despatched the uncouth manuscript in question. Mr. Taylor's were not as Mr. Twopenny's eyes. He knew diamonds when he saw them, even though a polisher had not exerted his craft upon them.

Before proceeding to describe the effect made on the public by the appearance of "Poems descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery," it will be necessary to revert for a moment to the affairs of love. No sooner was the first quarrel between the sweethearts swept away by the broom of reconciliation than the flame of passion, burning to a conquering height, made a bonfire out of the broken materials of virtue. This disaster was followed by fresh bickerings. Martha Turner found it impossible to be for ever displaying a cheerful front. Her tears, her reproaches, her simple tricks to make Clare jealous, resulted in a serious breach. Clare, listening far too readily to glib and evil persuasions from within, appears to have convinced himself that he was the injured party; whereupon he began to wound Martha by flirting outrageously with Betty Sell, the daughter of a Southorp labourer. This inglorious behaviour received a sudden check, just after the publication of Clare's book, by reason of a letter from Martha Turner, in which she spoke of her coming motherhood, and implored the author of her shame to cleanse her in so far as he was able. Truth to tell, Clare was by this time wellnigh assured that Betty was his favourite, but he had

the manliness to follow the right star, and on the 16th of March, 1820, was united to Martha at Great Casterton Church. A month after the wedding Anna Maria Clare was born to him. As this marriage would hardly have been possible but for the stir occasioned by the poems, we may now give a short history of the events immediately following their issue.

Although the art of preliminary puffing was as yet in swaddling clothes, so to speak, Mr. Taylor contrived to interest a large number of his acquaintances, some of whom had access to the columns of certain periodicals. Moreover, Mr. Gilchrist's magazine article had proved a useful forerunner. The book itself was born into a golden clime. The reading world happening to be sick of Metropolitan and modish fare, Clare's birds and mayblossoms came as a tonic to all who were desirous of a change. The triumph of the country over the town was of the completest sort; customers poured into Mr. Taylor's shop in their anxiety to purchase copies of the labourer's poems; for once the critics and the public were agreed. Journals of fine stature joined with insignificant prints in praising Clare to the skies, and when this new writer actually succeeded in carrying the defences of the "Quarterly," it was allowed on all sides that lion-hunters were in luck's way. Clare was fortunate in some of his advertisers. Rossini and Madame Vestris brought him into further prominence by means of a musical setting and of recitations at Covent Garden. Genius in hobnailed boots and a smock-frock shouldered aside the more usual figures of literary London. While all this was taking place in Fleet Street, as well as in the aristocratic sections of the capital, rumours of Clare's amazing success reached the county residences in the neighbourhood of Helpstone. General Birch Reynardson gave him to eat with his lackeys, and Viscount Milton flung seventeen guineas into his lap with as much feeling as he might have thrown seventeen crumbs to a cur. In great contrast to blue-blooded vulgarity of this stamp was the Marquis of Exeter's treatment of the poet, although a more liberal display of tact upon his part would have enabled Clare to leave his mansion with a heart given over completely

to joy and gratitude. Friends of Clare are not likely to forget the generosity of the Marquis. An annuity of fifteen guineas for life was indeed a handsome backing of the Muse. Because of this gift Anna Maria Clare was born in wedlock; without it her parents would not have been able to marry as soon as they did. Foolish folk spared the poet none of the customary agonies. He was pestered by inquisitive visitors; collectors of autographs bullied him for his signature, and the owners of albums plagued him to encourage them in their whim. Some persons of the goody-goody type improved the shining hour by sending him an assortment of tracts, the fate of which is wrapped in impenetrable mystery. Clare was a simple child of nature, certainly, but we may almost take it for granted that he left these precious effusions undigested.

The news that Clare was about to trust his bones to London almost paralysed his rustic intimates. Generations of romancers had made strange impressions upon the provincial mind. Particularly full of odious vaticinations was James Burridge, an old farm labourer whose head was stuffed to the bursting point with stories horrifying enough to make Clare’s flesh creep. According to this authority, London thoroughly deserved the doubtful compliment of being compared with Babylon. He declared that there were trap-doors in the streets, down which wayfarers flopped into cauldrons of boiling water amid the plaudits of ministering cut-throats! Clare quailed, his parents wept, and his wife approached within measurable distance of hysterics. But even the prospect of being cooked in this casual manner did not suffice to deter the poet from visiting Mr. Taylor, of Fleet Street. That he set some value upon the legends of James Burridge is proved by his adoption of a small device to baffle the trapdoor operators. Believing safety to be resident in a smock-frock and in boots the soles of which sustained grinning rows of hobnails, he set forth upon his journey thus attired. He was not long in regretting his precautions, for he soon perceived that his costume evoked from onlookers merry comments and derisive glances. In the end, Mr. Taylor supplied him with an overcoat which

covered the defects of his attire. Whatever the heat of theatre or drawing-room, whether among lords or commoners, John Clare clung to this garment with the courage of despair. What his agonies were, because of his raiment, when driven into a corner by a countess for a tête-à-tête, we can do no more than dimly conjecture. In the course of this visit Clare was introduced to Admiral Lord Radstock, who took a great fancy to him and remained a firm friend, and to Mrs. Emmerson, a lady who, seeing that her purse and sympathies were always ready to alleviate the mischances of young poets and artists, might be described as a female Maecenas. To this rather gushing and sentimental patroness of the arts Clare from time to time addressed letters which were not devoid of the elements of wildness and Platonic passion. At last his emphasis became so absurd that Mrs. Emmerson requested him to send back her portrait. Had a jug of cold water been poured down the poet's neck he could not have been more cooled than he was by this piece of diplomacy. The shrine was despoiled. The picture was despatched by the next carrier; and doubtless Martha, who must have hated the sight of Mrs. Emmerson's face, congratulated herself in secret. There is no need to say more about Clare's first visit to London, if we except mention of the fact that the mighty city's chief effect upon him was to fill his breast with yearning for the oaks and rivulets round about his native village. A week in the Metropolis had been more than enough for the countryman. As he rumbled homeward in the coach, he had dreams of unsullied waters and unsmoked rainbows; and he counted over his country joys as a miser adds up the total of his various coins. At the top of his treasures stood his wife and baby, for, with all his Platonic declensions from the state most comfortable to Martha, he was an affectionate husband and father. About this time several hearty friends strove with might and main to secure a competence for the poet. A sum of four hundred and twenty pounds was the result of their earnestness; but when it is remembered that Earl Fitzwilliam and Clare's publishers were between them responsible for no less than two hundred of this amount, the harvest of solicitation is not notable for bounteousness. Dr.

Bell—a friend of the right complexion—extracted an annual ten pounds from Earl Spencer, so that, what with this gift, the Marquis of Exeter's donation, and the fund, the genius of Helpstone was possessed of an income of forty-five pounds per annum. Clare felt a very mendicant throughout all these transactions, and even went so far as to disavow them in letters despatched to his noble helpers. Had it not been for the persuasions of Mr. Gilchrist and the amusing invectives of Dr. Bell, he would have kicked with greater persistence against the pricks of charity.

As soon as the harvest was over, Clare made an end of labouring in the fields. He was under agreement to hand over another volume of poetry to Messrs. Taylor and Hessey for publication early in 1821. It was now his earnest endeavour to fulfil his share of the bargain, and he bared his forehead to inspiration. Clare always felt himself cheated and empty of ideas when shut up within four walls. The Muse would not follow him to his fireside, but she would frolic with him the live-long day in the open air, filling him with buoyancy, kissing his lips, and smoothing out his wrinkles. Seated inside an old oak, whose heart had gradually passed into the atmosphere, Clare was wont to pour his soul in song, and so fruitful were the hints of his unseen companion that he soon had a great collection of new verses. All that he approved he desired to publish, but Mr. Taylor spoke a few strong words in favour of weeding, suggesting to Clare that he should play the part of Herod toward some of the children of his imagination. A deadlock ensued. For a time the poet was adamant, the publishers marble. In this difficulty Clare bethought himself of Mr. Gilchrist as an excellent agent for the casting of oil on the troubled waters. This gentleman, however, was thick in a squabble of his own, and when Clare appeared unsympathetic he displayed a spirit very much huffed. At last the tension between poet and publishers became less, with the result that in the middle of September "The Village Minstrel" was ready for purchasers. The two volumes were handsomely presented; the type was beautiful, and a couple of steel engravings made a brave show. Despite the attractions of genius, despite the various ornaments,

“The Village Minstrel” met with rather an icy greeting. Among the several explanations of this coldness put forward by the publishers and by certain friends, the likeliest is that the season of issue was not wisely chosen. In this year such gods of the pen as Scott, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, and Lamb distributed joy to many a reader, so that poor John Clare naturally ran a great risk of being overlooked. It was now proved how dangerous had been the heat of his first welcome. Superlatives had been done to death; the lion-hunters had exhausted their treacly compliments, and were now eagerly scanning the literary horizon in the hope of seeing approach a fresh victim. Moreover, some injudicious persons had descanted more upon Clare’s poverty than upon his remarkable powers. It was the general opinion, as Mr. Martin points out in his biography, that a really capable poet should be able to support himself. If he did not succeed in so doing, then he was but a dabbler while pretending to be a priest. The logic was of the sort to shrink from scrutiny, but it contented the shallow sufficiently well. To my thinking, the charge of twelve shillings for these two volumes was a factor in the neglect which overtook them. Be this as it may, a collection of verse containing some exquisite and lovely pieces, and marking in some respects an advance upon the forerunning book, fell upon the stony patch of indifference, there to remain while verse of fifty times less merit enjoyed a vogue out of proportion to its worth. In a word, Clare’s second luck was the exact opposite of his first. In days saddened by the reflection that he had failed to hold by the glory which he obtained at his first venture, it was balm to Clare to know that Robert Bloomfield at least warmly approved of what lukewarm triflers failed to appreciate.

In the summer of 1821, not long after the meteoric appearance at Helpstone of a minor poet, who presented Clare with a sonnet and a one-pound note in a glorious burst of bounty and condescension, Mr. John Taylor passed a few hours in the little Northamptonshire village. Under the guidance of Clare he reviewed many of the spots which the poet had celebrated in song, and, in some cases, he was amazed to

find how Clare had compelled dull localities to yield strains both abundant and beautiful. But to gather roses in a desert is child's play for a genius. Upon taking leave, Mr. Taylor invited Clare to spend a few weeks in Fleet Street. Luckily the poet decided to avail himself of this offer, for about this time he was far too frequent a visitor at the "Blue Bell," where he had his corner reserved, and passed for the chief of the assembly. This meant more than sufficient exercise for the gullet. The bad habit contracted at Burghley Hall was strengthened at these sittings, and Clare, deplorably unstable in some mental particulars, approached nearer and nearer to that abyss which has engulfed so many great wits. The winter being over, Clare departed for London. He was something of a bolt from the blue to Mr. Taylor, but that gentleman was not slow in welcoming his client, though he looked askance at the gay pocket handkerchief in which was contained the whole of his friend's luggage. As the publisher was very busy, he delivered Clare into the keeping of Thomas Hood, who, in turn, handed him over to the head porter of the firm. The poet was not long in finding his way to the house of Mrs. Emmerson, whose hospitality was as frank and unstinted as ever. Here Clare met Mr. Rippingille, a young artist with a dash of Dick Swiveller in him, who had a strong appetite for noisy pranks. In company with this unreflective spirit the peasant from the Midlands attended some very dubious functions, penetrating to quarters of the Metropolis which were famous for the topmost achievements of rascality, where he ran riot among various intoxicants. After besieging a certain beauteous actress with all the languishing glances at their command, these foolish comrades would pledge her in pale ale till, like Byron, they seemed to walk upon the ceiling. Thus were buttresses added to Clare's unfortunate predilection. Those who revel by gaslight are not fond of returning home before midnight, and Clare was no exception to the rule. But the hours of his choice were not grateful to Mr. Taylor, whose sense of the fitness of things was offended by his visitor's conduct. Therefore, Thomas Hood was deputed to inform Clare that he was vexing his host, an intimation which resulted in the poet

carrying his handkerchief full of belongings to Mrs. Emmerson's house, where his manners did not improve. Under the accomplished tuition of Mr. Rippingille he found how easy the descent of Avernus was. His next move was to Chiswick, where the Rev. H. T. Cary entertained him. His stay here was brief, owing to an amusing episode. Strangely enough Clare was ignorant of the fact that his elderly host had a young and handsome wife. In the belief that he was doing homage to the charms of one of Mr. Cary's grown-up daughters, he addressed several poems, which were not without the quality of ardour, to the wife of the translator's bosom. After this, although his explanation was accepted and understood, Clare thought he had better depart from Chiswick. During this stay in London the Northamptonshire poet was introduced to William Gifford and Charles Lamb, the latter of whom, if report may be trusted, was guilty of a rather coarse jape at his expense. Not long after this, Clare returned to Helpstone. It is worthy to note that, whereas his first visit to London had only accentuated his country raptures, the village minstrel now actually pined for the fatted calves, the theatres, the glitter, and the merry companions of the city. The taint of Rippingille was upon him. Reaction came in time; the meadows captured him again; but this small piece of history is significant of much.

As soon as he was once more in possession of his best self, Clare began to face his troubles—most of which sprang from insufficient means at this time—with as much courage as he could summon. He was rather slow in being convinced that he could not derive a steady income from the composition of poetry; but when this truth was driven home his mind at once became agile in devising numberless plans for the betterment of his state, for he suffered from a torturing anxiety when he remembered for how many his fate had appointed him the bread-winner. He was now fighting hand to hand with poverty, valorous in behalf of his aged mother, his wife, and his little children, who enjoyed the fruits of whatsoever victories were gained far more than did their defender—since he secretly starved himself in order to increase the tale of loaves presided over by Patty. In the year 1823, worn out by his failures to

extract a supporting flow of guineas from either poetry or agriculture, he fell very ill, just after the shock occasioned by the death of Mr. Gilchrist. His recovery was of the slowest, and it was not till he was put by Mr. Taylor under the care of Dr. Darling, in London, that the poet mended in a manner to satisfy his friends. It was during this third visit to the Metropolis that Clare came in contact with De Quincey, Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and Allan Cunningham, to mention only four of the prominent men whom Mr. Taylor delighted to make members of his evening parties. Clare found his imaginary portraits to be very deceptive, especially so in the case of De Quincey. The bulk and dull appearance of Coleridge also surprised, as well as disappointed, him, for he had pictured the great man in a guise completely opposite to reality. There is little need to say that in Mr. Taylor's house nothing of a bacchanalian tinge was likely to occur; but even the moderate pleasures of the publisher's entertainments threatened to destroy the good brought about by the skill and care of Dr. Darling, and therefore Clare was induced to return to Helpstone, where he once more renewed his search for employment, encountered thoughtless snubs from the high and mighty of the district, and gradually approached the line which separates mental health from mental disease. He was for ever engaged in keeping the wolf from the door. He did not eat a due share of what his means supplied, denying himself from day to day with a rigidity which could not fail to injure both body and brain. At the end of the year 1825, after working in the cornfields throughout the harvest, Clare turned to the composition of poetry, and produced "The Shepherd's Calendar," a volume in which he used the file to excellent purpose. Already bruised and wounded by the rough edges of life, the poet found an additional hardship in the fact that Mr. Taylor long delayed to publish this third book of verse; for to make both ends meet was now a miracle beyond his accomplishing. Although several editors of those elegant annuals which were then so much in favour had asked Clare to assist in making their sugary volumes attractive, they were by no means quick to send him the money he had earned. He had only his annuity and a few shillings

gained by doing odd jobs for the farmers of the neighbourhood. At this juncture Patty bore him a third child.

