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[Illustration: JOHN CLARE.

Engraved by E. Scriven, from a Painting by W. Hilton, R.A.]

POEMS CHIEFLY FROM MANUSCRIPT by JOHN CLARE

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NOTE

For the present volume over two thousand poems by Clare have been considered and compared; of which over two-thirds have not been published. Of those here given ninety are now first printed, and are distinguished with asterisks in the contents: one or two are gleaned from periodicals: and many of the others have been brought into line with manuscript versions. While poetic value has been the general ground of selection, the development of the poet has

seemed of sufficient interest for representation; and some of Clare's juvenilia are accordingly included. The arrangement is chronological, though in many cases the date of a poem can only be conjectured from the handwriting and the style; and it is almost impossible to affix dates to such Asylum Poems as bear none.

Punctuation and orthography have been attempted; Clare left such matters to his editor in his lifetime, conceiving them to be an "awkward squad." In some poems stanzas have been omitted, particularly in the case of first drafts which demand revision; but in others stanzas dropped by previous editors have been restored. Titles have been given to many poems which, doubtless, in copies not available to us were better christened by Clare himself. So regularly does Clare use such forms as "oer," "eer," and the like that he seems to have regarded them not as abbreviations but as originals, and they are given without apostrophe. The text of the Asylum Poems which has been used is a transcript, and one or two difficult passages are probably the fault of the copyist.

For permission to examine and copy many of the poems preserved in the Peterborough Museum, and to have photographs taken, we are indebted to J. W. Bodger, Esq., the President for 1919-1920; without whose co-operation and interest the volume would have been a very different matter. Valuable help, too, has been given by Mr. Samuel Loveman of Cleveland, Ohio, who has placed at our disposal his collection of Clare MSS. To G. C. Druce, Esq., of Oxford, whose pamphlet on Clare's knowledge of flowers cannot but delight the lover of Clare: to the Rev. S. G. Short of Maxey, and formerly of Northborough: to J. Middleton Murry, Esq., the Editor of the *Athenaeum*: to Edward Liveing, Esq., and E. G. Clayton, Esq.: and to Norman Gale, Esq., who has not wavered from his early faith in Clare, our gratitude is gladly given for assistance and sympathy.

And to Mr. Samuel Sefton of Derby, the grandson of Clare and one of his closest investigators, who has patiently and carefully responded to all our queries in a long correspondence, and who, besides informing us of the Clare tradition as it exists in the family, has supplied many materials of importance in writing the poet's life, special thanks are due. It was a fortunate chance that put us in communication with him.

EDMUND BLUNDEN

ALAN PORTER

INTRODUCTION

And he repulséd, (a short tale to make),
Fell into a sadness; then into a fast;
Thence to a watch; thence into a weakness;
Thence to a lightness; and by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves.

BIOGRAPHICAL

The life of John Clare, offering as it does so much opportunity for sensational contrast and unbridled distortion, became at one time (like the tragedy of Chatterton) a favourite with the quillmen. Even his serious biographers have made excessive use of light and darkness, poetry and poverty, genius and stupidity: that there should be some uncertainty about dates and incidents is no great matter, but that misrepresentations of character or of habit should be made is the fault of shallow research or worse. We have been informed, for instance, that drink was a main factor in Clare's mental collapse; that Clare "pottered in the fields feebly"; that on his income of "£45 a year … Clare thought he could live without working"; and all biographers have tallied in the melodramatic legend; "Neither wife nor children ever came to see him, except the youngest son, who came once," during his Asylum days. To these attractive exaggerations there are the best of grounds for giving the lie.

John Clare was born on the 13th of July, 1793, in a small cottage degraded in popular tradition to a mud hut of the parish of Helpston, between Peterborough and Stamford. This cottage is standing to-day, almost as it was when Clare lived there; so that those who care to do so may examine Martin's description of "a narrow wretched hut, more like a prison than a human dwelling," in face of the facts. Clare's father, a labourer named Parker Clare, was a man with his wits about him, whether educated or not; and Ann his wife is recorded to have been a woman of much natural ability and precise habits, who thought the world of her son John. Of the other children, little is known but that there were two who died young and one girl who was alive in 1824. Clare himself wrote a sonnet in the *London Magazine* for June, 1821, "To a Twin Sister, Who Died in Infancy."

Parker Clare, a man with some reputation as a wrestler and chosen for thrashing corn on account of his strength, sometimes shared the fate of almost all farm labourers of his day and was compelled to accept parish relief: at no time can he have been many shillings to the good: but it was his determination to have John educated to the best of his power. John Clare therefore attended a dame-school until he was seven; thence, he is believed to have gone to a day-school, where he made progress enough to receive on leaving the warm praise of the schoolmaster, and the advice to continue at a nightschool—which he did. His aim, he notes later on, was to write copperplate: but there are evidences that he learned much more than penmanship. Out of school he appears to have been a happy, imaginative child: as alert for mild mischief as the rest of the village boys, but with something solitary and romantic in his disposition. One day indeed at a very early age he went off to find the horizon; and a little later while he tended sheep and cows in his holiday-time on Helpston Common, he made friends with a curious old lady called Granny Bains, who taught him old songs and ballads. Such poems as "Childhood" and "Remembrances" prove that Clare's early life was not mere drudgery and despair. "I never had much relish for the pastimes of youth. Instead of going out on the green at the town end on winter Sundays to play football I stuck to my corner stool poring over a book; in fact, I grew so fond of being alone at last that my mother was fain to force me into company, for the neighbours had assured her mind … that I was no better than crazy…. I used to be very fond of fishing, and of a Sunday morning I have been out before the sun delving for worms in some old weed-blanketed dunghill and steering off across the wet

grain … till I came to the flood-washed meadow stream.… And then the year used to be crowned with its holidays as thick as the boughs on a harvest home." It is probable that the heavy work which he is said to have done as a child was during the long holiday at harvesttime. When he was twelve or thirteen he certainly became team-leader, and in this employment he saw a farm labourer fall from the top of his loaded wagon and break his neck. For a time his reason seemed affected by the sight.

At evening-school, Clare struck up a friendship with an excise-man's son, to the benefit of both. In 1835, one of many sonnets was addressed to this excellent soul:

Turnill, we toiled together all the day,
And lived like hermits from the boys at play;
We read and walked together round the fields,
Not for the beauty that the journey yields—
But muddied fish, and bragged oer what we caught,
And talked about the few old books we bought.
Though low in price you knew their value well,
And I thought nothing could their worth excel;
And then we talked of what we wished to buy,
And knowledge always kept our pockets dry.
We went the nearest ways, and hummed a song,
And snatched the pea pods as we went along,
And often stooped for hunger on the way
To eat the sour grass in the meadow hay.

One of these "few old books" was Thomson's "Seasons", which gave a direction to the poetic instincts of Clare, already manifesting themselves in scribbled verses in his exercise-books.

Read, mark, learn as Clare might, no opportunity came for him to enter a profession. "After I had done with going to school it was proposed that I should be bound apprentice to a shoemaker, but I rather disliked this bondage. I whimpered and turned a sullen eye on every persuasion, till they gave me my will. A neighbour then offered to learn me his trade—to be a stone mason,—but I disliked this too.… I was then sent for to drive the plough at Woodcroft Castle of Oliver Cromwell memory; though Mrs. Bellairs the mistress was a kind-hearted woman, and though the place was a very good one for living, my mind was set against it from the first;… one of the disagreeable things was getting up so early in the morning … and another was getting wetshod … every morning and night—for in wet weather the moat used to overflow the cause-way that led to the porch, and as there was but one way to the house we were obliged to wade up to the knees to get in and out.… I staid here one month, and then on coming home to my parents they could not persuade me to return. They now gave up all hopes of doing any good with me and fancied that I should make nothing but a soldier; but luckily in this dilemma a next-door neighbour at the Blue Bell, Francis Gregory, wanted me to drive plough, and as I suited him, he made proposals to hire me for a year—which as it had my consent my parents readily agreed to." There he spent a year in light work with plenty of leisure for his books and his long reveries in lonely favourite places. His imagination grew intensely, and in his weekly errand to a flour-mill at Maxey ghosts rose out of a swamp and

harried him till he dropped. This stage was hardly ended when one day on his road he saw a young girl named Mary Joyce, with whom he instantly fell in love. This crisis occurred when Clare was almost sixteen: the fate of John Clare hung in the balance for six months. Then Mary's father, disturbed principally by the chance that his daughter might be seen talking to this erratic youngster, put an end to their meetings. From this time, with intervals of tranquillity, Clare was to suffer the slow torture of remorse, until at length deliberately yielding himself up to his amazing imagination he held conversation with Mary, John Clare's Mary, his first wife Mary—as though she had not lived unwed, and had not been in her grave for years.

But this was not yet; and we must return to the boy Clare, now terminating his year's hiring at the Blue Bell. It was time for him to take up some trade in good earnest; accordingly, in an evil hour disguised as a fortunate one, he was apprenticed to the head gardener at Burghley Park. The head gardener was in practice a sot and a slave-driver. After much drunken wild bravado, not remarkable in the lad Clare considering his companions and traditions, there came the impulse to escape; with the result that Clare and a companion were shortly afterwards working in a nursery garden at Newark-upon-Trent. Both the nursery garden and "the silver Trent" are met again in the poems composed in his asylum days; but for the time being they meant little to him, and he suddenly departed through the snow. Arrived home at Helpston, he lost some time in finding farm work and in writing verses: sharing a loft at night with a fellow-labourer, he would rise at all hours to note down new ideas. It was not unnatural in the fellow-labourer to request him to "go and do his poeting elsewhere." Clare was already producing work of value, none the less. Nothing could be kept from his neighbours, who looked askance on his ways of thinking, and writing: while a candid friend to whom he showed his manuscripts directed his notice to the study of grammar. Troubled by these ill omens, he comforted himself in the often intoxicated friendship of the bad men of the village, who under the mellowing influences of old ale roared applause as he recited his ballads. This life was soon interrupted.

"When the country was chin-deep," Clare tells us, "in the fears of invasion, and every mouth was filled with the terror which Buonaparte had spread in other countries, a national scheme was set on foot to raise a raw army of volunteers: and to make the matter plausible a letter was circulated said to be written by the Prince Regent. I forget how many were demanded from our parish, but remember the panic which it created was very great. No great name rises in the world without creating a crowd of little mimics that glitter in borrowed rays; and no great lie was ever yet put in circulation without a herd of little lies multiplying by instinct, as it were and crowding under its wings. The papers that were circulated assured the people of England that the French were on the eve of invading it and that it was deemed necessary by the Regent that an army from eighteen to forty-five should be raised immediately. This was the great lie, and then the little lies were soon at its heels; which assured the people of Helpston that the French had invaded and got to London. And some of these little lies had the impudence to swear that the French had even reached Northampton. The people were at their doors in the evening to talk over the rebellion of '45 when the rebels reached Derby, and even listened at intervals to fancy they heard the French rebels at Northampton, knocking it down with their cannon. I never gave much credit to popular stories of any sort, so I felt no concern at these stories; though I could not say much for my valour if the tale had proved true. We had a crossgrained sort of choice left us, which was to be found, to be drawn, and go for nothing—or take on as volunteers for the bounty of two guineas. I accepted the latter and went with a

neighbour's son, W. Clarke, to Peterborough to be sworn on and prepared to join the regiment at Oundle. The morning we left home our mothers parted with us as if we were going to Botany Bay, and people got at their doors to bid us farewell and greet us with a Job's comfort 'that they doubted we should see Helpston no more.' I confess I wished myself out of the matter. When we got to Oundle, the place of quartering, we were drawn out into the field, and a more motley multitude of lawless fellows was never seen in Oundle before—and hardly out of it. There were 1,300 of us. We were drawn up into a line and sorted out into companies. I was one of the shortest and therefore my station is evident. I was in that mixed multitude called the battalion, which they nicknamed 'bum-tools' for what reason I cannot tell; the light company was called 'light-bobs,' and the grenadiers 'bacon-bolters' … who felt as great an enmity against each other as ever they all felt against the French."

In 1813 he read among other things the "Eikon Basilike," and turned his hand to odd jobs as they presented themselves. His life appears to have been comfortable and a little dull for a year or two; flirtation, verse-making, ambitions and his violin took their turns amiably enough! At length he went to work in a lime-kiln several miles from Helpston, and wrote only less poems than he read: one day in the autumn of 1817, he was dreaming yet new verses when he first saw "Patty," his wife-to-be. She was then eighteen years old, and modestly beautiful; for a moment Clare forgot Mary Joyce, and though "the courtship ultimately took a more prosaic turn," there is no denying the fact that he was in love with "Patty" Turner, the daughter of the small farmer who held Walkherd Lodge. In the case of Clare, poetry was more than ever as time went on autobiography; and it is noteworthy that among the many love lyrics addressed to Mary Joyce there are not wanting affectionate tributes to his faithful wife Patty.

Maid of Walkherd, meet again,
By the wilding in the glen….

And I would go to Patty's cot
And Patty came to me;
Each knew the other's very thought
Under the hawthorn tree….
And I'll be true for Patty's sake
And she'll be true for mine;
And I this little ballad make,
To be her valentine.

Not long after seeing Patty, Clare was informed by the owner of the lime-kiln that his wages would now be seven shillings a week, instead of nine. He therefore left this master and found similar work in the village of Pickworth, where being presented with a shoemaker's bill for £3, he entered into negotiations with a Market Deeping bookseller regarding "Proposals for publishing by subscription a Collection of Original Trifles on Miscellaneous Subjects, Religious and Moral, in verse, by John Clare, of Helpstone." Three hundred proposals were printed, with a specimen sonnet well chosen to intrigue the religious and moral; and yet the tale of intending subscribers stood adamantly at seven. On the face of it, then, Clare had lost one pound; had worn himself out with distributing his prospectuses; and further had been discharged from the lime-kiln for doing so in working hours. His ambitions, indeed, set all employers and acquaintances against him; and he found himself at the age of twenty-five

compelled to ask for parish relief. In this extremity, even the idea of enlisting once more crossed his brain; then, that of travelling to Yorkshire for employment: and at last, the prospectus which had done him so much damage turned benefactor. With a few friends Clare was drinking success to his goose-chase when there appeared two "real gentlemen" from Stamford. One of these, a bookseller named Drury, had chanced on the prospectus, and wished to see more of Clare's poetry. Soon afterwards, he promised to publish a selection, with corrections; and communicated with his relative, John Taylor, who with his partner Hessey managed the well-known publishing business in Fleet Street. While this new prospect was opening upon Clare, he succeeded in obtaining work once more, near the home of Patty; their love-making proceeded, despite the usual thunderstorms, and the dangerous rivalry of a certain dark lady named Betty Sell. The bookseller Drury, though his appearance was in such critical days timely for Clare, was not a paragon of virtue. Without Clare's knowing it, he acquired the legal copyright of the poems, probably by the expedient of dispensing money at convenient times—a specious philanthropy, as will be shown. At the same time he allowed Clare to open a book account, which proved at length to be no special advantage. And further, with striking astuteness, he found constant difficulty in returning originals. In a note written some ten years later, Clare regrets that "Ned Drury has got my early vol. of MSS. I lent it him at first, but like all my other MSS. elsewhere I could never get it again…. He has copies of all my MSS. except those written for the 'Shepherd's Calendar.'" Nevertheless, through Drury, Clare was enabled to meet his publisher Taylor and his influential friend of the *Quarterly*, Octavius Gilchrist, before the end of 1819.

By 1818, there is no doubt, Clare had read very deeply, and even had some idea of the classical authors through translations. It is certain that he knew the great English writers, probable that he possessed their works. What appears to be a list of books which he was anxious to sell in his hardest times includes some curious titles, with some familiar ones. There are Cobb's Poems, Fawke's Poems, Broom's, Mrs. Hoole's, and so on; there are also Cowley's Works—Folio, Warton's "Milton," Waller, and a Life of Chatterton; nor can he have been devoid of miscellaneous learning after the perusal of Watson's "Electricity," Aristotle's Works, Gasse's "Voyages," "Nature Display'd," and the *European Magazine* ("fine heads and plates"). His handwriting at this time was bold and hasty; his opinions, to judge from his uncompromising notes to Drury respecting the text of the poems, almost cynical and decidedly his own. Tact was essential if you would patronize Clare: you might broaden his opinions, but you dared not assail them. Thus the friendly Gilchrist, a high churchman, hardly set eyes on Clare before condemning Clare's esteem for a dissenting minister, a Mr. Holland, who understood the poet and the poetry: it was some time before Gilchrist set eyes on Clare again.

The year 1820 found Clare unemployed once more, but the said Mr. Holland arrived before long with great news. "In the beginning of January," Clare briefly puts it, "my poems were published after a long anxiety of nearly two years and all the Reviews, except Phillips' waste paper magazine, spoke in my favour." Most assuredly they did. The literary world, gaping for drouth, had seen an announcement, then an account of "John Clare, an agricultural labourer and poet," during the previous autumn; the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, in a little while seemed to usurp the whole sky—or in other terms, three editions of "Poems Descriptiveof Rural Life and Scenery" were sold between January 16 and the last of March. While this fever was raging among the London coteries, critical, fashionable, intellectual, even the country folk round Helpston came to the conclusion that Clare was something of a

phenomenon. "In the course of the publication," says Clare, "I had ventured to write to Lord Milton to request leave that the volume might be dedicated to him; but his Lordship was starting into Italy and forgot to answer it. So it was dedicated to nobody, which perhaps might be as well. As soon as it was out, my mother took one to Milton; when his Lordship sent a note to tell me to bring ten more copies. On the following Sunday I went, and after sitting awhile in the servants' hall (where I could eat or drink nothing for thought), his Lordship sent for me, and instantly explained the reasons why he did not answer my letter, in a quiet unaffected manner which set me at rest. He told me he had heard of my poems by Parson Mossop (of Helpston), who I have since heard took hold of every opportunity to speak against my success or poetical abilities before the book was published, and then, when it came out and others praised it, instantly turned round to my side. Lady Milton also asked me several questions, and wished me to name any book that was a favourite; expressing at the same time a desire to give me one. But I was confounded and could think of nothing. So I lost the present. In fact, I did not like to pick out a book for fear of seeming over-reaching on her kindness, or else Shakespeare was at my tongue's end. Lord Fitzwilliam, and Lady Fitzwilliam too, talked to me and noticed me kindly, and his Lordship gave me some advice which I had done well perhaps to have noticed better than I have. He bade me beware of booksellers and warned me not to be fed with promises. On my departure they gave me a handful of money—the most that I had ever possessed in my life together. I almost felt I should be poor no more—there was £17." Such is Clare's description of an incident which has been rendered in terms of insult. Other invitations followed, the chief practical result being an annuity of fifteen pounds promised by the Marquis of Exeter. Men of rank and talent wrote letters to Clare, or sent him books: some found their way to Helpston, and others sent tracts to show him the way to heaven. And now at last Clare was well enough off to marry Patty, before the birth of their first child, Anna Maria.

Before his marriage, probably, Clare was desired to spend a few days with his publisher Taylor in London. In smock and gaiters he felt most uncertain of himself and borrowed a large overcoat from Taylor to disguise his dress: over and above this question of externals, he instinctively revolted against being exhibited. Meeting Lord Radstock, sometime admiral in the Royal Navy, at dinner in Taylor's house, Clare gained a generous if somewhat religiose friend, with the instant result that he found himself "trotting from one drawing-room to the other." He endured this with patience, thinking possibly of the cat killed by kindness; and incidentally Radstock introduced him to the strangely superficial-genuine lady Mrs. Emmerson, who was to be a faithful, thoughtful friend to his family for many years to come. In another direction, soon after Clare's return to Helpston, the retired admiral did him a great service, opening a private subscription list for his benefit: it was found possible to purchase "£250 Navy 5 Per Cents" on the 28th April and a further "£125 Navy 5 Per Cents" a month or so later. This stock, held by trustees, yielded Clare a dividend of £18 15s. at first, but in 1823 this income dwindled to £15 15s.; and by 1832 appears to have fallen to £13 10s. To the varying amount thus derived, and to the £15 given yearly by the Marquis of Exeter, a Stamford doctor named Bell—one of Clare's most energetic admirers—succeeded in adding another annuity of £10 settled upon the poet by Lord Spencer. But in the consideration of these bounties, it is just to examine the actual financial effect of Clare's first book. The publishers' own account, furnished only through Clare's repeated demands in 1829 or thereabouts, has a sobering tale to tell: but so far no biographer has condescended to examine it.

On the first edition Clare got nothing. Against him is entered the item "Cash paid Mr. Clare for copyright p. Mr. Drury … £20"; but this money if actually paid had been paid in 1819. Against him also is charged a curious "Commission 5 p. Cent… £8 12s.," while Drury and Taylor acknowledge sharing profits of £26 odd.

On the second and third editions Clare got nothing; but to his account is charged the £100 which Taylor and Hessey "subscribed" to his fund. "Commission," "Advertising," "Sundries," and "Deductions allowed to Agents," account for a further £51 of the receipts: and Drury and Taylor ostensibly take over £30 apiece.

The fourth edition not being exhausted, the account is not closed: but "Advertising" has already swollen to £30, and there is no sign that Clare benefits a penny piece. Small wonder that at the foot of these figures he has written, "How can this be? I never sold the poems for any price—what money I had of Drury was given me on account of profits to be received—but here it seems I have got nothing and am brought in minus twenty pounds of which I never received a sixpence—or it seems that by the sale of these four thousand copies I have lost that much—and Drury told me that 5,000 copies had been printed tho' 4,000 only are accounted for." Had Clare noticed further an arithmetical discrepancy which apparently shortened his credit balance by some £27, he might have been still more sceptical.

Not being overweighted, therefore, with instant wealth, Clare returned to Helpston determined to continue his work in the fields. But fame opposed him: all sorts and conditions of Lydia Whites, Leo Hunters, Stigginses, and Jingles crowded to the cottage, demanding to see the Northamptonshire Peasant, and often wasting hours of his time. One day, for example, "the inmates of a whole boarding-school, located at Stamford, visited the unhappy poet"; and even more congenial visitors who cheerfully hurried him off to the tavern parlour were the ruin of his work. Yet he persevered, writing his poems only in his leisure, until the harvest of 1820 was done; then in order to keep his word with Taylor, who had agreed to produce a new volume in the spring of 1821, he spent six months in the most energetic literary labour. Writing several poems a day as he roamed the field or sat in Lea Close Oak, he would sit till late in the night sifting, recasting and transcribing. His library, by his own enterprise and by presents from many friends, was greatly enlarged, and he already knew not only the literature of the past, but also that of the present. In his letters to Taylor are mentioned his appreciations of Keats, "Poor Keats, you know how I reverence him," Shelley, Hunt, Lamb—and almost every other contemporary classic. Nor was he afraid to criticize Scott with freedom in a letter to Scott's friend Sherwell: remarking also that Wordworth's Sonnet on Westminster Bridge had no equal in the language, but disagreeing with "his affected godliness."

Taylor and Hessey for their part did not seem over-anxious to produce the new volume of poems, perhaps because Clare would not allow any change except in the jots and tittles of his work, perhaps thinking that the public had had a surfeit of sensation. At length in the autumn of 1821 the "Village Minstrel" made its appearance, in two volumes costing twelve shillings; with the bait of steel engravings,—the first, an unusually fine likeness of Clare from the painting by Hilton; the second, an imaginative study of Clare's cottage, not without representation of the Blue Bell, the village cross and the church. The book was reviewed less noisily, and a sale of a mere 800 copies in two months was regarded as "a very modified success." Meanwhile, Clare

was writing for the *London Magazine*, and Cherry tells us that "as he contributed almost regularly for some time, a substantial addition was made to his income." Clare tells us, in a note on a cash account dated 1827, "In this cash account there is nothing allowed me for my three years' writing for the *London Magazine*. I was to have £12 a year."

To insist in the financial affairs of Clare may seem blatant, or otiose: actually, the treatment which he underwent was a leading influence in his career. He was grateful enough to Radstock for raising a subscription fund; he may have been grateful to Taylor and Hessey for subscribing £100 of his own money; but what hurt and embittered him was to see this sum and the others invested for him under trustees. Indeed, what man would not, if possessed of any independence of mind, strongly oppose such namby-pamby methods? It is possible to take a more sinister view of Taylor and Hessey and their reluctance ever to provide Clare with a statement of account; but in the matter of Clare's funded property folly alone need be considered.

In October 1821, notably, Clare saw an excellent opportunity for the future of his family. A small freehold of six or seven acres with a pleasant cottage named Bachelor's Hall, where Clare had spent many an evening in comfort and even in revelry, was mortgaged to a Jew for two hundred pounds; the tenants offered Clare the whole property on condition that he paid off the mortgage. Small holdings were rare in that district of great landowners, and this to Clare was the chance of a lifetime. He applied therefore to Lord Radstock for two hundred pounds from his funded property; Radstock replied that "the funded property was vested in trustees who were restricted to paying the interest to him." It would have been, thought Clare, no difficult matter for Radstock to have advanced me that small amount; and he rightly concluded that his own strength of character and common sense were distrusted by his patrons. Not overwhelmed by this, he now applied to his publisher Taylor, offering to sell his whole literary output for five years at the price of two hundred pounds. Taylor was not enthusiastic. These writings, he urged, might be worth more, or might be worth less; in the first case Clare, in the second himself would lose on the affair; besides, there were money-lenders and legal niceties to beware of; let not Clare "be ambitious but remain in the state in which God had placed him." Thus the miserable officiousness went on, and if Clare for a time found some comfort in the glass who can blame him? In his own words, "for enemies he cared nothing, from his friends he had much to fear." He was "thrown back among all the cold apathy of killing kindness that had numbed him … for years."

In May, 1822, Clare spent a brief holiday in London, meeting there the strong men of the *London Magazine*, Lamb, Hood, and therest. From his clothes, the *London* group called him The Green Man; Lamb took a singular interest in him, and was wont to address him as "Clarissimus" and "Princely Clare." Another most enthusiastic acquaintance was a painter named Rippingille, who had begun life as the son of a farmer at King's Lynn, and who was now thoroughly capable of taking Clare into the most Bohemian corners of London. Suddenly, however, news came from Helpston recalling the poet from these perambulations, and he returned in haste, to find his second daughter born, Eliza Louisa, god-child of Mrs. Emmerson and Lord Radstock.

At this time, Clare appears to have been writing ballads of a truly rustic sort, perhaps in the light of his universal title, The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet. He would now, moreover, collect such old ballads and songs as his father and mother or those who worked with him

might chance to sing; but was often disappointed to find that "those who knew fragments seemed ashamed to acknowledge it … and those who were proud of their knowledge in such things knew nothing but the senseless balderdash that is brawled over and sung at country feasts, statutes, and fairs, where the most senseless jargon passes for the greatest excellence, and rudest indecency for the finest wit." None the less he recovered sufficient material to train himself into the manner of these "old and beautiful recollections." But whatever he might write or edit, he was unlikely to find publishers willing to bring out. The "Village Minstrel" had barely passed the first thousand, and the "second edition" was not melting away. Literature after all was not money, and to increase Clare's anxiety and dilemma came illness. In the early months of 1823, he made a journey to Stamford to ask the help of his old friend Gilchrist.

Gilchrist was already in the throes of his last sickness, and Clare took his leave without a word of his own difficulties. Arriving home, he fell into a worse illness than before; but as the spring came on he rallied, and occasionally walked to Stamford to call on his friend, who likewise seemed beginning to mend. On the 30th of June, Clare was received with the news "Mr. Gilchrist is dead." Clare relapsed into a curious condition which appeared likely to overthrow his life or his reason when Taylor most fortunately came to see him, and procured him the best doctor in Peterborough. This doctor not only baffled Clare's disease, but, rousing attention wherever he could in the neighbourhood, was able to provide him with good food and even some old port from the cellar of the Bishop of Peterborough.

At last on the advice of the good doctor and the renewed invitation of Taylor, Clare made a third pilgrimage to London, and this time stayed from the beginning of May till the middle of July, 1824. Passing the first three weeks in peaceful contemplation of London crowds, he was well enough then to attend a *London Magazine* dinner, where De Quincey swam into his ken, and the next week a similar gathering where Coleridge talked for three hours. Clare sat next to Charles Elton and gained a staunch friend, who shortly afterwards sent him a letter in verse with a request that he should sit to Rippingille for his portrait:

> His touch will, hue by hue, combine
> Thy thoughtful eyes, that steady shine,
> The temples of Shakesperian line,
> The quiet smile.

