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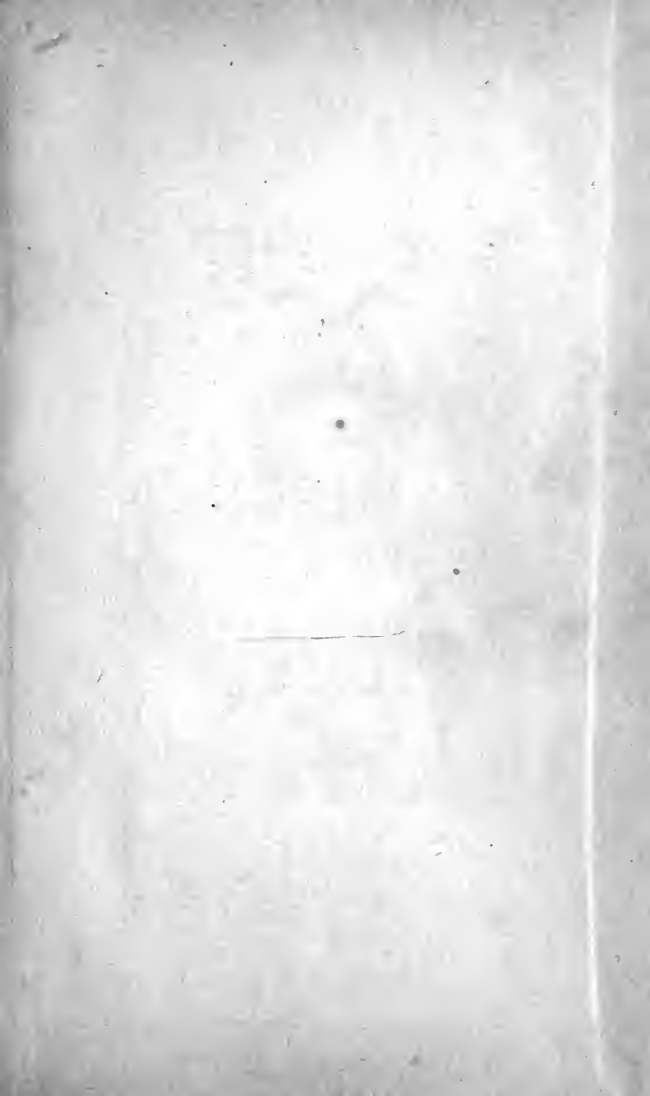
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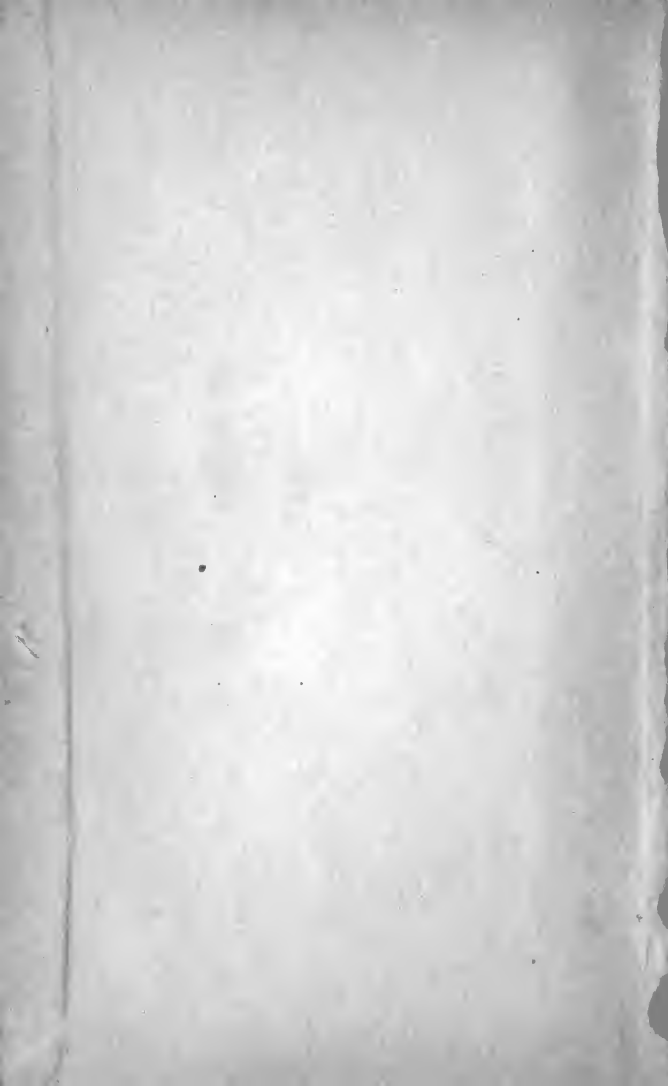
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# THE TASK:

A Poem

IN SIX BOOKS.