In 1828 Clare went to London again at the invitation of Mrs. Emmerson, and it was then that he discovered how completely the “Shepherd’s Calendar” had failed to stir the interest of the public. It was during this visit that Mr. Taylor, doubtless believing the open-air exercise would be most beneficial to the poet, suggested to Clare the advisability of his attempting to dispose of his works by carrying them from house to house in Northamptonshire and the adjoining counties. Allan Cunningham was furious at the idea, but in the end Clare embraced it, though it had been better for him had he held the same opinion as his friend, for the adventure was prolific of more kicks than halfpence. The history of this part of Clare’s career makes very sad reading. Hungry and footsore he tramped from rebuff to rebuff, pondering misery and dreading the workhouse. But though the record of his travels is, for the most part, a document of disaster, there are a few proofs of kindliness contained in its pages. For example, when he returned to Helpstone from Boston, where certain of the leading inhabitants had done their best to render him extremely uncomfortable, he found ten sovereigns in his wallet. A few young men had treated him as Joseph treated his brethren. For three months after his experiences at Boston, Clare was exceedingly ill, and it looked as if there was to be no ebbing of that tide of misfortune which had flowed in his direction for so long. Better luck, however, was in store. Clare got some regular work to do, and was thus prevented from poring over foolscap. Little by little he reduced his debts; his body throve in the sunshine of content; and he was able to comfort himself with the belief that, after all, he would escape the degradation of becoming a pauper. Unfortunately a hard winter followed the summer and autumn during which he had been so happy, and illness once more caused him to renew acquaintance with those bitter familiars of his—want and despair. About this time he chanced to have a conversation with Earl Fitzwilliam, with the result that his patron promised to build him a cottage somewhere near

Helpstone. The exact place decided upon by his lordship was Northborough, a hamlet three miles distant from Helpstone. This situation was chosen in a spirit of kindness, the earl believing that the many natural beauties to be found almost at the door of the cottage would please the eye as well as stimulate the genius of the poet. But the prospect of being severed from the bleak surroundings of his native place filled Clare with sensations of terror acute enough to make a severe effect upon his mind. For days before the final wrench came he strode about the lanes and fields, outwardly exhibiting symptoms of a deranged intellect; but when the hour for departure struck he allowed himself to be led to his new home as placidly as a tired horse to the pasture. So far from proving a blessing to Clare, the cottage at Northborough was the immediate cause of fresh perplexities. Expenditure was necessary to furnish it and to keep it in repair; debts were quickly piled one upon the other; among strangers it was harder to obtain employment than it had been at Helpstone; and in the January of 1833 Patty bore her seventh child. At the thought that he could scarcely provide his dear ones with bread enough to keep body and soul together, Clare, shortly after hearing the news of his boy's birth, rushed out into the fields to give his sorrow vent. Late in the evening his eldest daughter found him lying insensible on an embankment. A month of bed followed this collapse. In the spring, although his vital forces were now sufficient to carry him in search of the early flowers, he showed no inclination to leave the little room where he kept his books and papers. The irresistible magnets of former years—blossoms, birds, greenery and sunshine—had all lost their pulling power. Clare himself perceived that he was in danger of ceasing to be his own master, and accordingly wrote to Mr. Taylor begging him to secure Dr. Darling's help. In reply, his old publisher invited him to London. But the poet neither had money in his purse nor a single chance of raising the amount necessary to defray the costs of the journey. Messrs. Whittaker & Co., who were responsible for the appearance of the "Rural Muse," declined to send him even a small sum on account, so that he was tied fast to Northborough, where

his mental malady had everything in its favour. Had it not been for the untiring exertions of Dr. Smith, of Peterborough, who mingled poetry and pills in his advice to patients, thus obtaining a goodly list of subscribers, it is doubtful whether the "Rural Muse" would have made its appearance before Clare was overcome by permanent imbecility. In the summer of 1835 this beautiful collection of rustic reeds was put forward as a candidate for the affection of those professing a love for music and wholesomeness in verse. The reception accorded to the book proved conclusively what important parts fashion and hypocrisy play in the concerns of the lyre. Clare was out of vogue; he was a stale lion; the parasites upon genius could no longer hope to gain a temporary notoriety by displaying his peculiarities in their saloons. The idea of reading poetry for the sake of poetry appears never to have occurred to the members of a society as ponderable, in the matter of intellect, as thistledown, and as variable as the sheen of an opal. It is a moot point whether or no the reviewers wrote notices of the "Rural Muse." If they did their duty, the editors certainly did not back them up by granting space for the criticisms, for scarcely a paragraph of commendation saw the light. If Clare did not fall among thieves, he at least fell among blind bats. Literary England blotted her own escutcheon in this respect, but Scotland was saved from a similar disgrace by a noble outburst of praise for the poet, and scorn for his frigid countrymen, from the pen of Professor Wilson, in the course of which he adjured the Southrons to hold their tongues about the fate of Burns. Let them remember Bloomfield. Had he but known all the evil circumstances which were combining to push John Clare in the direction of a lunatic asylum, his retort would have been strengthened to a degree melancholy to contemplate.

Mental derangement advanced upon Clare with rapidity. In the spring of 1836 there was a brief period when the flowers made him a clear-minded partaker of their magic, but the improvement was not maintained, and little by little the condition of the poet became more widley known, till at last it reached the ears of several

patrons. These advised his immediate removal to the asylum at Northampton, a plan to which Patty refused her consent, for she still had hopes that if her husband were allowed to range at his will and seek a cure from the pharmacy of nature, he would beat the disease. But Patty's love only delayed the inevitable. Clare, it is true, escaped from the control suggested by Earl Fitzwilliam, who endeavoured to place the poet at Northampton, where a weekly dole from the nobleman's purse would secure for the patient some additional comforts; but he had nowhither to fly from the severe benefactions of the friends of former days. Mr. John Taylor and others, willing to heed now that the catastrophe to which their silence had contributed was come by its full dimensions, clubbed together and sent Clare to Dr. Allen's private lunatic asylum in Epping Forest, where all the resources of a humane treatment were brought to bear upon his case. He wrote a great quantity of verse, some of which was of real worth; tended the flowers in the garden beds; wandered about the woods hour after hour, smoking, musing, or conversing with some companion. In the middle of July, 1841, he escaped, and eventually reached Werrington, a hamlet lying beyond Peterborough. His chief food had been grass; blood was trickling from his feet when Patty took the wanderer into her arms on the roadside at Werrington. After a day's rest at Northborough, the poet asked for pen and ink. When these were supplied he commenced to write his Odyssey. It is almost safe to say that no more extraordinary a document belongs to the personal history of any genius born within our boundaries. It is of a character to draw tears from the unsympathetic; your Scrooge, your Quilp, could scarcely withstand its pathos. Well might Christopher North request us to be done with our comments upon Scotland's usage of Burns!

The rest is soon told. Clare, though quite harmless, was not allowed to pass free among the country sights and sounds. For some reason or other he was haled to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, where he remained for twenty-two years, neglected alike by kindred, by friends, and by the educated mob which had once made an idol of him. At the Asylum he was treated with unvarying mildness by the

authorities, who refused to regulate the comforts of the poet by the eleven shillings a week supplied by Earl Fitzwilliam. That their natures were not subservient to coinage they proved by placing Clare—poor, eleven-shillings-a-week John Clare—among private patients in the best ward.

The end came in 1864, and on the 25th of May in that year the mortal remnant of John Clare, peasant and poet, was interred at Helpstone. When Earl Fitzwilliam was asked for a grant of the few pounds necessary for the burial of the poet in the churchyard so beloved by him during his lifetime, he responded by suggesting that the funeral should be that of a pauper at Northampton. However, a few friends of the right heart prevented this disgrace, and the body rested where the soul had marked out for it a spot of greenery and quietude.

That some of Clare's poems belong of right to the excellent things of this earth admits of no dispute. A worshipper of Nature, by whom he was surely appointed to be one of her chief historians, he revelled in her manifestations, whether they showed in the higher heaven of blue or in the lower heaven of green. He was, if the phrases may pass muster, a gossip of the rainbow, a crony of the flowers. His heart was not less slow than that of Wordsworth to leap up with joy when he beheld standing across the sky, its feet treading the horizon, the most splendid triumphal arch ever devised; and though it was not granted him to render homage to his mistress in such large accents as those which fell from the lips of his great brother in song, he paid for her love and favours in music far from perishable, as may be noted by all who will read the pieces that have been selected for this volume from the "Rural Muse." Who passes by any one of these poems because he early finds a flaw, does so at his own danger, for each of them belongs, as I venture to assert, so indubitably to the particular treasures of pastoral poetry that I doubt whether the contradiction of our greatest critics could frighten me from the attitude of admiration. To influences other than those of the countryside, Clare remained unimpressionable. To be in London was to long for Helpstone, the commons and

pools of which were more precious to the poet than all the glories of Westminster Abbey, and the expanses of the artificial lakes. While he sojourned in the Metropolis the right spark would not fall from heaven, but as soon as he wandered once more among the scenes so long familiar to him, the Muse was his unfailing companion. Brooks glided in his songs; birds and clouds and leafage were foundations without which he had been well-nigh powerless. He understood, and was content with, his limits; and so perfectly did he accomplish his duty as Nature's cherished amanuensis, that it is no hard task for a man with an ounce of imagination in his being to hear the trickle of streams, and to fancy his study carpeted with grass, while reading John Clare's poems within four walls. As this volume of selections is designed for the purpose of attracting readers to a poet whose appreciative receipts from his posterity are sadly deficient in quantity, the publisher has thought well to ask from me the tale of Clare's life, rather than my views of the poet's work and its effect upon his successors in the production of poetry dealing almost exclusively with the vowels and consonants in Nature's mighty alphabet. Enough has been said to prove the writer no half-hearted advocate; and if these few pages serve to increase the number of Clare's friends, he will be more than satisfied, happy in the thought that he has been the means of introducing readers to poetry as gentle as it is healing, as simple as it is sincere. Touching its wholesomeness, how could it fail to delight in this respect when the chief of its constituent parts were the large and lovely expressions of Nature's handicraft? John Clare's gift fell upon him direct from the skies. It came clean; and clean he kept it from the beginning to the end of his stewardship.

Norman Gale.

WHAT IS LIFE?

AND what is Life?—An hour-glass on the run, A mist retreating from the morning

sun, A busy, bustling, still repeated dream.— Its length?—A minute's pause, a moment's thought. And happiness?—A bubble on the stream, That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought.

What is vain Hope?—The puffing gale of morn, That robs each flow'ret of its gem,—and dies; A cobweb hiding disappointment's thorn, Which stings more keenly through the thin disguise.

—And thou, O Trouble?—nothing can suppose (And sure the Power of Wisdom only knows), What need requireth thee: So free and liberal as thy bounty flows, Some necessary cause must surely be. But disappointments, pains, and every woe Devoted wretches feel, The universal plagues of life below, Are mysteries still 'neath Fate's unbroken seal.

And what is Death? is still the cause unfound? That dark, mysterious name of horrid sound?— A long and lingering sleep, the weary crave. And Peace? where can its happiness abound?— No where at all, save heaven, and the grave.

Then what is Life?—When stripp'd of its disguise, A thing to be desir'd it cannot be; Since every thing that meets our foolish eyes Gives proof sufficient of its vanity. 'Tis but a trial all must undergo; To teach unthankful mortals how to prize That happiness vain man's denied to know, Until he's call'd to claim it in the skies.

ADDRESS TO PLENTY IN WINTER

O THOU Bliss! to riches known, Stranger to the poor alone; Giving most where none's requir'd, Leaving none where most's desir'd; Who, sworn friend to miser, keeps Adding to his useless heaps Gifts on gifts, profusely stor'd, Till thousands swell the mouldy hoard: While poor, shatter'd Poverty, To advantage seen in me, With his rags, his wants, and pain, Waking pity but in vain, Bowing, cringing at thy side, Begs his mite, and is denied. O, thou blessing! let not me Tell, as vain, my wants to thee; Thou, by name of Plenty stil'd Fortune's heir, her favourite child. 'Tis

a maxim—hunger feed, Give the needy when they need; He, whom all profess to serve, The same maxim did observe: Their obedience here, how well, Modern times will plainly tell. Hear my wants, nor deem me bold, Not without occasion told: Hear one wish; nor fail to give; Use me well, and bid me live.

’Tis not great, what I solicit: Was it more, thou couldst not miss it: Now the cutting Winter’s come, ’Tis but just to find a home, In some shelter, dry and warm, That will shield me from the storm. Toiling in the naked fields, Where no bush a shelter yields, Needy Labour dithering stands, Beats and blows his numbing hands; And upon the crumping snows Stamps, in vain, to warm his toes. Leaves are fled, that once had power To resist a summer shower; And the wind so piercing blows, Winnowing small the drifting snows, The summer shade of loaded bough Would vainly boast a shelter now: Piercing snows so searching fall, They sift a passage through them all. Though all’s vain to keep him warm, Poverty must brave the storm. Friendship none, its aid to lend: Health alone his only friend; Granting leave to live in pain, Giving strength to toil in vain; To be, while winter’s horrors last, The sport of every pelting blast.

Oh, sad sons of Poverty! Victims doom’d to misery; Who can paint what pain prevails O’er that heart which Want assails? Modest Shame the pain conceals: No one knows, but he who feels. O thou charm which Plenty crowns: Fortune! smile, now Winter frowns: Cast around a pitying eye! Feed the hungry, ere they die. Think, oh! think upon the poor, Nor against them shut thy door: Freely let thy bounty flow, On the sons of Want and Woe.

Hills and dales no more are seen In their dress of pleasing green; Summer’s robes are all thrown by, For the clothing of the sky; Snows on snows in heaps combine, Hillocks, rais’d as mountains, shine, And at distance rising proud, Each appears a fleecy cloud. Plenty! now thy gifts bestow; Exit bid to every woe: Take me in, shut out the blast, Make the doors and windows fast; Place me in some corner, where,

Lolling in an elbow chair, Happy, blest to my desire, I may find a rouzing fire; While in chimney-corner nigh, Coal or wood, a fresh supply, Ready stands for laying on, Soon as t'other's burnt and gone. Now and then, as taste decreed In a book a page I'd read; And, inquiry to amuse, Peep at something in the news; See who's married, and who's dead, And who, through bankrupt, beg their bread: While on hob, or table nigh, Just to drink before I'm dry, A pitcher at my side should stand, With the barrel nigh at hand, Always ready as I will'd, When 'twas empty, to be fill'd; And, to be possess'd of all, A corner cupboard in the wall, With store of victuals lin'd complete, That when hungry I might eat. Then would I, in Plenty's lap, For the first time take a nap; Falling back in easy lair, Sweetly slumbering in my chair; With no reflective thoughts to wake Pains that cause my heart to ache, Of contracted debts, long made, In no prospect to be paid; And, to Want, sad news severe, Of provisions getting dear: While the Winter, shocking sight, Constant freezes day and night, Deep and deeper falls the snow, Labour's slack, and wages low. These, and more, the poor can tell, Known, alas, by them too well, Plenty! oh, if blest by thee, Never more should trouble me. Hours and weeks will sweetly glide, Soft and smooth as flows the tide, Where no stones or choaking grass Force a curve ere it can pass: And as happy, and as blest, As beasts drop them down to rest, When in pastures, at their will, They have roam'd and eat their fill; Soft as nights in summer creep, So should I then fall asleep; While sweet visions of delight, So enchanting to the sight, Sweetly swimming o'er my eyes, Would sink me into extacies. Nor would pleasure's dream once more, As they oft have done before, Cause be to create a pain, When I woke, to find them vain: Bitter past, the present sweet, Would my happiness complete. Oh; how easy should I lie, With the fire up-blazing high, (Summer's artificial bloom,) That like an oven keeps the room, Or lovely May, as mild and warm: While, without, the raging storm Is roaring in the chimney-top, In no likelihood to drop; And the witchen-branches nigh, O'er my snug box towering high, That sweet shelter'd stands beneath, In convulsive eddies

wreathe. Then while, tyrant-like, the storm Takes delight in doing harm. Down before him crushing all, Till his weapons useless fall; And as in oppression proud Peal his howlings long and loud, While the clouds, with horrid sweep, Give (as suits a tyrant's trade) The sun a minute's leave to peep, To smile upon the ruin's made; And to make complete the blast, While the hail comes hard and fast, Rattling loud against the glass; And the snowy sleets, that pass, Driving up in heaps remain Close adhering to the pane, Stop the light and spread a gloom, Suiting sleep, around the room:— Oh, how blest 'mid these alarms, I should bask in Fortune's arms, Who, defying every frown, Hugs me on her drowny breast, Bids my head lie easy down, And on Winter's ruins rest. So upon the troubled sea, Emblematic simile, Birds are known to sit secure, While the billows roar and rave, Slumbering in their safety sure, Rock'd to sleep upon the wave. So would I still slumber on, Till hour-telling clocks had gone, And, from the contracted day, One or more had click'd away. Then with sitting wearied out, I for change's sake, no doubt, Just might wish to leave my seat, And, to exercise my feet, Make a journey to the door, Put my nose out, but no more: There to village taste agree; Mark how times are like to be; How the weather's getting on; Peep in ruts where carts have gone; Or, by stones, a sturdy stroke, View the hole the boys have broke, Crizzling, still inclin'd to freeze;— And the rime upon the trees. Then to pause on ills to come, Just look upward on the gloom; See fresh storms approaching fast, View them busy in the air, Boiling up the brewing blast, Still fresh horrors scheming there. Black and dismal, rising high, From the north they fright the eye: Pregnant with a thousand storms, Huddled in their icy arms, Heavy hovering as they come, Some as mountains seem—and some Jagg'd as craggy rocks appear Dismally advancing near: Fancy, at the cumbrous sight, Chills and shudders with affright, Fearing lest the air, in vain, Strive her station to maintain, And wearied, yeilding to the skies, The world beneath in ruin lies. So may Fancy think and feign; Fancy oft imagines vain: Nature's laws, by wisdom penn'd, Mortals cannot comprehend; Power almighty Being gave, Endless Mercy stoops to

save; Causes, hid from mortals' sight, Prove "whatever is, is right."