To J. H. Reynolds he seemed "a very quiet and worthy yet enthusiastic man." George Darley, too, was impressed by Clare the man, and for some time was to be one of the few serious critics of Clare the poet. Allan Cunningham showed a like sympathy and a still more active interest. A less familiar character, the journalist Henry Van Dyk, perhaps did Clare more practical good than either.

With these good effects of Clare's third visit to town, another may be noted. A certain Dr. Darling attended him throughout, and persuaded him to give up drink; this he did. The real trouble at Helpston was to discover employment, for already Clare was supporting his wife, his father and mother, and three young children. Farmers were unwilling to employ Clare, indeed insulted him if he applied to them: and his reticence perhaps lost him situations in the gardens of the Marquis of Exeter, and then of the Earl Fitzwilliam.

In spite of disappointments, he wrote almost without pause, sometimes making poems in the manner of elder poets (with the intention of mild literary forgery), sometimes writing in his normal vein for the lately announced "New Shepherd's Calendar"; and almost daily preparing two series of articles, on natural history and on British birds. A curious proof of the facility with which he wrote verse is afforded by the great number of rhymed descriptions of birds, their nests and eggs which this period produced: as though he sat down resolved to write prose notes and found his facts running into metre even against his will. As if not yet embroiled in schemes enough, Clare planned and began a burlesque novel, an autobiography, and other prose papers: while he kept a diary which should have been published. Clare had been forced into a literary career, and no one ever worked more conscientiously or more bravely. Those who had at first urged him to write can scarcely be acquitted of desertion now: but the more and the better Clare wrote, the less grew the actual prospect of production, success and independence.

On the 9th of March, 1825, Clare wrote in his diary: "I had a very odd dream last night, and take it as an ill omen … I thought I had one of the proofs of the new poems from London, and after looking at it awhile it shrank through my hands like sand, and crumbled into dust." Three days afterwards, the proof of the "Shepherd's Calendar" arrived at Helpston. The ill omen was to be proved true, but not yet. Clare continued to write and to botanize, and being already half-forgotten by his earlier friends was contented with the company of two notable local men, Edward Artis the archaeologist who discovered ancient Durobrivae, and Henderson who assisted Clare in his nature-work. These two pleasant companions were in the service of Earl Fitzwilliam. It was perhaps through their interest that Clare weathered the hardships of 1825 so well; and equally, although the "Shepherd's Calendar" seemed suspended, did Clare's old patron Radstock endeavour to keep his spirits up, writing repeatedly to the publisher in regard to Clare's account. The hope of a business agreement was destroyed by the sudden death of Radstock, "the best friend," says Clare, "I have met with."

Not long after this misfortune, Clare returned to field work for the period of harvest, then through the winter concentrated his energy on his poetry. Nor was poetry his only production, for through his friend Van Dyk he was enabled to contribute prose pieces to the London press. In June, 1826, his fourth child was born, and Clare entreated Taylor to bring out the "Shepherd's Calendar," feeling that he might at least receive money enough for the comfort of his wife and his baby; but Taylor felt otherwise, recommending Clare to write for the annuals which now began to flourish. This Clare at last persuaded himself to do. Payment was tardy, and in some cases imaginary; and for the time being the annuals were not the solution of his perplexities. He therefore went back to the land; and borrowing the small means required rented at length a few acres, with but poor results.

The publication of Clare's first book had been managed with excellent strategy; Taylor had left nothing to chance, and the public responded as he had planned. The independence of Clare may have displeased the publisher; at any rate, his enthusiasm dwindled, and further to jeopardize Clare's chances it occurred that in 1825 Taylor and Hessey came to an end, the partners separating. Omens were indeed bad for the "Shepherd's Calendar" which, two years after its announcement, in June, 1827, made its unobtrusive appearance. There were very few reviews, and the book sold hardly at all. Yet this was conspicuously finer work than Clare had done before. Even "that beautiful frontispiece of De Wint's," as Taylor wrote, did not attract

attention. The forgotten poet, slaving at his small-holding, found that his dream had come true. Meanwhile Allan Cunningham had been inquiring into this non-success, and early in 1828 wrote to Clare urging him to come to London and interview the publisher. An invitation from Mrs. Emmerson made thevisit possible. Once more then did Clare present himself at 20, Stratford Place, and find his "sky chamber" ready to receive him. Nor did he allow long time to elapse before finding out Allan Cunningham, who heartily approved of his plan to call on Taylor, telling him to request a full statement of account. The next day, when Clare was on the point of making the demand, Taylor led across the trail with an unexpected offer; recommending Clare to buy the remaining copies of his "Shepherd's Calendar" from him at half-a-crown each, that he might sell them in his own district. Clare asked time to reflect. A week later, against the wish of Allan Cunningham, he accepted the scheme.

Clare had had another object in coming to town. Dr. Darling had done him so much good on a previous occasion that he wished to consult him anew. On the 25th of February, 1828, Clare wrote to his wife: "Mr. Emmerson's doctor, a Mr. Ward, told me last night that there was little or nothing the matter with me—and yet I got no sleep the whole of last night." Already, it appears, had coldness and dilemma unsettled him. That they had not subdued him, and that his home life was in the main happy and affectionate, and of as great an importance to him as any of his aspirations, is to be judged from his poems and his letters of 1828 and thereabouts. They show him as the very opposite of the feeble neurotic who has so often been beworded under his name:

20, STRATFORD PLACE, *March 21st, 1828*.

MY DEAR PATTY,

I have been so long silent that I feel ashamed of it, but I have been so much engaged that I really have not had time to write; and the occasion of my writing now is only to tell you that I shall be at home next week for certain.—I am anxious to see you and the children and I sincerely hope you are all well. I have bought the dear little creatures four books, and Henry Behnes has promised to send Frederick a wagon and horses as a box of music is not to be had. The books I have bought them are "Puss-in-Boots," "Cinderella," "Little Rhymes," and "The Old Woman and Pig"; tell them that the pictures are all coloured, and they must make up their minds to chuse which they like best ere I come home.—Mrs. Emmerson desires to be kindly remembered to you, and intends sending the children some toys. I hope next Wednesday night at furthest will see me in my old corner once again amongst you. I have made up my mind to buy Baxter "The History of Greece," which I hope will suit him. I have been poorly, having caught cold, and have been to Dr. Darling. I would have sent you some money which I know you want, but as I am coming home so soon I thought it much safer to bring it home myself than send it; and as this is only to let you know that I am coming home, I shall not write further than hoping you are all well—kiss the dear children for me all round—give my remembrances to all—and believe me, my dear Patty,

Yours most affectionately,

JOHN CLARE.

During this stay in London, Clare had had proofs that his poems were not completely overlooked. Strangers, recognizing him from the portrait in the "Village Minstrel," often addressed him in the street. In this way he first met Alaric A. Watts, and Henry Behnes, the sculptor, who induced Clare to sit to him. The result was a strong, intensely faithful bust (preserved now in the Northampton Free Library). Hilton, who had painted Clare in water-colours and in oils, celebrated with Behnes and Clare the modelling of this bust, all three avoiding a dinner of lions arranged by Mrs. Emmerson. On another occasion, Clare found a congenial spirit in William Hone.

But now Clare is home at Helpston, ready with a sack of poetry to tramp from house to house and try his luck. Sometimes he dragged himself thirty miles a day, meeting rectors who "held it unbecoming to see poems hawked about": one day, having walked seven milesinto Peterborough, and having sold no books anywhere, he trudged home to find Patty in the pains of labour; and now had to go back to Peterborough as fast as he might for a doctor. Now there were nine living beings dependent on Clare. At length he altered his plan of campaign, and advertised that his poems could be had at his cottage, with some success. About this time Clare was invited to write for "The Spirit of the Age," and still he supplied brief pieces to the hated but unavoidable annuals. Letters too from several towns in East Anglia, summoning John Clare with his bag of books, at least promised him some slight revenue; actually he only went to one of these places, namely Boston, where the mayor gave a banquet in his honour, and enabled him to sell several volumes—autographed. Among the younger men, a similar feast was proposed; but Clare declined, afterwards reproaching himself bitterly on discovering that they had hidden ten pounds in his wallet. On his return home not only himself but the rest of the family in turn fell ill with fever, so that the spring of 1829 found Clare out of work and faced with heavy doctor's-bills.

Intellectually, John Clare was in 1828 and 1829 probably at his zenith. He had ceased long since to play the poetic ploughman; he had gained in his verses something more ardent and stirring than he had shown in the "Shepherd's Calendar"; and the long fight (for it was nothing less) against leading-strings and obstruction now began to manifest itself in poems of regret and of soliloquy. Having long written for others' pleasure, he now wrote for his own nature.

I would not wish the burning blaze
Of fame around a restless world,
The thunder and the storm of praise
In crowded tumults heard and hurled.

There had been few periods of mental repose since 1820. His brain and his poetic genius, by this long discipline and fashioning, were now triumphant together. The declension from this high estate might have been more abrupt but for the change in his fortunes. He had again with gentleness demanded his accounts from his publisher, and when in August, 1829, these accounts actually arrived, disputed several points and gained certain concessions: payment was made from the editors of annuals; and with these reliefs came the chance for him to rent a small farm and to work on the land of Earl Fitzwilliam. His working hours were long, and his mind was forced to be idle. This salutary state of affairs lasted through 1830, until happiness seemed the only possibility before him. What poems he wrote occurred suddenly and simply to

him. His children—now six in number—were growing up in more comfort and in more prospect than he had ever enjoyed. But he reckoned not with illness.

In short, illness reduced Clare almost to skin-and-bone. Farming not only added nothing but made encroachment on his small stipend. In despair he flung himself into field labour again, and was carried home nearly dead with fever. Friends there were not wanting to send food and medicine; Parson Mossop, having long ago been converted to Clare, did much for him. Even so the landlord distrained for rent, and Clare applied to his old friend Henderson the botanist at Milton Park. Lord Milton came by and Clare was encouraged to tell him his trouble; his intense phrases and bearing were such that the nobleman at once promised him a new cottage and a plot of ground. At the same time, he expressed his hope that there would soon be another volume of poems by John Clare. This hope was the spark which fired a dangerous train, perhaps; for Clare once again fell into his exhausting habit of poetry all the day and every day. He decided to publish a new volume by subscription.

The new cottage was in the well-orcharded village of Northborough, three miles from Helpston. It was indeed luxurious in comparison with the old stooping house where Clare had spent nearly forty years, but there was more in that old house than mere stone and timber. Clare began to look on the coming change with terror; delayed the move day after day, to the distress of poor Patty; and when at last news came from Milton Park that the Earl was not content with such strange hesitation, and when Patty had her household on the line of march, he "followed in the rear, walking mechanically, with eyes half shut, as if in a dream." There was no delay in his self-expression.

I've left mine own old home of homes,
Green fields and every pleasant place;
The summer like a stranger comes;
I pause and hardly know her face.
I miss the hazel's happy green,
The bluebell's quiet hanging blooms,
Where envy's sneer was never seen,
Where staring malice never comes.

This and many other verses, not the least pathetic in our language, were written by John Clare on June 20th, 1832, on the occasion of his moving out of a small and crowded cottage in a village street to a roomy, romantic farmhouse standing in its own grounds. Was this ingratitude? ask rather, is the dyer's hand subdued to what it works in?

Clare rapidly proceeded with his new collection of poems, destined never to appear in his lifetime. In a thick oblong blank-book, divided into four sections to receive Tales in Verse, Poems, Ballads and Songs, and Sonnets, he copied his best work in a hand small but clear, and with a rare freedom from slips of the pen. His proposals, reprinted with a warm-hearted comment in the *Athenaeum* of 1832, were in these terms:

The proposals for publishing these fugitives being addressed to friends no further apology is necessary than the plain statement of facts. Necessity is said to be the mother of invention, but there is very little need of invention for truth; and the truth is, that difficulty has grown up like a tree of the forest, and being no longer able to conceal it, I meet it in the best way possible by

attempting to publish them for my own benefit and that of a numerous and increasing family. It were false delicacy to make an idle parade of independence in my situation, and it would be unmanly to make a troublesome appeal to favours, public or private, like a public petitioner. Friends neither expect this from me, or wish me to do it to others, though it is partly owing to such advice that I was induced to come forward with these proposals, and if they are successful they will render me a benefit, and if not they will not cancel any obligations that I may have received from friends, public and private, to whom my best wishes are due, and having said this much in furtherance of my intentions, I will conclude by explaining them.

Proposals for publishing in 1 volume, F.c. 8vo, The Midsummer Cushion, or Cottage Poems, by John Clare.

1st. The Book will be printed on fine paper, and published as soon as a sufficient number of subscribers are procured to defray the expense of publishing.

2nd. It will consist of a number of fugitive trifles, some of which have appeared in different periodicals, and of others that have never been published.

3rd. No money is requested until the volume shall be delivered, free of expense, to every subscriber.

4th. The price will not exceed seven shillings and sixpence, and it may not be so much, as the number of pages and the expense of the book will be regulated by the Publisher.

In his new home Clare was for a time troubled with visitors; to most he was aloof, but sometimes he spoke freely of his affairs. One visitor who found him in the communicative mood chanced to be the editor of a magazine, *The Alfred*. The denials of Clare, frankly given to rumours of his new benefits (variously estimated between two hundred and a thousand a year), were to this gentleman as meat and drink; and *The Alfred* for October the 5th, 1832, contained a violent manifesto condemning publishers and patrons in the most fiery fashion and apparently inspired by the poet himself. This did his cause much damage, and Clare wrote to the perpetrator in anger: "There never was a more scandalous insult to my feelings than this officious misstatement.... I am no beggar; for my income is £36, and though I have had no final settlement with Taylor, I expect to have one directly." Clare ended by demanding a recantation. None was forthcoming, and the effect on patrons and poet was unfortunate indeed. Yet still he could write of himself in this uncoloured style: "I am ready to laugh with you at my own vanity. For I sit sometimes and wonder over the little noise I have made in the world, until I think I have written nothing yet to deserve any praise at all. So the spirit of fame, of living a little after life like a noise on a conspicuous place, urges my blood upward into unconscious melodies; and striding down my orchard and homestead I hum and sing inwardly these little madrigals, and then go in and pen them down, thinking them much better things than they are —until I look over them again. And then the charm vanishes into the vanity that I shall do something better ere I die; and so, in spite of myself, I rhyme on and write nothing but little things at last."

With the gear that Mrs. Emmerson's kindness and activity had provided, Clare kept his garden and ground in order; yet the winter of 1832 was a time of great hardship and foreboding. His youngest son Charles was born on the 4th of January, 1833; the event shook

Clare's nerve more terribly perhaps than anything before had done and he went out into the fields. Late in the day his daughter Anna found him lying unconscious, and for a month he had to keep his bed. As if to prove the proverb "It never rains but it pours," subscribers to his new volume hung back, and when spring had come they numbered in all forty-nine. Clare submitted the work to the publishers, great and small, but the best offer that he got depended on his providing in advance £100 for the necessary steel engravings. And now Clare lost all his delight in lonely walks, but sitting in his study wrote curious paraphrases of "the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the Book of Job." His manner towards those round him became apathetic and silent. Even the news brought by his doctor—who prescribed Clare to his other patients—that subscribers now were more than two hundred, seemed to sound meaningless in his ears. But even these danger-signs seemed discounted by the self-command and cheerfulness which Clare soon afterwards regained; and ashamed of his misjudgment, Dr. Smith came to the conclusion that he need visit Clare no more. An attack of insanity immediately followed, during which Clare did not know his wife, his children or himself.

From this heavy trance he awoke, bitterly aware of his peril. He wrote at once to Taylor, again and again. "You must excuse my writing; but I feel that if I do not write now I shall not be able. What I wish is to get under Dr. Darling's advice, or to have his advice to go somewhere; for I have not been from home this twelve-month, and cannot get anywhere." … "If I could but go to London, I think I should get better. How would you advise me to come? I dare not come up by myself. Do you think one of my children might go with me?… Thank God my wife and children are all well." Taylor wrote once in mildly sympathetic words, but probably thought that Clare was making much ado about nothing. And here at least was the opportunity for a patron to save a poet from death-in-life for five pounds. Nothing was done, and Clare sat in his study, writing more and more paraphrases of the Old Testament, together with series of sonnets of a grotesque, rustic sort, not resembling any other poems in our language.

The "Midsummer Cushion" had been set aside, but Clare had submitted many of the poems together with hundreds more to Messrs. Whittaker. Largely through the recommendations of Mr. Emmerson, the publishers decided to print a volume from these, picking principally those poems which had already shown themselves respectable by appearing in the annuals. One even written in 1820, "The Autumn Robin," was somehow chosen, to the exclusion of such later poems as "Remembrances" and "The Fallen Elm." With faults like these, the selection was nevertheless a distinctly beautiful book of verse. In March, 1834, Clare definitely received forty pounds for the copyright, and finally in July, 1835, appeared this his last book, "The Rural Muse." Its success was half-hearted, in spite of a magnificent eulogy by Christopher North in *Blackwood's*, and of downright welcome by the *Athenaeum*, the *New Monthly* and other good judges. There was a slow sale for several months, but for Clare there was little chance of new remuneration. This he could regard calmly, for while the book was in the press he had received from the Literary Fund a present of fifty pounds.

Clare's malady slowly increased. The exact history of this decline is almost lost, yet we may well believe that the death of his mother on the 18th of December, 1835, was a day of double blackness for him. The winter over, Patty made a great fight for his reason, and at last persuaded him to go out for walks, which checked the decline. Now he became so passionately fond of being out-of-doors that "he could not be made to stop a single day at home." In one of

these roving walks he met his old friend Mrs. Marsh, the wife of the Bishop of Peterborough. A few nights later as her guest he sat in the Peterborough theatre watching the "Merchant of Venice." So vivid was his imagination—for doubtless the strolling players were not in themselves convincing—that he at last began to shout at Shylock and try to attack him on the stage. When Clare returned to Helpston, the change in him terrified his wife. And yet, he rallied and walked the fields, and sitting on the window-seat taught his sons to trim the two yew-trees in his garden into old-fashioned circles and cones. The positive signs of derangement which he had given so far were not after all conclusive. He had seen Mary Joyce pass by, he had spoken to her, occasionally he as a third person had watched and discussed the doings of John Clare and this lost sweetheart. He had surprised one or two people by calling mole-hills mountains. One day, too, at Parson Mossop's house he had suddenly pointed to figures moving up and down. Under these circumstances, a Market Deeping doctor named Skrimshaw certified him mad; and on similar grounds almost any one in the world might be clapped into an asylum.

Hallucinations ceased for a few months, but Mrs. Clare had difficulty in keeping outside interference at bay. Earl Fitzwilliam, in his position of landlord, proposed to send the man who called mole-hills mountains at once to the Northampton Asylum. When the summer came, unfortunately, Clare's mind seemed suddenly to give way, and preparations were being made for his admission to the county Asylum when letters came from Taylor and other old friends in London, proposing to place him in private hands. Clare was taken accordingly on the 16th of July, 1837, to Fair Mead House, Highbeach, in Epping Forest.

Dr. Allen, the mild broad-minded founder of this excellent asylum, had few doubts as to the condition of Clare's mind, and assured him an eventual recovery. As with the fifty other patients, so he dealt with Clare: keeping him away from books, and making him work in the garden and the fields. Poetry, it is said, was made impossible for him, paper being taken away from him; but it is not conceivable that Clare could live apart from this kindest of companions for many months together. Soon he was allowed to go out into the forest at his will, often taking his new acquaintance Thomas Campbell, the son of the poet, on these wood-rambles. His hallucinations do not appear to have diminished, although they changed. He was now convinced that Mary Joyce was his true wife—Patty was his "second wife." He had known William Shakespeare, and many other great ones in person. Why such men as Wordsworth, Campbell and Byron were allowed to steal John Clare's best poems and to publish them as their own, he could not imagine. John Clare was not only noble by nature but by blood also.—On such rumoured eccentricities did the popular notion of his madness rest. It would seem that anything he said was taken down in evidence against him. How dared he be figurative?

On the other hand, Miss Mitford records figurative conversations not so easily explained; his eye-witness's account of the execution of Charles the First, "the most graphic and minute, with an accuracy as to costume and manners far exceeding what would probably have been at his command if sane," and his seaman's narrative of the battle of the Nile and the death of Nelson in exact nautical detail. These imaginations she compares to clairvoyance. Cyrus Redding, who left three accounts of his visit, found him "no longer, as he was formerly, attenuated and pale of complexion … a little man, of muscular frame and firmly set, his complexion fresh and forehead high, a nose somewhat aquiline, and long full chin." "His manner was perfectly unembarrassed, his language correct and fluent; he appeared to possess great candour and openness of mind, and much of the temperament of genius. There was about his manner no

tincture of rusticity." Once only during the conversation did Clare betray any aberration, abruptly introducing and abandoning the topic of Prize-fighting, as though "a note had got into a piece of music which had no business there."

Clare told Redding that he missed his wife and his home, the society of women, and books. At last, having been in the private asylum four years, he "returned home out of Essex" on foot, leaving Epping Forest early on July 20, 1841, and dragging himself along almost without pause until July 23. Of this amazing journey he himself wrote an account for "Mary Clare," which is printed in full in Martin's "Life": it is both in style and in subject an extraordinary document. The first night, he says, "I lay down with my head towards the north, to show myself the steering-point in the morning." On "the third day I satisfied my hunger by eating the grass on the roadside which seemed to taste something like bread. I was hungry and eat heartily till I was satisfied; in fact, the meal seemed to do me good." And "there was little to notice, for the road very often looked as stupid as myself." At last between Peterborough and Helpston "a cart met me, with a man, a woman and a boy in it. When nearing me the woman jumped out, and caught fast hold of my hands, and wished me to get into the cart. But I refused; I thought her either drunk or mad. But when I was told it was my second wife, Patty, I got in, and was soon at Northborough."

Rest and home somewhat restored Clare's mind, and it was Patty's hope and aim to keep him in his cottage. Though she attempted to keep paper from him he contrived to write verse paraphrases of the prophetical books, sometimes putting in between a song to Mary or a stanza of nature poetry. At the end of August, round the edges of a local newspaper he wrote the draft of a letter to Dr. Allen, of Highbeach, which in the almost complete absence of documents for this period is an important expression:

MY DEAR SIR,

Having left the Forest in a hurry I had not time to take my leave of you and your family, but I intended to write, and that before now. But dullness and disappointment prevented me, for I found your words true on my return here, having neither friends nor home left. But as it is called the "Poet's Cottage" I claimed a lodging in it where I now am. One of my fancies I found here with her family and all well. They met me on this side Werrington with a horse and cart, and found me all but knocked up, for I had travelled from Essex to Northamptonshire without ever eating or drinking all the way—save one pennyworth of beer which was given me by a farm servant near an odd house called "The Plough." One day I eat grass to keep on my [feet], but on the last day I chewed tobacco and never felt hungry afterwards.

Where my poetical fancy is I cannot say, for the people in the neighbourhood tell me that the one called "Mary" has been dead these eight years: but I can be miserably happy in any situation and any place and could have staid in yours on the Forest if any of my friends had noticed me or come to see me. But the greatest annoyance in such places as yours are those servants styled keepers, who often assumed as much authority over me as if I had been their prisoner; and not liking to quarrel I put up with it till I was weary of the place altogether. So I heard the voice of freedom, and started, and could have travelled to York with a penny loaf and a pint of beer; for I should not have been fagged in body, only one of my old shoes had nearly lost the sole before I started, and let in the water and silt the first day, and made me crippled and lame to the end of my journey.

I had eleven books sent me from How & Parsons, Booksellers—some lent and some given me; out of the eleven I only brought 5 vols. here, and as I don't want any part of Essex in Northamptonshire agen I wish you would have the kindness to send a servant to get them for me. I should be very thankful—not that I care about the books altogether, only it may be an excuse to see me and get me into company that I do not want to be acquainted with—one of your labourers', Pratt's, wife borrowed [ ] of Lord Byron's—and Mrs. Fish's daughter has two or three more, all Lord Byron's poems; and Mrs. King late of The Owl Public House Leppit Hill, and now of Endfield Highway, has two or three—all Lord Byron's, and one is the "Hours of Idleness."

You told me something before haytime about the Queen allowing me a yearly salary of £100, and that the first quarter had then commenced—or else I dreamed so. If I have the mistake is not of much consequence to any one save myself, and if true I wish you would get the quarter for me (if due), as I want to be independent and pay for board and lodging while I remain here. I look upon myself as a widow[er] or bachelor, I don't know which. I care nothing about the women now, for they are faithless and deceitful; and the first woman, when there was no man but her husband, found out means to cuckold him by the aid and assistance of the devil—but women being more righteous now, and men more plentiful, they have found out a more godly way to do it without the devil's assistance. And the man who possesses a woman possesses losses without gain. The worst is the road to ruin, and the best is nothing like a good Cow. Man I never did like—and woman has long sickened me. I should like to be to myself a few years and lead the life of a hermit: but even there I should wish for her whom I am always thinking of—and almost every song I write has some sighs and wishes in ink about Mary. If I have not made your head weary by reading thus far I have tired my own by writing it; so I will bid you goodbye, and am

My dear doctor

Yours very sincerely

JOHN CLARE

Give my best respects to Mrs. Allen and Miss Allen, and to Dr. Stedman; also to Campbell, and Hayward, and Howard at Leopard's Hill, or in fact to any one who may think it worth while to enquire about me.

Patty worked her hardest to keep Clare out of future asylums, but it seems that her wishes were overridden. Dr. Allen let it be known through the *Gentleman's Magazine* and other publications that Clare would in the ordinary way almost certainly recover: but the local doctors knew better. On the authority of an anonymous "patron" the doctor Skrimshaw who had previously found Clare insane now paid him another visit, and with a certain William Page, also of Market Deeping, condemned him to be shut up "After years addicted to poetical prosings."

Then one day keepers came, and a vain struggle, and the Northborough cottage saw John Clare no more. He was now in the asylum at Northampton, and the minds of Northamptonshire noblemen need no longer be troubled that a poet was wandering in miserable happiness under their park walls.

So far, the madness of Clare had been rather an exaltation of mind than a collapse. Forsaken mainly by his friends—even Mrs. Emmerson's letters ceased in 1837,—unrecognized by the new generation of writers and of readers, hated by his neighbours, wasted with hopeless love, he had encouraged a life of imagination and ideals. Imagination overpowered him, until his perception of realities failed him. He could see Mary Joyce or talk with her, he had a family of dream-children by her: but if this was madness, there was method in it. But now the blow fell, imprisonment for life: down went John Clare into idiocy, "the ludicrous with the terrible." And even from this desperate abyss he rose.

Earl Fitzwilliam paid for Clare's maintenance in the Northampton Asylum, but at the ordinary rate for poor people. The asylum authorities at least seemed to have recognized Clare as a man out of the common, treating him as a "gentleman patient," and allowing him—for the first twelve years—to go when he wished into Northampton, where he would sit under the portico of All Saints' Church in meditation. What dreams were these! "sometimes his face would brighten up as if illuminated by an inward sun, overwhelming in its glory and beauty." Sane intervals came, in which he wrote his poems; and these poems were of a serenity and richness not surpassed in his earlier work, including for instance "Graves of Infants" (May, 1844), "The Sleep of Spring" (1844), "Invitation to Eternity" (1848) and "Clock-a-Clay" (before 1854). But little news of him went farther afield than the town of Northampton, and the poems remained in manuscript. A glimpse of Clare in these years is left us by a Mr. Jesse Hall, who as an admirer of his poems called on him in May, 1848. "As it was a very fine day, he said we could go and have a walk in the grounds of the institution. We discussed many subjects and I found him very rational, there being very little evidence of derangement…. I asked permission for him to come to my hotel the next day. We spent a few hours together. I was very sorry to find a great change in him from the previous day, and I had ample evidence of his reason being dethroned, his conversation being disconnected and many of his remarks displaying imbecility: but at times he spoke rationally and to the point." To Hall as to almost every other casual visitor Clare gave several manuscript poems.

A letter to his wife, dated July 19th, 1848, gives fresh insight into his condition:

MY DEAR WIFE,

I have not written to you a long while, but here I am in the land of Sodom where all the people's brains are turned the wrong way. I was glad to see John yesterday, and should like to have gone back with him, for I am very weary of being here. You might come and fetch me away, for I think I have been here long enough.