BY

WILLIAM COWPER, Esq.,  
OF THE INNER TEMPLE.

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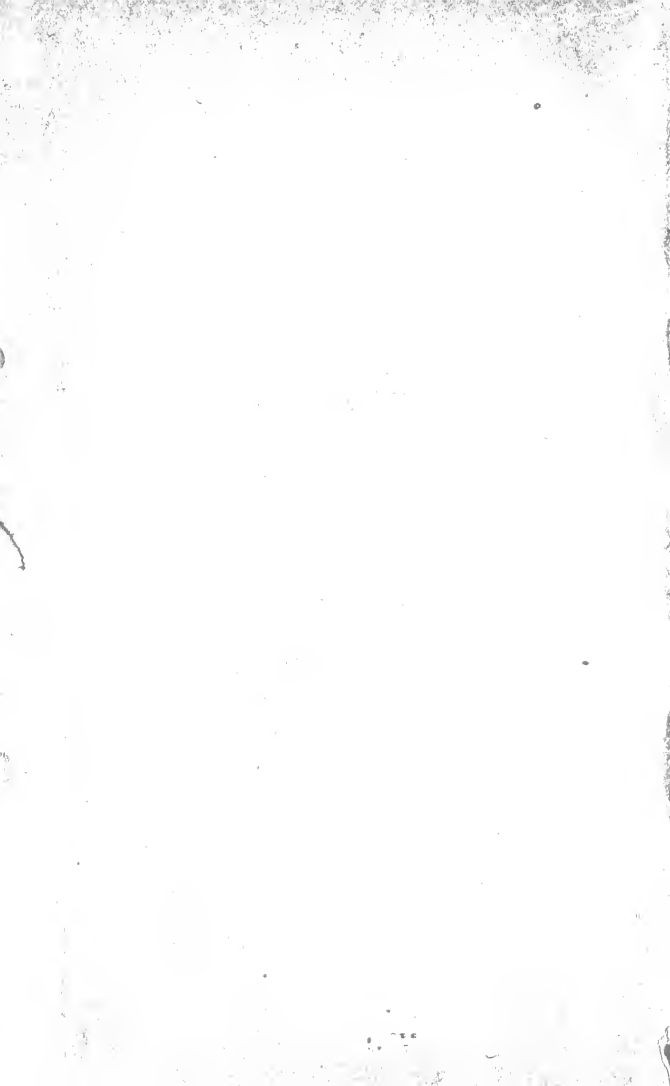
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## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE history of the following production is briefly this : A lady, fond of blank verse, demanded a poem of that kind from the Author, and gave him the Sofa for a subject. He obeyed; and having much leisure, connected another subject with it; and, pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair—a Volume.





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THE TASK. BOOK I.

THE SOFA.

## ARGUMENT.

HISTORICAL deduction of seats, from the stool to the Sofa. A schoolboy's ramble. A walk in the country. The scene described. Rural sounds as well as sights delightful. Another walk. Mistake concerning the charms of solitude corrected. Colonnades commended. Alcove, and the view from it. The wilderness. The grove. The thresher. The necessity and the benefits of exercise. The works of nature superior to, and in some instances inimitable by, art. The wearisomeness of what is commonly called a life of pleasure. Change of scene sometimes expedient. A common described, and the character of crazy Kate introduced. Gipsies. The blessings of civilized life. That state most favourable to virtue. The South Sea islanders - compassionated, but chiefly Omai. His present state of mind supposed. Civilized life friendly to virtue, but not great cities. Great cities, and London in particular, allowed their due praise, but censured. Fête champêtre. The book concludes with a reflection on the effects of dissipation and effeminacy upon our public measures.