Then to look again below, Labour's former life I'd view, Who, still beating through the snow, Spite of storms their toils pursue, Forc'd out by sad Necessity That sad fiend that forces me. Troubles, then no more my own, Which I but too long had known, Might create a care, a pain; Then I'd seek my joys again: Pile the fire up, fetch a drink, Then sit down again and think; Pause on all my sorrows past, Think how many a bitter blast, When it snow'd, and hail'd, and blew, I have toil'd and batter'd through. Then to ease reflective pain, To my sports I'd fall again, Till the clock had counted ten; When I'd seek my downy bed, Easy, happy, and well fed.

Then might peep the morn, in vain, Through the rimy misted pane; Then might bawl the restless cock, And the loud-tongued village clock; And the flail might lump away, Waking soon the dreary day: They should never waken me, Independent, blest, and free; Nor, as usual, make me start, Yawning sigh with heavy heart, Loth to ope my sleepy eyes, Weary still, in pain to rise, With aching bones and heavy head, Worse than when I went to bed. With nothing then to raise a sigh, Oh, how happy should I lie Till the clock was eight, or more, Then proceed as heretofore. Best of blessings! sweetest charm! Boon these wishes while they're warm; My fairy visions ne'er despise; As reason thinks, thou realize: Depress'd with want and poverty I sink, I fall, denied by thee.

NOON

ALL how silent and how still; Nothing heard but yonder mill: While the dazzled eye surveys All around a liquid blaze; And amid the scorching gleams, If we earnest look, it seems As if crooked bits of glass Seem'd repeatedly to pass. Oh, for a puffing breeze to blow! But breezes are all strangers now; Not a twig is seen to shake, Nor the smallest bent to quake; From the river's muddy side Not a curve is seen to glide; And no longer on the stream Watching lies the silver bream, Forcing,

from repeated springs, “Verges in successive rings.” Bees are faint, and cease to hum; Birds are overpower’d and dumb. Rural voices all are mute, Tuneless lie the pipe and flute: Shepherds, with their panting sheep, In the swaliest corner creep; And from the tormenting heat All are wishing to retreat. Huddled up in grass and flowers, Mowers wait for cooler hours; And the cow-boy seeks the sedge, Ramping in the woodland hedge, While his cattle o’er the vales Scamper, with uplifted tails; Others not so wild and mad, That can better bear the gad, Underneath the hedge-row lunge, Or, if nigh, in waters plunge. Oh! to see how flowers are took, How it grieves me when I look: Ragged-robins, once so pink, Now are turn’d as black as ink, And the leaves, being scorch’d so much, Even crumble at the touch; Drowking lies the meadow-sweet, Flopping down beneath one’s feet While to all the flowers that blow, If in open air they grow, Th’ injurious deed alike is done By the hot relentless sun. E’en the dew is parched up From the teasel’s jointed cup: O poor birds! where must ye fly, Now your water-pots are dry? If ye stay upon the heath, Ye’ll be choak’d and clamm’d to death: Therefore leave the shadeless goss, Seek the spring-head lin’d with moss; There your little feet may stand, Safely printing on the sand; While, in full possession, where Purling eddies ripple clear, You with ease and plenty blest, Sip the coolest and the best. Then away! and wet your throats; Cheer me with your warbling notes: T’will hot noon the more revive; While I wander to contrive For myself a place as good, In the middle of a wood: There aside some mossy bank, Where the grass in bunches rank Lifts its down on spindles high, Shall be where I’ll choose to lie; Fearless of the things that creep, There I’ll think, and there I’ll sleep; Caring not to stir at all, Till the dew begins to fall.

THE UNIVERSAL EPITAPH

NO flattering praises daub my stone, My frailties and my faults to hide; My faults and failings all are known— I liv’d in sin—in sin I died.

And oh! condemn me not, I pray, You who my sad confession view; But ask your soul, if it can say, That I'm a viler man than you.

THE HARVEST MORNING

COCKS wake the early morn with many a crow; Loud-striking village clock has counted four; The labouring rustic hears his restless foe, And weary, of his pains complaining sore, Hobbles to fetch his horses from the moor: Some busy 'gin to teem the loaded corn, Which night throng'd round the barn's becrowded door; Such plenteous scenes the farmer's yard adorn, Such noisy, busy toils now mark the Harvest Morn.

The bird-boy's pealing horn is loudly blow'd; The waggons jostle on with rattling sound; And hogs and geese now throng the dusty road, Grunting, and gabbling, in contention, round The barley ears that litter on the ground. What printing traces mark the waggon's way; What busy bustling wakens echo round; How drive the sun's warm beams the mist away; How labour sweats and toils, and dreads the sultry day!

His scythe the mower o'er his shoulder leans, And whetting, jars with sharp and tinkling sound; Then sweeps again 'mong corn and crackling beans, And swath by swath flops lengthening o'er the ground; While 'neath some friendly heap, snug shelter'd round From spoiling sun, lies hid the heart's delight; And hearty soaks oft hand the bottle round, Their toils pursuing with redoubled might— Great praise to him is due that brought its birth to light.

Upon the waggon now, with eager bound, The lusty picker whirls the rustling sheaves; Or, resting ponderous creaking fork aground, Boastful at once whole shocks of barley heaves: The loading boy revengeful inly grieves To find his unmatch'd strength and power decay; The barley horn his garments interweaves; Smarting and sweating 'neath the sultry day, With muttering curses stung, he mauls

the heaps away.

A motley group the clearing field surround; Sons of Humanity, oh ne'er deny The humble gleaner entrance in your ground; Winter's sad cold, and Poverty are nigh. Grudge not from Providence the scant supply: You'll never miss it from your ample store. Who gives denial—harden'd, hungry hound,— May never blessings crowd his hated door! But he shall never lack, that giveth to the poor.

Ah, lovely Emma! mingling with the rest, Thy beauties blooming in low life unseen, Thy rosy cheeks, thy sweetly swelling breast; But ill it suits thee in the stubs to glean. O Poverty! how basely you demean The imprison'd worth your rigid fates confine: Not fancied charms of an Arcadian queen So sweet as Emma's real beauties shine: Had Fortune blest, sweet girl, this lot had ne'er been thine.

The sun's increasing heat now mounted high, Refreshment must recruit exhausted power; The waggon stops, the busy tool's thrown by, And 'neath a shock's enjoy'd the bevering hour. The bashful maid, sweet health's engaging flower Lingering behind, o'er rake still blushing bends; And when to take the horn fond swains implore, With feign'd excuses its dislike pretends. So pass the bevering hours, so Harvest Morning ends.

O Rural Life! what charms thy meanness hide; What sweet descriptions bards disdain to sing; What loves, what graces on thy plains abide: Oh, could I soar me on the Muse's wing, What rifled charms should my researches bring! Pleas'd would I wander where these charms reside; Of rural sports and beauties would I sing; Those beauties, Wealth, which you in vain deride, Beauties of richest bloom, superior to your pride.

ON AN INFANT'S GRAVE

BENEATH the sod where smiling creep The daisies into view, The ashes of an Infant sleep, Whose soul's as smiling too; Ah! doubly happy, doubly blest, (Had I so

happy been!) Recall'd to heaven's eternal rest, Ere it knew how to sin.

Thrice happy Infant! great the bliss Alone reserv'd for thee; Such joy 'twas my sad fate to miss, And thy good luck to see; For oh! when all must rise again, And sentence then shall have, What crowds will wish with me, in vain, They'd fill'd an infant's grave.

TO AN APRIL DAISY

WELCOME, old Comrade! peeping once again; Our meeting 'minds me of a pleasant hour: Spring's pencil pinks thee in that blushy stain, And Summer glistens in thy tinty flower.

Hail, Beauty's Gem! disdaining time nor place; Carelessly creeping on the dunghill's side; Demeanour's softness in thy crimpled face Decks thee in beauties unattain'd by pride.

Hail, 'Venturer! once again that fearless here Encampeth on the hoar hill's sunny side; Spring's early messenger! thou'rt doubly dear; And winter's frost by thee is well supplied.

Now winter's frowns shall cease their pelting rage, But winter's woes I need not tell to thee; Far better luck thy visits well presage, And be it thine and mine that luck to see.

Ah, may thy smiles confirm the hopes they tell To see thee frost-bit I'd be griev'd at heart; I meet thee happy, and I wish thee well, Till ripening summer summons us to part.

Then like old mates, or two who've neighbours been, We'll part, in hopes to meet another year; And o'er thy exit from this changing scene We'll mix our wishes in a tokening tear.

SUMMER EVENING

THE sinking sun is taking leave, And sweetly gilds the edge of Eve, While huddling clouds of purple dye Gloomy hang the western sky. Crows crowd croaking over-head, Hastening to the woods to bed. Cooing sits the lonely dove, Calling home her absent love. With “Kirchup! kirchup!” ’mong the wheats, Partridge distant partridge greets; Beckoning hints to those that roam, That guide the squander’d covey home. Swallows check their winding flight, And twittering on the chimney light. Round the pond the martins flirt, Their snowy breasts bedaub’d with dirt, While the mason, ’neath the slates, Each mortar-bearing bird awaits: By art untaught, each labouring spouse Curious daubs his hanging house. Bats flit by in hood and cowl; Through the barn-hole pops the owl; From the hedge, in drowsy hum, Heedless buzzing beetles bum, Haunting every bushy place, Flopping in the labourer’s face. Now the snail hath made his ring; And the moth with snowy wing Circles round in winding whirls, Through sweet evening’s sprinkled pearls On each nodding rush besprent; Dancing on from bent to bent: Now to downy grasses clung, Resting for a while he’s hung; Strong to ferry o’er the stream, Vanishing as flies a dream: Playful still his hours to keep, Till his time has come to sleep; In tall grass, by fountain-head, Weary then he drops to bed. From the hay-cock’s moisten’d heaps Startled frogs take vaunting leaps; And along the shaven mead, Jumping travellers, they proceed: Quick the dewy grass divides, Moistening sweet their speckled sides; From the grass or flowret’s cup, Quick the dew-drop bounces up. Now the blue fog creeps along, And the bird’s forgot his song: Flowers now sleep within their hoods; Daisies button into buds; From soiling dew the butter-cup Shuts his golden jewels up; And the rose and woodbine they Wait again the smiles of day. ’Neath the willow’s wavy boughs, Dolly, singing, milks hers cows; While the brook, as bubbling by, Joins in murmuring melody. Dick and Dob, with jostling joll, Homeward drag the rumbling roll; Whilom Ralph, for Doll to wait, Lolls him o’er

the pasture gate. Swains to fold their sheep begin; Dogs loud barking drive them in. Hedgers now along the road Homeward bend beneath their load; And from the long furrow'd seams, Ploughmen loose their weary teams: Ball, with urging lashes weal'd. Still so slow to drive a-field, Eager blundering from the plough, Wants no whip to drive him now; At the stable-door he stands, Looking round for friendly hands To loose the door its fast'ning pin, And let him with his corn begin. Round the yard, a thousand ways Beasts in expectation gaze, Catching at the loads of hay Passing fodd'rers tug away. Hogs with grumbling, deaf'ning noise Bother round the server boys; And, far and near, the motley group Anxious claim their suppering-up. From the rest, a blest release, Gabbling home, the quarrelling geese Seek their warm straw-litter'd shed, And, waddling, prate away to bed. 'Nighted by unseen delay, Poking hens, that lose their way, On the hovel's rafters rise, Slumbering there, the fox's prize. Now the cat has ta'en her seat, With her tail curl'd round her feet; Patiently she sits to watch Sparrows fighting on the thatch. Now Doll brings th' expected pails. And dogs begin to wag their tails; With strokes and pats they're welcom'd in And they with looking wants begin: Slove in the milk-pail brimming o'er, She pops their dish behind the door. Prone to mischief boys are met, 'Neath the eaves the ladder's set, Sly they climb in softest tread, To catch the sparrow on his bed, Massacred, O cruel pride! Dash against the ladder's side. Curst barbarians! pass me by: Come not, Turks, my cottage nigh; Sure my sparrow's are my own, Let ye then my birds alone. Come poor birds! from foes severe Fearless come, you're welcome here; My heart yearns at fate like yours, A sparrow's life's as sweet as ours. Hardy clowns! grudge not the wheat Which hunger forces birds to eat: Your blinded eyes, worst foes to you, Can't see the good which sparrows do. Did not poor birds with watching rounds Pick up the insects from your grounds, Did they not tend your rising grain, You might then sow to reap in vain. Thus Providence, right understood, Whose end and aim is doing good, Sends nothing here without its use; Though ignorance loads it with abuse; And fools despise the blessing sent, And

mock the Giver’s good intent— O God! let me what’s good pursue, Let me the same to others do As I’d have others do to me, And learn at least humanity.

Dark and darker glooms the sky; Sleep ’gins close the labourer’s eye: Dobson leaves his greensward seat, Neighbours where they neighbours meet Crops to praise and work in hand, And battles tell from foreign land. While his pipe is puffing out, Sue he’s putting to the rout, Gossiping, who takes delight To shool her knitting out at night, And back-bite neighbours ’bout the town— Who’s got new caps, and who a gown, And many a thing, her evil eye Can see they don’t come honest by. Chattering at a neighbour’s house, She hears call out her frowning spouse Prepar’d to start, she soodles home, Her knitting twirling o’er her thumb, As, loth to leave, afraid to stay, She bawls her story all the way: The tale so fraught with ’ticing charms. Her apron folded o’er her arms, She leaves the unfinished tale, in pain, To end as evening comes again; And in the cottage gangs with dread To meet old Dobson’s timely frown, Who grumbling sits, prepar’d for bed, While she stands chelping ’bout the town.

The night-wind now, with sooty wings, In the cotter’s chimney sings; Now, as stretching o’er the bed, Soft I raise my drowsy head, Listening to the ushering charms That shake the elm tree’s mossy arms; Till sweet slumbers stronger creep, Deeper darkness stealing round, Then, as rock’d, I sink to sleep, ’Mid the wild wind’s lulling sound.

PATTY

YE swampy falls of pasture ground, And rushy spreading greens; Ye rising swells in brambles bound, And freedom’s wilder’d scenes; I’ve trod ye oft, and love ye dear, And kind was fate to let me; On you I found my all, for here ’Twas first my Patty met me.

Flow on, thou gently plashing stream, O’er weed-beds wild and rank; Delighted I’ve

enjoy'd my dream Upon thy mossy bank: Bemoistening many a weedy stem, I've watched thee wind so clearly; And on thy bank I found the gem That makes me love thee dearly.

Thou wilderness, so rudely gay; Oft as I seek thy plain, Oft as I wend my steps away, And meet my joys again, And brush the weaving branches by Of briars and thorns so matty; So oft Reflection warms a sigh,— Here first I meet my Patty.

PATTY OF THE VALE

WHERE lonesome woodlands close surrounding Mark the spot a solitude, And nature's uncheck'd scenes abounding Form a prospect wild and rude, A cottage cheers the spot so glooming, Hid in the hollow of the dale, Where, in youth and beauty blooming Lives sweet Patty of the Vale.

Gay as the lambs her cot surrounding, Sporting wild the shades among, O'er the hills and bushes bounding, Artless, innocent, and young, Fresh, as blush of morning roses Ere the mid-day suns prevail, Fair as lily-bud uncloses, Blooms sweet Patty of the Vale.

Low and humble though her station, Dress though mean she's doom'd to wear, Few superiors in the nation With her beauty can compare. What are riches?—not worth naming, Though with some they may prevail; Their's be choice of wealth proclaiming, Mine is Patty of the Vale.

Fools may fancy wealth and fortune Join to make a happy pair, And for such the god importune, With full many a fruitless prayer: I, their pride and wealth disdaining Should my humble hopes prevail, Happy then, would cease complaining, Blest with Patty of the Vale.

MY LOVE, THOU ART A NOSEGAY SWEET

MY love, thou art a nosegay sweet, My sweetest flower I prove thee; And pleas'd I pin thee to my breast, And dearly do I love thee.

And when, my nosegay, thou shalt fade, As sweet a flower thou'lt prove thee; And as thou witherest on my breast, For beauty past I'll love thee.

And when, my nosegay, thou shalt die, And heaven's flower shalt prove thee; My hopes shall follow to the sky, And everlasting love thee.

THE MEETING

HERE we meet, too soon to part, Here to leave will raise a smart, Here I'll press thee to my heart, Where none have place above thee: Here I vow to love thee well, And could words unseal the spell, Had but language strength to tell, I'd say how much I love thee.