I write this in a green meadow by the side of the river agen Stokes Mill, and I see three of their daughters and a son now and then. The confusion and roar of mill dams and locks is sounding very pleasant while I write it, and it's a very beautiful evening; the meadows are greener than usual after the shower and the rivers are brimful. I think it is about two years since I was first sent up in this Hell and French Bastille of English liberty. Keep yourselves happy and comfortable and love one another. By and bye I shall be with you, perhaps before you expect me. There has been a great storm here with thunder and hail that did much damage to the glass in the neighbourhood. Hailstones the size of hens' eggs fell in some places. Did your brother John come to Northborough or go to Barnack? His uncle John Riddle came the next morning but did not stay. I thought I was coming home but I got cheated. I see many of your

little brothers and sisters at Northampton, weary and dirty with hard work; some of them with red hands, but all in ruddy good health: some of them are along with your sister Ruth Dakken who went from Helpston a little girl. Give my love to your Mother, Grandfather and Sisters, and believe me, my dear children, hers and yours,

Very affectionately

JOHN CLARE

Life went on with little incident for Clare in the asylum. To amuse himself he read and wrote continually; in 1850 his portrait was painted, and his death reported. In 1854 he assisted Miss Baker in her "Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases," providing her with all his asylum manuscripts and specially contributing some verses on May-day customs. At this time an edition of his poems was projected, and the idea met with much interest among those who yet remembered Clare: but it faded and was gone. The "harmless lunatic" was at length confined to the asylum grounds, and to the distresses of his mind began to be added those of the ageing body. Hope even now was not dead, and a poor versifier but good Samaritan who saw him in 1857 printed some lines in the *London Journal* for November 2lst asking the aid of Heaven to restore Clare to his home and his poetry (for he seems to have written little at that time); a gentleman who was in a position to judge wrote also that in the spring of 1860 his mind was calmer than it had been for years, and that he was induced to write verses once more. But Clare was sixty-seven years old; it was perhaps too late to release him, and perhaps he had grown past the desire of liberty. On the 7th of March he wrote to Patty, asking after all his children and some of his friends, and sending his love to his father and mother (so long since dead); signing himself "Your loving husband till death, John Clare." On the 8th he wrote a note to Mr. Hopkins: "Why I am shut up I don't know." And on the 9th he answered his "dear Daughter Sophia's letter," saying that he was "not quite so well to write" as he had been, and (presumably in reply to some offer of books or comforts) "I want nothing from Home to come here. I shall be glad to see you when you come." In the course of 1860 he was photographed, and that the Northampton folk still took an interest in their poet is proved by the sale of these likenesses; copies could be seen in the shops until recent years. But that Clare might have been set at large seems not to have occurred to those who in curiosity purchased his portrait. A visitor named John Plummer went to the asylum in 1861, and found Clare reading in the window recess of a very comfortable room. "Time had dealt kindly with him," he wrote. "It was in vain that we strove to arrest his attention: he merely looked at us with a vacant gaze for a moment, and then went on reading his book." This was possibly rather the action of sanity than of insanity. Yet Plummer did his best, in *Once a Week* and elsewhere, to call attention to the forgotten poet, who was visited soon afterwards by the worthy Nonconformist Paxton Hood, and presently by Joseph Whitaker, the publisher of the "Almanack."

Clare became patriarchal in appearance; and his powers failed more rapidly, until he could walk no longer. A wheel-chair was procured for him, that he might still enjoy the garden and the open air. On Good Friday in 1864 he was taken out for the last time; afterwards he could not be moved, yet he would still manage to reach his window-seat; then came paralysis, and on the afternoon of May the 20th, 1864,

His soul seemed with the free,
He died so quietly.

His last years had been spent in some degree of happiness, and from officials and fellow-patients he had received gentleness, and sympathy, and even homage. It has been said, not once nor twice but many times, that in the asylum he was never visited by his wife, nor by any of his children except the youngest son, Charles, who came once. That any one should condemn Patty for her absence is surely presumptuous in the extreme: she was now keeping her home together with the greatest difficulty, nor can it be known what deeper motives influenced relationships between wife and husband, even if the name of Mary Joyce meant nothing. That the children came to see their father whenever they could, the letters given above signify: but, if the opportunities were not many, there were the strongest of reasons. Frederick died in 1843, just after Clare's incarceration: Anna in the year following: Charles the youngest, a boy of great promise, in 1852: and Sophia in 1863. William, and John who went to Wales, went when occasion came and when they could afford the expense of the journey: Eliza, who survived last of Clare's children and who most of all understood him and his poetry, was unable through illness to leave her home for many years, yet she went once to see him. The isolation which found its expression in "I Am" was another matter: it was the sense of futility, of not having fulfilled his mission, of total eclipse that spoke there. N. P. Willis, perhaps the Howitts, and a few more worthies came for brief hours to see Clare, rather as a phenomenon than as a poet; but Clare, who had sat with Elia and his assembled host, who had held his own with the finest brains of his time and had written such a cornucopia of genuine poetry now lying useless in his cottage at Northborough, cannot but have regarded the Northampton Asylum as "the shipwreck of his own esteems."

Clare was buried on May 25th, 1864, where he had wished to be, in the churchyard at Helpston. The letter informing Mrs. Clare of his death was delivered at the wrong address, and did not eventually reach her at Northborough before Clare's coffin arrived at Helpston; scarcely giving her time to attend the funeral the next day. Indeed, had the sexton at Helpston been at home, the bearers would have urged him to arrange for the funeral at once; in his absence, they left the coffin in an inn parlour for the night, and a scandal was barely prevented. A curious superstition grew up locally that it was not Clare's body which was buried in that coffin: and among those who attended the last rite, not one but found it almost impossible to connect this episode with those days forty years before, when so many a notable man was seen making through Helpston village for the cottage of the eager-eyed, brilliant, unwearying young poet who was the talk of London. After such a long silence and oblivion, even the mention of John Clare's name in his native village awoke odd feelings of unreality.

The poetry of John Clare, originally simple description of the country and countrymen, or ungainly imitation of the poetic tradition as he knew it through Allan Ramsay, Burns, and the popular writers of the eighteenth century, developed into a capacity for exact and complete nature-poetry and for self-expression. Thoroughly awake to all the finest influences in life and in literature, he devoted himself to poetry in every way. Imagination, colour, melody and affection were his by nature; where he lacked was in dramatic impulse and in passion, and sometimes his incredible facility in verse, which enabled him to complete poem after poem without pause or verbal difficulty, was not his best friend. He possesses a technique of his own; his rhymes are based on pronunciation, the Northamptonshire pronunciation to which his ear

had been trained, and thus he accurately joins "stoop" and "up," or "horse" and "cross"—while his sonnets are free and often unique in form. In spite of his individual manner, there is no poet who in his nature-poetry so completely subdues self and mood and deals with the topic for its own sake. That he is by no means enslaved to nature-poetry, the variety of the poems in this selection must show.

His Asylum Poems are distinct from most of the earlier work. They are often the expressions of his love tragedy, yet strange to say they are not often sad or bitter: imagination conquers, and the tragedy vanishes. They are rhythmically new, the movement having changed from that of quiet reflection to one of lyrical enthusiasm: even nature is now seen in brighter colours and sung in subtler music. Old age bringing ever intenser recollection and childlike vision found Clare writing the light lovely songs which bear no slightest sign of the cruel years. So near in these later poems are sorrow and joy that they awaken deeper feelings and instincts than almost any other lyrics can—emotions such as he shares with us in his "Adieu!":

I left the little birds
And sweet lowing of the herds,
And couldn't find out words,
Do you see,
To say to them good-bye,
Where the yellowcups do lie;
So heaving a deep sigh,
Took to sea….

In this sort of pathos, so indefinable and intimate, William Blake and only he can be said to resemble him.

B.

CONTENTS

MIDDLE PERIOD, 1824-1836—

Poems with asterisks are now first printed, or in one or two cases now first collected.

EARLY POEMS

Ballad

A faithless shepherd courted me,
He stole away my liberty.
When my poor heart was strange to men,
He came and smiled and stole it then.

When my apron would hang low,
Me he sought through frost and snow.
When it puckered up with shame,
And I sought him, he never came.

When summer brought no fears to fright,
He came to guard me every night.
When winter nights did darkly prove,
None came to guard me or to love.

I wish, I wish, but all in vain,
I wish I was a maid again.
A maid again I cannot be,
O when will green grass cover me?

Song

Mary, leave thy lowly cot
When thy thickest jobs are done;
When thy friends will miss thee not,
Mary, to the pastures run.
Where we met the other night

Neath the bush upon the plain,
Be it dark or be it light,
Ye may guess we'll meet again.

Should ye go or should ye not,
Never shilly-shally, dear.
Leave your work and leave your cot,
Nothing need ye doubt or fear:
Fools may tell ye lies in spite,
Calling me a roving swain;
Think what passed the other night—
I'll be bound ye'll meet again.

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 squandered covey home.
Swallows check their winding flight,
And twittering on the chimney light.
Round the pond the martins flirt,
Their snowy breasts bedaubed 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 its 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;
Then, to ferry oer 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 moistened 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 her 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 furrowed seams,
Ploughmen loose their weary teams:
Ball, with urging lashes wealed,
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 fastening 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 fodderers tug away.
Hogs with grumbling, deafening 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 quarreling geese
Seek their warm straw-littered 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 curled round her feet;
Patiently she sits to watch
Sparrows fighting on the thatch.
Now Doll brings the expected pails,
And dogs begin to wag their tails;
With strokes and pats they're welcomed 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!
Dashed against the ladder's side.
Curst barbarians! pass me by;
Come not, Turks, my cottage nigh;
Sure my sparrows 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 then might 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;
Prepared to start, she soodles home,
Her knitting twisting oer her thumb,
As, both to leave, afraid to stay,
She bawls her story all the way;
The tale so fraught with 'ticing charms,
Her apron folded oer 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, prepared 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 oer 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 rocked, I sink to sleep,
  Mid the wild wind's lulling sound.

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 are vain Hopes?—The puffing gale of morn,
  That of its charms divests the dewy lawn,
And robs each floweret 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 stripped of its disguise,
  A thing to be desired 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 called to claim it in the skies.

The Maid Of Ocram or, Lord Gregory

Gay was the Maid of Ocram
As lady eer might be
Ere she did venture past a maid
To love Lord Gregory.
Fair was the Maid of Ocram
And shining like the sun
Ere her bower key was turned on two
Where bride bed lay for none.

And late at night she sought her love—
The snow slept on her skin—
Get up, she cried, thou false young man,
And let thy true love in.
And fain would he have loosed the key
All for his true love's sake,
But Lord Gregory then was fast asleep,
His mother wide awake.

And up she threw the window sash,
And out her head put she:
And who is that which knocks so late
And taunts so loud to me?
It is the Maid of Ocram,
Your own heart's next akin;
For so you've sworn, Lord Gregory,
To come and let me in.

O pause not thus, you know me well,
Haste down my way to win.
The wind disturbs my yellow locks,
The snow sleeps on my skin.—
If you be the Maid of Ocram,
As much I doubt you be,
Then tell me of three tokens
That passed with you and me.—

O talk not now of tokens
Which you do wish to break;
Chilled are those lips you've kissed so warm,
And all too numbed to speak.
You know when in my father's bower
You left your cloak for mine,

Though yours was nought but silver twist
And mine the golden twine.—

If you're the lass of Ocram,
As I take you not to be,
The second token you must tell
Which past with you and me.—
O know you not, O know you not
Twas in my father's park,
You led me out a mile too far
And courted in the dark?

When you did change your ring for mine
My yielding heart to win,
Though mine was of the beaten gold
Yours but of burnished tin,
Though mine was all true love without,
Yours but false love within?

O ask me no more tokens
For fast the snow doth fall.
Tis sad to strive and speak in vain,
You mean to break them all.—
If you are the Maid of Ocram,
As I take you not to be,
You must mention the third token
That passed with you and me.—

Twas when you stole my maidenhead;
That grieves me worst of all.—
Begone, you lying creature, then
This instant from my hall,
Or you and your vile baby
Shall in the deep sea fall;
For I have none on earth as yet
That may me father call.—

O must none close my dying feet,
And must none close my hands,
And may none bind my yellow locks
As death for all demands?
You need not use no force at all,
Your hard heart breaks the vow;
You've had your wish against my will
And you shall have it now.

And must none close my dying feet,
And must none close my hands,

And will none do the last kind deeds
That death for all demands?—
Your sister, she may close your feet,
Your brother close your hands,
Your mother, she may wrap your waist
In death's fit wedding bands;
Your father, he may tie your locks
And lay you in the sands.—

My sister, she will weep in vain,
My brother ride and run,
My mother, she will break her heart;
And ere the rising sun
My father will be looking out—
But find me they will none.
I go to lay my woes to rest,
None shall know where I'm gone.
God must be friend and father both,
Lord Gregory will be none.—

Lord Gregory started up from sleep
And thought he heard a voice
That screamed full dreadful in his ear,
And once and twice and thrice.
Lord Gregory to his mother called:
O mother dear, said he,
I've dreamt the Maid of Ocram
Was floating on the sea.

Lie still, my son, the mother said,
Tis but a little space
And half an hour has scarcely passed
Since she did pass this place.—
O cruel, cruel mother,
When she did pass so nigh
How could you let me sleep so sound
Or let her wander bye?
Now if she's lost my heart must break—
I'll seek her till I die.

He sought her east, he sought her west,
He sought through park and plain;
He sought her where she might have been
But found her not again.
I cannot curse thee, mother,
Though thine's the blame, said he
I cannot curse thee, mother,

Though thou'st done worse to me.
Yet do I curse thy pride that aye
So tauntingly aspires;
For my love was a gay knight's heir,
And my father was a squire's.

And I will sell my park and hall;
And if ye wed again
Ye shall not wed for titles twice
That made ye once so vain.
So if ye will wed, wed for love,
As I was fain to do;
Ye've gave to me a broken heart,
And I'll give nought to you.

Your pride has wronged your own heart's blood;
For she was mine by grace,
And now my lady love is gone
None else shall take her place.
I'll sell my park and sell my hall
And sink my titles too.
Your pride's done wrong enough as now
To leave it more to do.

She owneth none that owned them all
And would have graced them well;
None else shall take the right she missed
Nor in my bosom dwell.—
And then he took and burnt his will
Before his mother's face,
And tore his patents all in two,
While tears fell down apace—
But in his mother's haughty look
Ye nought but frowns might trace.

And then he sat him down to grieve,
But could not sit for pain.
And then he laid him on the bed
And ne'er got up again.

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 tattered rags,
Uncouth-brimmed hat, and weather-beaten cloak,

Neath the wild shelter of a knotty oak,
Along the greensward uniformly pricks
Her pliant bending hazel's arching sticks:
While round-topt bush, or briar-entangled hedge,
Where flag-leaves spring beneath, or ramping sedge,
Keeps off the bothering bustle of the wind,
And give the best retreat she hopes to find.
How oft I've bent me oer her fire and smoke,
To hear her gibberish tale so quaintly spoke,
While the old Sybil forged 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 talked of morts of luck:
And still, as boyish hopes did first agree,
Mingled with fears to drop the fortune's fee,
I never failed to gain the honours sought,
And Squire and Lord were purchased with a groat.
But as man's unbelieving taste came round,
She furious stampt her shoeless foot aground,
Wiped 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 possesst,
And when all's done, be shoved to hell at last!

Impromptu

"Where art thou wandering, little child?"
I said to one I met to-day.—
She pushed her bonnet up and smiled,
"I'm going upon the green to play:
Folks tell me that the May's in flower,
That cowslip-peeps are fit to pull,
And I've got leave to spend an hour
To get this little basket full."

—And thou'st got leave to spend an hour!
My heart repeated.—She was gone;
—And thou hast heard the thorn's in flower,

And childhood's bliss is urging on:
Ah, happy child! thou mak'st me sigh,
This once as happy heart of mine,
Would nature with the boon comply,
How gladly would I change for thine.

The Wood-cutter's Night Song

Welcome, red and roundy sun,
Dropping lowly in the west;
Now my hard day's work is done,
I'm as happy as the best.

Joyful are the thoughts of home,
Now I'm ready for my chair,
So, till morrow-morning's come,
Bill and mittens, lie ye there!

Though to leave your pretty song,
Little birds, it gives me pain,
Yet to-morrow is not long,
Then I'm with you all again.

If I stop, and stand about,
Well I know how things will be,
Judy will be looking out
Every now-and-then for me.

So fare ye well! and hold your tongues,
Sing no more until I come;
They're not worthy of your songs
That never care to drop a crumb.

All day long I love the oaks,
But, at nights, yon little cot,
Where I see the chimney smokes,
Is by far the prettiest spot.

Wife and children all are there,
To revive with pleasant looks,
Table ready set, and chair,
Supper hanging on the hooks.

Soon as ever I get in,
When my faggot down I fling,
Little prattlers they begin
Teasing me to talk and sing.

Welcome, red and roundy sun,
Dropping lowly in the west;
Now my hard day's work is done,
I'm as happy as the best.

Joyful are the thoughts of home,
Now I'm ready for my chair,
So, till morrow-morning's come,
Bill and mittens, lie ye there!

Rural Morning

Soon as the twilight through the distant mist
In silver hemmings skirts the purple east,
Ere yet the sun unveils his smiles to view
And dries the morning's chilly robes of dew,
Young Hodge the horse-boy, with a soodly gait,
Slow climbs the stile, or opes the creaky gate,
With willow switch and halter by his side
Prepared for Dobbin, whom he means to ride;
The only tune he knows still whistling oer,
And humming scraps his father sung before,
As "Wantley Dragon," and the "Magic Rose,"
The whole of music that his village knows,
Which wild remembrance, in each little town,
From mouth to mouth through ages handles down.
Onward he jolls, nor can the minstrel-throngs
Entice him once to listen to their songs;
Nor marks he once a blossom on his way;
A senseless lump of animated clay—
With weather-beaten hat of rusty brown,
Stranger to brinks, and often to a crown;
With slop-frock suiting to the ploughman's taste,
Its greasy skirtings twisted round his waist;
And hardened high-lows clenched with nails around,
Clamping defiance oer the stoney ground,
The deadly foes to many a blossomed sprout
That luckless meets him in his morning's rout.
In hobbling speed he roams the pasture round,
Till hunted Dobbin and the rest are found;
Where some, from frequent meddlings of his whip,
Well know their foe, and often try to slip;
While Dobbin, tamed by age and labour, stands
To meet all trouble from his brutish hands,
And patient goes to gate or knowly brake,
The teasing burden of his foe to take;

Who, soon as mounted, with his switching weals,
Puts Dob's best swiftness in his heavy heels,
The toltering bustle of a blundering trot
Which whips and cudgels neer increased a jot,
Though better speed was urged by the clown—
And thus he snorts and jostles to the town.

And now, when toil and summer's in its prime,
In every vill, at morning's earliest time,
To early-risers many a Hodge is seen,
And many a Dob's heard clattering oer the green.

Now straying beams from day's unclosing eye
In copper-coloured patches flush the sky,
And from night's prison strugglingly encroach,
To bring the summons of warm day's approach,
Till, slowly mounting oer the ridge of clouds
That yet half shows his face, and half enshrouds,
The unfettered sun takes his unbounded reign
And wakes all life to noise and toil again:
And while his opening mellows oer the scenes
Of wood and field their many mingling greens,
Industry's bustling din once more devours
The soothing peace of morning's early hours:
The grunt of hogs freed from their nightly dens
And constant cacklings of new-laying hens,
And ducks and geese that clamorous joys repeat
The splashing comforts of the pond to meet,
And chirping sparrows dropping from the eaves
For offal kernels that the poultry leaves,
Oft signal-calls of danger chittering high
At skulking cats and dogs approaching nigh.
And lowing steers that hollow echoes wake
Around the yard, their nightly fast to break,
As from each barn the lumping flail rebounds
In mingling concert with the rural sounds;
While oer the distant fields more faintly creep
The murmuring bleatings of unfolding sheep,
And ploughman's callings that more hoarse proceed
Where industry still urges labour's speed,
The bellowing of cows with udders full
That wait the welcome halloo of "come mull,"
And rumbling waggons deafening again,
Rousing the dust along the narrow lane,
And cracking whips, and shepherd's hooting cries,
From woodland echoes urging sharp replies.
Hodge, in his waggon, marks the wondrous tongue,

And talks with echo as he drives along;
Still cracks his whip, bawls every horse's name,
And echo still as ready bawls the same:
The puzzling mystery he would gladly cheat,
And fain would utter what it can't repeat,
Till speedless trials prove the doubted elf
As skilled in noise and sounds as Hodge himself;
And, quite convinced with the proofs it gives,
The boy drives on and fancies echo lives,
Like some wood-fiend that frights benighted men,
The troubling spirit of a robber's den.

And now the blossom of the village view,
With airy hat of straw, and apron blue,
And short-sleeved gown, that half to guess reveals
By fine-turned arms what beauty it conceals;
Whose cheeks health flushes with as sweet a red
As that which stripes the woodbine oer her head;
Deeply she blushes on her morn's employ,
To prove the fondness of some passing boy,
Who, with a smile that thrills her soul to view,
Holds the gate open till she passes through,
While turning nods beck thanks for kindness done,
And looks—if looks could speak-proclaim her won.
With well-scoured buckets on proceeds the maid,
And drives her cows to milk beneath the shade,
Where scarce a sunbeam to molest her steals—
Sweet as the thyme that blossoms where she kneels;
And there oft scares the cooing amorous dove
With her own favoured melodies of love.
Snugly retired in yet dew-laden bowers,
This sweetest specimen of rural flowers
Displays, red glowing in the morning wind,
The powers of health and nature when combined.

Last on the road the cowboy careless swings,
Leading tamed cattle in their tending strings,
With shining tin to keep his dinner warm
Swung at his back, or tucked beneath his arm;
Whose sun-burnt skin, and cheeks chuffed out with fat,
Are dyed as rusty as his napless hat.
And others, driving loose their herds at will,
Are now heard whooping up the pasture-hill;
Peeled sticks they bear of hazel or of ash,
The rib-marked hides of restless cows to thrash.
In sloven garb appears each bawling boy,
As fit and suiting to his rude employ;

His shoes, worn down by many blundering treads,
Oft show the tenants needing safer sheds:
The pithy bunch of unripe nuts to seek,
And crabs sun-reddened with a tempting cheek,
From pasture hedges, daily puts to rack
His tattered clothes, that scarcely screen the back,—
Daubed all about as if besmeared with blood,
Stained with the berries of the brambly wood
That stud the straggling briars as black as jet,
Which, when his cattle lair, he runs to get;
Or smaller kinds, as if beglossed with dew
Shining dim-powdered with a downy blue,
That on weak tendrils lowly creeping grow
Where, choaked in flags and sedges, wandering slow,
The brook purls simmering its declining tide
Down the crooked boundings of the pasture-side.
There they to hunt the luscious fruit delight,
And dabbling keep within their charges' sight;
Oft catching prickly struttles on their rout,
And miller-thumbs and gudgeons driving out,
Hid near the arched brig under many a stone
That from its wall rude passing clowns have thrown.
And while in peace cows eat, and chew their cuds,
Moozing cool sheltered neath the skirting woods,
To double uses they the hours convert,
Turning the toils of labour into sport;
Till morn's long streaking shadows lose their tails,
And cooling winds swoon into faultering gales;
And searching sunbeams warm and sultry creep,
Waking the teazing insects from their sleep;
And dreaded gadflies with their drowsy hum
On the burnt wings of mid-day zephyrs come,—
Urging each lown to leave his sports in fear,
  To stop his starting cows that dread the fly;
Droning unwelcome tidings on his ear,
  That the sweet peace of rural morn's gone by.

Song

  One gloomy eve I roamed 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 pounced my peace away.

The Cross Roads; or, The Haymaker's Story

Stopt by the storm, that long in sullen black
From the south-west stained its encroaching track,
Haymakers, hustling from the rain to hide,
Sought the grey willows by the pasture-side;
And there, while big drops bow the grassy stems,
And bleb the withering hay with pearly gems,
Dimple the brook, and patter in the leaves,
The song or tale an hour's restraint relieves.
And while the old dames gossip at their ease,
And pinch the snuff-box empty by degrees,
The young ones join in love's delightful themes,
Truths told by gipsies, and expounded dreams;
And mutter things kept secrets from the rest,
As sweethearts' names, and whom they love the best;
And dazzling ribbons they delight to show,
And last new favours of some veigling beau,
Who with such treachery tries their hearts to move,
And, like the highest, bribes the maidens' love.
The old dames, jealous of their whispered praise,
Throw in their hints of man's deluding ways;
And one, to give her counsels more effect,
And by example illustrate the fact
Of innocence oercome by flattering man,
Thrice tapped her box, and pinched, and thus began.

"Now wenches listen, and let lovers lie,
Ye'll hear a story ye may profit by;
I'm your age treble, with some oddments to't,
And right from wrong can tell, if ye'll but do't:
Ye need not giggle underneath your hat,
Mine's no joke-matter, let me tell you that;
So keep ye quiet till my story's told,
And don't despise your betters cause they're old.

"That grave ye've heard of, where the four roads meet,
Where walks the spirit in a winding-sheet,
Oft seen at night, by strangers passing late,
And tarrying neighbours that at market wait,
Stalking along as white as driven snow,
And long as one's shadow when the sun is low;
The girl that's buried there I knew her well,
And her whole history, if ye'll hark, can tell.
Her name was Jane, and neighbour's children we,
And old companions once, as ye may be;
And like to you, on Sundays often strolled
To gipsies' camps to have our fortunes told;
And oft, God rest her, in the fortune-book
Which we at hay-time in our pockets took,
Our pins at blindfold on the wheel we stuck,
When hers would always prick the worst of luck;
For try, poor thing, as often as she might,
Her point would always on the blank alight;
Which plainly shows the fortune one's to have,
As such like go unwedded to the grave,—
And so it proved.—The next succeeding May,
We both to service went from sports and play,
Though in the village still; as friends and kin
Thought neighbour's service better to begin.
So out we went:—Jane's place was reckoned good,
Though she bout life but little understood,
And had a master wild as wild can be,
And far unfit for such a child as she;
And soon the whisper went about the town,
That Jane's good looks procured her many a gown
From him, whose promise was to every one,
But whose intention was to wive with none.
Twas nought to wonder, though begun by guess;
For Jane was lovely in her Sunday dress,
And all expected such a rosy face
Would be her ruin—as was just the case.
The while the change was easily perceived,
Some months went by, ere I the tales believed;
For there are people nowadays, Lord knows,
Will sooner hatch up lies than mend their clothes;
And when with such-like tattle they begin,
Don't mind whose character they spoil a pin:
But passing neighbours often marked them smile,
And watched him take her milkpail oer a stile;
And many a time, as wandering closer by,
From Jenny's bosom met a heavy sigh;

And often marked her, as discoursing deep,
When doubts might rise to give just cause to weep,
Smothering their notice, by a wished disguise
To slive her apron corner to her eyes.
Such signs were mournful and alarming things,
And far more weighty than conjecture brings;
Though foes made double what they heard of all,
Swore lies as proofs, and prophesied her fall.
Poor thoughtless wench! it seems but Sunday past
Since we went out together for the last,
And plain enough indeed it was to find
She'd something more than common on her mind;
For she was always fond and full of chat,
In passing harmless jokes bout beaus and that,
But nothing then was scarcely talked about,
And what there was, I even forced it out.
A gloomy wanness spoiled her rosy cheek,
And doubts hung there it was not mine to seek;
She neer so much as mentioned things to come,
But sighed oer pleasures ere she left her home;
And now and then a mournful smile would raise
At freaks repeated of our younger days,
Which I brought up, while passing spots of ground
Where we, when children, "hurly-burlied" round,
Or "blindman-buffed" some morts of hours away—
Two games, poor thing, Jane dearly loved to play.
She smiled at these, but shook her head and sighed
When eer she thought my look was turned aside;
Nor turned she round, as was her former way,
To praise the thorn, white over then with May;
Nor stooped once, though thousands round her grew,
To pull a cowslip as she used to do:
For Jane in flowers delighted from a child—
I like the garden, but she loved the wild—
And oft on Sundays young men's gifts declined,
Posies from gardens of the sweetest kind,
And eager scrambled the dog-rose to get,
And woodbine-flowers at every bush she met.
The cowslip blossom, with its ruddy streak,
Would tempt her furlongs from the path to seek;
And gay long purple, with its tufty spike,
She'd wade oer shoes to reach it in the dyke;
And oft, while scratching through the briary woods
For tempting cuckoo-flowers and violet buds,
Poor Jane, I've known her crying sneak to town,
Fearing her mother, when she'd torn her gown.