## THE TASK. BOOK I.

### THE SOFA.

I SING the SOFA. I who lately sang  
Truth, Hope, and Charity,\* and touch'd with awe  
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,  
Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,  
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme: 5  
The theme though humble, yet august and proud  
The occasion—for the Fair commands the song.  
Time was, when clothing sumptuous or for use,  
Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.  
As yet black breeches were not; satin smooth, 10  
Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile:  
The hardy chief upon the rugged rock,  
Wash'd by the sea, or on the gravelly bank  
Thrown up by wintry torrents roaring loud,  
Fearless of wrong, reposed his weary strength. 15  
Those barbarous ages past, succeeded next  
The birthday of Invention; weak at first,  
Dull in design, and clumsy to perform.  
Joint-stools were then created; on three legs  
Upborne they stood. Three legs upholding firm 20

\* See Poems, vol. i.

A massy slab, in fashion square or round.  
 On such a stool immortal Alfred sat,  
 And sway'd the sceptre of his infant realms :  
 And such in ancient halls and mansions drear  
 May still be seen ; but perforated sore, 25  
 And drill'd in holes, the solid oak is found,  
 By worms voracious eating through and through.

At length a generation more refined  
 Improved the simple plan ; made three legs four,  
 Gave them a twisted form vermicular, 30  
 And o'er the seat, with plenteous wadding stuff'd,  
 Induced a splendid cover, green and blue,  
 Yellow and red, of tapestry richly wrought  
 And woven close, or needlework sublime.  
 There might ye see the piony spread wide, 35  
 The full blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,  
 Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,  
 And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.

Now came the cane from India, smooth and bright  
 With Nature's varnish ; sever'd into stripes, 40  
 That interlaced each other, these supplied  
 Of texture firm a lattice-work, that braced  
 The new machine, and it became a chair.  
 But restless was the chair ; the back erect  
 Distress'd the weary loins, that felt no ease ; 45  
 The slippery seat betray'd the sliding part  
 That press'd it, and the feet hung dangling down,  
 Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.

These for the rich ; the rest, whom Fate had placed  
 In modest mediocrity, content 50  
 With base materials, sat on well-tann'd hides,  
 Obdurate and unyielding, glassy smooth,  
 With here and there a tuft of crimson yarn,  
 Or scarlet crewel, in the cushion fix'd,  
 If cushion might be call'd, what harder seem'd 55  
 Than the firm oak of which the frame was form'd.  
 No want of timber then was felt or fear'd  
 In Albion's happy isle. The lumber stood  
 Ponderous and fix'd by its own massy weight.  
 But elbows still were wanting; these, some say, 60  
 An alderman of Cripplegate contrived;  
 And some ascribe the invention to a priest,  
 Burly and big, and studious of his ease.  
 But rude at first, and not with easy slope  
 Receding wide, they press'd against the ribs, 65  
 And bruised the side; and, elevated high,  
 Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears.  
 Long time elapsed or e'er our rugged sires  
 Complain'd, though incommodiously pent in,  
 And ill at ease behind. The ladies first 70  
 'Gan murmur, as became the softer sex.  
 Ingenious Fancy, never better pleased  
 Than when employ'd to accommodate the fair,  
 Heard the sweet moan with pity, and devised  
 The soft settee; one elbow at each end, 75  
 And in the midst an elbow it received,

United yet divided, twain at once.  
 So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne ;  
 And so two citizens, who take the air,  
 Close pack'd, and smiling, in a chaise and one. 80  
 But relaxation of the languid frame,  
 By soft recumbency of outstretch'd limbs,  
 Was bliss reserved for happier days. So slow  
 The growth of what is excellent ; so hard  
 To attain perfection in this nether world. 85  
 Thus first Necessity invented stools,  
 Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,  
 And Luxury the accomplish'd Sofa last.

The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick,  
 Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he 90  
 Who quits the coachbox at the midnight hour,  
 To sleep within the carriage more secure,  
 His legs depending at the open door.  
 Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,  
 The tedious rector drawling o'er his head ; 95  
 And sweet the clerk below. But neither sleep  
 Of lazy nurse, who snores the sick man dead,  
 Nor his who quits the box at midnight hour,  
 To slumber in the open carriage more secure,  
 Nor sleep enjoy'd by curate in his desk, 100  
 Nor yet the dozings of the clerk are sweet,  
 Compared with the repose the Sofa yields.