Here, the rose that decks thy door, Here, the thorn that spreads thy bow'r, Here, the willow on the moor, The birds at rest above thee, Had they light of life to see, Sense of soul like thee and me, Soon might each a witness be How doatingly I love thee.

By the night-sky's purple ether, And by even's sweetest weather, That oft has blest us both together,— The moon that shines above thee, And shews thy beauteous cheek so blooming, And by pale age's winter coming, The charms, and casualties of woman, I will for ever love thee.

EFFUSION

AH, little did I think in time that's past, By summer burnt, or numb'd by winter's blast, Delving the ditch a livelihood to earn, Or lumping corn out in a dusty barn; With aching bones returning home at night, And sitting down with weary hand to write; Ah, little did I think, as then unknown, Those artless rhymes I even blush'd to own Would be one day applauded and approv'd, By learning notic'd, and by genius

lov'd. God knows, my hopes were many, but my pain Damp'd all the prospects which I hop'd to gain; I hardly dar'd to hope.—Thou corner-chair, In which I've oft slung back in deep despair, Hadst thou expression, thou couldst easy tell The pains and all that I have known too well: 'Twould be but sorrow's tale, yet still 'twould be A tale of truth, and passing sweet to me. How oft upon my hand I've laid my head, And thought how poverty deform'd our shed; Look'd on each parent's face I fain had cheer'd Where sorrow triumph'd, and pale want appear'd; And sigh'd, and hop'd, and wish'd some day would come, When I might bring a blessing to their home,— That toil and merit comforts had in store, To bid the tear defile their cheeks no more. Who that has feelings would not wish to be A friend to parents, such as mine to me, Who in distress broke their last crust in twain, And though want pinch'd, the remnant broke again, And still, if craving of their scanty bread, Gave their last mouthful that I might be fed? Nor for their own wants tear-drops follow'd free, Worse anguish stung—they had no more for me, And now hope's sun is looking brighter out, And spreading thin the clouds of fear and doubt, That long in gloomy sad suspense to me Hid the long-waited smiles I wish'd to see. And now, my parents, helping you is sweet,— The rudest havoc fortune could complete; A piteous couple, little blest with friends, Where pain and poverty have had their ends. I'll be thy crutch, my father, lean on me; Weakness knits stubborn while its bearing thee; And hard shall fall the shock of fortune's frown To eke thy sorrows, ere it breaks me down. My mother, too, thy kindness shall be met, And ere I'm able will I pay the debt; For what thou'st done, and what gone through for me, My last-earn'd sixpence will I break with thee: And when my dwindled sum won't more divide, Then take it all—to fate I'll leave the rest; In helping thee I'll always feel a pride, Nor think I'm happy till ye both are blest.

BALLAD

A WEEDLING wild, on lonely lea, My evening rambles chanc'd to see; And much the weedling tempted me To crop its tender flower: Expos'd to wind and heavy rain, Its head bow'd lowly on the plain; And silently it seem'd in pain Of life's endanger'd hour.

"And wilt thou bid my bloom decay, And crop my flower, and me betray? And cast my injur'd sweets away,"— Its silence seemly sigh'd— "A moment's idol of thy mind? And is a stranger so unkind, To leave a shameful root behind, Bereft of all its pride?"

And so it seemly did complain; And beating fell the heavy rain; And how it droop'd upon the plain, To fate resign'd to fall: My heart did melt at its decline, And "Come," said I, "thou gem divine, My fate shall stand the storm with thine:" So took the root and all.

SONG

ONE gloomy eve I roam'd about 'Neath Oxey's hazel bowers, While timid hares were darting out, To crop the dewy flowers; And soothing was the scene to me, Right pleased was my soul, My breast was calm as summer's sea When waves forget to roll.

But short was even's placid smile, My startled soul to charm, When Nelly lightly skipt the stile, With milk-pail on her arm: One careless look on me she flung, As bright as parting day: And like a hawk from covert sprung, It pounc'd my peace away.

THE GIPSY'S CAMP

HOW oft on Sundays, when I'd time to tramp, My rambles led me to a gipsy's camp, Where the real effigy of midnight hags, With tawny smoked flesh and tatter'd

rags, Uncouth-brimm’d hat, and weather-beaten cloak, ’Neath the wild shelter of a knotty oak, Along the greensward uniforming pricks Her pliant bending hazel’s arching sticks; While round-topt bush or briar-entangled hedge, Where flag-leaves spring beneath, or ramping sedge, Keep off the bothering bustle of the wind, And give the best retreat she hopes to find. How oft I’ve bent me o’er her fire and smoke, To hear her gibberish tale so quaintly spoke, While the old Sybil forg’d her boding clack, Twin imps the meanwhile bawling at her back; Oft on my hand her magic coin’s been struck, And hoping chink, she talk’d of morts of luck: And still, as boyish hopes did first agree, Mingled with fears to drop the fortune’s fee, I never fail’d to gain the honours sought, And Squire and Lord were purchas’d with a groat. But as man’s unbelieving taste came round, She furious stampt her shoeless foot aground, Wip’d bye her soot-black hair with clenching fist, While through her yellow teeth the spittle hist, Swearing by all her lucky powers of fate, Which like as footboys on her actions wait, That fortune’s scale should to my sorrow turn And I one day the rash neglect should mourn; That good to bad should change, and I should be Lost to this world and all eternity; That poor as Job I should remain unblest;— (Alas, for fourpence how my die is cast!) Of not a hoarded farthing be possest, And when all’s done, be shov’d to hell at last!

TO THE CLOUDS

O PAINTED clouds! sweet beauties of the sky, How have I view’d your motion and your rest When like fleet hunters ye have left mine eye, In your thin gauze of woolly-fleecing drest; Or in your threaten’d thunder’s grave black vest, Like black deep waters slowly moving by, Awfully striking the spectator’s breast With your Creator’s dread sublimity, As admiration mutely views your storms. And I do love to see you idly lie, Painted by heav’n as various as your forms, Pausing upon the eastern mountain high, As morn awakes with spring’s wood-harmony; And sweeter

still, when in your slumbers sooth You hang the western arch o’er day’s proud eye: Still as the even-pool, uncurv’d and smooth, My gazing soul has look’d most placidly; And higher still devoutly wish’d to strain, To wipe your shrouds and sky’s blue blinders by, With all the warmness of a moon-struck brain,— To catch a glimpse of Him who bids you reign, And view the dwelling of all majesty.

THE WOODMAN DEDICATED TO THE REV. J. KNOWLES HOLLAND.

THE beating snow-clad bell, with sounding dead, Hath clanked four—the woodman’s wak’d again; And, as he leaves his comfortable bed, Dithers to view the rimy feather’d pane, And shrugs, and wishes—but ’tis all in vain: The bed’s warm comforts he most now forego; His family that oft till eight hath lain, Without his labour’s wage could not do so. And glad to make them blest he shuffles through the snow.

The early winter’s morn is dark as pitch, The wary wife from tinder brought at night With flint and steel, and may a sturdy twitch, Sits up in bed to strike her man a light; And as the candle shows the rapturous sight, Aside his wife his rosy sleeping boy, He smacks his lips with exquisite delight, With all a father’s feelings, father’s joy, Then bids his wife good-bye, and hies to his employ. His breakfast water-porridge, humble food; A barley-crust he in his wallet flings; On this he toils and labours in the wood, And chops his faggot, twists his band, and sings, As happily as princes and as kings With all their luxury:—and blest is he, Can but the little which his labour brings Make both ends meet, and from long debts keep free, And neat and clean preserve his numerous family.

Far o’er the dreary fields the woodland lies, Rough is the journey which he daily goes; The woolly clouds, that hang the frowning skies, Keep winnowing down their drifting sleet and snows, And thro’ his doublet keen the north wind blows; While

hard as iron the cemented ground, And smooth as glass the glibbed pool is froze; His nailed boots with clenching tread rebound, And dithering echo starts and mocks the clamping sound.

The woods how gloomy in a winter's morn! The crows and ravens even cease to croak, The little birds sit chittering on the thorn, The pies scarce chatter when they leave the oak, Startled from slumber by the woodman's stroke; The milk-maid's song is drown'd in gloomy care, And while the village chimneys curl their smoke, She milks, and blows, and hastens to be there; And nature all seems sad, and dying in despair.

The quirking rabbit scarcely leaves her hole, But rolls in torpid slumbers all the day; The fox is loth to 'gin a long patrol, And scouts the woods, content with meaner prey; The hare so frisking, timid once and gay, 'Hind the dead thistle hurkles from the view, Nor scarce is scar'd though in the traveller's way, Though waffling curs and shepherd-dogs pursue: So winter's ragged power affects all nature through.

What different changes winter's frowns supply: The clown no more a loitering hour beguiles, Nor gaping tracks the clouds along the sky, As when buds blossom, and the warm sun smiles, And "Lawrence wages bids" on hills and stiles; Banks, stiles, and flowers, and skies, no longer charm; Deep drifting snow each summer-seat defiles; With hasty blundering step and folded arm He glad the stable seeks, his frost-nip nose to warm. The shepherd haunts no more his spreading oak, Nor on the sloping pond-head lies at lair; The arbour he once wattled up is broke, And left unworthy of his future care; The ragged plundering stickers have been there, And pilfer'd it away; he passes by His summer dwelling, desolate and bare, And ne'er so much as turns a conscious eye, But gladly seeks his fire, and shuns th' inclement sky.

The scene is cloth'd in snow from morn till night, The woodman's loth his chilly tools to seize; The crows unroosting as he comes in sight Shake down the feathery

burden from the trees; To look at things around he's fit to freeze: Scar'd from her perch the fluttering pheasant flies: His hat and doublet whiten by degrees, He quakes, looks round, and pats his hands and sighs, And wishes to himself that the warm sun would rise.

The robin, tamest of the feather'd race, Soon as he hears the woodman's sounding chops, With ruddy bosom and a simple face Around his old companion fearless hops, And there for hours in pleas'd attention stops: The woodman's heart is tender and humane And at his meals he many a crumble drops. Thanks to thy generous feelings, gentle swain; And what thy pity gives, shall not be given in vain.

The woodman gladly views the closing day, To see the sun drop down behind the wood, Sinking in clouds deep blue or misty grey, Round as a football and as red as blood: The pleasing prospect does his heart much good, Though 'tis not his such beauties to admire; He hastes to fill his bags with billet-wood, Well-pleas'd from the chill prospect to retire, To seek his corner chair, and warm snug cottage fire.

And soon as dusky even hovers round, And the white frost 'gins crizzle pond and brook, The little family are glimpsing round, And from the door dart many a wistful look; The supper's ready stewing on the hook: And every foot that clampers down the street Is for the coming father's step mistook; O'erjoy'd are they when he their eyes doth meet, Bent 'neath his load, snow-clad, as white as any sheet.

I think I see him seated in his chair, Taking the bellows up the fire to blow; I think I hear him joke and chatter there, Telling his children news they wish to know; With leather leggings on, that stopt the snow, And broad-brimm'd hat uncouthly shapen round: Nor would he, I'll be bound, if it were so, Give twopence for the chance, could it be found, At that same hour to be the king of England crown'd.

The woodman smokes, the brats in mirth and glee, And artless prattle, even's hour beguile, While love's last pledge runs scrambling up his knee, The nightly comfort from his weary toil, His chuff cheeks dimpling in a fondling smile; He claims his

kiss, and says his scraps of prayer; Begging his daddy's pretty song the while, Playing with his jacket-buttons and his hair;— And thus in wedlock's joys the labourer drowns his care.

And as most labourers knowingly pretend By certain signs to judge the weather right, As oft from "Noah's ark" great floods descend, And "buried moons" foretell great storms at night, In such-like things the woodman took delight; And ere he went to bed would always ken Whether the sky was gloom'd or stars shone bright, Then went to comfort's arms till morn, and then As cheery as the sun resum'd his toils agen.

And ere he slept he always breath'd a prayer, "I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou to-day didst give Sufficient strength to toil; and blest Thy care, And thank Thee still for what I may receive: And, O Almighty God! while I still live, Ere my eyes open on the last day's sun, Prepare Thou me this wicked world to leave, And fit my passage ere my race is run; 'Tis all I beg, O Lord! Thy heavenly will be done."

Holland; to thee this humble ballad's sent, Who for the poor man's welfare oft hast pray'd; Whose tongue did ne'er belie its good intent, Preacher, as well in practice, as in trade— Alas, too often money's business made! O may the wretch, that's still in darkness living, The Bible's comforts hear by thee display'd; And many a woodman's family, forgiven, Have cause for blessing thee that led their way to heaven.

RURAL EVENING

THE sun now sinks behind the woodland green, And twittering spangles glow the leaves between, So bright and dazzling on the eye it plays As if noon's heat had kindled to a blaze, But soon it dims in red and heavier hues, And shows wild fancy cheated in her views. A mist-like moisture rises from the ground, And deeper blueness stains the distant round. The eye each moment, as it gazes o'er, Still loses

objects which it mark'd before; The woods at distance changing like to clouds, And spire-points croodling under evening's shrouds; Till forms of things, and hues of leaf and flower, In deeper shadows, as by magic power, With light and all, in scarce-perceiv'd decay, Put on mild evening's sober garb of grey.

Now in the sleepy gloom that blackens round Dies many a lulling hum of rural sound, From cottage door, farm-yard and dusty lane, Where home the cart-house tolters with the swain. Or padded holm, where village boys resort, Bawling enraptur'd o'er their evening sport, Till night awakens superstition's dread And drives them prisoners to a restless bed. Thrice happy eve of days no more to me! Whoever thought such change belong'd to thee? When, like to boys whom now thy gloom surrounds, I chas'd the stag, or play'd at fox-and-hounds, Or wander'd down the lane with many a mate To play at see-saw on the pasture-gate, Or on the threshold of some cottage sat To watch the flittings of the shrieking bat, Who, seemly pleas'd to mock our treacherous view, Would even swoop and touch us as he flew, And vainly still our hopes to entertain Would stint his route, and circle us again,— Till, wearied out with many a coaxing call Which boyish superstition loves to bawl, His shrill song shrieking he betook to flight, And left us puzzled in short-sighted night. Those days have fled me, as from them they steal: And I've felt losses they must shortly feel; But sure such ends make every bosom sore, To think of pleasures we must meet no more.

Now from the pasture milking-maidens come, With each a swain to bear the burden home, Who often coax them on their pleasant way To soodle longer out in love's delay; While on a mole-hill, or a resting stile, The simple rustics try their arts the while With glegging smiles, and hopes and fears between, Snatching a kiss to open what they mean: And all the utmost that their tongues can do, The honey'd words which nature learns to woo, The wild-flower sweets of language, "love" and "dear," With warmest utterings meet each maiden's ear; Who as by magic smit, she knows not why, From the warm look that waits a wish'd reply Droops fearful down in

love’s delightful swoon As slinks the blossom from the suns of noon; While sighs half-smother’d from the throbbing breast, And broken words sweet trembling o’er the rest, And cheeks, in blushes burning, turn’d aside, Betray the plainer what she strives to hide. The amorous swain sees through the feign’d disguise, Discerns the fondness she at first denies, And with all passions love and truth can move Urges more strong the simpering maid to love; More freely using toying ways to win— Tokens that echo from the soul within— Her soft hand nipping, that with ardour burns, And, timid, gentlier presses its returns; Then stealing pins with innocent deceit, To loose the ’kerchief from its envied seat; Then unawares her bonnet he’ll untie, Her dark-brown ringlets wiping gently by, To steal a kiss in seemly feign’d disguise, As love yields kinder taken by surprise: While nearly conquer’d she less disapproves, And owns at last, mid tears and sighs, she loves. With sweetest feelings that this world bestows Now each to each their inmost souls disclose, Vow to be true; and to be truly ta’en, Repeat their loves, and vow it o’er again; And pause at loss of language to proclaim Those purest pleasures, yet without a name: And while, in highest ecstacy of bliss The shepherd holds her yielding hand in his He turns to heaven to witness what he feels, And silent shows what want of words conceals; Then ere the parting moments hustle nigh, And night in deeper dye his curtain dips, Till next day’s evening glads the anxious eye, He swears his truth, and seals it on her lips.