Ah, these were days her conscience viewed with pain,
Which all are loth to lose, as well as Jane.
And, what I took more odd than all the rest,
Was, that same night she neer a wish exprest
To see the gipsies, so beloved before,
That lay a stone's throw from us on the moor:
I hinted it; she just replied again—
She once believed them, but had doubts since then.
And when we sought our cows, I called, "Come mull!"
But she stood silent, for her heart was full.
She loved dumb things: and ere she had begun
To milk, caressed them more than eer she'd done;
But though her tears stood watering in her eye,
I little took it as her last good-bye;
For she was tender, and I've often known
Her mourn when beetles have been trampled on:
So I neer dreamed from this, what soon befell,
Till the next morning rang her passing-bell.
My story's long, but time's in plenty yet,
Since the black clouds betoken nought but wet;
And I'll een snatch a minute's breath or two,
And take another pinch, to help me through.

"So, as I said, next morn I heard the bell,
And passing neighbours crossed the street, to tell
That my poor partner Jenny had been found
In the old flag-pool, on the pasture, drowned.
God knows my heart! I twittered like a leaf,
And found too late the cause of Sunday's grief;
For every tongue was loosed to gabble oer
The slanderous things that secret passed before:
With truth or lies they need not then be strict,
The one they railed at could not contradict.
Twas now no secret of her being beguiled,
For every mouth knew Jenny died with child;
And though more cautious with a living name,
Each more than guessed her master bore the blame.
That very morning, it affects me still,
Ye know the foot-path sidles down the hill,
Ignorant as babe unborn I passed the pond
To milk as usual in our close beyond,
And cows were drinking at the water's edge,
And horses browsed among the flags and sedge,
And gnats and midges danced the water oer,
Just as I've marked them scores of times before,
And birds sat singing, as in mornings gone,—
While I as unconcerned went soodling on,

But little dreaming, as the wakening wind
Flapped the broad ash-leaves oer the pond reclin'd,
And oer the water crinked the curdled wave,
That Jane was sleeping in her watery grave.
The neatherd boy that used to tend the cows,
While getting whip-sticks from the dangling boughs
Of osiers drooping by the water-side,
Her bonnet floating on the top espied;
He knew it well, and hastened fearful down
To take the terror of his fears to town,—

A melancholy story, far too true;
And soon the village to the pasture flew,
Where, from the deepest hole the pond about,
They dragged poor Jenny's lifeless body out,
And took her home, where scarce an hour gone by
She had been living like to you and I.
I went with more, and kissed her for the last,
And thought with tears on pleasures that were past;
And, the last kindness left me then to do,
I went, at milking, where the blossoms grew,
And handfuls got of rose and lambtoe sweet,
And put them with her in her winding-sheet.
A wilful murder, jury made the crime;
Nor parson 'lowed to pray, nor bell to chime;
On the cross roads, far from her friends and kin,
The usual law for their ungodly sin
Who violent hands upon themselves have laid,
Poor Jane's last bed unchristian-like was made;
And there, like all whose last thoughts turn to heaven,
She sleeps, and doubtless hoped to be forgiven.
But, though I say't, for maids thus veigled in
I think the wicked men deserve the sin;
And sure enough we all at last shall see
The treachery punished as it ought to be.
For ere his wickedness pretended love,
Jane, I'll be bound, was spotless as the dove,
And's good a servant, still old folks allow,
As ever scoured a pail or milked a cow;
And ere he led her into ruin's way,
As gay and buxom as a summer's day:
The birds that ranted in the hedge-row boughs,
As night and morning we have sought our cows,
With yokes and buckets as she bounced along,
Were often deafed to silence with her song.

But now she's gone:—girls, shun deceitful men,
The worst of stumbles ye can fall agen;
Be deaf to them, and then, as twere, ye'll see
Your pleasures safe as under lock and key.
Throw not my words away, as many do;
They're gold in value, though they're cheap to you.
And husseys hearken, and be warned from this,
If ye love mothers, never do amiss:
Jane might love hers, but she forsook the plan
To make her happy, when she thought of man.
Poor tottering dame, it was too plainly known,
Her daughter's dying hastened on her own,
For from the day the tidings reached her door
She took to bed and looked up no more,
And, ere again another year came round,
She, well as Jane, was laid within the ground;
And all were grieved poor Goody's end to see:
No better neighbour entered house than she,
A harmless soul, with no abusive tongue,
Trig as new pins, and tight's the day was long;
And go the week about, nine times in ten
Ye'd find her house as cleanly as her sen.
But, Lord protect us! time such change does bring,
We cannot dream what oer our heads may hing;
The very house she lived in, stick and stone,
Since Goody died, has tumbled down and gone:
And where the marjoram once, and sage, and rue,
And balm, and mint, with curled-leaf parsley grew,
And double marygolds, and silver thyme,
And pumpkins neath the window used to climb;
And where I often when a child for hours
Tried through the pales to get the tempting flowers,
As lady's laces, everlasting peas,
True-love-lies-bleeding, with the hearts-at-ease,
And golden rods, and tansy running high
That oer the pale-tops smiled on passers-by,
Flowers in my time that every one would praise,
Though thrown like weeds from gardens nowadays;
Where these all grew, now henbane stinks and spreads,
And docks and thistles shake their seedy heads,
And yearly keep with nettles smothering oer;—
The house, the dame, the garden known no more:
While, neighbouring nigh, one lonely elder-tree
Is all that's left of what had used to be,
Marking the place, and bringing up with tears
The recollections of one's younger years.

And now I've done, ye're each at once as free
To take your trundle as ye used to be;
To take right ways, as Jenny should have ta'en,
Or headlong run, and be a second Jane;
For by one thoughtless girl that's acted ill
A thousand may be guided if they will:
As oft mong folks to labour bustling on,
We mark the foremost kick against a stone,
Or stumble oer a stile he meant to climb,
While hind ones see and shun the fall in time.
But ye, I will be bound, like far the best
Love's tickling nick-nacks and the laughing jest,
And ten times sooner than be warned by me,
Would each be sitting on some fellow's knee,
Sooner believe the lies wild chaps will tell
Than old dames' cautions, who would wish ye well:
So have your wills."—She pinched her box again,
And ceased her tale, and listened to the rain,
Which still as usual pattered fast around,
And bowed the bent-head loaded to the ground;
While larks, their naked nest by force forsook,
Pruned their wet wings in bushes by the brook.

The maids, impatient now old Goody ceased,
As restless children from the school released,
Right gladly proving, what she'd just foretold,
That young ones' stories were preferred to old,
Turn to the whisperings of their former joy,
That oft deceive, but very rarely cloy.

In Hilly-Wood

How sweet to be thus nestling deep in boughs,
Upon an ashen stoven pillowing me;
Faintly are heard the ploughmen at their ploughs,
But not an eye can find its way to see.
The sunbeams scarce molest me with a smile,
So thickly the leafy armies gather round;
And where they do, the breeze blows cool the while,
Their leafy shadows dancing on the ground.
Full many a flower, too, wishing to be seen,
Perks up its head the hiding grass between,—
In mid-wood silence, thus, how sweet to be;
Where all the noises, that on peace intrude,
Come from the chittering cricket, bird, and bee,
Whose songs have charms to sweeten solitude.

The Ants

What wonder strikes the curious, while he views
The black ant's city, by a rotten tree,
Or woodland bank! In ignorance we muse:
Pausing, annoyed,—we know not what we see,
Such government and thought there seem to be;
Some looking on, and urging some to toil,
Dragging their loads of bent-stalks slavishly:
And what's more wonderful, when big loads foil
One ant or two to carry, quickly then
A swarm flock round to help their fellow-men.
Surely they speak a language whisperingly,
Too fine for us to hear; and sure their ways
Prove they have kings and laws, and that they be
Deformed remnants of the Fairy-days.

To Anna Three Years Old

My Anna, summer laughs in mirth,
And we will of the party be,
And leave the crickets in the hearth
For green fields' merry minstrelsy.

I see thee now with little hand
Catch at each object passing bye,
The happiest thing in all the land
Except the bee and butterfly.

* * * * *

And limpid brook that leaps along,
Gilt with the summer's burnished gleam,
Will stop thy little tale or song
To gaze upon its crimping stream.

Thou'lt leave my hand with eager speed
The new discovered things to see—
The old pond with its water weed
And danger-daring willow tree,
Who leans an ancient invalid
Oer spots where deepest waters be.

In sudden shout and wild surprise
I hear thy simple wonderment,
As new things meet thy childish eyes
And wake some innocent intent;

As bird or bee or butterfly
Bounds through the crowd of merry leaves
And starts the rapture of thine eye
To run for what it neer achieves.

But thou art on the bed of pain,
So tells each poor forsaken toy.
Ah, could I see that happy hour
When these shall be thy heart's employ,
And see thee toddle oer the plain,
And stoop for flowers, and shout for joy.

From "The Parish: A Satire"

I

In politics and politicians' lies
The modern farmer waxes wondrous wise;
Opinionates with wisdom all compact,
And een could tell a nation how to act;
Throws light on darkness with excessive skill,
Knows who acts well and whose designs are ill,
Proves half the members nought but bribery's tools,
And calls the past a dull dark age of fools.

As wise as Solomon they read the news,
Not with their blind forefathers' simple views,
Who read of wars, and wished that wars would cease,
And blessed the King, and wished his country peace;
Who marked the weight of each fat sheep and ox,
The price of grain and rise and fall of stocks;
Who thought it learning how to buy and sell,
And him a wise man who could manage well.
No, not with such old-fashioned, idle views
Do these newsmongers traffic with the news.
They read of politics and not of grain,
And speechify and comment and explain,
And know so much of Parliament and state
You'd think they're members when you heard them prate;
And know so little of their farms the while
They can but urge a wiser man to smile.

II

A thing all consequence here takes the lead,
Reigning knight-errant oer this dirty breed—
A bailiff he, and who so great to brag

Of law and all its terrors as Bumtagg;
Fawning a puppy at his master's side
And frowning like a wolf on all beside;
Who fattens best where sorrow worst appears
And feeds on sad misfortune's bitterest tears?
Such is Bumtagg the bailiff to a hair,
The worshipper and demon of despair,
Who waits and hopes and wishes for success
At every nod and signal of distress,
Happy at heart, when storms begin to boil,
To seek the shipwreck and to share the spoil.
Brave is this Bumtagg, match him if you can;
For there's none like him living—save his man.

As every animal assists his kind
Just so are these in blood and business joined;
Yet both in different colours hide their art,
And each as suits his ends transacts his part.
One keeps the heart-bred villain full in sight,
The other cants and acts the hypocrite,
Smoothing the deed where law sharks set their gin
Like a coy dog to draw misfortune in.
But both will chuckle oer their prisoners' sighs
And are as blest as spiders over flies.
Such is Bumtagg, whose history I resign,
As other knaves wait room to stink and shine;
And, as the meanest knave a dog can brag,
Such is the lurcher that assists Bumtagg.

Nobody Cometh to Woo

On Martinmas eve the dogs did bark,
And I opened the window to see,
When every maiden went by with her spark
But neer a one came to me.
And O dear what will become of me?
And O dear what shall I do,
When nobody whispers to marry me—
Nobody cometh to woo?

None's born for such troubles as I be:
If the sun wakens first in the morn
"Lazy hussy" my parents both call me,
And I must abide by their scorn,
For nobody cometh to marry me,
Nobody cometh to woo,

So here in distress must I tarry me—
What can a poor maiden do?

If I sigh through the window when Jerry
The ploughman goes by, I grow bold;
And if I'm disposed to be merry,
My parents do nothing but scold;
And Jerry the clown, and no other,
Eer cometh to marry or woo;
They think me the moral of mother
And judge me a terrible shrew.

For mother she hateth all fellows,
And spinning's my father's desire,
While the old cat growls bass with the bellows
If eer I hitch up to the fire.
I make the whole house out of humour,
I wish nothing else but to please,
Would fortune but bring a new comer
To marry, and make me at ease!

When I've nothing my leisure to hinder
I scarce get as far as the eaves;
Her head's instant out of the window
Calling out like a press after thieves.
The young men all fall to remarking,
And laugh till they're weary to see't,
While the dogs at the noise begin barking,
And I slink in with shame from the street.

My mother's aye jealous of loving,
My father's aye jealous of play,
So what with them both there's no moving,
I'm in durance for life and a day.
O who shall I get for to marry me?
Who will have pity to woo?
Tis death any longer to tarry me,
And what shall a poor maiden do?

Distant Hills

What is there in those distant hills
My fancy longs to see,
That many a mood of joy instils?
Say what can fancy be?

Do old oaks thicken all the woods,
With weeds and brakes as here?

Does common water make the floods,
That's common everywhere?

Is grass the green that clothes the ground?
Are springs the common springs?
Daisies and cowslips dropping round,
Are such the flowers she brings?

* * * * *

Are cottages of mud and stone,
By valley wood and glen,
And their calm dwellers little known
Men, and but common men,

That drive afield with carts and ploughs?
Such men are common here,
And pastoral maidens milking cows
Are dwelling everywhere.

If so my fancy idly clings
To notions far away,
And longs to roam for common things
All round her every day,

Right idle would the journey be
To leave one's home so far,
And see the moon I now can see
And every little star.

And have they there a night and day,
And common counted hours?
And do they see so far away
This very moon of ours?

* * * * *

I mark him climb above the trees
With one small [comrade] star,
And think me in my reveries—
He cannot shine so far.

* * * * *

The poets in the tales they tell
And with their happy powers
Have made lands where their fancies dwell
Seem better lands than ours.

Why need I sigh far hills to see
If grass is their array,
While here the little paths go through
The greenest every day?

Such fancies fill the restless mind,
At once to cheat and cheer
With thought and semblance undefined,
Nowhere and everywhere.

MIDDLE PERIOD 1824-1836

The Stranger

When trouble haunts me, need I sigh?
No, rather smile away despair;
For those have been more sad than I,
With burthens more than I could bear;
Aye, gone rejoicing under care
Where I had sunk in black despair.

When pain disturbs my peace and rest,
Am I a hopeless grief to keep,
When some have slept on torture's breast
And smiled as in the sweetest sleep,
Aye, peace on thorns, in faith forgiven,
And pillowed on the hope of heaven?

Though low and poor and broken down,
Am I to think myself distrest?
No, rather laugh where others frown
And think my being truly blest;
For others I can daily see
More worthy riches worse than me.

Aye, once a stranger blest the earth
Who never caused a heart to mourn,
Whose very voice gave sorrow mirth—
And how did earth his worth return?
It spurned him from its lowliest lot,
The meanest station owned him not;

An outcast thrown in sorrow's way,
A fugitive that knew no sin,
Yet in lone places forced to stray—
Men would not take the stranger in.
Yet peace, though much himself he mourned,
Was all to others he returned.

* * * * *

His presence was a peace to all,
He bade the sorrowful rejoice.
Pain turned to pleasure at his call,
Health lived and issued from his voice.
He healed the sick and sent abroad
The dumb rejoicing in the Lord.

The blind met daylight in his eye,
The joys of everlasting day;
The sick found health in his reply;
The cripple threw his crutch away.
Yet he with troubles did remain
And suffered poverty and pain.

Yet none could say of wrong he did,
And scorn was ever standing bye;
Accusers by their conscience chid,
When proof was sought, made no reply.
Yet without sin he suffered more
Than ever sinners did before.

Song's Eternity

What is song's eternity?
Come and see.
Can it noise and bustle be?
Come and see.
Praises sung or praises said
Can it be?
Wait awhile and these are dead—
Sigh, sigh;
Be they high or lowly bred They die.

What is song's eternity?
Come and see.
Melodies of earth and sky,
Here they be.
Song once sung to Adam's ears
Can it be?

Ballads of six thousand years
  Thrive, thrive;
Songs awaken with the spheres
  Alive.

  Mighty songs that miss decay,
  What are they?
Crowds and cities pass away
  Like a day.
Books are out and books are read;
  What are they?
Years will lay them with the dead—
  Sigh, sigh;
Trifles unto nothing wed,
  They die.

  Dreamers, mark the honey bee;
  Mark the tree
Where the blue cap "*tootle tee*"
  Sings a glee
Sung to Adam and to Eve
  Here they be.
When floods covered every bough,
  Noah's ark
Heard that ballad singing now;
  Hark, hark,

  "*Tootle tootle tootle tee*"—
  Can it be
Pride and fame must shadows be?
  Come and see—
Every season own her own;
  Bird and bee
Sing creation's music on;
  Nature's glee
Is in every mood and tone
  Eternity.

The Old Cottagers

  The little cottage stood alone, the pride
Of solitude surrounded every side.
Bean fields in blossom almost reached the wall;
A garden with its hawthorn hedge was all
The space between.—Green light did pass
Through one small window, where a looking-glass
Placed in the parlour, richly there revealed

A spacious landscape and a blooming field.
The pasture cows that herded on the moor
Printed their footsteps to the very door,
Where little summer flowers with seasons blow
And scarcely gave the eldern leave to grow.
The cuckoo that one listens far away
Sung in the orchard trees for half the day;
And where the robin lives, the village guest,
In the old weedy hedge the leafy nest
Of the coy nightingale was yearly found,
Safe from all eyes as in the loneliest ground;
And little chats that in bean stalks will lie
A nest with cobwebs there will build, and fly
Upon the kidney bean that twines and towers
Up little poles in wreaths of scarlet flowers.

There a lone couple lived, secluded there
From all the world considers joy or care,
Lived to themselves, a long lone journey trod,
And through their Bible talked aloud to God;
While one small close and cow their wants maintained,
But little needing, and but little gained.
Their neighbour's name was peace, with her they went,
With tottering age, and dignified content,
Through a rich length of years and quiet days,
And filled the neighbouring village with their praise.

Young Lambs

The spring is coming by a many signs;
The trays are up, the hedges broken down,
That fenced the haystack, and the remnant shines
Like some old antique fragment weathered brown.
And where suns peep, in every sheltered place,
The little early buttercups unfold
A glittering star or two—till many trace
The edges of the blackthorn clumps in gold.
And then a little lamb bolts up behind
The hill and wags his tail to meet the yoe,
And then another, sheltered from the wind,
Lies all his length as dead—and lets me go
Close bye and never stirs but baking lies,
With legs stretched out as though he could not rise.

Early Nightingale

When first we hear the shy-come nightingales,
They seem to mutter oer their songs in fear,
And, climb we eer so soft the spinney rails,
All stops as if no bird was anywhere.
The kindled bushes with the young leaves thin
Let curious eyes to search a long way in,
Until impatience cannot see or hear
The hidden music; gets but little way
Upon the path—when up the songs begin,
Full loud a moment and then low again.
But when a day or two confirms her stay
Boldly she sings and loud for half the day;
And soon the village brings the woodman's tale
Of having heard the newcome nightingale.

Winter Walk

The holly bush, a sober lump of green,
Shines through the leafless shrubs all brown and grey,
And smiles at winter be it eer so keen
With all the leafy luxury of May.
And O it is delicious, when the day
In winter's loaded garment keenly blows
And turns her back on sudden falling snows,
To go where gravel pathways creep between
Arches of evergreen that scarce let through
A single feather of the driving storm;
And in the bitterest day that ever blew
The walk will find some places still and warm
Where dead leaves rustle sweet and give alarm
To little birds that flirt and start away.

The Soldier

Home furthest off grows dearer from the way;
And when the army in the Indias lay
Friends' letters coming from his native place
Were like old neighbours with their country face.
And every opportunity that came
Opened the sheet to gaze upon the name
Of that loved village where he left his sheep
For more contented peaceful folk to keep;
And friendly faces absent many a year
Would from such letters in his mind appear.
And when his pockets, chafing through the case,
Wore it quite out ere others took the place,

Right loath to be of company bereft
He kept the fragments while a bit was left.

Ploughman Singing

Here morning in the ploughman's songs is met
Ere yet one footstep shows in all the sky,
And twilight in the east, a doubt as yet,
Shows not her sleeve of grey to know her bye.
Woke early, I arose and thought that first
In winter time of all the world was I.
The old owls might have hallooed if they durst,
But joy just then was up and whistled bye
A merry tune which I had known full long,
But could not to my memory wake it back,
Until the ploughman changed it to the song.
O happiness, how simple is thy track.
—Tinged like the willow shoots, the east's young brow
Glows red and finds thee singing at the plough.

Spring's Messengers

Where slanting banks are always with the sun
The daisy is in blossom even now;
And where warm patches by the hedges run
The cottager when coming home from plough
Brings home a cowslip root in flower to set.
Thus ere the Christmas goes the spring is met
Setting up little tents about the fields
In sheltered spots.—Primroses when they get
Behind the wood's old roots, where ivy shields
Their crimpled, curdled leaves, will shine and hide.
Cart ruts and horses' footings scarcely yield
A slur for boys, just crizzled and that's all.
Frost shoots his needles by the small dyke side,
And snow in scarce a feather's seen to fall.

Letter in Verse

Like boys that run behind the loaded wain
For the mere joy of riding back again,
When summer from the meadow carts the hay
And school hours leave them half a day to play;
So I with leisure on three sides a sheet
Of foolscap dance with poesy's measured feet,
Just to ride post upon the wings of time

And kill a care, to friendship turned in rhyme.
The muse's gallop hurries me in sport
With much to read and little to divert,
And I, amused, with less of wit than will,
Run till I tire.—And so to cheat her still.
Like children running races who shall be
First in to touch the orchard wall or tree,
The last half way behind, by distance vext,
Turns short, determined to be first the next;
So now the muse has run me hard and long—
I'll leave at once her races and her song;
And, turning round, laugh at the letter's close
And beat her out by ending it in prose.

Snow Storm

What a night! The wind howls, hisses, and but stops
To howl more loud, while the snow volley keeps
Incessant batter at the window pane,
Making our comfort feel as sweet again;
And in the morning, when the tempest drops,
At every cottage door mountainous heaps
Of snow lie drifted, that all entrance stops
Untill the beesom and the shovel gain
The path, and leave a wall on either side.
The shepherd rambling valleys white and wide
With new sensations his old memory fills,
When hedges left at night, no more descried,
Are turned to one white sweep of curving hills,
And trees turned bushes half their bodies hide.

The boy that goes to fodder with surprise
Walks oer the gate he opened yesternight.
The hedges all have vanished from his eyes;
Een some tree tops the sheep could reach to bite.
The novel scene emboldens new delight,
And, though with cautious steps his sports begin,
He bolder shuffles the huge hills of snow,
Till down he drops and plunges to the chin,
And struggles much and oft escape to win—
Then turns and laughs but dare not further go;
For deep the grass and bushes lie below,
Where little birds that soon at eve went in
With heads tucked in their wings now pine for day
And little feel boys oer their heads can stray.

Firwood

The fir trees taper into twigs and wear
The rich blue green of summer all the year,
Softening the roughest tempest almost calm
And offering shelter ever still and warm
To the small path that towels underneath,
Where loudest winds—almost as summer's breath—
Scarce fan the weed that lingers green below
When others out of doors are lost in frost and snow.
And sweet the music trembles on the ear
As the wind suthers through each tiny spear,
Makeshifts for leaves; and yet, so rich they show,
Winter is almost summer where they grow.

Grasshoppers

Grasshoppers go in many a thumming spring
And now to stalks of tasseled sow-grass cling,
That shakes and swees awhile, but still keeps straight;
While arching oxeye doubles with his weight.
Next on the cat-tail-grass with farther bound
He springs, that bends until they touch the ground.

Field Path

The beams in blossom with their spots of jet
Smelt sweet as gardens wheresoever met;
The level meadow grass was in the swath;
The hedge briar rose hung right across the path,
White over with its flowers—the grass that lay
Bleaching beneath the twittering heat to hay
Smelt so deliciously, the puzzled bee
Went wondering where the honey sweets could be;
And passer-bye along the level rows
Stoopt down and whipt a bit beneath his nose.

Country Letter

Dear brother robin this comes from us all With our kind love and could Gip write and all Though but a dog he'd have his love to spare For still he knows and by your corner chair The moment he comes in he lyes him down and seems to fancy you are in the town. This leaves us well in health thank God for that For old acquaintance Sue has kept your hat Which mother brushes ere she lays it bye and every sunday goes upstairs to cry Jane still is yours till you come back agen and neer so much as dances with the men and ned the woodman every week comes in and asks about you kindly as our kin and he with this and goody Thompson sends Remembrances with those of all our friends Father with us sends love untill he hears and

mother she has nothing but her tears Yet wishes you like us in health the same and longs to see a letter with your name So loving brother don't forget to write Old Gip lies on the hearth stone every night Mother can't bear to turn him out of doors and never noises now of dirty floors Father will laugh but lets her have her way and Gip for kindness get a double pay So Robin write and let us quickly see You don't forget old friends no more than we Nor let my mother have so much to blame To go three journeys ere your letter came.

From "January"

Supper removed, the mother sits,
And tells her tales by starts and fits.
Not willing to lose time or toil,
She knits or sews, and talks the while
Something, that may be warnings found
To the young listeners gaping round—
Of boys who in her early day
Strolled to the meadow-lake to play,
Where willows, oer the bank inclined
Sheltered the water from the wind,
And left it scarcely crizzled oer—
When one sank in, to rise no more!
And how, upon a market-night,
When not a star bestowed its light,
A farmer's shepherd, oer his glass,
Forgot that he had woods to pass:
And having sold his master's sheep,
Was overta'en by darkness deep.
How, coming with his startled horse,
To where two roads a hollow cross;
Where, lone guide when a stranger strays,
A white post points four different ways,
Beside the woodride's lonely gate
A murdering robber lay in wait.
The frightened horse, with broken rein,
Stood at the stable-door again;
But none came home to fill his rack,
Or take the saddle from his back;
The saddle—it was all he bore—
The man was seen alive no more!—
In her young days, beside the wood,
The gibbet in its terror stood:
Though now decayed, tis not forgot,
But dreaded as a haunted spot.—

She from her memory oft repeats
Witches' dread powers and fairy feats:

How one has oft been known to prance
In cowcribs, like a coach, to France,
And ride on sheep-trays from the fold
A race-horse speed to Burton-hold;
To join the midnight mystery's rout,
Where witches meet the yews about:
And how, when met with unawares,
They turn at once to cats or hares,
And race along with hellish flight,
Now here, now there, now out of sight!—
And how the other tiny things
Will leave their moonlight meadow-rings,
And, unperceived, through key-holes creep,
When all around have sunk to sleep,
To feast on what the cotter leaves,—
Mice are not reckoned greater thieves.
They take away, as well as eat,
And still the housewife's eye they cheat,
In spite of all the folks that swarm
In cottage small and larger farm;
They through each key-hole pop and pop,
Like wasps into a grocer's shop,
With all the things that they can win
From chance to put their plunder in;—
As shells of walnuts, split in two
By crows, who with the kernels flew;
Or acorn-cups, by stock-doves plucked,
Or egg-shells by a cuckoo sucked;
With broad leaves of the sycamore
They clothe their stolen dainties oer:
And when in cellar they regale,
Bring hazel-nuts to hold their ale;
With bung-holes bored by squirrels well,
To get the kernel from the shell;
Or maggots a way out to win,
When all is gone that grew within;
And be the key-holes eer so high,
Rush poles a ladder's help supply.
Where soft the climbers fearless tread,
On spindles made of spiders' thread.
And foul, or fair, or dark the night,
Their wild-fire lamps are burning bright:
For which full many a daring crime
Is acted in the summer-time;—
When glow-worm found in lanes remote
Is murdered for its shining coat,

And put in flowers, that nature weaves
With hollow shapes and silken leaves,
Such as the Canterbury bell,
Serving for lamp or lantern well;
Or, following with unwearied watch
The flight of one they cannot match,
As silence sliveth upon sleep,
Or thieves by dozing watch-dogs creep,
They steal from Jack-a-Lantern's tails
A light, whose guidance never fails
To aid them in the darkest night
And guide their plundering steps aright.
Rattling away in printless tracks,
Some, housed on beetles' glossy backs,
Go whisking on—and others hie
As fast as loaded moths can fly:
Some urge, the morning cock to shun,
The hardest gallop mice can run,
In chariots, lolling at their ease,
Made of whateer their fancies please;—
Things that in childhood's memory dwell—
Scooped crow-pot-stone, or cockle-shell,
With wheels at hand of mallow seeds,
Where childish sport was stringing beads;
And thus equipped, they softly pass
Like shadows on the summer-grass,
And glide away in troops together
Just as the Spring-wind drives a feather.
As light as happy dreams they creep,
Nor break the feeblest link of sleep:
A midge, if in their road a-bed,
Feels not the wheels run oer his head,
But sleeps till sunrise calls him up,
Unconscious of the passing troop,—

Thus dame the winter-night regales
With wonder's never-ceasing tales;
While in a corner, ill at ease,
Or crushing tween their father's knees,
The children—silent all the while—
And een repressed the laugh or smile—
Quake with the ague chills of fear,
And tremble though they love to hear;
Starting, while they the tales recall,
At their own shadows on the wall:
Till the old clock, that strikes unseen
Behind the picture-pasted screen

Where Eve and Adam still agree
To rob Life's fatal apple-tree,
Counts over bed-time's hour of rest,
And bids each be sleep's fearful guest.
She then her half-told tales will leave
To finish on to-morrow's eve;—
The children steal away to bed,
And up the ladder softly tread;
Scarce daring—from their fearful joys—
To look behind or make a noise;
Nor speak a word! but still as sleep
They secret to their pillows creep,
And whisper oer, in terror's way,
The prayers they dare no louder say;
Then hide their heads beneath the clothes,
And try in vain to seek repose:
While yet, to fancy's sleepless eye,
Witches on sheep-trays gallop by,
And fairies, like a rising spark,
Swarm twittering round them in the dark;
Till sleep creeps nigh to ease their cares,
And drops upon them unawares.