O may I live exempted (while I live  
 Guiltless of pamper'd appetite obscene)



From pangs arthritic, that infest the toe 105  
 Of libertine Excess. The Sofa suits  
 The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,  
 Though on a Sofa, may I never feel:  
 For I have loved the rural walk through lanes  
 Of grassy swarth, close cropp'd by nibbling sheep, 110  
 And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
 Of thorny boughs; have loved the rural walk  
 O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,  
 E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds  
 To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames; 115  
 And still remember, nor without regret,  
 Of hours that sorrow since has much endear'd,  
 How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,  
 Still hungering, penniless, and far from home,  
 I fed on scarlet lips and stony haws, 120  
 Or blushing crabs, or berries, that emboss  
 The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere,  
 Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite  
 Disdains not; nor the palate, undepraved  
 By culinary arts, unsavoury deems. 125  
 No Sofa then awaited my return;  
 Nor Sofa then I needed. Youth repairs  
 His wasted spirits quickly, by long toil  
 Incurring short fatigue; and though our years,  
 As life declines, speed rapidly away, 130  
 And not a year but pilfers as he goes  
 Some youthful grace, that age would gladly keep;

A tooth or auburn lock, and by degrees  
 Their length and colour from the locks they spare ;  
 The elastic spring of an unwearied foot, 135  
 That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,  
 That play of lungs, inhaling and again  
 Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes  
 Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,  
 Mine have not pilfer'd yet ; nor yet impair'd 140  
 My relish of fair prospect : scenes that soothed  
 Or charm'd me young, no longer young, I find  
 Still soothing, and of power to charm me still.  
 And witness, dear companion of my walks,  
 Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive 145  
 Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love,  
 Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth  
 And well tried virtues, could alone inspire—  
 Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.  
 Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere, 150  
 And that my raptures are not conjured up  
 To serve occasions of poetic pomp,  
 But genuine, and art partner of them all.  
 How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
 Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne 155  
 The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
 While Admiration, feeding at the eye,  
 And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.  
 Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd  
 The distant plough slow moving, and beside 160

His labouring team, that swerved not from the track,  
 The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy !  
 Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain  
 Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er,  
 Conducts the eye along his sinuous course 165  
 Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,  
 Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,  
 That screen the herdsman's solitary hut ;  
 While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,  
 That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale, 170  
 The sloping land recedes into the clouds ;  
 Displaying on its varied side the grace  
 Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,  
 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
 Just undulates upon the listening ear, 175  
 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
 Scenes must be beautiful which, daily view'd,  
 Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
 Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.  
 Praise justly due to those that I describe. 180  
 Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,  
 Exhilarate the spirit, and restore  
 The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,  
 That sweep the skirt of some far spreading wood  
 Of ancient growth, make music not unlike 185  
 The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,  
 And lull the spirit while they fill the mind ;  
 Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,

And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.  
 Nor less composure waits upon the roar 190  
 Of distant floods, or on the softer voice  
 Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip  
 Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall  
 Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length.  
 In matted grass, that with a livelier green 195  
 Betrays the secret of their silent course.  
 Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,  
 But animated nature sweeter still,  
 To soothe and satisfy the human ear.  
 Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one 200  
 The livelong night: nor these alone, whose notes  
 Nice-finger'd Art must emulate in vain,  
 But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime  
 In still repeated circles, screaming loud,  
 The jay, the pie, and e'en the boding owl, 205  
 That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.  
 Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,  
 Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,  
 And only there, please highly for their sake.  
 Peace to the artist, whose ingenious thought 210  
 Devised the weatherhouse, that useful toy!  
 Fearless of humid air and gathering rains,  
 Forth steps the man—an emblem of myself!  
 More delicate his timorous mate retires.  
 When Winter soaks the fields, and female feet, 215  
 Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,

Or ford the rivulets, are best at home,  
 The task of new discoveries falls on me.  
 At such a season, and with such a charge,  
 Once went I forth; and found, till then unknown, 220  
 A cottage, whither oft we since repair:  
 'Tis perch'd upon the green hill top, but close  
 Environ'd with a ring of branching elms,  
 That overhang the thatch, itself unseen  
 Peeps at the vale below; so thick beset 225  
 With foliage of such dark redundant growth,  
 I call'd the low-roof'd lodge the peasant's nest.  
 And, hidden as it is, and far remote  
 From such displeasing sounds as haunt the ear  
 In village or in town, the bay of curs 230  
 Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,  
 And infants clamorous whether pleased or pain'd,  
 Oft have I wish'd the peaceful covert mine.  
 Here, I have said, at least I should possess  
 The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge 235  
 The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure.  
 Vain thought! the dweller in that still retreat  
 Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.  
 Its elevated site forbids the wretch  
 To drink sweet waters of the crystal well; 240  
 He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,  
 And, heavy laden, brings his beverage home,  
 Far fetch'd and little worth; nor seldom waits,  
 Dependent on the baker's punctual call,

To hear his creaking panniers at the door, 245  
 Angry and sad, and his last crust consumed.  
 So farewell envy of the peasant's nest!  
 If solitude make scant the means of life,  
 Society for me!—thou seeming sweet,  
 Be still a pleasing object in my view; 250  
 My visit still, but never mine abode.