At even’s hour, the truce of toil, ’tis sweet The sons of labour at their ease to meet, On piled bench, beside the cottage door, Made up of mud and stones and sodded o’er; Where rustic taste at leisure trimly weaves The rose and straggling woodbine to the eaves,— And on the crowded spot that pales enclose The white and scarlet daisy rears in rows,— Training the trailing peas in bunches neat, Perfuming evening with a luscious sweet,— And sun-flowers planting for their gilded show, That scale the window’s lattice ere they blow, Then sweet to habitants within the sheds, Peep through the diamond pane their golden heads: Or at the shop where ploughs and

harrows lie, Well-known to every child that passes by From shining fragments littering on the floor; And branded letter burnt upon the door, Where meddling boys, the torment of the street, In hard-burnt cinders ready weapons meet, To pelt the martins ’neath the eves at rest That oft are wak’d to mourn a ruin’d nest; Or sparrows, that delight their nests to leave, In dust to flutter at the cool of eve. For such-like scenes the gossip leaves her home, And sons of labour light their pipes, and come To talk of wages, whether high or low, And mumble news that still as secrets go; When, heedless then to all the rest may say, The beckoning lover nods the maid away, And at a distance many an hour they seem In jealous whisperings o’er their pleasing theme; While children round them teasing sports prolong, To twirl the top, or bounce the hoop along, Or shout across the street their “one catch all,” Or prog the hous’d bee from the cotter’s wall.

Now at the parish cottage wall’d with dirt, Where all the cumber-grounds of life resort, From the low door that bows two props between, Some feeble tottering dame surveys the scene; By them reminded of the long-lost day When she herself was young, and went to play; And, turning to the painful scenes again, The mournful changes she has meet since then, Her aching heart, the contrast moves so keen, E’en sighs a wish that life had never been. Still vainly sinning, while she strives to pray, Half-smother’d discontent pursues its way In whispering Providence, how blest she’d been If life’s last troubles she’d escap’d unseen; If, ere want sneak’d for grudg’d support from pride, She had but shar’d of childhood’s joys, and died. And as to talk some passing neighbours stand, And shove their box within her tottering hand, She turns from echoes of her younger years, And nips the portion of her snuff with tears.

RUSTIC FISHING

ON Sunday mornings, freed from hard employ, How oft I mark the mischievous

young boy With anxious haste his pole and lines provide, For make-shifts oft crook’d pins to thread were tied; And delve his knife with wishes ever warm In rotten dunghills for the grub and worm, The harmless treachery of his hooks to bait; Tracking the dewy grass with many a mate, To seek the brook that down the meadows glides, Where the grey willow shadows by its sides, Where flag and reed in wild disorder spread, And bending bulrush bows its taper head; And, just above the surface of the floods, Where water-lilies mount their snowy buds, On whose broad swimming leaves of glossy green The shining dragon-fly is often seen: Where hanging thorns, with roots wash’d bare, appear, That shield the moor-hen’s nest from year to year; While crowding osiers mingling wild among Prove snug asylums to her brood when young, Who, when surpris’d by foes approaching near, Plunge ’neath the weeping boughs and disappear. There far from terrors that the parson brings, Or church bell hearing when its summons rings, Half hid in meadow-sweet and keck’s high flowers, In lonely sport they spend the Sunday hours. Though ill supplied for fishing seem the brook, That breaks the mead in many a stinted crook, Oft choak’d in weeds, and foil’d to find a road, The choice retirement of the snake and toad, Then lost in shallows dimpling restlessly, In fluttering struggles murmuring to be free,— O’er gravel stones its depth can scarcely hide It runs remnant of its broken tide, Till, seemly weary of each choak’d control, It rests collected in some gulled hole Scoop’d by the sudden floods when winter’s snow Melts in confusion by a hasty thaw; There bent in hopeful musings on the brink They watch their floating corks that seldom sink, Save when a wary roach or silver bream Nibbles the worm as passing up the stream, Just urging expectation’s hopes to stay To view the dodging cork, then slink away; Still hopes keep burning with untir’d delight, Still wobbling curves keep wavering like a bite: If but the breezy wind their floats should spring, And move the water with a troubling ring, A captive fish still fills the anxious eyes And willow-wicks lie ready for the prize; Till evening gales awaken damp and chill, And nip the hopes that morning suns instil; And

resting flies have tired their gauzy wing, Nor longer tempt the watching fish to spring, Who at the worm no nibbles more repeat, But lunge from night in sheltering flag-retreat. Then disappointed in their day's employ, They seek amusement in a feebler joy. Short is the sigh for fancies prov'd untrue: With humbler hopes still pleasure they pursue Where the rude oak-bridge scales the narrow pass Half hid in rustling reeds and scrambling grass, Or stepping stones stride o'er the narrow sloughs Which maidens daily cross to milk their cows; There they in artless glee for minnows run, And wade and dabble past the setting sun; Chasing the struttle o'er the shallow tide, And flat stones turning up where gudgeons hide. All former hopes their ill success delay'd, In this new change they fancy well repaid. And thus they wade, and chatter o'er their joys Till night, unlook'd-for, young success destroys, Drives home the sons of solitude and streams, And stops uncloy'd hope's ever-fresh'ning dreams. They then, like school-boys that at truant play, In sloomy fear lounge on their homeward way, And inly tremble, as they gain the town, Where chastisement awaits with many a frown, And hazel twigs, in readiness prepar'd, For their long absence brings a meet reward.

JUNE

NOW Summer is in flower, and Nature's hum Is never silent round her bounteous bloom; Insects, as small as dust, have never done With glitt'ring dance, and reeling in the sun; And green wood-fly, and blossom-haunting bee, Are never weary of their melody. Round field and hedge, flowers in full glory twine, Large bind-weed bells, wild hop, and streak'd woodbine, That lift athirst their slender throated flowers, Agape for dew-fall, and for honey showers; These o'er each bush in sweet disorder run, And spread their wild hues to the sultry sun. The mottled spider, at eve's leisure, weaves His webs of silken lace on twigs and leaves, Which ev'ry morning meet the poet's eye, Like fairies' dew-wet dresses hung to dry. The wheat swells

into ear, and hides below The May-month wild flowers and their gaudy show, Leaving, a school-boy's height, in snugger rest, The leveret's seat, and lark, and partridge nest. The mowers now bend o'er the beaded grass, Where oft the gipsy's hungry journeying ass Will turn his wishes from the meadow paths, List'ning the rustle of the falling swaths. The ploughman sweats along the fallow vales And down the sun-crack'd furrow slowly trails; Oft seeking, when athirst, the brook's supply, Where, brushing eagerly the bushes by For coolest water, he disturbs the rest Of ring-dove, brooding o'er its idle nest. The shepherd's leisure hours are over now; No more he loiters 'neath the hedge-row bough, On shadow-pillowed banks and lolling stile; The wilds must lose their summer friend awhile. With whistle, barking dogs, and chiding scold, He drives the bleating sheep from fallow fold To wash-pools, where the willow shadows lean, Dashing them in, their stained coats to clean, Then, on the sunny sward, when dry again, He brings them homeward to the clipping pen, Of hurdles, form'd where elm or sycamore Shut out the sun—or to some threshing-floor. There with the scraps of songs, and laugh, and tale, He lightens annual toil, while merry ale Goes round, and glads some old man's heart to praise The threadbare customs of his early days: How the high bowl was in the middle set At breakfast time, when clippers yearly met, Fill'd full of furmety, where dainty swum The streaking sugar and the spotting plum. The maids could never to the table bring The bowl, without one rising from the ring To lend a hand; who, if 'twere ta'en amiss, Would sell his kindness for a stolen kiss. The large stone pitcher in its homely trim And clouded pint-horn with its copper rim, Were there; from which were drunk, with spirits high Healths of the best the cellar could supply; While sung the ancient swains, in uncouth rhymes, Songs that were pictures of the good old times. Thus will the old man ancient ways bewail, Till toiling shears gain ground upon the tale, And break it off,—for now the timid sheep, His fleece shorn off, starts with a fearful leap, Shaking his naked skin with wond'ring joys, While others are brought in by sturdy boys. Though fashion's haughty frown hath thrown aside Half

the old forms simplicity supplied, Yet there are some pride’s winter deigns to spare, Left like green ivy when the trees are bare. And now, when shearing of the flocks is done Some ancient customs, mix’d with harmless fun, Crown the swain’s merry toils. The timid maid, Pleased to be praised, and yet of praise afraid, Seeks the best flowers; not those of woods and fields, But such as every farmer’s garden yields— Fine cabbage-roses, painted like her face; The shining pansy, trimm’d with golden lace; The tall topp’d larkheels, feather’d thick with flowers; The woodbine, climbing o’er the door in bowers; The London tufts, of many a mottled hue; The pale pink pea, and monkshood darkly blue; The white and purple gilliflowers, that stay Ling’ring, in blossom, summer half away; The single blood-walls, of a luscious smell, Old-fashion’d flowers which housewives love so well; The columbine, stone-blue, or deep night-brown, Their honeycomb-like blossoms hanging down, Each cottage-garden’s fond adopted child, Though heaths still claim them, where they yet grow wild; With marjoram knots, sweet-brier, and ribbon-grass, And lavender, the choice of ev’ry lass, And sprigs of lad’s-love—all familiar names, Which every garden through the village claims. These the maid gathers with a coy delight, And ties them up, in readiness for night; Then gives to ev’ry swain, ’tween love and shame, Her “clipping-posies” as his yearly claim. He rises, to obtain the custom’d kiss:— With stifled smiles, half hankering after bliss, She shrinks away, and blushing, calls it rude; Yet turns to smile, and hopes to be pursued; While one, to whom the hint may be applied, Follows to gain it, and is not denied. The rest the loud laugh raise, to make it known,— She blushes silent, and will not disown! Thus ale, and song, and healths, and merry ways, Keep up a shadow still of former days; But the old beechen bowl, that once supplied The feast of furmety, is thrown aside; And the old freedom that was living then, When masters made them merry with their men; When all their coats alike were russet brown, And his rude speech was vulgar as their own— All this is past, and soon will pass away The time-torn remnant of the holiday.

DECEMBER

GLAD Christmas comes, and every hearth Makes room to give him welcome now, E’en want will dry its tears in mirth, And crown him with a holly bough; Though tramping ’neath a winter sky, O’er snowy paths and rimy stiles, The housewife sets her spinning by To bid him welcome with her smiles.

Each house is swept the day before, And windows stuck with evergreens, The snow is besom’d from the door, And comfort crowns the cottage scenes. Gilt holly, with its thorny pricks, And yew and box, with berries small, These deck the unused candlesticks, And pictures hanging by the wall.

Neighbours resume their annual cheer, Wishing, with smiles and spirits high, Glad Christmas and a happy year, To every morning passer-by; Milkmaids their Christmas journeys go, Accompanied with favour’d swain; And children pace the crumping snow To taste their granny’s cake again.

The shepherd, now no more afraid, Since custom doth the chance bestow, Starts up to kiss the giggling maid Beneath the branch of mistletoe That ’neath each cottage beam is seen, With pearl-like berries shining gay; The shadow still of what hath been, Which fashion yearly fades away.

The singing wates, a merry throng, At early morn, with simple skill, Yet imitate the angel’s song, And chant their Christmas ditty still; And ’mid the storm that dies and swells By fits—in hummings softly steals The music of the village bells, Ringing round their merry peals.

When this is past, a merry crew, Bedeck’d in masks and ribbons gay, The “Morris-dance,” their sports renew, And act their winter evening play. The clown turn’d king, for penny-praise, Storms with the actor’s strut and swell; And Harlequin, a laugh to raise, Wears his hunch-back and tinkling bell.

And oft for pence and spicy ale, With winter nosegays pinn’d before, The

wassail-singer tells her tale, And drawls her Christmas carols o'er. While 'prentice boy, with ruddy face, And rime-bepowder'd, dancing locks, From door to door with happy pace, Runs round to claim his "Christmas box."

The block upon the fire is put, To sanction custom's old desires; And many a fagot's bands are cut, For the old farmers' Christmas fires; Where loud-tongued Gladness joins the throng, And Winter meets the warmth of May, Till feeling soon the heat too strong, He rubs his shins, and draws away.

While snows the window-panes bedim, The fire curls up a sunny charm, Where, creaming o'er the pitcher's rim, The flowering ale is set to warm; Mirth, full of joy as summer bees, Sits there, its pleasures to impart And children, 'tween their parent's knees, Sing scraps of carols o'er by heart.

And some, to view the winter weathers, Climb up the window-seat with glee. Likening the snow to falling feathers, In Fancy's infant ecstasy; Laughing, with superstitious love, O'er visions wild that youth supplies, Of people pulling geese above, And keeping Christmas in the skies.

As tho' the homestead trees were drest, In lieu of snow, with dancing leaves; As tho' the sun-dried martin's nest, Instead of i'cles hung the eaves; The children hail the happy day— As if the snow were April's grass, And pleas'd, as 'neath the warmth of May, Sport o'er the water froze to glass.

Thou day of happy sound and mirth, That long with childish memory stays, How blest around the cottage hearth I met thee in my younger days! Harping, with rapture's dreaming joys, On presents which thy coming found, The welcome sight of little toys, The Christmas gifts of cousins round.

The wooden horse with arching head, Drawn upon wheels around the room; The gilded coach of gingerbread, And many-colour'd sugar plum; Gilt cover'd books for pictures sought, Or stories childhood loves to tell, With many an urgent promise bought, To get to-morrow's lesson well.

And many a thing, a minute's sport, Left broken on the sanded floor, When we would leave our play, and court Our parent's promises for more. Tho' manhood bids such raptures die, And throws such toys aside as vain, Yet memory loves to turn her eye, And count past pleasures o'er again.

Around the glowing hearth at night, The harmless laugh and winter tale Go round, while parting friends delight To toast each other o'er their ale; The cotter oft with quiet zeal Will musing o'er his Bible lean; While in the dark the lovers steal To kiss and toy behind the screen.

Old customs! Oh! I love the sound: However simple they may be: Whate'er with time have sanction found, Is welcome, and is dear to me. Pride grows above simplicity, And spurns them from her haughty mind, And soon the poet's song will be The only refuge they can find.

THE APPROACH OF SPRING

NOW once again, thou lovely Spring, Thy sight the day beguiles; For fresher greens the fairy ring, The daisy brighter smiles: The winds, that late with chiding voice Would fain thy stay prolong, Relent, while little birds rejoice, And mingle into song.

Undaunted maiden, thou shalt find Thy home in gleaming woods, Thy mantle in the southern wind, Thy wreath in swelling buds: And may thy mantle wrap thee round, And hopes still warm and thrive, And dews with every morn be found To keep thy wreath alive.

May coming suns, that tempt thy flowers, Smile on as they begin; And gentle be succeeding hours As those that bring thee in; Full lovely are thy dappled skies, Pearl'd round with promised showers, And sweet thy blossoms round thee rise To meet the sunny hours.

The primrose bud, thy early pledge, Sprouts 'neath each woodland tree, And violets under every hedge Prepare a seat for thee: As maids just meeting woman's bloom

Feel love’s delicious strife, So Nature warms to find thee come, And kindles into life.

Through hedge-row leaves, in drifted heaps Left by the stormy blast, The little hopeful blossom peeps, And tells of winter past: A few leaves flutter from the woods, That hung the season through, Leaving their place for swelling buds To spread their leaves anew.

’Mong withered grass upon the plain, That lent the blast a voice, The tender green appears again, And creeping things rejoice; Each warm bank shines with early flowers, Where oft a lonely bee Drones, venturing on in sunny hours, Its humming song to thee.

The birds are busy on the wing, The fish play in the stream; And many a hasty curdled ring Crimps round the leaping bream; The buds unfold to leaves apace, Along the hedge-row bowers, And many a child with rosy face Is seeking after flowers.

The soft wind fans the violet blue, Its opening sweets to share, And infant breezes, waked anew, Play in the maidens’ hair— Maidens that freshen with thy flowers, To charm the gentle swain, And dally, in their milking hours, With lovers’ vows again.

Bright dews illume the grassy plain, Sweet messengers of morn, And drops hang glistening after rain Like gems on every thorn; What though the grass is moist and rank Where dews fall from the tree, The creeping sun smiles on the bank And warms a seat for thee.

The eager morning earlier wakes To glad thy fond desires, And oft its rosy bed forsakes Ere night’s pale moon retires; Sweet shalt thou feel the morning sun To warm thy dewy breast, And chase the chill mist’s purple dun That lingers in the west.

Her dresses Nature gladly trims, To hail thee as her queen, And soon shall fold thy lovely limbs In modest garb of green: Each day shall like a lover come Some gifts

with thee to share, And swarms of flowers shall quickly bloom To dress thy golden hair.

All life and beauty warm and smile Thy lovely face to see, And many a hopeful hour beguile In seeking joys with thee; The sweetest hours that ever come Are those which thou dost bring, And sure the fairest flowers that bloom Are partners of the Spring.

I've met the Winter's biting breath In nature's wild retreat, When Silence listens as in death, And thought its wildness sweet; And I have loved the Winter's calm When frost has left the plain, When suns that morning waken'd warm Left eve to freeze again.