November

The landscape sleeps in mist from morn till noon;
And, if the sun looks through, tis with a face
Beamless and pale and round, as if the moon,
When done the journey of her nightly race,
Had found him sleeping, and supplied his place.
For days the shepherds in the fields may be,
Nor mark a patch of sky—blindfold they trace,
The plains, that seem without a bush or tree,
Whistling aloud by guess, to flocks they cannot see.

The timid hare seems half its fears to lose,
Crouching and sleeping neath its grassy lair,
And scarcely startles, though the shepherd goes
Close by its home, and dogs are barking there;
The wild colt only turns around to stare
At passer by, then knaps his hide again;
And moody crows beside the road forbear
To fly, though pelted by the passing swain;
Thus day seems turned to night, and tries to wake in vain.

The owlet leaves her hiding-place at noon,
And flaps her grey wings in the doubling light;

The hoarse jay screams to see her out so soon,
And small birds chirp and startle with affright;
Much doth it scare the superstitious wight,
Who dreams of sorry luck, and sore dismay;
While cow-boys think the day a dream of night,
And oft grow fearful on their lonely way,
Fancying that ghosts may wake, and leave their graves by day.

Yet but awhile the slumbering weather flings
Its murky prison round—then winds wake loud;
With sudden stir the startled forest sings
Winter's returning song-cloud races cloud.
And the horizon throws away its shroud,
Sweeping a stretching circle from the eye;
Storms upon storms in quick succession crowd,
And oer the sameness of the purple sky
Heaven paints, with hurried hand, wild hues of every dye.

At length it comes among the forest oaks,
With sobbing ebbs, and uproar gathering high;
The scared, hoarse raven on its cradle croaks,
And stockdove-flocks in hurried terrors fly,
While the blue hawk hangs oer them in the sky.—
The hedger hastens from the storm begun,
To seek a shelter that may keep him dry;
And foresters low bent, the wind to shun,
Scarce hear amid the strife the poacher's muttering gun.

The ploughman hears its humming rage begin,
And hies for shelter from his naked toil;
Buttoning his doublet closer to his chin,
He bends and scampers oer the elting soil,
While clouds above him in wild fury boil,
And winds drive heavily the beating rain;
He turns his back to catch his breath awhile,
Then ekes his speed and faces it again,
To seek the shepherd's hut beside the rushy plain.

The boy, that scareth from the spiry wheat
The melancholy crow—in hurry weaves,
Beneath an ivied tree, his sheltering seat,
Of rushy flags and sedges tied in sheaves,
Or from the field a shock of stubble thieves.
There he doth dithering sit, and entertain
His eyes with marking the storm-driven leaves;
Oft spying nests where he spring eggs had ta'en,
And wishing in his heart twas summer-time again.

Thus wears the month along, in checkered moods,
Sunshine and shadows, tempests loud, and calms;
One hour dies silent oer the sleepy woods,
The next wakes loud with unexpected storms;
A dreary nakedness the field deforms—
Yet many a rural sound, and rural sight,
Lives in the village still about the farms,
Where toil's rude uproar hums from morn till night
Noises, in which the ears of industry delight.

At length the stir of rural labour's still,
And industry her care awhile foregoes;
When winter comes in earnest to fulfil
His yearly task, at bleak November's close,
And stops the plough, and hides the field in snows;
When frost locks up the stream in chill delay
And mellows on the hedge the jetty sloes,
For little birds—then toil hath time for play,
And nought but threshers' flails awake the dreary day.

The Fens

Wandering by the river's edge,
I love to rustle through the sedge
And through the woods of reed to tear
Almost as high as bushes are.
Yet, turning quick with shudder chill,
As danger ever does from ill,
Fear's moment ague quakes the blood,
While plop the snake coils in the flood
And, hissing with a forked tongue,
Across the river winds along.
In coat of orange, green, and blue
Now on a willow branch I view,
Grey waving to the sunny gleam,
Kingfishers watch the ripple stream
For little fish that nimble bye
And in the gravel shallows lie.

Eddies run before the boats,
Gurgling where the fisher floats,
Who takes advantage of the gale
And hoists his handkerchief for sail
On osier twigs that form a mast—
While idly lies, nor wanted more,
The spirit that pushed him on before.

There's not a hill in all the view,
Save that a forked cloud or two
Upon the verge of distance lies
And into mountains cheats the eyes.
And as to trees the willows wear
Lopped heads as high as bushes are;
Some taller things the distance shrouds
That may be trees or stacks or clouds
Or may be nothing; still they wear
A semblance where there's nought to spare.

Among the tawny tasselled reed
The ducks and ducklings float and feed.
With head oft dabbing in the flood
They fish all day the weedy mud,
And tumbler-like are bobbing there,
Heels topsy turvy in the air.

The geese in troops come droving up,
Nibble the weeds, and take a sup;
And, closely puzzled to agree,
Chatter like gossips over tea.
The gander with his scarlet nose
When strife's at height will interpose;
And, stretching neck to that and this,
With now a mutter, now a hiss,
A nibble at the feathers too,
A sort of "pray be quiet do,"
And turning as the matter mends,
He stills them into mutual friends;
Then in a sort of triumph sings
And throws the water oer his wings.

Ah, could I see a spinney nigh,
A puddock riding in the sky
Above the oaks with easy sail
On stilly wings and forked tail,
Or meet a heath of furze in flower,
I might enjoy a quiet hour,
Sit down at rest, and walk at ease,
And find a many things to please.
But here my fancy's moods admire
The naked levels till they tire,
Nor een a molehill cushion meet
To rest on when I want a seat.

Here's little save the river scene
And grounds of oats in rustling green
And crowded growth of wheat and beans,
That with the hope of plenty leans
And cheers the farmer's gazing brow,
Who lives and triumphs in the plough—
One sometimes meets a pleasant sward
Of swarthy grass; and quickly marred
The plough soon turns it into brown,
And, when again one rambles down
The path, small hillocks burning lie
And smoke beneath a burning sky.
Green paddocks have but little charms
With gain the merchandise of farms;
And, muse and marvel where we may,
Gain mars the landscape every day—
The meadow grass turned up and copt,
The trees to stumpy dotterels lopt,
The hearth with fuel to supply
For rest to smoke and chatter bye;
Giving the joy of home delights,
The warmest mirth on coldest nights.
And so for gain, that joy's repay,
Change cheats the landscape every day,
Nor trees nor bush about it grows
That from the hatchet can repose,
And the horizon stooping smiles
Oer treeless fens of many miles.
Spring comes and goes and comes again
And all is nakedness and fen.

Spear Thistle

Where the broad sheepwalk bare and brown
[Yields] scant grass pining after showers,
And winds go fanning up and down
The little strawy bents and nodding flowers,
There the huge thistle, spurred with many thorns,
The suncrackt upland's russet swells adorns.

Not undevoid of beauty there they come,
Armed warriors, waiting neither suns nor showers,
Guarding the little clover plots to bloom
While sheep nor oxen dare not crop their flowers
Unsheathing their own knobs of tawny flowers
When summer cometh in her hottest hours.

The pewit, swopping up and down
And screaming round the passer bye,
Or running oer the herbage brown
With copple crown uplifted high,
Loves in its clumps to make a home
Where danger seldom cares to come.

The yellowhammer, often prest
For spot to build and be unseen,
Will in its shelter trust her nest
When fields and meadows glow with green;
And larks, though paths go closely bye,
Will in its shade securely lie.

The partridge too, that scarce can trust
The open downs to be at rest,
Will in its clumps lie down, and dust
And prune its horseshoe-circled breast,
And oft in shining fields of green
Will lay and raise its brood unseen.

The sheep when hunger presses sore
May nip the clover round its nest;
But soon the thistle wounding sore
Relieves it from each brushing guest,
That leaves a bit of wool behind,
The yellowhammer loves to find.

The horse will set his foot and bite
Close to the ground lark's guarded nest
And snort to meet the prickly sight;
He fans the feathers of her breast—
Yet thistles prick so deep that he
Turns back and leaves her dwelling free.

Its prickly knobs the dews of morn
Doth bead with dressing rich to see,
When threads doth hang from thorn to thorn
Like the small spinner's tapestry;
And from the flowers a sultry smell
Comes that agrees with summer well.

The bee will make its bloom a bed,
The humble bee in tawny brown;
And one in jacket fringed with red
Will rest upon its velvet down
When overtaken in the rain,
And wait till sunshine comes again.

And there are times when travel goes
Along the sheep tracks' beaten ways,
Then pleasure many a praise bestows
Upon its blossoms' pointed rays,
When other things are parched beside
And hot day leaves it in its pride.

Idle Fame

I would not wish the burning blaze
Of fame around a restless world,
The thunder and the storm of praise
In crowded tumults heard and hurled.
I would not be a flower to stand
The stare of every passer-bye;
But in some nook of fairyland,
Seen in the praise of beauty's eye.

Approaching Night

O take this world away from me;
Its strife I cannot bear to see,
Its very praises hurt me more
Than een its coldness did before,
Its hollow ways torment me now
And start a cold sweat on my brow,
Its noise I cannot bear to hear,
Its joy is trouble to my ear,
Its ways I cannot bear to see,
Its crowds are solitudes to me.
O, how I long to be agen
That poor and independent man,
With labour's lot from morn to night
And books to read at candle light;
That followed labour in the field
From light to dark when toil could yield
Real happiness with little gain,
Rich thoughtless health unknown to pain:
Though, leaning on my spade to rest,
I've thought how richer folks were blest
And knew not quiet was the best.

Go with your tauntings, go;
Neer think to hurt me so;
I'll scoff at your disdain.
Cold though the winter blow,

When hills are free from snow
  It will be spring again.

  So go, and fare thee well,
Nor think ye'll have to tell
  Of wounded hearts from me,
Locked up in your hearts cell.
Mine still at home doth dwell
  In its first liberty.

  Bees sip not at one flower,
Spring comes not with one shower,
  Nor shines the sun alone
Upon one favoured hour,
But with unstinted power
  Makes every day his own.

  And for my freedom's sake
With such I'll pattern take,
  And rove and revel on.
Your gall shall never make
Me honied paths forsake;
  So prythee get thee gone.

  And when my toil is blest
And I find a maid possest
  Of truth that's not in thee,
Like bird that finds its nest
I'll stop and take my rest;
  And love as she loves me.

Farewell and Defiance to Love

  Love and thy vain employs, away
From this too oft deluded breast!
No longer will I court thy stay,
To be my bosom's teazing guest.
Thou treacherous medicine, reckoned pure,
Thou quackery of the harassed heart,
That kills what it pretends to cure,
  Life's mountebank thou art.

  With nostrums vain of boasted powers,
That, ta'en, a worse disorder leave;
An asp hid in a group of flowers,
That bites and stings when few perceive;
Thou mock-truce to the troubled mind,
Leading it more in sorrow's way,

Freedom, that leaves us more confined,
I bid thee hence away.

Dost taunt, and deem thy power beyond
The resolution reason gave?
Tut! Falsity hath snapt each bond,
That kept me once thy quiet slave,
And made thy snare a spider's thread,
Which een my breath can break in twain;
Nor will I be, like Sampson, led
To trust thy wiles again.

I took thee as my staff to guide
Me on the road I did pursue,
And when my weakness most relied
Upon its strength it broke in two.
I took thee as my friendly host
That counsel might in dangers show,
But when I needed thee the most
I found thou wert my foe.

Tempt me no more with rosy cheeks,
Nor daze my reason with bright eyes;
I'm wearied with thy painted freaks,
And sicken at such vanities:
Be roses fine as eer they will,
They, with the meanest, fade and die,
And eyes, though thronged with darts to kill,
Share like mortality.
Feed the young bard, that madly sips
His nectar-draughts from folly's flowers,
Bright eyes, fair cheeks, and ruby lips,
Till muses melt to honey showers;
Lure him to thrum thy empty lays,
While flattery listens to the chimes,
Till words themselves grow sick with praise
And stop for want of rhymes.

Let such be still thy paramours,
And chaunt love's old and idle tune,
Robbing the spring of all its flowers,
And heaven of all her stars and moon,
To gild with dazzling similes
Blind folly's vain and empty lay:
I'm sobered from such phantasies,
So get thee hence away.

Nor bid me sigh for mine own cost,
Nor count its loss, for mine annoy,
Nor say my stubbornness hath lost
A paradise of dainty joy:
I'll not believe thee, till I know
That sober reason turns an ape,
And acts the harlequin, to show
That cares in every shape,

Heart-achings, sighs, and grief-wrung tears,
Shame-blushes at betrayed distress,
Dissembled smiles, and jealous fears,
Are nought but real happiness:
Then will I mourn what now I brave,
And suffer Celia's quirks to be
(Like a poor fate-bewilder'd slave,)
The rulers of my destiny.

I'll weep and sigh wheneer she wills
To frown, and when she deigns to smile
It shall be cure for all my ills,
And, foolish still, I'll laugh the while;
But till that comes, I'll bless the rules
Experience taught, and deem it wise
To hold thee as the game of fools,
And all thy tricks despise.

To John Milton

"*From his honoured friend, William Davenant*"

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 passed thy sun,
They could not hide it long;
Its brightness soon exhaled away
Dank 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,
With the eternity of song.

Thy genius saw, in quiet mood,
Gilt fashion's follies pass thee by,
And, like the monarch of the wood,
Towered oer it to the sky,
Where thou couldst 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 passed 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,
Oer 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 neer 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;

A sunny wreath for poets meet,
From Helicon's immortal soil,
Where sacred Time with pilgrim feet
Walks forth to worship, not to spoil,
A wreath which Fame creates and bears,
And deathless genius only heirs.

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.

The Vanities of Life

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.—*Solomon*

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
Is 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 that pride exalts
Thyself in other's 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 the display?
—The country magistrate,
The meanest 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,
Like toys of golden glow
That's 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 oer 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 house and in land?
Go, read the fairy lure
To twist a cord in 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 slipping eels,
That slide the firmest hold:
Though sweet as sleep with health
Thy lulling luck may be,
Pride may oerstride thy wealth,
And check prosperity.

Dost think that beauty's power
Life 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;
View but the clearest sky,

And thou shalt find a cloud;
Nor call each face ye 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 ungive,
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 an harlot's smile,
And by her wiles are led,
Plays, with a sword the while
Hung dropping oer his head.

Dost doubt my warning song?
Then doubt the sun gives light,
Doubt truth to teach thee 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 eer 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.

Wouldst 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.

Death

Why should man's high aspiring mind
Burn in him with so proud a breath,
When all his haughty views can find
In this world yields to death?
The fair, the brave, the vain, the wise,
The rich, the poor, the great, and small,
Are each but worm's anatomies
To strew his quiet hall.

Power may make many earthly gods,
Where gold and bribery's guilt prevails,
But death's unwelcome, honest odds
Kick o'er the unequal scales.
The flattered great may clamours raise
Of power, and their own weakness hide,
But death shall find unlooked-for ways
To end the farce of pride,

An arrow hurtled eer so high,
From een a giant's sinewy strength,
In Time's untraced eternity
Goes but a pigmy length;
Nay, whirring from the tortured string,
With all its pomp of hurried flight,
Tis by the skylark's little wing
Outmeasured in its height.

Just so man's boasted strength and power
Shall fade before death's lightest stroke,
Laid lower than the meanest flower,
Whose pride oer-topt the oak;
And he who, like a blighting blast,
Dispeopled worlds with war's alarms

Shall be himself destroyed at last
  By poor despised worms.

  Tyrants in vain their powers secure,
And awe slaves' murmurs with a frown,
For unawed death at last is sure
  To sap the babels down.
A stone thrown upward to the sky
Will quickly meet the ground agen;
So men-gods of earth's vanity
  Shall drop at last to men;

  And Power and Pomp their all resign,
Blood-purchased thrones and banquet halls.
Fate waits to sack Ambition's shrine
  As bare as prison walls,
Where the poor suffering wretch bows down
To laws a lawless power hath passed;
And pride, and power, and king, and clown
  Shall be Death's slaves at last.

  Time, the prime minister of Death!
There's nought can bribe his honest will.
He stops the richest tyrant's breath
  And lays his mischief still.
Each wicked scheme for power all stops,
With grandeurs false and mock display,
As eve's shades from high mountain tops
  Fade with the rest away.

  Death levels all things in his march;
Nought can resist his mighty strength;
The palace proud, triumphal arch,
  Shall mete its shadow's length.
The rich, the poor, one common bed
Shall find in the unhonoured grave,
Where weeds shall crown alike the head
  Of tyrant and of slave.

The Fallen Elm

  Old elm, that murmured in our chimney top
The sweetest anthem autumn ever made
And into mellow whispering calms would drop
When showers fell on thy many coloured shade
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made—
While darkness came as it would strangle light

With the black tempest of a winter night
That rocked thee like a cradle in thy root—
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid
Thy strength without—while all within was mute.
It seasoned comfort to our hearts' desire,
We felt thy kind protection like a friend
And edged our chairs up closer to the fire,
Enjoying comfort that was never penned.
Old favourite tree, thou'st seen time's changes lower,
Though change till now did never injure thee;
For time beheld thee as her sacred dower
And nature claimed thee her domestic tree.
Storms came and shook thee many a weary hour,
Yet stedfast to thy home thy roots have been;
Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower
Till earth grew iron—still thy leaves were green.
The children sought thee in thy summer shade
And made their playhouse rings of stick and stone;
The mavis sang and felt himself alone
While in thy leaves his early nest was made.
And I did feel his happiness mine own,
Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed,
Friend not inanimate—though stocks and stones
There are, and many formed of flesh and bones.
Thou owned a language by which hearts are stirred
Deeper than by a feeling clothed in word,
And speakest now what's known of every tongue,
Language of pity and the force of wrong.
What cant assumes, what hypocrites will dare,
Speaks home to truth and shows it what they are.
I see a picture which thy fate displays
And learn a lesson from thy destiny;
Self-interest saw thee stand in freedom's ways—
So thy old shadow must a tyrant be.
Tnou'st heard the knave, abusing those in power,
Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free;
Thou'st sheltered hypocrites in many a shower,
That when in power would never shelter thee.
Thou'st heard the knave supply his canting powers
With wrong's illusions when he wanted friends;
That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers
And when clouds vanished made thy shade amends—
With axe at root he felled thee to the ground
And barked of freedom—O I hate the sound
Time hears its visions speak,—and age sublime
Hath made thee a disciple unto time.

—It grows the cant term of enslaving tools
To wrong another by the name of right;
Thus came enclosure—ruin was its guide,
But freedom's cottage soon was thrust aside
And workhouse prisons raised upon the site.
Een nature's dwellings far away from men,
The common heath, became the spoiler's prey;
The rabbit had not where to make his den
And labour's only cow was drove away.
No matter—wrong was right and right was wrong,
And freedom's bawl was sanction to the song.
—Such was thy ruin, music-making elm;
The right of freedom was to injure thine:
As thou wert served, so would they overwhelm
In freedom's name the little that is mine.
And there are knaves that brawl for better laws
And cant of tyranny in stronger power
Who glut their vile unsatiated maws
And freedom's birthright from the weak devour.

Sport in the Meadows

Maytime is to the meadows coming in,
And cowslip peeps have gotten eer so big,
And water blobs and all their golden kin
Crowd round the shallows by the striding brig.
Daisies and buttercups and ladysmocks
Are all abouten shining here and there,
Nodding about their gold and yellow locks
Like morts of folken flocking at a fair.
The sheep and cows are crowding for a share
And snatch the blossoms in such eager haste
That basket-bearing children running there
Do think within their hearts they'll get them all
And hoot and drive them from their graceless waste
As though there wa'n't a cowslip peep to spare.
—For they want some for tea and some for wine
And some to maken up a cuckaball
To throw across the garland's silken line
That reaches oer the street from wall to wall.
—Good gracious me, how merrily they fare:
One sees a fairer cowslip than the rest,
And off they shout—the foremost bidding fair
To get the prize—and earnest half and jest
The next one pops her down—and from her hand
Her basket falls and out her cowslips all

Tumble and litter there—the merry band
In laughing friendship round about her fall
To helpen gather up the littered flowers
That she no loss may mourn. And now the wind
In frolic mood among the merry hours
Wakens with sudden start and tosses off
Some untied bonnet on its dancing wings;
Away they follow with a scream and laugh,
And aye the youngest ever lags behind,
Till on the deep lake's very bank it hings.
They shout and catch it and then off they start
And chase for cowslips merry as before,
And each one seems so anxious at the heart
As they would even get them all and more.
One climbs a molehill for a bunch of may,
One stands on tiptoe for a linnet's nest
And pricks her hand and throws her flowers away
And runs for plantin leaves to have it drest.
So do they run abouten all the day
And teaze the grass-hid larks from getting rest.
—Scarce give they time in their unruly haste
To tie a shoestring that the grass unties—
And thus they run the meadows' bloom to waste,
Till even comes and dulls their phantasies,
When one finds losses out to stifle smiles
Of silken bonnet-strings—and utters sigh
Oer garments renten clambering over stiles.
Yet in the morning fresh afield they hie,
Bidding the last day's troubles all goodbye;
When red pied cow again their coming hears,
And ere they clap the gate she tosses up
Her head and hastens from the sport she fears:
The old yoe calls her lamb nor cares to stoop
To crop a cowslip in their company.
Thus merrily the little noisy troop
Along the grass as rude marauders hie,
For ever noisy and for ever gay
While keeping in the meadows holiday.

Death

The winds and waters are in his command,
Held as a courser in the rider's hand.
He lets them loose, they triumph at his will:
He checks their course and all is calm and still.

Life's hopes waste all to nothingness away
As showers at night wash out the steps of day.

* * * * *

The tyrant, in his lawless power deterred,
Bows before death, tame as a broken sword.
One dyeth in his strength and, torn from ease,
Groans in death pangs like tempests in the trees.
Another from the bitterness of clay
Falls calm as storms drop on an autumn day,
With noiseless speed as swift as summer light
Death slays and keeps her weapons out of sight.

The tyrants that do act the God in clay
And for earth's glories throw the heavens away,
Whose breath in power did like to thunder sear,
When anger hurried on the heels of fear,
Whose rage planned hosts of murders at a breath—
Here in sound silence sheath their rage in death.

Their feet, that crushed down freedom to its grave
And felt the very earth they trod a slave,
How quiet here they lie in death's cold arms
Without the power to crush the feeble worms
Who spite of all the dreadful fears they made
Creep there to conquer and are not afraid.

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 thy 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 oer,
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

Oer 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 pendent haws,

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

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

While oer the pleachy lands of mellow brown,
The mower's stubbling scythe clogs to his foot
The ever eking whisp,
With sharp and sudden jerk,

Till into formal rows the russet shocks
Crowd the blank field to thatch time-weathered 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 bye
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 thine,
Not broken inharmoniously, as now
That lone and vagrant bee
Booms faint with wearp 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 sicken 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 parch-lipped summer pines in drought away,
Then from thine ivied trance
Awake to glories new.

Summer Images

Now swarthy summer, by rude health embrowned,
Precedence takes of rosy fingered spring;
And laughing joy, with wild flowers pranked and crowned,
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 smiles 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 mirth 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 ears with mellow horn.

The green-swathed grasshopper, on treble pipe,
Sings there, and dances, in mad-hearted pranks;
There 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.

There 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 oerflow,
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.

And 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;
Where passions vain and rude
By calm reflection, 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;

And green lane traverse heedless where it goes
Nought guessing, till some sudden turn espies
Rude battered finger post, that stooping shows
Where the snug mystery lies;
And then a mossy spire, with ivy crown,
Clears 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 yminted new;

And mark by rustic bridge, oer 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:

Then thread the sunny valley laced with streams,
Or forests rude, and the oershadowed brims
Of simple ponds, where idle shepherd dreams,

And streaks 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 oer 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 bents and 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:

And sawning boy by tanning corn espy,
With clapping noise to startle birds away,
And hear him bawl to every passer by
To know the hour of day;
And see the uncradled breeze, refreshed and strong,
With waking blossoms play,
And breathe eolian song.

I love the south-west wind, or low or loud,
And not the less when sudden drops of rain
Moisten my pallid 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 oer the mingling scenes
Far spreads the laughing sky.

And wind-enamoured aspin—mark the leaves
Turn up their silver lining to the sun,
And list! the brustling noise, that oft deceives,
And makes the sheep-boy run;
The sound so mimics fast-approaching showers,
He thinks the rain 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 nighty circlet makes;
The glow-worm burnishes its lamp anew
Oer meadows dew-besprent; and beetle wakes
Enquiries ever new,
Teazing each passing ear with murmurs vain,
As wanting to pursue
His homeward path again.

Hark to the melody of distant bells
That on the wind with pleasing hum rebounds
By fitful starts, then musically swells
Oer the dun 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,
Then scour the dewy plain.

How sweet the soothing calm that smoothly stills
Oer 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 cheered me when a boy.
Play—pastime—all time's blotting pen concealed,
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;
It loves in quiet moods to sympathize,
And meet vibrating joys
Oer nature's pleasant things; nor will it deem
Pastime the muse employs
A vain obtrusive theme.

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 eer 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.

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.

Nature's Hymn to the Deity

All nature owns with one accord
The great and universal Lord:
The sun proclaims him through the day,
The moon when daylight drops away,
The very darkness smiles to wear
The stars that show us God is there,
On moonlight seas soft gleams the sky
And "God is with us" waves reply.

Winds breathe from God's abode "we come,"
Storms louder own God is their home,
And thunder yet with louder call,
Sounds "God is mightiest over all";
Till earth right loath the proof to miss
Echoes triumphantly "He is,"
And air and ocean makes reply,
God reigns on earth, in air and sky.

All nature owns with one accord
The great and universal Lord:
Insect and bird and tree and flower—
The witnesses of every hour—
Are pregnant with his prophesy
And "God is with us" all reply.
The first link in the mighty plan
Is still—and all upbraideth man.

Decay

O Poesy is on the wane,
For Fancy's visions all unfitting;
I hardly know 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 is 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 adry
To pledge her health in draughts divine;
Smiles made it nectar from the sky,
Love turned een 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 oer 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 overswelling,
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 hills
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!

The Cellar Door

By the old tavern door on the causey there lay
A hogshead of stingo just rolled from a dray,
And there stood the blacksmith awaiting a drop
As dry as the cinders that lay in his shop;
And there stood the cobbler as dry as a bun,
Almost crackt like a bucket when left in the sun.
He'd whetted his knife upon pendil and hone
Till he'd not got a spittle to moisten the stone;
So ere he could work—though he'd lost the whole day—
He must wait the new broach and bemoisten his clay.