Not distant far, a length of colonnade  
 Invites us. Monument of ancient taste,  
 Now scorn'd, but worthy of a better fate.  
 Our fathers knew the value of a screen 255  
 From sultry suns; and, in their shaded walks  
 And long protracted bowers, enjoyed at noon  
 The gloom and coolness of declining day.  
 We bear our shades about us; self-deprived  
 Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread, 260  
 And range an Indian waste without a tree.  
 Thanks to Benevolus\*—he spares me yet  
 These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines;  
 And, though himself so polish'd, still reprieves  
 The obsolete prolixity of shade. 265

Descending now (but cautious, lest too fast)  
 A sudden steep upon a rustic bridge,  
 We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip  
 Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.  
 Hence, ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme, 270

\* John Courtney Throckmorton, Esq., of Weston Underwood.

We mount again, and feel at every step  
 Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,  
 Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.  
 He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,  
 Disfigures earth : and, plotting in the dark, 275  
 Toils much to earn a monumental pile,  
 That may record the mischiefs he has done.

The summit gain'd, behold the proud alcove  
 That crowns it ! yet not all its pride secures  
 The grand retreat from injuries impress'd 280  
 By rural carvers, who with knives deface  
 The panels, leaving an obscure, rude name,  
 In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.  
 So strong the zeal to immortalize himself  
 Beats in the breast of man, that e'en a few, 285  
 Few transient years, won from the abyss abhorr'd  
 Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,  
 And even to a clown. Now roves the eye ;  
 And, posted on this speculative height,  
 Exults in its command. The sheepfold here 290  
 Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.  
 At first, progressive as a stream, they seek  
 The middle field ; but, scattered by degrees,  
 Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.  
 There from the sunburnt hay-field homeward creeps 295  
 The loaded wain ; while, lightened of its charge,  
 The wain that meets it passes swiftly by ;

The boorish driver leaning o'er his team  
 Vociferous, and impatient of delay.  
 Nor less attractive is the woodland scene, 300  
 Diversified with trees of every growth,  
 Alike, yet various. Here the gray smooth trunks  
 Of ash, or lime, or beech, distinctly shine,  
 Within the twilight of their distant shades ;  
 There, lost behind a rising ground, the woods 305  
 Seem sunk, and shortened to its topmost boughs.  
 No tree in all the grove but has its charms,  
 Though each its hue peculiar ; paler some,  
 And of a wannish gray ; the willow such,  
 And poplar, that with silver lines his leaf, 310  
 And ash far stretching his umbrageous arm ;  
 Of deeper green the elm ; and deeper still,  
 Lord of the woods, the long surviving oak.  
 Some glossy leaved, and shining in the sun,  
 The maple, and the beech of oily nuts 315  
 Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve  
 Diffusing odours : nor unnoted pass  
 The sycamore, capricious in attire,  
 Now green, now tawny, and, ere autumn yet  
 Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright. 320  
 O'er these, but far beyond (a spacious map  
 Of hill and valley interposed between),  
 The Ouse, dividing the well water'd land,  
 Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,  
 As bashful, yet impatient to be seen. 325



Hence the declivity is sharp and short,  
 And such the reascent; between them weeps  
 A little naiad her impoverish'd urn  
 All summer long, which winter fills again.  
 The folded gates would bar my progress now, 330  
 But that the lord\* of this enclosed demesne,  
 Communicative of the good he owns,  
 Admits me to a share; the guiltless eye  
 Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.  
 Refreshing change! where now the blazing sun? 335  
 By short transition we have lost his glare,  
 And stepp'd at once into a cooler clime.  
 Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn  
 Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice  
 That yet a remnant of your race survives. 340  
 How airy and how light the graceful arch,  
 Yet awful as the consecrated roof  
 Reëchoing pious anthems! while beneath,  
 The chequer'd earth seems restless as a flood  
 Brush'd by the wind. So sportive is the light 345  
 Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,  
 Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,  
 And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves  
 Play wanton, every moment, every spot.  
 And now, with nerves new braced and spirits  
 cheer'd, 350

\* See the foregoing note.