I've heard in Autumn's early reign Her first, her gentlest song; I've mark'd her change o'er wood and plain, And wish'd her reign were long; Till winds like armies, gather'd round, And stripp'd her colour'd woods, And storms urged on, with thunder-sound Their desolating floods.

And Summer's endless stretch of green, Spread over plain and tree, Sweet solace to my eyes has been, As it to all must be; Long I have stood his burning heat, And breathed the sultry day, And walk'd and toil'd with weary feet, Nor wish'd his pride away.

But oft I've watch'd the greening buds Brush'd by the linnet's wing, When, like a child, the gladden'd woods First lisp the voice of Spring; When flowers, like dreams, peep every day, Reminding what they bring; I've watch'd them, and am warn'd to pay A preference to Spring.

TO THE RURAL MUSE.

MUSE of the Fields! oft have I said farewell To thee, my boon companion, loved so long, And hung thy sweet harp in the bushy dell, For abler hands to wake an abler song. Much did I fear my homage did thee wrong: Yet, loth to leave, as oft I turned

again; And to its wires mine idle hands would cling, Torturing it into song. It may be vain; Yet still I try, ere Fancy droops her wing, And hopeless Silence comes to numb its ev'ry string.

Muse of the Pasture Brooks! on thy calm sea Of poesy I've sailed; and though the will To speed were greater than my prowess be, I've ventur'd with much fear of usage ill, Yet more of joy. Though timid be my skill, As not to dare the depths of mightier streams; Yet rocks abide in shallow ways, and I Have much of fear to mingle with my dreams. Yet, lovely Muse, I still believe thee by, And think I see thee smile, and so forget I sigh.

Muse of the Cottage Hearth! oft did I tell My hopes to thee, nor feared to plead in vain; But felt around my heart thy witching spell, That bade me as thy worshipper remain: I did so, and still worship. Oh! again Smile on my offerings, and so keep them green! Bedeck my fancies like the clouds of even, Mingling all hues which thou from heaven dost glean! To me a portion of thy power be given, If theme so mean as mine may merit aught of heaven.

For thee in youth I culled the simple flower, That on thy bosom gained a sweeter hue, And took thy hand along life's sunny hour, Meeting the sweetest joys that ever grew: More friends were needless, and my foes were few. Though freedom then be deemed as rudeness now. And what once won thy praise now meets disdain, Yet the last wreath I braided for thy brow, Thy smiles did so commend, it made me vain To weave another one, and hope for praise again.

With thee the spirit of departed years Wakes that sweet voice which time hath rendered dumb; And freshens, like to spring, loves, hopes, and fears, That in my bosom found an early home, Wooing the heart to ecstasy.—I come To thee, when sick of care, of joy bereft, Seeking the pleasures that are found in bloom. O happy hopes, that Time hath only left Around the haunts where thou didst erst sojourn! Then smile, sweet Muse, again, and welcome my return.

With thee the raptures of life's early day Appear, and all that pleased me when a boy. Though pains and cares have torn the best away, And winter creeps between us to destroy, Do thou commend, the recompence is joy: The tempest of the heart shall soon be calm. Though sterner Truth against my dreams rebel, Hope feels success; and all my spirits warm, To strike with happier mood thy simple shell, And seize thy mantle's hem—O! say not fare-thee-well.

Still, sweet Enchantress! youth's strong feelings move, That from thy presence their existence took:— The innocent idolatry and love, Paying thee worship in each secret nook, That fancied friends in tree, and flower, and brook, Shaped clouds to angels and beheld them smile, And heard commending tongues in ev'ry wind. Life's grosser fancies did these dreams defile, Yet not entirely root them from the mind; I think I hear them still, and often look behind.

Aye, I have heard thee in the summer wind, As if commending what I sung to thee; Aye, I have seen thee on a cloud reclined, Kindling my fancies into poesy; I saw thee smile, and took the praise to me. In beauties, past all beauty, thou wert drest; I thought the very clouds around thee knelt: I saw the sun to linger in the west, Paying thee worship; and as eve did melt In dews, they seemed thy tears for sorrows I had felt.

Sweeter than flowers on beauty's bosom hung, Sweeter than dreams of happiness above, Sweeter than themes by lips of beauty sung, Are the young fancies of a poet's love. When round his thoughts thy trancing visions move. In floating melody no notes may sound, The world is all forgot and past his care, While on thy harp thy fingers lightly bound, As winning him its melody to share; And heaven itself, with him, where is it then but there?

E'en now my heart leaps out from grief, and all The gloom thrown round by Care's o'ershading wing; E'en now those sunny visions to recall, Like to a bird I quit dull earth and sing: Life's tempest swoon to calms on every string. Ah! sweet

Enchantress, if I do but dream, If earthly visions have been only mine, My weakness in thy service woos esteem, And proves my truth as almost worthy thine: Surely true worship makes the meanest theme divine.

And still, warm courage, calming many a fear, Heartens my hand once more thy harp to try To join the anthem of the minstrel year: For summer's music in thy praise is high; The very winds about thy mantle sigh Love-melodies; thy minstrel bards to be, Insects and birds, exerting all their skill, Float in continued song for mastery, While in thy haunts loud leaps the little rill, To kiss thy mantle's hem; and how can I be still?

There still I see thee fold thy mantle grey, To trace the dewy lawn at morn and night; And there I see thee, in the sunny day, Withdraw thy veil and shine confest in light; Burning my fancies with a wild delight, To win a portion of thy blushing fame. Though haughty Fancy treat thy power as small, And Fashion thy simplicity disclaim, Should but a portion of thy mantle fall O'er him who woos thy love, 'tis recompense for all.

Not with the mighty to thy shrine I come, In anxious sighs, or self applauding mirth, On Mount Parnassus as thine heir to roam: I dare not credit that immortal birth; But mingling with the lesser ones on earth— Like as the little lark from off its nest, Beside the mossy hill awakes in glee, To seek the morning's throne a merry guest— So do I seek thy shrine, if that may be, To win by new attempts another smile from thee.

If without thee 'neath storms, and clouds, and wind, I've roam'd the wood, and field, and meadow lea; And found no flowers but what the vulgar find, Nor met one breath of living poesy, Among such charms where inspirations be; The fault is mine—and I must bear the lot Of missing praise to merit thy disdain. To feel each idle plea though urged, forgot; I can but sigh—though foolish to complain O'er hopes so fair begun, to find them end so vain.

Then will it prove presumption thus to dare To add fresh failings to each faulty song, Urging thy blessings on an idle prayer, To sanction silly themes: it will be wrong For one so lowly to be heard so long. Yet, sweet Enchantress, yet a little while Forego impatience, and from frowns refrain; The strong are ne'er debarr'd thy cheering smile, Why should the weak, who need them most, complain Alone, in solitude, soliciting in vain?

But if my efforts on thy harp prove true, Which bashful youth at first so feared to try; If aught of nature be in sounds I drew From hope's young dreams, and doubt's uncertainty, To these late offerings, not without their sigh; Then on thine altar shall these themes be laid, And past the deeds of graven brass remain, Filling a space in time that shall not fade; And if it be not so—avert disdain, Till dust shall feel no sting, nor know it toil'd in vain.

SUMMER IMAGES

NOW swarthy Summer, by rude health embrowned, Precedence takes of rosy fingered Spring; And laughing Joy, with wild flowers prank'd, and crown'd, A wild and giddy thing, And Health robust, from every care unbound, Come on the zephyr's wing, And cheer the toiling clown.

Happy as holiday-enjoying face, Loud tongued, and "merry as a marriage bell," Thy lightsome step sheds joy in every place; And where the troubled dwell, Thy witching charms wean them of half their cares: And from thy sunny spell, They greet joy unawares.

Then with thy sultry locks all loose and rude, And mantle laced with gems of garish light, Come as of wont; for I would fain intrude, And in the world's despite, Share the rude wealth that thy own heart beguiles; If haply so I might Win pleasure from thy smiles.

Me not the noise of brawling pleasure cheers, In nightly revels or in city streets; But

joys which soothe, and not distract the ears, That one at leisure meets In the green woods, and meadows summer-shorn, Or fields, where bee-fly greets The ear with mellow horn.

The green-swathed grasshopper, on treble pipe, Sings there, and dances, in mad-hearted pranks; The bees go courting every flower that's ripe, On baulks and sunny banks; And droning dragon-fly, on rude bassoon, Attempts to give God thanks In no discordant tune.

The speckled thrush, by self-delight embued, There sings unto himself for joy's amends, And drinks the honey dew of solitude. There Happiness attends With inbred Joy until the heart o'erflow, Of which the world's rude friends. Nought heeding, nothing know.

There the gay river, laughing as it goes, Plashes with easy wave its flaggy sides, And to the calm of heart, in calmness shows What pleasure there abides, To trace its sedgy banks, from trouble free: Spots, Solitude provides To muse, and happy be.

There ruminating 'neath some pleasant bush, On sweet silk grass I stretch me at mine ease, Where I can pillow on the yielding rush; And, acting as I please, Drop into pleasant dreams; or musing lie, Mark the wind-shaken trees, And cloud-betravelled sky.

There think me how some barter joy for care, And waste life's summer-health in riot rude, Of nature, nor of nature's sweets aware. When passions vain intrude, These, by calm musings, softened are and still; And the heart's better mood Feels sick of doing ill.

There I can live, and at my leisure seek Joys far from cold restraints—not fearing pride Free as the winds, that breathe upon my cheek Rude health, so long denied. Here poor Integrity can sit at ease, And list self-satisfied The song of honey bees;

The green lane now I traverse, where it goes Nought guessing, till some sudden turn espies Rude batter'd finger post, that stooping shows Where the snug mystery lies;

And then a mossy spire, with ivy crown, Cheers up the short surprise, And shows a peeping town.

I see the wild flowers, in their summer morn Of beauty, feeding on joy's luscious hours; The gay convolvulus, wreathing round the thorn, Agape for honey showers; And slender kingcup, burnished with the dew Of morning's early hours, Like gold minted new.

And mark by rustic bridge, o'er shallow stream, Cow-tending boy, to toil unreconciled, Absorbed as in some vagrant summer dream; Who now, in gestures wild, Starts dancing to his shadow on the wall, Feeling self-gratified, Nor fearing human thrall.

Or thread the sunny valley laced with streams, Or forests rude, and the o'ershadow'd brims Of simple pond, where idle shepherd dreams, Stretching his listless limbs; Or trace hay-scented meadows, smooth and long Where joy's wild impulse swims In one continued song.

I love at early morn, from new mown swath, To see the startled frog his route pursue; To mark while, leaping o'er the dripping path, His bright sides scatter dew, The early lark that, from its bustle flies, To hail his matin new; And watch him to the skies.

To note on hedgerow baulks, in moisture sprent, The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn, With earnest heed, and tremulous intent, Frail brother of the morn, That from the tiny bent's dew-misted leaves Withdraws his timid horn, And fearful vision weaves.

Or swallow heed on smoke-tanned chimney top, Wont to be first unsealing Morning's eye, Ere yet the bee hath gleaned one wayward drop Of honey on his thigh; To see him seek morn's airy couch to sing, Until the golden sky Bepaint his russet wing.

Or sauntering boy by tanning corn to spy, With clapping noise to startle birds away,

And hear him bawl to every passer by To know the hour of day; While the uncradled breezes, fresh and strong, With waking blossoms play, And breathe Æolian song.

I love the south-west wind, or low or loud, And not the less when sudden drops of rain Moisten my glowing cheek from ebon cloud, Threatening soft showers again, That over lands new ploughed and meadow grounds, Summer's sweet breath unchain, And wake harmonious sounds.

Rich music breathes in Summer's every sound; And in her harmony of varied greens, Woods, meadows, hedge-rows, corn-fields, all around Much beauty intervenes; Filling with harmony the ear and eye; While o'er the mingling scenes Far spreads the laughing sky.

See, how the wind-enamoured aspin leaves Turn up their silver lining to the sun! And hark! the rustling noise, that oft deceives And makes the sheep-boy run; The sound so mimics fast-approaching showers, He thinks the rain's begun, And hastes to sheltering bowers.

But now the evening curdles dank and grey, Changing her watchet hue for sombre weed; And moping owls, to close the lids of day, On drowsy wing proceed; While chickering crickets, tremulous and long, Light's farewell inly heed, And give it parting song.

The pranking bat its flighty circlet makes; The glow-worm burnishes its lamp anew; O'er meadows dew-besprent, the beetle wakes Inquiries ever new, Teazing each passing ear with murmurs vain, As wanting to pursue His homeward path again.

Hark! 'tis the melody of distant bells That on the wind with pleasing hum rebounds By fitful starts, then musically swells O'er the dim stilly grounds; While on the meadow-bridge the pausing boy Listens the mellow sounds, And hums in vacant joy.

Now homeward-bound, the hedger bundles round His evening faggot, and with every stride His leathern doublet leaves a rustling sound, Till silly sheep beside His

path start tremulous, and once again Look back dissatisfied, And scour the dewy plain.

How sweet the soothing calmness that distills O'er the heart's every sense its opiate dews, In meek-eyed moods and ever balmy trills! That softens and subdues, With gentle Quiet's bland and sober train, Which dreamy eve renews In many a mellow strain!

I love to walk the fields, they are to me A legacy no evil can destroy; They, like a spell, set every rapture free That cheer'd me when a boy. Play—pastime—all Time's blotting pen conceal'd, Comes like a new-born joy, To greet me in the field.

For Nature's objects ever harmonize With emulous Taste, that vulgar deed annoys; Which loves in pensive moods to sympathize, And meet vibrating joys O'er Nature's pleasing things; nor slighting, deems Pastimes, the Muse employs, Vain and obtrusive themes.

AUTUMN

SYREN of sullen moods and fading hues, Yet haply not incapable of joy, Sweet Autumn! I thee hail With welcome all unfeigned;

And oft as morning from her lattice peeps To beckon up the sun, I seek with thee To drink the dewy breath Of fields left fragrant then,

In solitudes, where no frequented paths But what thy own foot makes betray thine home, Stealing obtrusive there To meditate thy end:

By overshadowed ponds, in woody nooks, With ramping sallows lined, and crowding sedge, Which woo the winds to play, And with them dance for joy;

And meadow pools, torn wide by lawless floods, Where water-lilies spread their oily leaves, On which, as wont, the fly Oft battens in the sun;

Where leans the mossy willow half way o'er, On which the shepherd crawls astride

to throw His angle, clear of weeds That crowd the water’s brim;

Or crispy hills, and hollows scant of sward, Where, step by step, the patient lonely boy Hath cut rude flights of stairs To climb their steepy sides;

Then track along their feet, grown hoarse with noise, The crawling brook, that ekes its weary speed, And struggles through the weeds With faint and sullen brawl.—

These haunts I long have favoured, more as now With thee thus wandering, moralizing on; Stealing glad thoughts from grief, And happy, though I sigh.

Sweet Vision, with the wild dishevelled hair, And raiment shadowy of each wind’s embrace, Fain would I win thine harp To one accordant theme.

Now not inaptly craved, communing thus, Beneath the curdled arms of this stunt oak, While pillowed on the grass, We fondly ruminate

O’er the disordered scenes of woods and fields, Ploughed lands, thin travelled with half-hungry sheep, Pastures tracked deep with cows, Where small birds seek for seed:

Marking the cow-boy that so merry trills His frequent, unpremeditated song, Wooing the winds to pause, Till echo brawls again;

As on with plashy step, and clouted shoon, He roves, half indolent and self-employed, To rob the little birds Of hips and pendant haws,

And sloes, dim covered as with dewy veils, And rambling bramble-berries, pulpy and sweet, Arching their prickly trails Half o’er the narrow lane:

Noting the hedger front with stubborn face The dank bleak wind, that whistles thinly by His leathern garb, thorn proof, And cheek red hot with toil;

While o’er the pleachy lands of mellow brown, The mower’s stubbling scythe clogs to his foot The ever ekeing whisp, With sharp and sudden jerk,

Till into formal rows the russet shocks Crowd the blank field to thatch time-weather’d barns, And hovels rude repair, Stript by disturbing winds.

See! from the rustling scythe the haunted hare Scampers circuitous, with startled ears Prickt up, then squat, as by She brushes to the woods,

Where reeded grass, breast-high and undisturbed, Forms pleasant clumps, through which the soothing winds Soften her rigid fears, And lull to calm repose.

Wild Sorceress! me thy restless mood delights, More than the stir of summer's crowded scenes, Where, jostled in the din, Joy palled my ear with song;

Heart-sickening for the silence, that is here Not broken inharmoniously, as now That lone and vagrant bee Booms faint with weary chime.

Now filtering winds thin winnow through the woods In tremulous noise, that bids, at every breath, Some sickly cankered leaf Let go its hold, and die.

And now the bickering storm, with sudden start, In flirting fits of anger carps aloud, Thee urging to thine end, Sore wept by troubled skies.