The cellar was empty, each barrel was drained
To its dregs—and Sir John like a rebel remained
In the street—for removal too powerful and large
For two or three topers to take into charge.
Odd zooks, said a gipsey, with bellows to mend,
Had I strength I would just be for helping a friend
To walk on his legs: but a child in the street
Had as much power as he to put John on his feet.
Then up came the blacksmith: Sir Barley, said he,
I should just like to storm your old tower for a spree;

And my strength for your strength and bar your renown
I'd soon try your spirit by cracking your crown.
And the cobbler he tuckt up his apron and spit
In his hands for a burster—but devil a bit
Would he move—so as yet they made nothing of land;
For there lay the knight like a whale in the sand.
Said the tinker: If I could but drink of his vein
I should just be as strong and as stubborn again.
Push along, said the toper, the cellar's adry:
There's nothing to moisten the mouth of a fly.

Says the host, We shall burn out with thirst, he's so big.
There's a cag of small swipes half as sour as a wig.
In such like extremes, why, extremes will come pat;
So let's go and wet all our whistles with that.
Says the gipsey, May I never bottom a chair
If I drink of small swipes while Sir John's lying there.
And the blacksmith he threw off his apron and swore
Small swipes should bemoisten his gullet no more:
Let it out on the floor for the dry cock-a-roach—
And he held up his hammer with threatens to broach

Sir John in his castle without leave or law
And suck out his blood with a reed or a straw
Ere he'd soak at the swipes—and he turned him to start,
Till the host for high treason came down a full quart.
Just then passed the dandy and turned up his nose:
They'd fain have him shove, but he looked at his clothes
And nipt his nose closer and twirled his stick round
And simpered, Tis nuisance to lie on the ground.
But Bacchus, he laughed from the old tavern sign,
Saying, Go on, thou shadow, and let the sun shine.

Then again they all tried, and the tinker he swore
That the hogshead had grown twice as heavy or more.
Nay nay, said the toper, and reeled as he spoke,
We're all getting weak, that's the end of the joke.
The ploughman came up and cut short his old tune,
Hallooed "woi" to his horses and though it was June
Said he'd help them an hour ere he'd keep them adry;
Well done, said the blacksmith with hopes running high;
He moves, and, by jingo, success to the plough!
Aye aye, said the cobbler, we'll conquer him now.

The hogshead rolled forward, the toper fell back,
And the host laughed aloud as his sides they would crack
To see the old tinker's toil make such a gap

In his coat as to rend it from collar to flap.
But the tinker he grumbled and cried Fiddle-dee!
This garment hath been an old tenant with me;
And a needle and thread with a little good skill
When I've leisure will make it stand more weathers still.
Then crack went his breeks from the hip to the knee
With his thrusting—no matter; for nothing cared he.

So long as Sir John rolled along to the door,
He's a chip of our block, said the blacksmith, and swore;
And as sure as I live to drive nails in a shoe
He shall have at my cost a full pitcher or two.
And the toper he hiccuped—which hindered an oath—
So long as he'd credit, he'd pitcher them both.
But the host stopt to hint when he'd ordered the dray
Sir Barleycorn's order was purchase and pay.
And now the old knight is imprisoned and ta'en
To waste in the tavern man's cellar again.

And now, said the blacksmith, let forfeits come first
For the insult swipes offered, or his hoops I will burst.
Here it is, my old hearties—Then drink your thirst full,
Said the host, for the stingo is worth a strong pull.
Never fear for your legs if they're broken to-day;
Winds only blow straws, dust, and feathers away.
But the cask that is full, like a giant he lies,
And giants alone can his spirits capsize.
If he lies in the path, though a king's coming bye,
John Barleycorn's mighty and there he will lie.

Then the toper sat down with a hiccup and felt
If he'd still an odd coin in his pocket to melt,
And he made a wry face, for his pocket was bare.
—But he laughed and danced up, What, old boy, are you there?
When he felt that a stiver had got to his knee
Through a hole in his fob, and right happy was he.
Says the tinker, I've brawled till no breath I have got
And not met with twopence to purchase a pot.
Says the toper, I've powder to charge a long gun,
And a stiver I've found when I thought I'd got none;

So helping a thirsty old friend in his need
Is my duty—take heart, thou art welcome indeed.
Then the smith with his tools in Sir John made a breach,
And the toper he hiccuped and ended his speech;
And pulled at the quart, till the snob he declared
When he went to drink next that the bottom was bared.

No matter for that, said the toper, and grinned;
I had but a soak and neer rested for wind.
That's the law, said the smith, with a look rather vexed,
But the quart was a forfeit; so pay for the next.

Thus they talked of their skill and their labour till noon
When the sober man's toil was exactly half done,
And there the plough lay—people hardly could pass
And the horses let loose polished up the short grass
And browsed on the bottle of flags lying there,
By the gipsey's old budget, for mending a chair.
The miller's horse tied to the old smithy door
Stood stamping his feet, by the flies bitten sore,
Awaiting the smith as he wanted a shoe;
And he stampt till another fell off and made two:

Till the miller, expecting that all would get loose,
Went to seek him and cursed him outright for a goose;
But he dipt his dry beak in the mug once or twice
And forgot all his passion and toil in a trice.
And the flybitten horse at the old smithy post
Might stamp till his shoes and his legs they were lost.
He sung his old songs and forgot his old mill—
Blow winds high or low, she might rest her at will.
And the cobbler, in spite of his bustle for pelf,
Left the shop all the day to take care of itself.

And the toper who carried his house on his head,
No wife to be teazing, no bairns to be fed,
Would sit out the week or the month or the year
Or a life-time so long as he'd credit for beer.
The ploughman he talked of his skill as divine,
How he could plough thurrows as straight as a line;
And the blacksmith he swore, had he but the command,
He could shoe the king's hunter the best in the land;
And the cobbler declared, was his skill but once seen,
He should soon get an order for shoes from the queen.

But the tinker he swore he could beat them all three,
For gi' me a pair of old bellows, says he,
And I'll make them roar out like the wind in a storm
And make them blow fire out of coal hardly warm.
The toper said nothing but wished the quart full
And swore he could toss it all off at a pull.
Have one, said the tinker; but wit was away,
When the bet was to bind him he'd nothing to pay.

And thus in the face of life's sun-and-shower weather
They drank, bragged, and sung, and got merry together.

The sun he went down—the last gleam from his brow
Flung a smile of repose on the holiday plough;
The glooms they approached, and the dews like a rain
Fell thick and hung pearls on the old sorrel mane
Of the horse that the miller had brought to be shod,
And the morning awoke, saw a sight rather odd—
For a bit of the halter still hung at the door,
Bit through by the horse now at feed on the moor;
And the old tinker's budget lay still in the weather,
While all kept on singing and drinking together.

The Flitting

I've left my own old home of homes,
Green fields and every pleasant place;
The summer like a stranger comes,
I pause and hardly know her face.
I miss the hazel's happy green,
The blue bell's quiet hanging blooms,
Where envy's sneer was never seen,
Where staring malice never comes.

I miss the heath, its yellow furze,
Molehills and rabbit tracks that lead
Through beesom, ling, and teazel burrs
That spread a wilderness indeed;
The woodland oaks and all below
That their white powdered branches shield,
The mossy paths: the very crow
Croaks music in my native field.

I sit me in my corner chair
That seems to feel itself from home,
And hear bird music here and there
From hawthorn hedge and orchard come;
I hear, but all is strange and new:
I sat on my old bench in June,
The sailing puddock's shrill "peelew"
On Royce Wood seemed a sweeter tune.

I walk adown the narrow lane,
The nightingale is singing now,
But like to me she seems at loss
For Royce Wood and its shielding bough.

I lean upon the window sill,
The trees and summer happy seem;
Green, sunny green they shine, but still
My heart goes far away to dream.

Of happiness, and thoughts arise
With home-bred pictures many a one,
Green lanes that shut out burning skies
And old crooked stiles to rest upon;
Above them hangs the maple tree,
Below grass swells a velvet hill,
And little footpaths sweet to see
Go seeking sweeter places still,

With bye and bye a brook to cross
Oer which a little arch is thrown:
No brook is here, I feel the loss
From home and friends and all alone.
—The stone pit with its shelvy sides
Seemed hanging rocks in my esteem;
I miss the prospect far and wide
From Langley Bush, and so I seem

Alone and in a stranger scene,
Far, far from spots my heart esteems,
The closen with their ancient green,
Heaths, woods, and pastures, sunny streams.
The hawthorns here were hung with may,
But still they seem in deader green,
The sun een seems to lose its way
Nor knows the quarter it is in.

I dwell in trifles like a child,
I feel as ill becomes a man,
And still my thoughts like weedlings wild
Grow up to blossom where they can.
They turn to places known so long
I feel that joy was dwelling there,
So home-fed pleasure fills the song
That has no present joys to hear.

I read in books for happiness,
But books are like the sea to joy,
They change—as well give age the glass
To hunt its visage when a boy.
For books they follow fashions new
And throw all old esteems away,

In crowded streets flowers never grew,
But many there hath died away.

Some sing the pomps of chivalry
As legends of the ancient time,
Where gold and pearls and mystery
Are shadows painted for sublime;
But passions of sublimity
Belong to plain and simpler things,
And David underneath a tree
Sought when a shepherd Salem's springs,

Where moss did into cushions spring,
Forming a seat of velvet hue,
A small unnoticed trifling thing
To all but heaven's hailing dew.
And David's crown hath passed away,
Yet poesy breathes his shepherd-skill,
His palace lost—and to this day
The little moss is blossoming still.

Strange scenes mere shadows are to me,
Vague impersonifying things;
I love with my old haunts to be
By quiet woods and gravel springs,
Where little pebbles wear as smooth
As hermits' beads by gentle floods,
Whose noises do my spirits soothe
And warm them into singing moods.

Here every tree is strange to me,
All foreign things where eer I go,
There's none where boyhood made a swee
Or clambered up to rob a crow.
No hollow tree or woodland bower
Well known when joy was beating high,
Where beauty ran to shun a shower
And love took pains to keep her dry,

And laid the sheaf upon the ground
To keep her from the dripping grass,
And ran for stocks and set them round
Till scarce a drop of rain could pass
Through; where the maidens they reclined
And sung sweet ballads now forgot,
Which brought sweet memories to the mind,
But here no memory knows them not.

There have I sat by many a tree
And leaned oer many a rural stile,
And conned my thoughts as joys to me,
Nought heeding who might frown or smile.
Twas nature's beauty that inspired
My heart with rapture not its own,
And she's a fame that never tires;
How could I feel myself alone?

No, pasture molehills used to lie
And talk to me of sunny days,
And then the glad sheep resting bye
All still in ruminating praise
Of summer and the pleasant place
And every weed and blossom too
Was looking upward in my face
With friendship's welcome "how do ye do?"

All tenants of an ancient place
And heirs of noble heritage,
Coeval they with Adam's race
And blest with more substantial age.
For when the world first saw the sun
These little flowers beheld him too,
And when his love for earth begun
They were the first his smiles to woo.

There little lambtoe bunches springs
In red tinged and begolden dye
For ever, and like China kings
They come but never seem to die.
There may-bloom with its little threads
Still comes upon the thorny bowers
And neer forgets those prickly heads
Like fairy pins amid the flowers.

And still they bloom as on the day
They first crowned wilderness and rock,
When Abel haply wreathed with may
The firstlings of his little flock,
And Eve might from the matted thorn
To deck her lone and lovely brow
Reach that same rose that heedless scorn
Misnames as the dog rosey now.

Give me no high-flown fangled things,
No haughty pomp in marching chime,
Where muses play on golden strings

And splendour passes for sublime,
Where cities stretch as far as fame
And fancy's straining eye can go,
And piled until the sky for shame
Is stooping far away below.

I love the verse that mild and bland
Breathes of green fields and open sky,
I love the muse that in her hand
Bears flowers of native poesy;
Who walks nor skips the pasture brook
In scorn, but by the drinking horse
Leans oer its little brig to look
How far the sallows lean across,

And feels a rapture in her breast
Upon their root-fringed grains to mark
A hermit morehen's sedgy nest
Just like a naiad's summer bark.
She counts the eggs she cannot reach
Admires the spot and loves it well,
And yearns, so nature's lessons teach,
Amid such neighbourhoods to dwell.

I love the muse who sits her down
Upon the molehill's little lap,
Who feels no fear to stain her gown
And pauses by the hedgerow gap;
Not with that affectation, praise
Of song, to sing and never see
A field flower grown in all her days
Or een a forest's aged tree.

Een here my simple feelings nurse
A love for every simple weed,
And een this little shepherd's purse
Grieves me to cut it up; indeed
I feel at times a love and joy
For every weed and every thing,
A feeling kindred from a boy,
A feeling brought with every Spring.

And why? this shepherd's purse that grows
In this strange spot, in days gone bye
Grew in the little garden rows
Of my old home now left; and I
Feel what I never felt before,
This weed an ancient neighbour here,

And though I own the spot no more
Its every trifle makes it dear.

The ivy at the parlour end,
The woodbine at the garden gate,
Are all and each affection's friend
That render parting desolate.
But times will change and friends must part
And nature still can make amends;
Their memory lingers round the heart
Like life whose essence is its friends.

Time looks on pomp with vengeful mood
Or killing apathy's disdain;
So where old marble cities stood
Poor persecuted weeds remain.
She feels a love for little things
That very few can feel beside,
And still the grass eternal springs
Where castles stood and grandeur died.

Remembrances

Summer's pleasures they are gone like to visions every one,
And the cloudy days of autumn and of winter cometh on.
I tried to call them back, but unbidden they are gone
Far away from heart and eye and forever far away.
Dear heart, and can it be that such raptures meet decay?
I thought them all eternal when by Langley Bush I lay,
I thought them joys eternal when I used to shout and play
On its bank at "clink and bandy," "chock" and "taw" and "ducking stone,"
Where silence sitteth now on the wild heath as her own
Like a ruin of the past all alone.

When I used to lie and sing by old Eastwell's boiling spring,
When I used to tie the willow boughs together for a swing,
And fish with crooked pins and thread and never catch a thing,
With heart just like a feather, now as heavy as a stone;
When beneath old Lea Close oak I the bottom branches broke
To make our harvest cart like so many working folk,
And then to cut a straw at the brook to have a soak.
O I never dreamed of parting or that trouble had a sting,
Or that pleasures like a flock of birds would ever take to wing,
Leaving nothing but a little naked spring.

When jumping time away on old Crossberry Way,
And eating awes like sugarplums ere they had lost the may,
And skipping like a leveret before the peep of day

On the roly poly up and downs of pleasant Swordy Well,
When in Round Oak's narrow lane as the south got black again
We sought the hollow ash that was shelter from the rain,
With our pockets full of peas we had stolen from the grain;
How delicious was the dinner time on such a showery day!
O words are poor receipts for what time hath stole away,
The ancient pulpit trees and the play.

When for school oer Little Field with its brook and wooden brig,
Where I swaggered like a man though I was not half so big,
While I held my little plough though twas but a willow twig,
And drove my team along made of nothing but a name,
"Gee hep" and "hoit" and "woi"—O I never call to mind
These pleasant names of places but I leave a sigh behind,
While I see little mouldiwarps hang sweeing to the wind
On the only aged willow that in all the field remains,
And nature hides her face while they're sweeing in their chains
And in a silent murmuring complains.

Here was commons for their hills, where they seek for freedom still,
Though every common's gone and though traps are set to kill
The little homeless miners—O it turns my bosom chill
When I think of old Sneap Green, Puddock's Nook and Hilly Snow,
Where bramble bushes grew and the daisy gemmed in dew
And the hills of silken grass like to cushions to the view,
Where we threw the pismire crumbs when we'd nothing else to do,
All levelled like a desert by the never weary plough,
All banished like the sun where that cloud is passing now
And settled here for ever on its brow.

O I never thought that joys would run away from boys,
Or that boys would change their minds and forsake such summer joys;
But alack I never dreamed that the world had other toys
To petrify first feelings like the fable into stone,
Till I found the pleasure past and a winter come at last,
Then the fields were sudden bare and the sky got overcast
And boyhood's pleasing haunt like a blossom in the blast
Was shrivelled to a withered weed and trampled down and done,
Till vanished was the morning spring and set the summer sun
And winter fought her battle strife and won.

By Langley Bush I roam, but the bush hath left its hill,
On Cowper Green I stray, tis a desert strange and chill,
And the spreading Lea Close oak, ere decay had penned its will,
To the axe of the spoiler and self-interest fell a prey,
And Crossberry Way and old Round Oak's narrow lane
With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again,

Enclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain,
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
And hung the moles for traitors—though the brook is running still
It runs a sicker brook, cold and chill.

O had I known as then joy had left the paths of men,
I had watched her night and day, be sure, and never slept agen,
And when she turned to go, O I'd caught her mantle then,
And wooed her like a lover by my lonely side to stay;
Ay, knelt and worshipped on, as love in beauty's bower,
And clung upon her smiles as a bee upon a flower,
And gave her heart my posies, all cropt in a sunny hour,
As keepsakes and pledges all to never fade away;
But love never heeded to treasure up the may,
So it went the common road to decay.

The Cottager

True as the church clock hand the hour pursues
He plods about his toils and reads the news,
And at the blacksmith's shop his hour will stand
To talk of "Lunun" as a foreign land.
For from his cottage door in peace or strife
He neer went fifty miles in all his life.
His knowledge with old notions still combined
Is twenty years behind the march of mind.
He views new knowledge with suspicious eyes
And thinks it blasphemy to be so wise.
On steam's almighty tales he wondering looks
As witchcraft gleaned from old blackletter books.
Life gave him comfort but denied him wealth,
He toils in quiet and enjoys his health,
He smokes a pipe at night and drinks his beer
And runs no scores on tavern screens to clear.
He goes to market all the year about
And keeps one hour and never stays it out.
Een at St. Thomas tide old Rover's bark
Hails Dapple's trot an hour before it's dark.
He is a simple-worded plain old man
Whose good intents take errors in their plan.
Oft sentimental and with saddened vein
He looks on trifles and bemoans their pain,
And thinks the angler mad, and loudly storms
With emphasis of speech oer murdered worms.
And hunters cruel—pleading with sad care
Pity's petition for the fox and hare,

Yet feels self-satisfaction in his woes
For war's crushed myriads of his slaughtered foes.
He is right scrupulous in one pretext
And wholesale errors swallows in the next.
He deems it sin to sing, yet not to say
A song—a mighty difference in his way.
And many a moving tale in antique rhymes
He has for Christmas and such merry times,
When "Chevy Chase," his masterpiece of song,
Is said so earnest none can think it long.
Twas the old vicar's way who should be right,
For the late vicar was his heart's delight,
And while at church he often shakes his head
To think what sermons the old vicar made,
Downright and orthodox that all the land
Who had their ears to hear might understand,
But now such mighty learning meets his ears
He thinks it Greek or Latin which he hears,
Yet church receives him every sabbath day
And rain or snow he never keeps away.
All words of reverence still his heart reveres,
Low bows his head when Jesus meets his ears,
And still he thinks it blasphemy as well
Such names without a capital to spell.
In an old corner cupboard by the wall
His books are laid, though good, in number small,
His Bible first in place; from worth and age
Whose grandsire's name adorns the title page,
And blank leaves once, now filled with kindred claims,
Display a world's epitome of names.
Parents and children and grandchildren all
Memory's affections in the lists recall.
And prayer-book next, much worn though strongly bound,
Proves him a churchman orthodox and sound.
The "Pilgrim's Progress" and the "Death of Abel"
Are seldom missing from his Sunday table,
And prime old Tusser in his homely trim,
The first of bards in all the world with him,
And only poet which his leisure knows;
Verse deals in fancy, so he sticks to prose.
These are the books he reads and reads again
And weekly hunts the almanacks for rain.
Here and no further learning's channels ran;
Still, neighbours prize him as the learned man.
His cottage is a humble place of rest
With one spare room to welcome every guest,

And that tall poplar pointing to the sky
His own hand planted when an idle boy,
It shades his chimney while the singing wind
Hums songs of shelter to his happy mind.
Within his cot the largest ears of corn
He ever found his picture frames adorn:
Brave Granby's head, De Grosse's grand defeat;
He rubs his hands and shows how Rodney beat.
And from the rafters upon strings depend
Beanstalks beset with pods from end to end,
Whose numbers without counting may be seen
Wrote on the almanack behind the screen.
Around the corner up on worsted strung
Pooties in wreaths above the cupboard hung.
Memory at trifling incidents awakes
And there he keeps them for his children's sakes,
Who when as boys searched every sedgy lane,
Traced every wood and shattered clothes again,
Roaming about on rapture's easy wing
To hunt those very pooty shells in spring.
And thus he lives too happy to be poor
While strife neer pauses at so mean a door.
Low in the sheltered valley stands his cot,
He hears the mountain storm and feels it not;
Winter and spring, toil ceasing ere tis dark,
Rests with the lamb and rises with the lark,
Content his helpmate to the day's employ
And care neer comes to steal a single joy.
Time, scarcely noticed, turns his hair to grey,
Yet leaves him happy as a child at play.

Insects

These tiny loiterers on the barley's beard,
And happy units of a numerous herd
Of playfellows, the laughing Summer brings,
Mocking the sunshine in their glittering wings,
How merrily they creep, and run, and fly!
No kin they bear to labour's drudgery,
Smoothing the velvet of the pale hedge-rose;
And where they fly for dinner no one knows—
The dew-drops feed them not—they love the shine
Of noon, whose sun may bring them golden wine.
All day they're playing in their Sunday dress—
Till night goes sleep, and they can do no less;
Then, to the heath bell's silken hood they fly,

And like to princes in their slumbers lie,
Secure from night, and dropping dews, and all,
In silken beds and roomy painted hall.
So merrily they spend their summer day,
Now in the cornfields, now the new-mown hay.
One almost fancies that such happy things,
With coloured hoods and richly burnished wings,
Are fairy folk, in splendid masquerade
Disguised, as if of mortal folk afraid,
Keeping their merry pranks a mystery still,
Lest glaring day should do their secrets ill.

Sudden Shower

Black grows the southern sky, betokening rain,
And humming hive-bees homeward hurry bye:
They feel the change; so let us shun the grain,
And take the broad road while our feet are dry.
Ay, there some dropples moistened on my face,
And pattered on my hat—tis coming nigh!
Let's look about, and find a sheltering place.
The little things around, like you and I,
Are hurrying through the grass to shun the shower.
Here stoops an ash-tree—hark! the wind gets high,
But never mind; this ivy, for an hour,
Rain as it may, will keep us dryly here:
That little wren knows well his sheltering bower,
Nor leaves his dry house though we come so near.

Evening Primrose

When once the sun sinks in the west,
And dew-drops pearl the evening's breast;
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
Or its companionable star,
The evening primrose opes anew
Its delicate blossoms to the dew;
And, shunning-hermit of the light,
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night;
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
Knows not the beauty he possesses.
Thus it blooms on till night is bye
And day looks out with open eye,
Abashed at the gaze it cannot shun,
It faints and withers, and is done.

The Shepherd's Tree

Huge elm, with rifted trunk all notched and scarred,
Like to a warrior's destiny! I love
To stretch me often on thy shadowed sward,
And hear the laugh of summer leaves above;
Or on thy buttressed roots to sit, and lean
In careless attitude, and there reflect
On times, and deeds, and darings that have been—
Old castaways, now swallowed in neglect;
While thou art towering in thy strength of heart,
Stirring the soul to vain imaginings,
In which life's sordid being hath no part.
The wind of that eternal ditty sings,
Humming of future things, that burn the mind
To leave some fragment of itself behind.

Wild Bees

These children of the sun which summer brings
As pastoral minstrels in her merry train
Pipe rustic ballads upon busy wings
And glad the cotters' quiet toils again.
The white-nosed bee that bores its little hole
In mortared walls and pipes its symphonies,
And never absent couzen, black as coal,
That Indian-like bepaints its little thighs,
With white and red bedight for holiday,
Right earlily a-morn do pipe and play
And with their legs stroke slumber from their eyes.
And aye so fond they of their singing seem
That in their holes abed at close of day
They still keep piping in their honey dreams,
And larger ones that thrum on ruder pipe
Round the sweet smelling closen and rich woods
Where tawny white and red flush clover buds
Shine bonnily and bean fields blossom ripe,
Shed dainty perfumes and give honey food
To these sweet poets of the summer fields;
Me much delighting as I stroll along
The narrow path that hay laid meadow yields,
Catching the windings of their wandering song.
The black and yellow bumble first on wing
To buzz among the sallow's early flowers,
Hiding its nest in holes from fickle spring
Who stints his rambles with her frequent showers;

And one that may for wiser piper pass,
In livery dress half sables and half red,
Who laps a moss ball in the meadow grass
And hoards her stores when April showers have fled;
And russet commoner who knows the face
Of every blossom that the meadow brings,
Starting the traveller to a quicker pace
By threatening round his head in many rings:
These sweeten summer in their happy glee
By giving for her honey melody.

The Firetail's Nest

"Tweet" pipes the robin as the cat creeps by
Her nestling young that in the elderns lie,
And then the bluecap tootles in its glee,
Picking the flies from orchard apple tree,
And "pink" the chaffinch cries its well-known strain,
Urging its kind to utter "pink" again,
While in a quiet mood hedgesparrows try
An inward stir of shadowed melody.
Around the rotten tree the firetail mourns
As the old hedger to his toil returns,
Chopping the grain to stop the gap close by
The hole where her blue eggs in safety lie.
Of everything that stirs she dreameth wrong
And pipes her "tweet tut" fears the whole day long.

The Fear of Flowers

The nodding oxeye bends before the wind,
The woodbine quakes lest boys their flowers should find,
And prickly dogrose spite of its array
Can't dare the blossom-seeking hand away,
While thistles wear their heavy knobs of bloom
Proud as a warhorse wears its haughty plume,
And by the roadside danger's self defy;
On commons where pined sheep and oxen lie
In ruddy pomp and ever thronging mood
It stands and spreads like danger in a wood,
And in the village street where meanest weeds
Can't stand untouched to fill their husks with seeds,
The haughty thistle oer all danger towers,
In every place the very wasp of flowers.

Summer Evening

The frog half fearful jumps across the path,
And little mouse that leaves its hole at eve
Nimbles with timid dread beneath the swath;
My rustling steps awhile their joys deceive,
Till past,—and then the cricket sings more strong,
And grasshoppers in merry moods still wear
The short night weary with their fretting song.
Up from behind the molehill jumps the hare,
Cheat of his chosen bed, and from the bank
The yellowhammer flutters in short fears
From off its nest hid in the grasses rank,
And drops again when no more noise it hears.
Thus nature's human link and endless thrall,
Proud man, still seems the enemy of all.

Emmonsail's Heath in Winter

I love to see the old heath's withered brake
Mingle its crimpled leaves with furze and ling,
While the old heron from the lonely lake
Starts slow and flaps his melancholy wing,
And oddling crow in idle motions swing
On the half rotten ashtree's topmost twig,
Beside whose trunk the gipsy makes his bed.
Up flies the bouncing woodcock from the brig
Where a black quagmire quakes beneath the tread,
The fieldfares chatter in the whistling thorn
And for the awe round fields and closen rove,
And coy bumbarrels twenty in a drove
Flit down the hedgerows in the frozen plain
And hang on little twigs and start again.

Pleasures of Fancy

A path, old tree, goes by thee crooking on,
And through this little gate that claps and bangs
Against thy rifted trunk, what steps hath gone?
Though but a lonely way, yet mystery hangs
Oer crowds of pastoral scenes recordless here.
The boy might climb the nest in thy young boughs
That's slept half an eternity; in fear
The herdsman may have left his startled cows
For shelter when heaven's thunder voice was near;
Here too the woodman on his wallet laid
For pillow may have slept an hour away;
And poet pastoral, lover of the shade,

Here sat and mused half some long summer day
While some old shepherd listened to the lay.

To Napoleon

The heroes of the present and the past
Were puny, vague, and nothingness to thee:
Thou didst a span grasp mighty to the last,
And strain for glory when thy die was cast.
That little island, on the Atlantic sea,
Was but a dust-spot in a lake: thy mind
Swept space as shoreless as eternity.
Thy giant powers outstript this gaudy age
Of heroes; and, as looking at the sun,
So gazing on thy greatness, made men blind
To merits, that had adoration won
In olden times. The world was on thy page
Of victories but a comma. Fame could find
No parallel, thy greatness to presage.