And yet, sublime in grief! thy thoughts delight To show me visions of most gorgeous dyes, Haply forgetting now They but prepare thy shroud;

Thy pencil dashing its excess of shades, Improvident of waste, till every bough Burns with thy mellow touch Disorderly divine.

Soon must I view thee as a pleasant dream Droop faintly, and so reckon for thine end, As sad the winds sink low In dirges for their queen;

While in the moment of their weary pause, To cheer thy bankrupt pomp, the willing lark Starts from his shielding clod, Snatching sweet scraps of song.

Thy life is waning now, and Silence tries To mourn, but meets no sympathy in sounds, As stooping low she bends, Forming with leaves thy grave;

To sleep inglorious there mid tangled woods, Till parched-lipped Summer pines in drought away Then from thine ivy'd trance Awake to glories new.

THE VANITIES OF LIFE

WHAT are life’s joys and gains, What pleasures crowd its ways, That man should take such pains To seek them all his days? Sift this untoward strife On which thy mind is bent— See if this chaff of life Be worth the trouble spent.

Is pride thy heart’s desire? Is power thy climbing aim? Is love thy folly’s fire? Is wealth thy restless game?— Pride, power, love, wealth, and all, Time’s touchstone shall destroy; And, like base coin, prove all Vain substitutes for joy.

Dost think thy pride exalts Thyself in others’ eyes, And hides thy folly’s faults, Which reason will despise? Dost strut, and turn, and stride, Like walking weathercocks? The shadow, by thy side, Becomes thy ape, and mocks.

Dost think that power’s disguise Can make thee mighty seem? It may in folly’s eyes, But not in worth’s esteem. When all that thou canst ask, And all that she can give, Is but a paltry mask, Which tyrants wear and live.

Go, let thy fancies range, And ramble where they may View power in every change, And what is its display?— The country magistrate, The lowest shade in power, To rulers of the state?— The meteors of an hour.

View all, and mark the end Of every proud extreme, Where flattery turns a friend, And counterfeits esteem; Where worth is aped in show, That doth her name purloin— As toys of golden glow, Are sold for copper coin.

Ambition’s haughty nod With fancies may deceive— Nay, tell thee thou’rt a god; And wilt thou such believe? Go, bid the seas be dry; Go, hold earth like a ball; Or throw thy fancies by, For God can do it all.

Dost thou possess the dower Of laws, to spare or kill? Call it not heavenly power, When but a tyrant’s will. Know what a god will do, And know thyself a fool; Nor tyrant-like pursue, Where he alone should rule.

O put away thy pride, Or be ashamed of power That cannot turn aside The breeze that waves a flower; Or bid the clouds be still— Though shadows, they can brave Thy poor power-mocking will, Then make not man a slave.

Dost think, when wealth is won, Thy heart has its desire? Hold ice up to the sun, And wax before the fire; Nor triumph o’er the reign Which they so soon resign, In this world’s ways they gain Insurance safe as thine.

Dost think life’s peace secure In houses and in land? Go, read the fairy lure— To twist a cord of sand, Lodge stones upon the sky, Hold water in a sieve; Nor give such tales the lie, And still thine own believe.

Whoso with riches deals, And thinks peace bought and sold, Will find them slippery eels, That slide the firmest hold; Though sweet as sleep with health Thy lulling luck may be, Pride may o’erstride thy wealth, And check prosperity.

Dost think that beauty’s power Life’s sweetest pleasure gives? Go, pluck the summer flower, And see how long it lives: Behold the rays glide on Along the summer plain, ’Ere thou canst say, “They’re gone!” And measure beauty’s reign.

Look on the brightest eye, Nor teach it to be proud, But view the clearest sky, And thou shalt find a cloud; Nor call each face you meet An angel’s, ’cause it’s fair, But look beneath your feet, And think of what they are.

Who thinks that love doth live In beauty’s tempting show, Shall find his hopes misgive, And melt in reason’s thaw; Who thinks that pleasure lies In every fairy bower, Shall oft, to his surprise, Find poison in the flower.

Dost lawless passions grasp?— Judge not thou deal’st in joy; Its flowers but hide the asp, Thy revels to destroy. Who trusts a harlot’s smile, And by her wiles is led, Plays with a sword the while, Hung dropping o’er his head.

Dost doubt my warning song?— Then doubt the sun gives light; Doubt truth to teach the wrong, And wrong alone as right; And live as lives the knave, Intrigue’s deceiving guest; Be tyrant or be slave, As suits thy ends the best.

Or pause amid thy toils For visions won and lost, And count the fancied spoils, If ’ere they quit the cost; And if they still possess, Thy mind as worthy things; Plat straws with bedlam Bess, And call them diamond rings.

Thy folly's past advice, Thy heart's already won, Thy fall's above all price, So go and be undone: For all who thus prefer The seeming great for small, Shall make wine vinegar, And sweetest honey gall.

Would'st heed the truths I sing, To profit wherewithal? Clip Folly's wanton wing, And keep her within call. I've little else to give, What thou canst easy try; The lesson how to live, Is but to learn to die.

THOUGHTS IN A CHURCH-YARD

AH! happy spot, how still it seems Where crowds of buried memories sleep; How quiet Nature o'er them dreams, 'Tis but our troubled thoughts that weep. Life's book shuts here—its page is lost With them, and all its busy claims, The poor are from its memory crost, The rich leave nothing but their names.

There rest the weary from their toil; There lie the troubled, free from care; Who through the strife of life's turmoil Sought rest, and only found it there. With none to fear his scornful brow, There sleeps the master with the slave; And heedless of all titles now, Repose the honoured and the brave.

There rest the miser and the heir, Both careless who their wealth shall reap; E'en love finds cure for heart-aches here, And none enjoy a sounder sleep. The fair one far from folly's freaks, As quiet as her neighbour seems, Unconscious now of rosy cheeks, Without a rival in her dreams.

Strangers alike to joy and strife, Heedless of all its past affairs. They're blotted from the list of life, And absent from its teazing cares. Grief, joy, hope, fear, and all their crew That haunt the memory's living mind, Ceased, when they could no more pursue, And left a painless blank behind.

Life's ignis fatuus light is gone, No more to lead their hopes astray; Care's poisoned cup is drain'd and done, And all its follies past away. The bill's made out, the reck'ning paid, The book is cross'd, the business done; On them the last demand is

made, And heaven’s eternal peace is won.

THE NIGHTINGALE’S NEST

UP this green woodland-ride let’s softly rove, And list the nightingale—she dwells just here. Hush! let the wood-gate softly clap, for fear The noise might drive her from her home of love; For here I’ve heard her many a merry year— At morn, at eve, nay, all the live-long day, As though she lived on song. This very spot, Just where that old-man’s-beard all wildly trails Rude arbours o’er the road, and stops the way— And where that child its blue-bell flowers hath got, Laughing and creeping through the mossy rails— There have I hunted like a very boy, Creeping on hands and knees through matted thorn To find her nest, and see her feed her young. And vainly did I many hours employ: All seemed as hidden as a thought unborn. And where those crimping fern-leaves ramp among The hazel’s under boughs, I’ve nestled down, And watched her while she sung; and her renown Hath made me marvel that so famed a bird Should have no better dress than russet brown. Her wings would tremble in her ecstasy, And feathers stand on end, as ’twere with joy, And mouth wide open to release her heart Of its out-sobbing songs. The happiest part Of summer’s fame she shared, for so to me Did happy fancies shapen her employ; But if I touched a bush, or scarcely stirred, All in a moment stopt. I watched in vain; The timid bird had left the hazel bush, And at a distance hid to sing again. Lost in a wilderness of listening leaves, Rich Ecstasy would pour its luscious strain, Till envy spurred the emulating thrush To start less wild and scarce inferior songs; For while of half the year Care him bereaves, To damp the ardour of his speckled breast; The nightingale to summer’s life belongs, And naked trees, and winter’s nipping wrongs, Are strangers to her music and her rest. Her joys are evergreen, her world is wide— Hark! there she is as usual—let’s be hush— For in this black-thorn clump, if rightly guest, Her curious house is hidden. Part aside These hazel branches

in a gentle way, And stoop right cautious ’neath the rustling boughs, For we will have another search to-day, And hunt this fern-strewn thorn-clump round and round; And where this reeded wood-grass idly bows, We’ll wade right through, it is a likely nook: In such like spots, and often on the ground, They’ll build, where rude boys never think to look— Aye, as I live! her secret nest is here, Upon this white-thorn stump! I’ve searched about For hours in vain. There! put that bramble by— Nay, trample on its branches and get near. How subtle is the bird! she started out, And raised a plaintive note of danger nigh, Ere we were past the brambles; and now, near Her nest, she sudden stops—as choking fear, That might betray her home. So even now We’ll leave it as we found it; safety’s guard Of pathless solitude shall keep it still. See there; she’s sitting on the old oak bough, Mute in her fears; our presence doth retard Her joys, and doubt turns every rapture chill. Sing on, sweet bird! may no worse hap befall Thy visions, than the fear that now deceives. We will not plunder music of its dower, Nor turn this spot of happiness to thrall; For melody seems hid in every flower, That blossoms near thy home. These harebells all Seem bowing with the beautiful in song; And gaping cuckoo-flowers, with spotted leaves, Seems blushing of the singing it has heard. How curious is the nest; no other bird Uses such loose materials, or weaves Its dwelling in such spots: dead open leaves Are placed without, and velvet moss within, And little scraps of grass, and, scant and spare, What scarcely seem materials, down and hair; For from men’s haunts she nothing seems to win. Yet Nature is the builder, and contrives Homes for her children’s comfort, even here; Where Solitude’s disciples spend their lives Unseen, save when a wanderer passes near That loves such pleasant places. Deep adown, The nest is made a hermit’s mossy cell. Snug lie her curious eggs in number five, Of deadened green, or rather olive brown; And the old prickly thorn-bush guards them well. So here we’ll leave them, still unknown to wrong, As the old woodland’s legacy of song.

TO P****

FAIR was thy bloom, when first I met Thy summer's maiden-blossom; And thou art fair and lovely yet, And dearer to my bosom. O thou wert once a wilding flower, All garden flowers excelling, And still I bless the happy hour That led me to thy dwelling.

Though nursed by field, and brook, and wood, And wild in every feature, Spring ne'er unsealed a fairer bud, Nor found a blossom sweeter. Of all the flowers the Spring hath met, And it has met with many, Thou art to me the fairest yet, And loveliest, of any.

Though ripening summers round thee bring Buds to thy swelling bosom, That wait the cheering smiles of spring To ripen into blossom; These buds shall added blessings be, To make our loves sincerer: For as their flowers resemble thee, They'll make thy memory dearer.

And though thy bloom shall pass away, By winter overtaken, Thoughts of the past will charms display, And many joys awaken. When time shall every sweet remove, And blight thee on my bosom— Let beauty fade—to me, my love, Thou'lt ne'er be out of blossom!

A WORLD FOR LOVE

OH, the world is all too rude for thee, with much ado and care; Oh, this world is but a rude world, and hurts a thing so fair; Was there a nook in which the world had never been to sear, That place would prove a paradise when thou and Love were near.

And there to pluck the blackberry, and there to reach the sloe, How joyously and happily would Love thy partner go; Then rest when weary on a bank, where not a grassy blade Had e'er been bent by Trouble's feet, and Love thy pillow made.

For Summer would be ever green, though sloes were in their prime, And Winter smile his frowns to Spring, in beauty's happy clime; And months would come, and months would go, and all in sunny mood, And everything inspired by thee grow beautifully good.

And there to make a cot unknown to any care and pain, And there to shut the door alone on singing wind and rain— Far, far away from all the world, more rude than rain or wind, Oh who could wish a sweeter home, or better place to find?

Than thus to love and live with thee, thou beautiful delight! Than thus to live and love with thee the summer day and night! The Earth itself, where thou hadst rest, would surely smile to see Herself grow Eden once again, possest of Love and thee.

SONG

O THE voice of woman's love! What a bosom-stirring word! Was a sweeter ever uttered, Was a dearer ever heard, Than woman's love?

How it melts upon the ear, How it nourishes the heart! Cold, ah! cold, must his appear, Who hath never shared a part Of woman's love.

'Tis pleasure to the mourner, 'Tis freedom to the thrall; The pilgrimage of many, And resting place of all, Is woman's love.

'Tis the gem of beauty's birth, It competes with joys above; What were angels upon earth, If without a woman's love— A woman's love?

LOVE

LOVE, though it is not chill and cold, But burning like eternal fire, Is yet not of approaches bold, Which gay dramatic tastes admire. Oh! timid love, more fond than free, In daring song is ill pourtrayed, Where, as in war, the devotee By valour wins each captive maid;—

Where hearts are prest to hearts in glee, As they could tell each other's mind; Where ruby lips are kissed as free, As flowers are by the summer wind. No! gentle love, that timid dream, With hopes and fears at foil and play, Works like a skiff against the stream, And thinking most finds least to say.

It lives in blushes and in sighs, In hopes for which no words are found; Thoughts dare not speak but in the eyes, The tongue is left without a sound. The pert and forward things that dare Their talk in every maiden's ear, Feel no more than their shadows there— Mere things of form, with nought of fear.

True passion, that so burns to plead, Is timid as the dove's disguise; 'Tis for the murder-aiming gleed To dart at every thing that flies. True love, it is no daring bird, But like the little timid wren, That in the new-leaved thorns of spring Shrinks farther from the sight of men.

The idol of his musing mind, The worship of his lonely hour, Love woos her in the summer wind, And tells her name to every flower; But in her sight, no open word Escapes, his fondness to declare; The sighs, by beauty's magic stirred, Are all that speak his passion there.

DECAY

O POESY is on the wane, For Fancy's visions all unfitting; I hardly knew her face again, Nature herself seems on the flitting. The fields grow old and common things, The grass, the sky, the winds a-blowing; And spots, where still a beauty clings, Are sighing "going! all a-going!" O Poesy in on the wane, I hardly know her face again.

The bank with brambles overspread, And little molehills round about it, Was more to me than laurel shades, With paths of gravel finely clouted; And streaking here and streaking there, Through shaven grass and many a border, With rutty lanes had no compare, And heaths were in a richer order. But Poesy is on the wane, I hardly know her face again.

I sat beside the pasture stream, When Beauty's self was sitting by The fields did more than Eden seem, Nor could I tell the reason why. I often drank when not a-dry, To pledge her health in draughts divine; Smiles made it nectar from the sky, Love turned e'en water into wine. O Poesy is on the wane, I cannot find her face again.

The sun those mornings used to find, Its clouds were other-country mountains, And heaven looked downward on the mind, Like groves, and rocks, and mottled fountains. Those heavens are gone, the mountains grey Turned mist—the sun, a homeless ranger, Pursues alone his naked way, Unnoticed like a very stranger. O Poesy is on the wane, Nor love nor joy is mine again.

Love's sun went down without a frown, For very joy it used to grieve us; I often think the West is gone, Ah, cruel Time, to undeceive us. The stream it is a common stream, Where we on Sundays used to ramble, The sky hangs o'er a broken dream, The bramble's dwindled to a bramble! O Poesy is on the wane, I cannot find her haunts again.

Mere withered stalks and fading trees, And pastures spread with hills and rushes, Are all my fading vision sees; Gone, gone are rapture's flooding gushes! When mushrooms they were fairy bowers, Their marble pillars over-swelling, And Danger paused to pluck the flowers, That in their swarthy rings were dwelling. Yes, Poesy is on the wane, Nor joy, nor fear is mine again.

Aye, Poesy hath passed away, And Fancy's visions undeceive us; The night hath ta'en the place of day, And why should passing shadows grieve us? I thought the flowers upon the hill Were flowers from Adam's open gardens; But I have had my summer thrills, And I have had my heart's rewardings. So Poesy is on the wane, I hardly know her face again.

And Friendship it hath burned away, Like to a very ember cooling, A make-believe on April day, That sent the simple heart a fooling; Mere jesting in an earnest way, Deceiving on and still deceiving; And Hope is but a fancy-play, And Joy the art of

true believing; For Poesy is on the wane, O could I feel her faith again!

PASTORAL FANCIES

SWEET pastime here my mind so entertains, Abiding pleasaunce, and heart-feeding joys, To meet this blithsome day these painted plains, These singing maids, and chubby laughing boys, Which hay-time and the summer here employs,— My rod and line doth all neglected lie; A higher joy my former sport destroys: Nature this day doth bait the hook, and I The glad fish am, that's to be caught thereby.

This silken grass, these pleasant flowers in bloom, Among these tasty molehills that do lie Like summer cushions, for all guests that come; Those little feathered folk, that sing and fly Above these trees, in that so gentle sky, Where not a cloud dares soil its heavenly light; And this smooth river softly grieving bye— All fill mine eyes with so divine a sight, As makes me sigh that it should e'er be night.