The Skylark

Above the russet clods the corn is seen
Sprouting its spiry points of tender green,
Where squats the hare, to terrors wide awake,
Like some brown clod the harrows failed to break.
Opening their golden caskets to the sun,
The buttercups make schoolboys eager run,
To see who shall be first to pluck the prize—
Up from their hurry see the Skylark flies,
And oer her half-formed nest, with happy wings,
Winnows the air till in the cloud she sings,
Then hangs a dust spot in the sunny skies,
And drops and drops till in her nest she lies,
Which they unheeded passed—not dreaming then
That birds, which flew so high, would drop again
To nests upon the ground, which anything
May come at to destroy. Had they the wing
Like such a bird, themselves would be too proud
And build on nothing but a passing cloud!
As free from danger as the heavens are free
From pain and toil, there would they build and be,
And sail about the world to scenes unheard
Of and unseen,—O were they but a bird!
So think they, while they listen to its song,
And smile and fancy and so pass along;

While its low nest, moist with the dews of morn,
Lies safely, with the leveret, in the corn.

The Flood

Waves trough, rebound, and furious boil again,
Like plunging monsters rising underneath,
Who at the top curl up a shaggy mane,
A moment catching at a surer breath,
Then plunging headlong down and down, and on
Each following whirls the shadow of the last;
And other monsters rise when those are gone,
Crest their fringed waves, plunge onward and are past.
The chill air comes around me oceanly,
From bank to bank the waterstrife is spread;
Strange birds like snowspots oer the whizzing sea
Hang where the wild duck hurried past and fled.
On roars the flood, all restless to be free,
Like Trouble wandering to Eternity.

The Thrush's Nest

Within a thick and spreading hawthorn bush,
That overhung a molehill large and round,
I heard from morn to morn a merry thrush
Sing hymns to sunrise, and I drank the sound
With joy; and, often an intruding guest,
I watched her secret toils from day to day—
How true she warped the moss, to form a nest,
And modelled it within with wood and clay;
And by and by, like heath-bells gilt with dew,
There lay her shining eggs, as bright as flowers,
Ink-spotted-over shells of greeny blue;
And there I witnessed in the sunny hours
A brood of nature's minstrels chirp and fly,
Glad as that sunshine and the laughing sky.

November

Sybil of months, and worshipper of winds,
I love thee, rude and boisterous as thou art;
And scraps of joy my wandering ever finds
Mid thy uproarious madness—when the start
Of sudden tempests stirs the forest leaves
Into hoarse fury, till the shower set free
Stills the huge swells. Then ebb the mighty heaves,

That sway the forest like a troubled sea.
I love thy wizard noise, and rave in turn
Half-vacant thoughts and rhymes of careless form;
Then hide me from the shower, a short sojourn,
Neath ivied oak; and mutter to the storm,
Wishing its melody belonged to me,
That I might breathe a living song to thee.

Earth's Eternity

Man, Earth's poor shadow! talks of Earth's decay:
But hath it nothing of eternal kin?
No majesty that shall not pass away?
No soul of greatness springing up within?
Thought marks without hoar shadows of sublime,
Pictures of power, which if not doomed to win
Eternity, stand laughing at old Time
For ages: in the grand ancestral line
Of things eternal, mounting to divine,
I read Magnificence where ages pay
Worship like conquered foes to the Apennine,
Because they could not conquer. There sits Day
Too high for Night to come at—mountains shine,
Outpeering Time, too lofty for decay.

Autumn

Autumn comes laden with her ripened load
Of fruitage and so scatters them abroad
That each fern-smothered heath and mole-hill waste
Are black with bramble berries—where in haste
The chubby urchins from the village hie
To feast them there, stained with the purple dye;
While painted woods around my rambles be
In draperies worthy of eternity.
Yet will the leaves soon patter on the ground,
And death's deaf voice awake at every sound:
One drops—then others—and the last that fell
Rings for those left behind their passing bell.
Thus memory every where her tidings brings
How sad death robs us of life's dearest things.

Signs of Winter

The cat runs races with her tail. The dog
Leaps oer the orchard hedge and knarls the grass.

The swine run round and grunt and play with straw,
Snatching out hasty mouthfuls from the stack.
Sudden upon the elmtree tops the crow
Unceremonious visit pays and croaks,
Then swops away. From mossy barn the owl
Bobs hasty out—wheels round and, scared as soon,
As hastily retires. The ducks grow wild
And from the muddy pond fly up and wheel
A circle round the village and soon, tired,
Plunge in the pond again. The maids in haste
Snatch from the orchard hedge the mizzled clothes
And laughing hurry in to keep them dry.

Nightwind

Darkness like midnight from the sobbing woods
Clamours with dismal tidings of the rain,
Roaring as rivers breaking loose in floods
To spread and foam and deluge all the plain.
The cotter listens at his door again,
Half doubting whether it be floods or wind,
And through the thickening darkness looks afraid,
Thinking of roads that travel has to find
Through night's black depths in danger's garb arrayed.
And the loud glabber round the flaze soon stops
When hushed to silence by the lifted hand
Of fearing dame who hears the noise in dread
And thinks a deluge comes to drown the land;
Nor dares she go to bed until the tempest drops.

NOTE.—The remaining poems in this section are taken from a series, numbering several hundred brief pieces, written by Clare in the winter of 1835-6. Perhaps it is unjust to Clare to consider them out of their environment; it would be more unjust not to represent this phase of his poetry.

Birds in Alarm

The firetail tells the boys when nests are nigh
And tweets and flies from every passer-bye.
The yellowhammer never makes a noise
But flies in silence from the noisy boys;
The boys will come and take them every day,
And still she lays as none were ta'en away.

The nightingale keeps tweeting-churring round
But leaves in silence when the nest is found.
The pewit hollos "chewrit" as she flies

And flops about the shepherd where he lies;
But when her nest is found she stops her song
And cocks [her] coppled crown and runs along.
Wrens cock their tails and chitter loud and play,
And robins hollo "tut" and fly away.

Dyke Side

The frog croaks loud, and maidens dare not pass
But fear the noisome toad and shun the grass;
And on the sunny banks they dare not go
Where hissing snakes run to the flood below.
The nuthatch noises loud in wood and wild,
Like women turning skreeking to a child.
The schoolboy hears and brushes through the trees
And runs about till drabbled to the knees.
The old hawk winnows round the old crow's nest;
The schoolboy hears and wonder fills his breast.
He throws his basket down to climb the tree
And wonders what the red blotched eggs can be:
The green woodpecker bounces from the view
And hollos as he buzzes bye "kew kew."

Badger

When midnight comes a host of dogs and men
Go out and track the badger to his den,
And put a sack within the hole, and lie
Till the old grunting badger passes bye.
He comes and hears—they let the strongest loose.
The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose.
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry,
And the old hare half wounded buzzes bye.
They get a forked stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town,
And bait him all the day with many dogs,
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs.
He runs along and bites at all he meets:
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets.

He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door.
The frequent stone is hurled where eer they go;
When badgers fight, then every one's a foe.
The dogs are clapt and urged to join the fray;
The badger turns and drives them all away.

Though scarcely half as big, demure and small,
He fights with dogs for bones and beats them all.
The heavy mastiff, savage in the fray,
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away.
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold,
The badger grins and never leaves his hold.
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels
And bites them through—the drunkard swears and reels.

The frighted women take the boys away,
The blackguard laughs and hurries on the fray.
He tries to reach the woods, an awkward race,
But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chace.
He turns agen and drives the noisy crowd
And beats the many dogs in noises loud.
He drives away and beats them every one,
And then they loose them all and set them on.
He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men,
Then starts and grins and drives the crowd agen;
Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
And leaves his hold and cackles, groans, and dies.

The Fox

The shepherd on his journey heard when nigh
His dog among the bushes barking high;
The ploughman ran and gave a hearty shout,
He found a weary fox and beat him out.
The ploughman laughed and would have ploughed him in
But the old shepherd took him for the skin.
He lay upon the furrow stretched for dead,
The old dog lay and licked the wounds that bled,
The ploughman beat him till his ribs would crack,
And then the shepherd slung him at his back;
And when he rested, to his dog's surprise,
The old fox started from his dead disguise;
And while the dog lay panting in the sedge
He up and snapt and bolted through the hedge.

He scampered to the bushes far away;
The shepherd called the ploughman to the fray;
The ploughman wished he had a gun to shoot.
The old dog barked and followed the pursuit.
The shepherd threw his hook and tottered past;
The ploughman ran but none could go so fast;
The woodman threw his faggot from the way
And ceased to chop and wondered at the fray.

But when he saw the dog and heard the cry
He threw his hatchet—but the fox was bye.
The shepherd broke his hook and lost the skin;
He found a badger hole and bolted in.
They tried to dig, but, safe from danger's way,
He lived to chase the hounds another day.

The Vixen

Among the taller wood with ivy hung,
The old fox plays and dances round her young.
She snuffs and barks if any passes bye
And swings her tail and turns prepared to fly.
The horseman hurries bye, she bolts to see,
And turns agen, from danger never free.
If any stands she runs among the poles
And barks and snaps and drives them in the holes.
The shepherd sees them and the boy goes bye
And gets a stick and progs the hole to try.
They get all still and lie in safety sure
And out again when every thing's secure
And start and snap at blackbirds bouncing bye
To fight and catch the great white butterfly.

Turkeys

The turkeys wade the close to catch the bees
In the old border full of maple trees
And often lay away and breed and come
And bring a brood of chelping chickens home.
The turkey gobbles loud and drops his rag
And struts and sprunts his tail and then lets drag
His wing on ground and makes a huzzing noise,
Nauntles at passer-bye and drives the boys
And bounces up and flies at passer-bye.
The old dog snaps and grins nor ventures nigh.
He gobbles loud and drives the boys from play;
They throw their sticks and kick and run away.

The Poet's Death

The world is taking little heed
And plods from day to day:
The vulgar flourish like a weed,
The learned pass away.

We miss him on the summer path
The lonely summer day,
Where mowers cut the pleasant swath
And maidens make the hay.

The vulgar take but little heed;
The garden wants his care;
There lies the book he used to read,
There stands the empty chair.

The boat laid up, the voyage oer,
And passed the stormy wave,
The world is going as before,
The poet in his grave.

The Beautiful Stranger

I cannot know what country owns thee now,
With France's forest lilies on thy brow.
When England knew thee thou wert passing fair;
I never knew a foreign face so rare.
The world of waters rolls and rushes bye,
Nor lets me wander where thy vallies lie.
But surely France must be a pleasant place
That greets the stranger with so fair a face;
The English maiden blushes down the dance,
But few can equal the fair maid of France.
I saw thee lovely and I wished thee mine,
And the last song I ever wrote is thine.

Thy country's honour on thy face attends;
Men may be foes but beauty makes us friends.

The Tramp

He eats (a moment's stoppage to his song)
The stolen turnip as he goes along;
And hops along and heeds with careless eye
The passing crowded stage coach reeling bye.
He talks to none but wends his silent way,
And finds a hovel at the close of day,
Or under any hedge his house is made.
He has no calling and he owns no trade.
An old smoaked blanket arches oer his head,
A whisp of straw or stubble makes his bed.
He knows a lawless law that claims no kin
But meet and plunder on and feel no sin—

No matter where they go or where they dwell
They dally with the winds and laugh at hell.

Farmer's Boy

He waits all day beside his little flock
And asks the passing stranger what's o'clock,
But those who often pass his daily tasks
Look at their watch and tell before he asks.
He mutters stories to himself and lies
Where the thick hedge the warmest house supplies,
And when he hears the hunters far and wide
He climbs the highest tree to see them ride—
He climbs till all the fields are blea and bare
And makes the old crow's nest an easy chair.
And soon his sheep are got in other grounds—
He hastens down and fears his master come,
He stops the gap and keeps them all in bounds
And tends them closely till it's time for home.

Braggart

With careful step to keep his balance up
He reels on warily along the street,
Slabbering at mouth and with a staggering stoop
Mutters an angry look at all he meets.
Bumptious and vain and proud he shoulders up
And would be something if he knew but how;
To any man on earth he will not stoop
But cracks of work, of horses and of plough.
Proud of the foolish talk, the ale he quaffs,
He never heeds the insult loud that laughs:
With rosy maid he tries to joke and play,—
Who shrugs and nettles deep his pomp and pride.
And calls him "drunken beast" and runs away—
King to himself and fool to all beside.

Sunday Dip

The morning road is thronged with merry boys
Who seek the water for their Sunday joys;
They run to seek the shallow pit, and wade
And dance about the water in the shade.
The boldest ventures first and dashes in,
And others go and follow to the chin,
And duck about, and try to lose their fears,

And laugh to hear the thunder in their ears.
They bundle up the rushes for a boat
And try across the deepest place to float:
Beneath the willow trees they ride and stoop—
The awkward load will scarcely bear them up.
Without their aid the others float away,
And play about the water half the day.

Merry Maid

Bonny and stout and brown, without a hat,
She frowns offended when they call her fat—
Yet fat she is, the merriest in the place,
And all can know she wears a pretty face.
But still she never heeds what praise can say,
But does the work, and oft runs out to play,
To run about the yard and ramp and noise
And spring the mop upon the servant boys.
When old hens noise and cackle every where
She hurries eager if the eggs are dear,
And runs to seek them when they lay away
To get them ready for the market day.
She gambols with the men and laughs aloud
And only quarrels when they call her proud.

Scandal

She hastens out and scarcely pins her clothes
To hear the news and tell the news she knows;
She talks of sluts, marks each unmended gown,
Her self the dirtiest slut in all the town.
She stands with eager haste at slander's tale,
And drinks the news as drunkards drink their ale.
Excuse is ready at the biggest lie—
She only heard it and it passes bye.
The very cat looks up and knows her face
And hastens to the chair to get the place;
When once set down she never goes away,
Till tales are done and talk has nought to say.
She goes from house to house the village oer,
Her slander bothers everybody's door.

Quail's Nest

I wandered out one rainy day
And heard a bird with merry joys

Cry "wet my foot" for half the way;
I stood and wondered at the noise,

When from my foot a bird did flee—
The rain flew bouncing from her breast
I wondered what the bird could be,
And almost trampled on her nest.

The nest was full of eggs and round—
I met a shepherd in the vales,
And stood to tell him what I found.
He knew and said it was a quail's,

For he himself the nest had found,
Among the wheat and on the green,
When going on his daily round,
With eggs as many as fifteen.

Among the stranger birds they feed,
Their summer flight is short and low;
There's very few know where they breed,
And scarcely any where they go.

Market Day

With arms and legs at work and gentle stroke
That urges switching tail nor mends his pace,
On an old ribbed and weather beaten horse,
The farmer goes jogtrotting to the fair.
Both keep their pace that nothing can provoke
Followed by brindled dog that snuffs the ground
With urging bark and hurries at his heels.
His hat slouched down, and great coat buttoned close
Bellied like hooped keg, and chuffy face
Red as the morning sun, he takes his round
And talks of stock: and when his jobs are done
And Dobbin's hay is eaten from the rack,
He drinks success to corn in language hoarse,
And claps old Dobbin's hide, and potters back.

Stonepit

The passing traveller with wonder sees
A deep and ancient stonepit full of trees;
So deep and very deep the place has been,
The church might stand within and not be seen.
The passing stranger oft with wonder stops

And thinks he een could walk upon their tops,
And often stoops to see the busy crow,
And stands above and sees the eggs below;
And while the wild horse gives its head a toss,
The squirrel dances up and runs across.
The boy that stands and kills the black nosed bee
Dares down as soon as magpies' nests are found,
And wonders when he climbs the highest tree
To find it reaches scarce above the ground.

"The Lass With The Delicate Air"

Timid and smiling, beautiful and shy,
She drops her head at every passer bye.
Afraid of praise she hurries down the streets
And turns away from every smile she meets.
The forward clown has many things to say
And holds her by the gown to make her stay,
The picture of good health she goes along,
Hale as the morn and happy as her song.
Yet there is one who never feels a fear
To whisper pleasing fancies in her ear;
Yet een from him she shuns a rude embrace,
And stooping holds her hands before her face,—
She even shuns and fears the bolder wind,
And holds her shawl, and often looks behind.

The Lout

For Sunday's play he never makes excuse,
But plays at taw, and buys his Spanish juice.
Hard as his toil, and ever slow to speak,
Yet he gives maidens many a burning cheek;
For none can pass him but his witless grace
Of bawdry brings the blushes in her face.
As vulgar as the dirt he treads upon
He calls his cows or drives his horses on;
He knows the lamest cow and strokes her side
And often tries to mount her back and ride,
And takes her tail at night in idle play,
And makes her drag him homeward all the way.
He knows of nothing but the football match,
And where hens lay, and when the duck will hatch.

Hodge

He plays with other boys when work is done,
But feels too clumsy and too stiff to run,
Yet where there's mischief he can find a way
The first to join and last [to run] away.
What's said or done he never hears or minds
But gets his pence for all the eggs he finds.
He thinks his master's horses far the best,
And always labours longer than the rest.
In frost and cold though lame he's forced to go—
The call's more urgent when he journeys slow.
In surly speed he helps the maids by force
And feeds the cows and hallos till he's hoarse;
And when he's lame they only jest and play
And bid him throw his kiby heels away.

Farm Breakfast

Maids shout to breakfast in a merry strife,
And the cat runs to hear the whetted knife,
And dogs are ever in the way to watch
The mouldy crust and falling bone to catch.
The wooden dishes round in haste are set,
And round the table all the boys are met;
All know their own save Hodge who would be first,
But every one his master leaves the worst.
On every wooden dish, a humble claim,
Two rude cut letters mark the owner's name;
From every nook the smile of plenty calls,
And rusty flitches decorate the walls,
Moore's Almanack where wonders never cease—
All smeared with candle snuff and bacon grease.

Love and Solitude

I hate the very noise of troublous man
Who did and does me all the harm he can.
Free from the world I would a prisoner be
And my own shadow all my company;
And lonely see the shooting stars appear,
Worlds rushing into judgment all the year.
O lead me onward to the loneliest shade,
The darkest place that quiet ever made,
Where kingcups grow most beauteous to behold
And shut up green and open into gold.
Farewell to poesy—and leave the will;
Take all the world away—and leave me still

The mirth and music of a woman's voice,
That bids the heart be happy and rejoice.

ASYLUM POEMS

Gipsies

The snow falls deep; the forest lies alone;
The boy goes hasty for his load of brakes,
Then thinks upon the fire and hurries back;
The gipsy knocks his hands and tucks them up,
And seeks his squalid camp, half hid in snow,
Beneath the oak which breaks away the wind,
And bushes close in snow-like hovel warm;
There tainted mutton wastes upon the coals,
And the half-wasted dog squats close and rubs,
Then feels the heat too strong, and goes aloof;
He watches well, but none a bit can spare,
And vainly waits the morsel thrown away.
Tis thus they live—a picture to the place,
A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race.

The Frightened Ploughman

I went in the fields with the leisure I got,
The stranger might smile but I heeded him not,
The hovel was ready to screen from a shower,
And the book in my pocket was read in an hour.

The bird came for shelter, but soon flew away;
The horse came to look, and seemed happy to stay;
He stood up in quiet, and hung down his head,
And seemed to be hearing the poem I read.

The ploughman would turn from his plough in the day
And wonder what being had come in his way,
To lie on a molehill and read the day long
And laugh out aloud when he'd finished his song.

The pewit turned over and stooped oer my head
Where the raven croaked loud like the ploughman ill-bred,
But the lark high above charmed me all the day long,
So I sat down and joined in the chorus of song.

The foolhardy ploughman I well could endure,
His praise was worth nothing, his censure was poor,
Fame bade me go on and I toiled the day long
Till the fields where he lived should be known in my song.

Farewell

Farewell to the bushy clump close to the river
And the flags where the butter-bump hides in for ever;
Farewell to the weedy nook, hemmed in by waters;
Farewell to the miller's brook and his three bonny daughters;
Farewell to them all while in prison I lie—
In the prison a thrall sees nought but the sky.

Shut out are the green fields and birds in the bushes;
In the prison yard nothing builds, blackbirds or thrushes,
Farewell to the old mill and dash of the waters,
To the miller and, dearer still, to his three bonny daughters.

In the nook, the large burdock grows near the green willow;
In the flood, round the moorcock dashes under the billow;
To the old mill farewell, to the lock, pens, and waters,
To the miller himsel', and his three bonny daughters.

The Old Year

The Old Year's gone away
To nothingness and night:
We cannot find him all the day
Nor hear him in the night:
He left no footstep, mark or place
In either shade or sun:
The last year he'd a neighbour's face,
In this he's known by none.

All nothing everywhere:
Mists we on mornings see
Have more of substance when they're here
And more of form than he.
He was a friend by every fire,
In every cot and hall—

A guest to every heart's desire,
And now he's nought at all.

Old papers thrown away,
Old garments cast aside,
The talk of yesterday,
Are things identified;
But time once torn away
No voices can recall:
The eve of New Year's Day
Left the Old Year lost to all.

The Yellowhammer

When shall I see the white-thorn leaves agen,
And yellowhammers gathering the dry bents
By the dyke side, on stilly moor or fen,
Feathered with love and nature's good intents?
Rude is the tent this architect invents,
Rural the place, with cart ruts by dyke side.
Dead grass, horse hair, and downy-headed bents
Tied to dead thistles—she doth well provide,
Close to a hill of ants where cowslips bloom
And shed oer meadows far their sweet perfume.
In early spring, when winds blow chilly cold,
The yellowhammer, trailing grass, will come
To fix a place and choose an early home,
With yellow breast and head of solid gold.

Autumn

The thistle-down's flying, though the winds are all still,
On the green grass now lying, now mounting the hill,
The spring from the fountain now boils like a pot;
Through stones past the counting it bubbles red hot.

The ground parched and cracked is like overbaked bread,
The greensward all wracked is, bents dried up and dead.
The fallow fields glitter like water indeed,
And gossamers twitter, flung from weed unto weed.

Hill tops like hot iron glitter bright in the sun,
And the rivers we're eying burn to gold as they run;
Burning hot is the ground, liquid gold is the air;
Whoever looks round sees Eternity there.

Song

I peeled bits of straws and I got switches too
From the grey peeling willow as idlers do,
And I switched at the flies as I sat all alone
Till my flesh, blood, and marrow was turned to dry bone.
My illness was love, though I knew not the smart,
But the beauty of love was the blood of my heart.
Crowded places, I shunned them as noises too rude
And fled to the silence of sweet solitude.
Where the flower in green darkness buds, blossoms, and fades,
Unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids—
The hermit bees find them but once and away.
There I'll bury alive and in silence decay.

I looked on the eyes of fair woman too long,
Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue:
When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say,
So I turned myself round and she wandered away.
When she got too far off, why, I'd something to tell,
So I sent sighs behind her and walked to my cell.
Willow switches I broke and peeled bits of straws,
Ever lonely in crowds, in Nature's own laws—
My ball room the pasture, my music the bees,
My drink was the fountain, my church the tall trees.
Who ever would love or be tied to a wife
When it makes a man mad all the days of his life?

The Winter's Come

Sweet chestnuts brown like soling leather turn;
The larch trees, like the colour of the Sun;
That paled sky in the Autumn seemed to burn,
What a strange scene before us now does run—
Red, brown, and yellow, russet, black, and dun;
White thorn, wild cherry, and the poplar bare;
The sycamore all withered in the sun.
No leaves are now upon the birch tree there:
All now is stript to the cold wintry air.

See, not one tree but what has lost its leaves—
And yet the landscape wears a pleasing hue.
The winter chill on his cold bed receives
Foliage which once hung oer the waters blue.
Naked and bare the leafless trees repose.
Blue-headed titmouse now seeks maggots rare,
Sluggish and dull the leaf-strewn river flows;

That is not green, which was so through the year
Dark chill November draweth to a close.

Tis Winter, and I love to read indoors,
When the Moon hangs her crescent up on high;
While on the window shutters the wind roars,
And storms like furies pass remorseless by.
How pleasant on a feather bed to lie,
Or, sitting by the fire, in fancy soar
With Dante or with Milton to regions high,
Or read fresh volumes we've not seen before,
Or oer old Burton's Melancholy pore.

Summer Winds

The wind waves oer the meadows green
And shakes my own wild flowers
And shifts about the moving scene
Like the life of summer hours;
The little bents with reedy head,
The scarce seen shapes of flowers,
All kink about like skeins of thread
In these wind-shaken hours.

All stir and strife and life and bustle
In everything around one sees;
The rushes whistle, sedges rustle,
The grass is buzzing round like bees;
The butterflies are tossed about
Like skiffs upon a stormy sea;
The bees are lost amid the rout
And drop in [their] perplexity.

Wilt thou be mine, thou bonny lass?
Thy drapery floats so gracefully;
We'll walk along the meadow grass,
We'll stand beneath the willow tree.
We'll mark the little reeling bee
Along the grassy ocean rove,
Tossed like a little boat at sea,
And interchange our vows of love.

Bonny Lassie O!

O the evening's for the fair, bonny lassie O!
To meet the cooler air and walk an angel there,

With the dark dishevelled hair,
Bonny lassie O!

The bloom's on the brere, bonny lassie O!
Oak apples on the tree; and wilt thou gang to see
The shed I've made for thee,
Bonny lassie O!

Tis agen the running brook, bonny lassie O!
In a grassy nook hard by, with a little patch of sky,
And a bush to keep us dry,
Bonny lassie O!

There's the daisy all the year, bonny lassie O!
There's the king-cup bright as gold, and the speedwell never cold,
And the arum leaves unrolled,
Bonny lassie O!

O meet me at the shed, bonny lassie O!
With a woodbine peeping in, and the roses like thy skin
Blushing, thy praise to win,
Bonny lassie O!

I will meet thee there at e'en, bonny lassie O!
When the bee sips in the bean, and grey willow branches lean,
And the moonbeam looks between,
Bonny lassie O!

Meet Me in the Green Glen

Love, meet me in the green glen,
Beside the tall elm tree,
Where the sweet briar smells so sweet agen;
There come with me,
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me at the sunset
Down in the green glen,
Where we've often met
By hawthorn tree and foxes' den,
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me in the green glen,
By sweet briar bushes there;
Meet me by your own sen,
Where the wild thyme blossoms fair.
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me by the sweet briar,
By the mole hill swelling there;
When the West glows like a fire
God's crimson bed is there.
Meet me in the green glen.

Love Cannot Die

In crime and enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die,
Who say to us in slander's breath
That love belongs to sin and death.
From heaven it came on angel's wing
To bloom on earth, eternal spring;
In falsehood's enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die.

Twas born upon an angel's breast.
The softest dreams, the sweetest rest,
The brightest sun, the bluest sky,
Are love's own home and canopy.
The thought that cheers this heart of mine
Is that of love; love so divine
They sin who say in slander's breath
That love belongs to sin and death.

The sweetest voice that lips contain,
The sweetest thought that leaves the brain,
The sweetest feeling of the heart—
There's pleasure in its very smart.
The scent of rose and cinnamon
Is not like love remembered on;
In falsehood's enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die.

Peggy

Peggy said good morning and I said good bye,
When farmers dib the corn and laddies sow the rye.
Young Peggy's face was common sense and I was rather shy
When I met her in the morning when the farmers sow the rye.

Her half laced boots fit tightly as she tripped along the grass,
And she set her foot so lightly where the early bee doth pass.
Oh Peggy was a young thing, her face was common sense,
I courted her about the spring and loved her ever thence.

Oh Peggy was the young thing and bonny as to size;
Her lips were cherries of the spring and hazel were her eyes.
Oh Peggy she was straight and tall as is the poplar tree,
Smooth as the freestone of the wall, and very dear to me.

Oh Peggy's gown was chocolate and full of cherries white;
I keep a bit on't for her sake and love her day and night.
I drest myself just like a prince and Peggy went to woo,
But she's been gone some ten years since, and I know not what to do.

The Crow Sat on the Willow

The crow sat on the willow tree
A-lifting up his wings,
And glossy was his coat to see,
And loud the ploughman sings,
"I love my love because I know
The milkmaid she loves me";
And hoarsely croaked the glossy crow
Upon the willow tree.
"I love my love" the ploughman sung,
And all the fields with music rung.

"I love my love, a bonny lass,
She keeps her pails so bright,
And blythe she trips the dewy grass
At morning and at night.
A cotton dress her morning gown,
Her face was rosy health:
She traced the pastures up and down
And nature was her wealth."
He sung, and turned each furrow down,
His sweetheart's love in cotton gown.