In sooth, methinks the choice I most should prize Were in these meadows of delight to dwell, To share the joyaunce heaven elsewhere denies, The calmness that doth relish passing well, The quiet conscience, that aye bears the bell, And happy musing Nature would supply, Leaving no room for troubles to rebel: Here would I think all day, at night would lie, The hay my bed, my coverlid the sky.

So would I live, as nature might command, Taking with Providence my wholesome meals; Plucking the savory peascod from the land, Where rustic lad oft dainty dinner steals. For drink, I'd his me where the moss conceals The little spring so chary from the sun, Then lie, and listen to the merry peals Of distant bells—all other noises shun; Then court the Muses till the day be done.

Here would high joys my lowly choice requite; For garden plot, I'd choose this flow'ry lea; Here I in culling nosegays would delight, The lambtoe tuft, the paler culverkey: The cricket's mirth were talk enough for me, When talk I needed; and when warmed to pray, The little birds my choristers should be, Who wear one suit

for worship and for play, And make the whole year long one sabbath-day.

A thymy hill should be my cushioned seat; An aged thorn, with wild hops intertwined, My bower, where I from noontide might retreat; A hollow oak would shield me from the wind, Or, as might hap, I better shed might find In gentle spot, where fewer paths intrude, The hut of shepherd swain, with rushes lined: There would I tenant be to Solitude, Seeking life's gentlest joys, to shun the rude.

Bidding a long farewell to every trouble, The envy and the hate of evil men; Feeling cares lessen, happiness redouble, And all I lost as if 'twere found again. Vain life unseen; the past alone known then: No worldly intercourse my mind should have To lure me backward to its crowded den; Here would I live and die, and only crave The home I chose might also be my grave.

THE AUTUMN ROBIN

SWEET little bird in russet coat, The livery of the closing year! I love thy lonely plaintive note, And tiny whispering song to hear. While on the stile or garden seat, I sit to watch the falling leaves, The song thy little joys repeat, My loneliness relieves.

And many are the lonely minds That hear, and welcome thee anew; Not Taste alone, but humble hinds, Delight to praise, and love thee too. The veriest clown, beside his cart, Turns from his song with many a smile, To see thee from the hedgerow start, To sing upon the stile.

The shepherd on the fallen tree Drops down to listen to thy lay, And chides his dog beside his knee, Who barks, and frightens thee away. The hedger pauses, ere he knocks The stake down in the meadow-gap— The boy, who every songster mocks, Forbears the gate to clap.

When in the hedge that hides the post Thy ruddy bosom he surveys,— Pleased with thy song, in transport lost, He pausing mutters scraps of praise. The maiden marks, at day's decline, Thee in the yard, on broken plough, And stops her song, to listen

thine, Milking the brindled cow.

Thy simple faith in man’s esteem, From every heart hath favour won; Dangers to thee no dangers seem— Thou seemest to court them more than shun. The clown in winter takes his gun, The barn-door flocking birds to slay, Yet should’st thou in the danger run He turns the tube away.

The gipsy boy, who seeks in glee Blackberries for a dainty meal, Laughs loud on first beholding thee, When called, so near his presence steal. He surely thinks thou know’st the call; And though his hunger ill can spare The fruit, he will not pluck it all, But leaves some to thy share.

Upon the ditcher’s spade thou’lt hop, For grubs and wreathing worms to search; Where woodmen in the forest chop, Thou’lt fearless on their faggots perch; Nay, by the gipsies’ camp I stop, And mark thee dwell a moment there, To prune thy wing awhile, then drop, The littered crumbs to share.

Domestic bird! thy pleasant face Doth well thy common suit commend; To meet thee in a stranger-place Is meeting with an ancient friend. I track the thicket’s glooms around, And there, as loth to leave, again Thou comest, as if thou knew the sound And loved the sight of men.

The loneliest wood that man can trace To thee a pleasant dwelling gives; In every town and crowded place The sweet domestic robin lives. Go where one will, in every spot Thy little welcome mates appear; And, like the daisy’s common lot, Thou’rt met with every where.

The swallow in the chimney tier, Or twittering martin in the eaves, With half of love and half of fear His mortared dwelling shily weaves; The sparrows in the thatch will shield; Yet they, as well as e’er they can, Contrive with doubtful faith to build Beyond the reach of man.

But thou’rt less timid than the wren, Domestic and confiding bird! And spots, the nearest haunts of men, Are oftenest for thy home preferred. In garden-walls thou’lt

build so low, Close where the bunch of fennel stands, That e'en a child just taught to go May reach with tiny hands.

Sweet favoured bird! thy under-notes In summer's music grow unknown, The concert from a thousand throats Leaves thee as if to pipe alone; No listening ear the shepherd lends, The simple ploughman marks thee not, And then by all thy autumn friends Thou'rt missing and forgot.

The far-famed nightingale, that shares Cold public praise from every tongue, The popular voice of music heirs, And injures much thy under-song: Yet then my walks thy theme salutes; I find thee autumn's favoured guest, Gay piping on the hazel-roots Above thy mossy nest.

'Tis wrong that thou shouldst be despised, When these gay fickle birds appear; They sing when summer flowers are prized— Thou at the dull and dying year. Well! let the heedless and the gay Bepraise the voice of louder lays, The joy thou steal'st from Sorrow's day Is more to thee than praise.

And could my notes win aught from thine, My words but imitate thy lay, Time could not then his charge resign, Nor throw the meanest verse away, But ever at this mellow time, He should thy autumn praise prolong, As they would share the happy prime Of thy eternal song.

A SPRING MORNING

THE Spring comes in with all her hues and smells, In freshness breathing over hills and dells; O'er woods where May her gorgeous drapery flings, And meads washed fragrant by their laughing springs. Fresh are new opened flowers, untouched and free From the bold rifling of the amorous bee. The happy time of singing birds is come, And Love's lone pilgrimage now finds a home; Among the mossy oaks now coos the dove, And the hoarse crow finds softer notes for love. The foxes play around their dens, and bark In joy's excess, 'mid woodland shadows dark. The

flowers join lips below; the leaves above; And every sound that meets the ear is Love.

THE CRAB-TREE

SPRING comes anew, and brings each little pledge That still, as wont, my childish heart deceives; I stoop again for violets in the hedge, Among the ivy and old withered leaves; And often mark, amid the clumps of sedge, The pooty-shells I gathered when a boy: But cares have claimed me many an evil day, And chilled the relish which I had for joy. Yet when Crab-blossoms blush among the May, As erst in years gone by, I scramble now Up ’mid the bramble for my old esteems, Filling my hands with many a blooming bough; Till the heart-stirring past as present seems, Save the bright sunshine of those fairy dreams.

WINTER

OLD January, clad in crispy rime, Comes limping on, and often makes a stand; The hasty snow-storm ne’er disturbs his time, He mends no pace, but beats his dithering hand. And February, like a timid maid, Smiling and sorrowing follows in his train; Huddled in cloak, of miry roads afraid, She hastens on to meet her home again. Then March, the prophetess, by storms inspired, Gazes in rapture on the troubled sky, And now in headlong fury madly fired, She bids the hail-storm boil and hurry by. Yet ’neath the blackest cloud, a Sunbeam flings Its cheering promise of returning Springs.

OLD POESY

SWEET is the poesy of the olden time, In the unsullied infancy of rhyme, When Nature reigned omnipotent to teach, And Truth and Feeling owned the powers of

speech. Rich is the music of each early theme, And sweet as sunshine in a summer dream, Giving to stocks and stones, in rapture's strife, A soul of utterance and a tongue of life. Sweet are these wild flowers in their disarray, Which Art and Fashion fling as weeds away, To sport with shadows of inferior kind, Mere magic-lanthorns of the shifting mind, Automatons of wonder-working powers, Shadows of life, and artificial flowers.

'TIS SPRING, MY LOVE, 'TIS SPRING

'TIS Spring, my love, 'tis Spring, And the birds begin to sing: If 't was Winter, left alone with you, Your bonny form and face, Would make a Summer place, And be the finest flower that ever grew.

Tis Spring, my love, 'tis Spring, And the hazel catkins hing, While the snowdrop has its little blebs of dew; But that's not so white within As your bosom's hidden skin— That sweetest of all flowers that ever grew.

The sun arose from bed, All strewn with roses red, But the brightest and the loveliest crimson place Is not so fresh and fair, Or so sweet beyond compare, As thy blushing, ever smiling, happy face.

I love Spring's early flowers, And their bloom in its first hours, But they never half so bright or lovely seem As the blithe and happy grace Of my darling's blushing face, And the happiness of loves young dream.

GRAVES OF INFANTS

INFANTS' gravemounds are steps of angels, where Earth's brightest gems of innocence repose. God is their parent, so they need no tear; He takes them to his bosom from earth's woes, A bud their lifetime and a flower their close. Their spirits are the Iris of the skies, Needing no prayers; a sunset's happy close. Gone are the

bright rays of their soft blue eyes; Flowers weep in dew-drops o’er them, and the gale gently sighs.

Their lives were nothing but a sunny shower, Melting on flowers as tears melt from the eye. Each death * * * Was tolled on flowers as Summer gales went by. They bowed and trembled, yet they heaved no sigh, And the sun smiled to show the end was well. Infants have nought to weep for ere they die; All prayers are needless, beads they need not tell, White flowers their mourners are, Nature their passing bell.

HOME YEARNINGS

O FOR that sweet, untroubled rest, That poets oft have sung!— The babe upon its mother’s breast, The bird upon its young, The heart asleep without a pain— When shall I know that sleep again?

When shall I be as I have been Upon my mother’s breast— Sweet Nature’s garb of verdant green To woo to perfect rest— Love in the meadow, field, and glen, And in my native wilds again?

The sheep within the fallow field, The herd upon the green, The larks that in the thistle shield, And pipe from morn to e’en— O for the pasture, fields, and fen, When shall I see such rest again?

I love the weeds along the fen, More sweet than garden flowers, For freedom haunts the humble glen That blest my happiest hours. Here prison injures health and me: I love sweet freedom and the free.

The crows upon the swelling hills, The cows upon the lea, Sheep feeding by the pasture rills, Are ever dear to me, Because sweet freedom is their mate, While I am lone and desolate.

I loved the winds when I was young, When life was dear to me; I loved the song which Nature sung, Endearing liberty; I loved the wood, the vale, the stream, For

there my boyhood used to dream.

There even toil itself was play; ’Twas pleasure e’en to weep; ’Twas joy to think of dreams by day, The beautiful of sleep. When shall I see the wood and plain, And dream those happy dreams again?

LOVE LIVES BEYOND THE TOMB

LOVE lives beyond the tomb, And earth, which fades like dew! I love the fond, The faithful, and the true.

Love lives in sleep; ’Tis happiness of healthy dreams; Eve’s dews may weep, But love delightful seems.

’Tis seen in flowers, And in the morning’s pearly dew; In earth’s green hours, And in the heaven’s eternal blue.

’Tis heard in Spring, When light and sunbeams, warm and kind, On angel’s wings Bring love and music to the mind.

And where’s the voice, So young, so beautiful, and sweet As Nature’s choice, Where Spring and lovers meet?

Love lives beyond the tomb, And earth, which fades like dew! I love the fond, The faithful, and the true.

MY EARLY HOME

HERE sparrows build upon the trees, And stockdove hides her nest; The leaves are winnowed by the breeze Into a calmer rest; The black-cap’s song was very sweet, That used the rose to kiss; It made the Paradise complete: My early home was this.

The redbreast from the sweetbriar bush Dropt down to pick the worm; On the horse-chesnut sang the thrush, O’er the house where I was born; The moonlight, like a shower of pearls, Fell o’er this “bower of bliss,” And on the bench sat boys and

girls: My early home was this.

The old house stooped just like a cave, Thatched o’er with mosses green; Winter around the walls would rave, But all was calm within; The trees are here all green agen, Here bees the flowers still kiss, But flowers and trees seemed sweeter then: My early home was this.

THE TELL-TALE FLOWERS

AND has the Spring’s all-glorious eye No lesson to the mind? The birds that cleave the golden sky— Things to the earth resigned— Wild flowers that dance to every wind— Do they no memory leave behind?

Aye, flowers! The very name of flowers, That bloom in wood and glen, Brings Spring to me in Winter’s hours, And childhood’s dreams again. The primrose on the woodland lea Was more than gold and lands to me.

The violets by the woodland side Are thick as they could thrive; I’ve talked to them with childish pride As things that were alive: I find them now in my distress— They seem as sweet, yet valueless.

The cowslips on the meadow lea, How have I run for them! I looked with wild and childish glee Upon each golden gem: And when they bowed their heads so shy I laughed, and thought they danced for joy.

And when a man, in early years, How sweet they used to come, And give me tales of smiles and tears, And thoughts more dear than home: Secrets which words would then reprove— They told the names of early love.

The primrose turned a babbling flower Within its sweet recess: I blushed to see its secret bower, And turned her name to bless. The violets said the eyes were blue: I loved, and did they tell me true?

The cowslips, blooming everywhere, My heart’s own thoughts could steal: I nip’t

them that they should not hear: They smiled, and would reveal; And o’er each meadow, right or wrong, They sing the name I’ve worshipped long.

The brook that mirrored clear the sky— Full well I know the spot; The mouse-ear looked with bright blue eye, And said “Forget-me-not.” And from the brook I turned away, But heard it many an after day.

The king-cup on its slender stalk, Within the pasture dell, Would picture there a pleasant walk With one I loved so well. It said “How sweet at eventide ’Twould be, with true love at thy side.”

And on the pasture’s woody knoll I saw the wild bluebell, On Sundays, where I used to stroll With her I loved so well: She culled the flowers the year before; These bowed, and told the story o’er.

And every flower that had a name Would tell me who was fair; But those without, as strangers, came And blossomed silent there: I stood to hear, but all alone: They bloomed and kept their thoughts unknown.

But seasons now have nought to say, The flowers no news to bring: Alone I live from day to day— Flowers deck the bier of Spring; And birds upon the bush or tree All sing a different tale to me.

TO JOHN MILTON

POET of mighty power, I fain Would court the muse that honoured thee, And, like Elisha’s spirit, gain A part of thy intensity; And share the mantle which she flung Around thee, when thy lyre was strung.

Though faction’s scorn at first did shun, With coldness, thy inspired song, Though clouds of malice pass’d thy sun, They could not hide it long; Its brightness soon exhaled away Dark night, and gained eternal day.

The critics’ wrath did darkly frown Upon thy muse’s mighty lay; But blasts that

break the blossom down Do only stir the bay; And thine shall flourish, green and long, In the eternity of song.

Thy genius saw, in quiet mood, Gilt fashion’s follies pass thee by, And, like the monarch of the wood, Tower’d o’er it to the sky; Where thou could’st sing of other spheres, And feel the fame of future years.

Though bitter sneers and stinging scorns Did throng the Muse’s dangerous way, Thy powers were past such little thorns, They gave thee no dismay; The scoffer’s insult pass’d thee by, Thou smild’st and mad’st him no reply.

Envy will gnaw its heart away To see thy genius gather root; And as its flowers their sweets display, Scorn’s malice shall be mute; Hornets that summer warmed to fly, Shall at the death of summer die.

Though friendly praise hath but its hour, And little praise with thee hath been; The bay may lose its summer flower, But still its leaves are green; And thine, whose buds are on the shoot, Shall only fade to change to fruit.

Fame lives not in the breath of words, In public praises’ hue and cry; The music of these summer birds Is silent in a winter sky, When thine shall live and flourish on, O’er wrecks where crowds of fames are gone.

The ivy shuns the city wall, When busy-clamorous crowds intrude, And climbs the desolated hall In silent solitude; The time-worn arch, the fallen dome, Are roots for its eternal home.

The bard his glory ne’er receives Where summer’s common flowers are seen, But winter finds it when she leaves The laurel only green; And time, from that eternal tree, Shall weave a wreath to honour thee.

Nought but thy ashes shall expire; Thy genius, at thy obsequies, Shall kindle up its living fire And light the Muse’s skies; Ay, it shall rise, and shine, and be A sun in song’s posterity.

I AM! YET WHAT I AM

I AM! yet what I am who cares, or knows? My friends forsake me like a memory lost. I am the self-consumer of my woes, They rise and vanish, an oblivious host, Shadows of life, whose very soul is lost. And yet I am—I live—though I am toss'd

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, Into the living sea of waking dream, Where there is neither sense of life, nor joys, But the huge shipwreck of my own esteem And all that's dear. Even those I loved the best Are strange—nay, they are stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod, For scenes where woman never smiled or wept; There to abide with my Creator, God, And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept Full of high thoughts, unborn. So let me lie, The grass below; above the vaulted sky.

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