"My love is young and handsome
As any in the town,
She's worth a ploughman's ransom
In the drab cotton gown."
He sang and turned his furrow oer
And urged his team along,
While on the willow as before
The old crow croaked his song:
The ploughman sung his rustic lay
And sung of Phoebe all the day.

The crow he was in love no doubt
And [so were] many things:

The ploughman finished many a bout,
And lustily he sings,
"My love she is a milking maid
With red rosy cheek;
Of cotton drab her gown was made,
I loved her many a week."
His milking maid the ploughman sung
Till all the fields around him rung.

Now is Past

Now is past—the happy *now*
When we together roved
Beneath the wildwood's oak-tree bough
And Nature said we loved.
Winter's blast
The *now* since then has crept between,
And left us both apart.
Winters that withered all the green
Have froze the beating heart.
Now is past.

Now is past since last we met
Beneath the hazel bough;
Before the evening sun was set
Her shadow stretched below.
Autumn's blast
Has stained and blighted every bough;
Wild strawberries like her lips
Have left the mosses green below,
Her bloom's upon the hips.
Now is past.

Now is past, is changed agen,
The woods and fields are painted new.
Wild strawberries which both gathered then,
None know now where they grew.
The skys oercast.
Wood strawberries faded from wood sides,
Green leaves have all turned yellow;
No Adelaide walks the wood rides,
True love has no bed-fellow.
Now is past.

Song

I wish I was where I would be,
With love alone to dwell,
Was I but her or she but me,
Then love would all be well.
I wish to send my thoughts to her
As quick as thoughts can fly,
But as the winds the waters stir
The mirrors change and fly.

First Love

I ne'er was struck before that hour
With love so sudden and so sweet.
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower
And stole my heart away complete.
My face turned pale as deadly pale,
My legs refused to walk away,
And when she looked "what could I ail?"
My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face
And took my sight away.
The trees and bushes round the place
Seemed midnight at noonday.
I could not see a single thing,
Words from my eyes did start;
They spoke as chords do from the string
And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?
Is love's bed always snow?
She seemed to hear my silent voice
And love's appeal to know.
I never saw so sweet a face
As that I stood before:
My heart has left its dwelling-place
And can return no more.

Mary Bayfield

How beautiful the summer night
When birds roost on the mossy tree,
When moon and stars are shining bright
And home has gone the weary bee!
Then Mary Bayfield seeks the glen,
The white hawthorn and grey oak tree,

And nought but heaven can tell me then
How dear thy beauty is to me.

Dear is the dewdrop to the flower,
The old wall to the weary bee,
And silence to the evening hour,
And ivy to the stooping tree.
Dearer than these, than all beside,
Than blossoms to the moss-rose tree,
The maid who wanders by my side—
Sweet Mary Bayfield is to me.

Sweet is the moonlight on the tree,
The stars above the glassy lake,
That from the bottom look at me
Through shadows of the crimping brake.
Such are sweet things—but sweeter still
Than these and all beside I see
The maid whose look my heart can thrill,
My Mary Bayfield's look to me.

O Mary with the dark brown hair,
The rosy cheek, the beaming eye,
I would thy shade were ever near;
Then would I never grieve or sigh.
I love thee, Mary dearly love—
There's nought so fair on earth I see,
There's nought so dear in heaven above,
As Mary Bayfield is to me.

The Maid of Jerusalem

Maid of Jerusalem, by the Dead Sea,
I wandered all sorrowing thinking of thee,—
Thy city in ruins, thy kindred deplored,
All fallen and lost by the Ottoman's sword.

I saw thee sit there in disconsolate sighs,
Where the hall of thy fathers a ruined heap lies.
Thy fair finger showed me the place where they trod,
In thy childhood where flourished the city of God.

The place where they fell and the scenes where they lie,
In the tomb of Siloa—the tear in her eye
She stifled: transfixed there it grew like a pearl,
Beneath the dark lash of the sweet Jewish Girl.

Jerusalem is fallen! still thou art in bloom,
As fresh as the ivy around the lone tomb,
And fair as the lily of morning that waves
Its sweet-scented bells over desolate graves.

When I think of Jerusalem in kingdoms yet free,
I shall think of its ruins and think upon thee;
Thou beautiful Jewess, content thou mayest roam;
A bright spot in Eden still blooms as thy home.

Song

I would not feign a single sigh
Nor weep a single tear for thee:
The soul within these orbs burns dry;
A desert spreads where love should be.
I would not be a worm to crawl
A writhing suppliant in thy way;
For love is life, is heaven, and all
The beams of an immortal day.

For sighs are idle things and vain,
And tears for idiots vainly fall.
I would not kiss thy face again
Nor round thy shining slippers crawl.
Love is the honey, not the bee,
Nor would I turn its sweets to gall
For all the beauty found in thee,
Thy lily neck, rose cheek, and all.

I would not feign a single tale
Thy kindness or thy love to seek;
Nor sigh for Jenny of the Vale,
Her ruby smile or rosy cheek.
I would not have a pain to own
For those dark curls and those bright eyes
A frowning lip, a heart of stone,
False love and folly I despise.

Thou Flower of Summer

When in summer thou walkest
In the meads by the river,
And to thyself talkest,
Dost thou think of one ever—
A lost and a lorn one
That adores thee and loves thee?

And when happy morn's gone,
And nature's calm moves thee,
Leaving thee to thy sleep like an angel at rest,
Does the one who adores thee still live in thy breast?

Does nature eer give thee
Love's past happy vision,
And wrap thee and leave thee
In fancies elysian?
Thy beauty I clung to,
As leaves to the tree;
When thou fair and young too
Looked lightly on me,
Till love came upon thee like the sun to the west
And shed its perfuming and bloom on thy breast.

The Swallow

Pretty swallow, once again
Come and pass me in the rain.
Pretty swallow, why so shy?
Pass again my window by.

The horsepond where he dips his wings,
The wet day prints it full of rings.
The raindrops on his [ ] track
Lodge like pearls upon his back.

Then again he dips his wing
In the wrinkles of the spring,
Then oer the rushes flies again,
And pearls roll off his back like rain.

Pretty little swallow, fly
Village doors and windows by,
Whisking oer the garden pales
Where the blackbird finds the snails;

Whewing by the ladslove tree
For something only seen by thee;
Pearls that on the red rose hing
Fall off shaken by thy wing.

On that low thatched cottage stop,
In the sooty chimney pop,
Where thy wife and family
Every evening wait for thee.

The Sailor-Boy

Tis three years and a quarter since I left my own fireside
To go aboard a ship through love, and plough the ocean wide.
I crossed my native fields, where the scarlet poppies grew,
And the groundlark left his nest like a neighbour which I knew.

The pigeons from the dove cote cooed over the old lane,
The crow flocks from the oakwood went flopping oer the grain;
Like lots of dear old neighbours whom I shall see no more
They greeted me that morning I left the English shore.

The sun was just a-rising above the heath of furze,
And the shadows grow to giants; that bright ball never stirs:
There the shepherds lay with their dogs by their side,
And they started up and barked as my shadow they espied.

A maid of early morning twirled her mop upon the moor;
I wished her my farewell before she closed the door.
My friends I left behind me for other places new,
Crows and pigeons all were strangers as oer my head they flew.

Trees and bushes were all strangers, the hedges and the lanes,
The steeples and the houses and broad untrodden plains.
I passed the pretty milkmaid with her red and rosy face;
I knew not where I met her, I was strange to the place.

At last I saw the ocean, a pleasing sight to me:
I stood upon the shore of a mighty glorious sea.
The waves in easy motion went rolling on their way,
English colours were a-flying where the British squadron lay.

I left my honest parents, the church clock and the village;
I left the lads and lasses, the labour and the tillage;
To plough the briny ocean, which soon became my joy—
I sat and sang among the shrouds, a lonely sailor-boy.

The Sleep of Spring

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 een 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?

Mary Bateman

My love she wears a cotton plaid,
A bonnet of the straw;
Her cheeks are leaves of roses spread,
Her lips are like the haw.
In truth she is as sweet a maid
As true love ever saw.

Her curls are ever in my eyes,
As nets by Cupid flung;
Her voice will oft my sleep surprise,
More sweet then ballad sung.
O Mary Bateman's curling hair!
I wake, and there is nothing there.

I wake, and fall asleep again,
The same delights in visions rise;
There's nothing can appear more plain
Than those rose cheeks and those bright eyes.
I wake again, and all alone
Sits Darkness on his ebon throne.

All silent runs the silver Trent,
The cobweb veils are all wet through,
A silver bead's on every bent,
On every leaf a bleb of dew.
I sighed, the moon it shone so clear;
Was Mary Bateman walking here?

Bonny Mary O!

The morning opens fine, bonny Mary O!
The robin sings his song by the dairy O!
Where the little Jenny wrens cock their tails among the hens,
Singing morning's happy songs with Mary O!

The swallow's on the wing, bonny Mary O!
Where the rushes fringe the spring, bonny Mary O!
Where the cowslips do unfold, shaking tassels all of gold,
Which make the milk so sweet, bonny Mary O!

There's the yellowhammer's nest, bonny Mary O!
Where she hides her golden breast, bonny Mary O!
On her mystic eggs she dwells, with strange writing on their shells,
Hid in the mossy grass, bonny Mary O!

There the spotted cow gets food, bonny Mary O!
And chews her peaceful cud, bonny Mary O!
In the mole-hills and the bushes, and the clear brook fringed with rushes
To fill the evening pail, bonny Mary O!

The cowpond once agen, bonny Mary O!
Lies dimpled like thy sen, bonny Mary O!
Where the gnat swarms fall and rise under evening's mellow skies,
And on flags sleep dragon flies, bonny Mary O!

And I will meet thee there, bonny Mary O!
When a-milking you repair, bonny Mary O!
And I'll kiss thee on the grass, my buxom, bonny lass,
And be thine own for aye, bonny Mary O!

Where She Told Her Love

I saw her crop a rose
Right early in the day,
And I went to kiss the place
Where she broke the rose away
And I saw the patten rings
Where she oer the stile had gone,
And I love all other things
Her bright eyes look upon.
If she looks upon the hedge or up the leafing tree,
The whitethorn or the brown oak are made dearer things to me.

I have a pleasant hill
Which I sit upon for hours,
Where she cropt some sprigs of thyme
And other little flowers;
And she muttered as she did it
As does beauty in a dream,
And I loved her when she hid it
On her breast, so like to cream,
Near the brown mole on her neck that to me a diamond shone
Then my eye was like to fire, and my heart was like to stone.

There is a small green place
Where cowslips early curled,
Which on Sabbath day I trace,
The dearest in the world.
A little oak spreads oer it,
And throws a shadow round,
A green sward close before it,
The greenest ever found:
There is not a woodland nigh nor is there a green grove,
Yet stood the fair maid nigh me and told me all her love.

Autumn

I love the fitful gust that shakes
The casement all the day,
And from the glossy elm tree takes
The faded leaves away,

Twirling them by the window pane
With thousand others down the lane.

I love to see the shaking twig
Dance till the shut of eve,
The sparrow on the cottage rig,
Whose chirp would make believe
That Spring was just now flirting by
In Summer's lap with flowers to lie.

I love to see the cottage smoke
Curl upwards through the trees,
The pigeons nestled round the cote
On November days like these;
The cock upon the dunghill crowing,
The mill sails on the heath a-going.

The feather from the raven's breast
Falls on the stubble lea,
The acorns near the old crow's nest
Drop pattering down the tree;
The grunting pigs, that wait for all,
Scramble and hurry where they fall.

Invitation to Eternity

Say, wilt thou go with me, sweet maid,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through the valley-depths of shade,
Of bright and dark obscurity;
Where the path has lost its way,
Where the sun forgets the day,
Where there's nor light nor life to see,
Sweet maiden, wilt thou go with me?

Where stones will turn to flooding streams,
Where plains will rise like ocean's waves,
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And darkness darken into caves,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity
Where parents live and are forgot,
And sisters live and know us not?

Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be,
To live in death and be the same,
Without this life or home or name,

At once to be and not to be—
That was and is not—yet to see
Things pass like shadows, and the sky
Above, below, around us lie?

The land of shadows wilt thou trace,
Nor look nor know each other's face;
The present marred with reason gone,
And past and present both as one?
Say, maiden, can thy life be led
To join the living and the dead?
Then trace thy footsteps on with me:
We are wed to one eternity.

The Maple Tree

The maple with its tassel flowers of green,
That turns to red a staghorn-shaped seed,
Just spreading out its scolloped leaves is seen,
Of yellowish hue, yet beautifully green;
Bark ribbed like corderoy in seamy screed,
That farther up the stem is smoother seen,
Where the white hemlock with white umbel flowers
Up each spread stoven to the branches towers;
And moss around the stoven spreads, dark green,
And blotched leaved orchis, and the blue bell flowers;
Thickly they grow and neath the leaves are seen;
I love to see them gemmed with morning hours,
I love the lone green places where they be,
And the sweet clothing of the maple tree.

House or Window Flies

These little window dwellers, in cottages and halls, were always entertaining to me; after dancing in the window all day from sunrise to sunset they would sip of the tea, drink of the beer, and eat of the sugar, and be welcome all summer long. They look like things of mind or fairies, and seem pleased or dull as the weather permits. In many clean cottages and genteel houses, they are allowed every liberty to creep, fly, or do as they like; and seldom or ever do wrong. In fact they are the small or dwarfish portion of our own family, and so many fairy familiars that we know and treat as one of ourselves.

Dewdrops

The dewdrops on every blade of grass are so much like silver drops that I am obliged to stoop down as I walk to see if they are pearls, and those sprinkled on the ivy-woven beds of primroses underneath the hazels, whitethorns and maples are so like gold beads that I stooped

down to feel if they were hard, but they melted from my finger. And where the dew lies on the primrose, the violet and whitethorn leaves they are emerald and beryl, yet nothing more than the dews of the morning on the budding leaves; nay, the road grasses are covered with gold and silver beads, and the further we go the brighter they seem to shine, like solid gold and silver. It is nothing more than the sun's light and shade upon them in the dewy morning; every thorn-point and every bramble-spear has its trembling ornament: till the wind gets a little brisker, and then all is shaken off, and all the shining jewelry passes away into a common spring morning full of budding leaves, primroses, violets, vernal speedwell, bluebell and orchis, and commonplace objects.

Fragment

The cataract, whirling down the precipice,
Elbows down rocks and, shouldering, thunders through.
Roars, howls, and stifled murmurs never cease;
Hell and its agonies seem hid below.
Thick rolls the mist, that smokes and falls in dew;
The trees and greenwood wear the deepest green.
Horrible mysteries in the gulph stare through,
Roars of a million tongues, and none knows what they mean.

From "A Rhapsody"

Sweet solitude, what joy to be alone—
In wild, wood-shady dell to stay for hours.
Twould soften hearts if they were hard as stone
To see glad butterflies and smiling flowers.
Tis pleasant in these quiet lonely places,
Where not the voice of man our pleasure mars,
To see the little bees with coal black faces
Gathering sweets from little flowers like stars.

The wind seems calling, though not understood.
A voice is speaking; hark, it louder calls.
It echoes in the far-outstretching wood.
First twas a hum, but now it loudly squalls;
And then the pattering rain begins to fall,
And it is hushed—the fern leaves scarcely shake,
The tottergrass it scarcely stirs at all.
And then the rolling thunder gets awake,
And from black clouds the lightning flashes break.

The sunshine's gone, and now an April evening
Commences with a dim and mackerel sky.
Gold light and woolpacks in the west are leaving,
And leaden streaks their splendid place supply.

Sheep ointment seems to daub the dead-hued sky,
And night shuts up the lightsomeness of day,
All dark and absent as a corpse's eye.
Flower, tree, and bush, like all the shadows grey,
In leaden hues of desolation fade away.

Tis May; and yet the March flower Dandelion
Is still in bloom among the emerald grass,
Shining like guineas with the sun's warm eye on—
We almost think they are gold as we pass,
Or fallen stars in a green sea of grass.
They shine in fields, or waste grounds near the town.
They closed like painter's brush when even was.
At length they turn to nothing else but down,
While the rude winds blow off each shadowy crown.

Secret Love

I hid my love when young till I
Couldn't bear the buzzing of a fly;
I hid my love to my despite
Till I could not bear to look at light:
I dare not gaze upon her face
But left her memory in each place;
Where eer I saw a wild flower lie
I kissed and bade my love good bye.

I met her in the greenest dells
Where dewdrops pearl the wood blue bells
The lost breeze kissed her bright blue eye,
The bee kissed and went singing by,
A sunbeam found a passage there,
A gold chain round her neck so fair;
As secret as the wild bee's song
She lay there all the summer long.

I hid my love in field and town
Till een the breeze would knock me down,
The bees seemed singing ballads oer,
The fly's bass turned a lion's roar;
And even silence found a tongue,
To haunt me all the summer long;
The riddle nature could not prove
Was nothing else but secret love.

Bantry Bay

On the eighteenth of October we lay in Bantry Bay,
All ready to set sail, with a fresh and steady gale:
A fortnight and nine days we in the harbour lay,
And no breeze ever reached us or strained a single sail.
Three ships of war had we, and the great guns loaded all;
But our ships were dead and beaten that had never feared a foe.
The winds becalmed around us cared for no cannon ball;
They locked us in the harbour and would not let us go.

On the nineteenth of October, by eleven of the clock,
The sky turned black as midnight and a sudden storm came on—
Awful and sudden—and the cables felt the shock;
Our anchors they all broke away and every sheet was gone.
The guns fired off amid the strife, but little hope had we;
The billows broke above the ship and left us all below.
The crew with one consent cried "Bear further out to sea,"
But the waves obeyed no sailor's call, and we knew not where to go.

She foundered on a rock, while we clambered up the shrouds,
And staggered like a mountain drunk, wedged in the waves almost.
The red hot boiling billows foamed in the stooping clouds,
And in that fatal tempest the whole ship's crew were lost.
Have pity for poor mariners, ye landsmen, in a storm.
O think what they endure at sea while safe at home you stay.
All ye that sleep on beds at night in houses dry and warm,
O think upon the whole ship's crew, all lost at Bantry Bay.

Peggy's the Lady of the Hall

And will she leave the lowly clowns
For silk and satins gay,
Her woollen aprons and drab gowns
For lady's cold array?
And will she leave the wild hedge rose,
The redbreast and the wren,
And will she leave her Sunday beaus
And milk shed in the glen?
And will she leave her kind friends all
To be the Lady of the Hall?

The cowslips bowed their golden drops,
The white thorn white as sheets;
The lamb agen the old ewe stops,
The wren and robin tweets.
And Peggy took her milk pails still,
And sang her evening song,
To milk her cows on Cowslip Hill

For half the summer long.
But silk and satins rich and rare
Are doomed for Peggy still to wear.

But when the May had turned to haws,
The hedge rose swelled to hips,
Peggy was missed without a cause,
And left us in eclipse.
The shepherd in the hovel milks,
Where builds the little wren,
And Peggy's gone, all clad in silks—
Far from the happy glen,
From dog-rose, woodbine, clover, all
To be the Lady of the Hall.

I Dreamt of Robin

I opened the casement this morn at starlight,
And, the moment I got out of bed,
The daisies were quaking about in their white
And the cowslip was nodding its head.
The grass was all shivers, the stars were all bright,
And Robin that should come at e'en—
I thought that I saw him, a ghost by moonlight,
Like a stalking horse stand on the green.

I went bed agen and did nothing but dream
Of Robin and moonlight and flowers.
He stood like a shadow transfixed by a stream,
And I couldn't forget him for hours.
I'd just dropt asleep when I dreamed Robin spoke,
And the casement it gave such a shake,
As if every pane in the window was broke;
Such a patter the gravel did make.

So I up in the morning before the cock crew
And to strike me a light I sat down.
I saw from the door all his track in the dew
And, I guess, called "Come in and sit down."
And one, sure enough, tramples up to the door,
And who but young Robin his sen?
And ere the old folks were half willing to stir
We met, kissed, and parted agen.

The Peasant Poet

He loved the brook's soft sound,
The swallow swimming by.
He loved the daisy-covered ground,
The cloud-bedappled sky.
To him the dismal storm appeared
The very voice of God;
And when the evening rack was reared
Stood Moses with his rod.
And everything his eyes surveyed,
The insects in the brake,
Were creatures God Almighty made,
He loved them for His sake—
A silent man in life's affairs,
A thinker from a boy,
A peasant in his daily cares,
A poet in his joy.

To John Clare

Well, honest John, how fare you now at home?
The spring is come, and birds are building nests;
The old cock robin to the stye is come,
With olive feathers and its ruddy breast;
And the old cock, with wattles and red comb,
Struts with the hens, and seems to like some best,
Then crows, and looks about for little crumbs,
Swept out by little folks an hour ago;
The pigs sleep in the stye; the bookman comes—
The little boy lets home-close nesting go,
And pockets tops and taws, where daisies bloom,
To look at the new number just laid down,
With lots of pictures, and good stories too,
And Jack the Giant-killer's high renown.

Feb. 10, 1860.

Early Spring

The Spring is come, and Spring flowers coming too,
The crocus, patty kay, the rich hearts' ease;
The polyanthus peeps with blebs of dew,
And daisy flowers; the buds swell on the trees;
While oer the odd flowers swim grandfather bees
In the old homestead rests the cottage cow;
The dogs sit on their haunches near the pail,
The least one to the stranger growls "bow wow,"

Then hurries to the door and cocks his tail,
To knaw the unfinished bone; the placid cow
Looks oer the gate; the thresher's lumping flail
Is all the noise the spring encounters now.

May 28, 1860.

Clock-a-Clay

In the cowslip pips I lie,
Hidden from the buzzing fly,
While green grass beneath me lies,
Pearled with dew like fishes' eyes,
Here I lie, a clock-a-clay,
Waiting for the time of day.

While the forest quakes surprise,
And the wild wind sobs and sighs,
My home rocks as like to fall,
On its pillar green and tall;
When the pattering rain drives by
Clock-a-clay keeps warm and dry.

Day by day and night by night,
All the week I hide from sigh;
In the cowslip pips I lie,
In rain and dew still warm and dry;
Day and night, and night and day,
Red, black-spotted clock-a-clay.

My home shakes in wind and showers,
Pale green pillar topped with flowers,
Bending at the wild wind's breath,
Till I touch the grass beneath;
Here I live, lone clock-a-clay,
Watching for the time of day.

Little Trotty Wagtail

Little trotty wagtail he went in the rain,
And tittering, tottering sideways he neer got straight again,
He stooped to get a worm, and looked up to get a fly,
And then he flew away ere his feathers they were dry.

Little trotty wagtail, he waddled in the mud,
And left his little footmarks, trample where he would.

He waddled in the water-pudge, and waggle went his tail,
And chirrupt up his wings to dry upon the garden rail.

Little trotty wagtail, you nimble all about,
And in the dimpling water-pudge you waddle in and out;
Your home is nigh at hand, and in the warm pig-stye,
So, little Master Wagtail, I'll bid you a good-bye.

Graves of Infants

Infant' graves are steps of angels, where
Earth's brightest gems of innocence repose.
God is their parent, and 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 an 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 oer them, and the gale gently sighs

Their lives were nothing but a sunny shower,
Melting on flowers as tears melt from the eye.
Their deaths were dew-drops on Heaven's amaranth bower,
And tolled on flowers as Summer gales went by.
They bowed and trembled, and they left no sigh,
And the sun smiled to show their 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.

The Dying Child

He could not die when trees were green,
For he loved the time too well.
His little hands, when flowers were seen,
Were held for the bluebell,
As he was carried oer the green.

His eye glanced at the white-nosed bee;
He knew those children of the Spring:
When he was well and on the lea
He held one in his hands to sing,
Which filled his heart with glee.

Infants, the children of the Spring!
How can an infant die
When butterflies are on the wing,

Green grass, and such a sky?
How can they die at Spring?

He held his hands for daisies white,
And then for violets blue,
And took them all to bed at night
That in the green fields grew,
As childhood's sweet delight.

And then he shut his little eyes,
And flowers would notice not;
Birds' nests and eggs caused no surprise,
He now no blossoms got:
They met with plaintive sighs.

When Winter came and blasts did sigh,
And bare were plain and tree,
As he for ease in bed did lie
His soul seemed with the free,
He died so quietly.

Love Lives Beyond the Tomb

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

Love lives in sleep,
The 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 wing
Bring love and music to the mind.

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

Love lives beyond
The tomb, the earth, the flowers, and dew.
I love the fond,
The faithful, young and true.

I Am

I AM: yet what I am none cares or knows,
My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes,
They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
Like shades in love and death's oblivion lost;
And yet I am, and live with shadows tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life nor joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
And een the dearest—that I loved the best—
Are strange—nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod;
A place where woman never smiled or wept;
There to abide with my Creator, GOD,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept:
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie;
The grass below—above the vaulted sky.

APPENDICES

Fragment

A Specimen of Clare's rough drafts

In a huge cloud of mountain hue
The sun sets dark nor shudders through
One single beam to shine again
Tis night already in the lane

The settled clouds in ridges lie
And some swell mountains calm and high

Clouds rack and drive before the wind
In shapes and forms of every kind
Like waves that rise without the roars
And rocks that guard untrodden shores
Now castles pass majestic bye
And ships in peaceful havens lie
These gone ten thousand shapes ensue
For ever beautiful and new

The scattered clouds lie calm and still
And day throws gold on every hill
Their thousand heads in glorys run
As each were worlds and owned a sun
The rime it clings to every thing
It beards the early buds of spring
The mossy pales the orchard spray
Are feathered with its silver grey

Rain drizzles in the face so small
We scarce can say it rains at all

The cows turned to the pelting rain
No longer at their feed remain
But in the sheltering hovel hides
That from two propping dotterels strides

The sky was hilled with red and blue
With lighter shadows waking through
Till beautiful and beaming day
Shed streaks of gold for miles away

The linnet stopt her song to clean
Her spreading wings of yellow green
And turn his head as liking well
To smooth the dropples as they fell

One scarce could keep one's path aright
From gazing upward at the sight

The boys for wet are forced to pass
The cuckoo flowers among the grass
To hasten on as well they may
For hedge or tree or stack of hay
Where they for shelter can abide
Safe seated by its sloping side
That by the blackthorn thicket cowers
A shelter in the strongest showers

The gardens golden gilliflowers
Are paled with drops of amber showers

Dead leaves from hedges flirt about
The chaff from barn doors winnows out
And down without a wing to flye
As fast as bees goes sailing bye
The feather finds a wing to flye
And dust in wirl puffs winnows bye

When the rain at midday stops
Spangles glitter in the drops
And as each thread a sunbeam was
Cobwebs glitter in the grass

The sheep all loaded with the rain
Try to shake it off in vain
And ere dryed by wind and sun
The load will scarcely let them run

The shepherds foot is sodden through
And leaves will clout his brushing shoe
The buttercups in gold alloyed
And daiseys by the shower destroyed

The sun is overcast clouds lie
And thicken over all the sky

Crows morn and eve will flock in crowds
To fens and darken like the clouds
So many is their cumberous flight
The dull eve darkens into night

Clouds curl and curdle blue and grey
And dapple the young summers day

Through the torn woods the violent rain
Roars and rattles oer the plain
And bubbles up in every pool
Till dykes and ponds are brimming full

The thickening clouds move slowly on
Till all the many clouds are one
That spreads oer all the face of day
And turns the sunny shine to grey

Now the meadow water smokes
And hedgerows dripping oaks
Fitter patter all around

And dimple the once dusty ground
The spinners threads about the weeds
Are hung with little drops in beads
Clover silver green becomes
And purple blue surrounds the plumbs
And every place breaths fresh and fair
When morning pays her visit there

The day is dull the heron trails
On flapping wings like heavy sails
And oer the mead so lowly swings
She fans the herbage with her wings

The waterfowl with suthering wings
Dive down the river splash and spring
Up to the very clouds again
That sprinkle scuds of coming rain
That flye and drizzle all the day
Till dripping grass is turned to grey

The various clouds that move or lye
Like mighty travellers in the sky
All mountainously ridged or curled
That may have travelled round the world

The water ruckles into waves
And loud the neighbouring woodland raves
All telling of the coming storm
That fills the village with alarm

Ere yet the sun is two hours high
Winds find all quarters of the sky
With sudden shiftings all around
And now the grass upon the ground
And now the leaves they wirl and wirl
With many a flirting flap and curl

JOHN CLARE: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

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