We tread the wilderness, whose well roll'd walks,  
 With curvature of slow and easy sweep—  
 Deception innocent—give ample space  
 To narrow bounds. The grove receives us next;  
 Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms 355  
 We may discern the thresher at his task.  
 Thump after thump resounds the constant flail,  
 That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls  
 Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff;  
 The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist 360  
 Of atoms, sparkling in the noonday beam.  
 Come hither, ye that press your beds of down,  
 And sleep not; see him sweating o'er his bread  
 Before he eats it.—'Tis the primal curse,  
 But soften'd into mercy; made the pledge 365  
 Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.  
 By ceaseless action all that is subsists.  
 Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel  
 That Nature rides upon maintains her health,  
 Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads 370  
 An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.  
 Its own revolvency upholds the world.  
 Winds from all quarters agitate the air,  
 And fit the limpid element for use,  
 Else noxious: oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams, 375  
 All feel the freshening impulse, and are cleansed  
 By restless undulation; e'en the oak  
 Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm:

He seems indeed indignant, and to feel  
The impression of the blast with proud disdain, 380  
Frowning, as if in his unconscious arm  
He held the thunder : but the monarch owes  
His firm stability to what he scorns—  
More fix'd below, the more disturb'd above.  
The law, by which all creatures else are bound, 385  
Binds man, the Lord of all. Himself derives  
No mean advantage from a kindred cause,  
From strenuous toil his hours of sweetest ease.  
The sedentary stretch their lazy length  
When Custom bids, but no refreshment find, 390  
For none they need : the languid eye, the cheek  
Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,  
And wither'd muscle, and the vapid soul,  
Reproach their owner with that love of rest  
To which he forfeits e'en the rest he loves. 395  
Not such the alert and active. Measure life  
By its true worth, the comforts it affords,  
And theirs alone seems worthy of the name,  
Good health, and, its associate in the most,  
Good temper ; spirits prompt to undertake, 400  
And not soon spent, though in an arduous task ;  
The powers of fancy and strong thought are theirs ;  
E'en age itself seems privileged in them,  
With clear exemption from its own defects,  
A sparkling eye beneath a wrinkled front 405  
The veteran shows, and, gracing a gray beard

With youthful smiles, descends toward the grave  
 Sprightly, and old almost without decay.  
 X Like a coy maiden, Ease, when courted most,  
 Farthest retires—an idol, at whose shrine 410  
 Who oftenest sacrifice are favour'd least.  
 The love of Nature, and the scenes she draws,  
 Is Nature's dictate. Strange! there should be found,  
 Who, self-imprison'd in their proud saloons,  
 Renounce the odours of the open field 415  
 For the unscented fictions of the loom;  
 Who, satisfied with only pencil'd scenes,  
 Prefer to the performance of a God  
 The inferior wonders of an artist's hand!  
 Lovely indeed the mimic works of Art; 420  
 But Nature's works far lovelier. I admire,  
 None more admires, the painter's magic skill,  
 Who shows me that which I shall never see,  
 Conveys a distant country into mine,  
 And throws Italian light on English walls: 425  
 But imitative strokes can do no more  
 Than please the eye—sweet Nature every sense.  
 The air salubrious of her lofty hills, †  
 The cheering fragrance of her dewy vales,  
 And music of her woods—no works of man 430  
 May rival these; these all bespeak a power  
 Peculiar, and exclusively her own.  
 Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast;  
 'Tis free to all—'tis every day renew'd;

Who scorns it starves deservedly at home. 435  
 He does not scorn it, who, imprison'd long  
 In some unwholesome dungeon, and a prey  
 To sallow sickness, which the vapours dank  
 And clammy, of his dark abode have bred,  
 Escapes at last to liberty and light: 440  
 His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue;  
 His eye relumines its extinguish'd fires;  
 He walks, he leaps, he runs—is wing'd with joy,  
 And riots in the sweets of every breeze.  
 He does not scorn it, who has long endured 445  
 A fever's agonies, and fed on drugs.  
 Nor yet the mariner, his blood inflamed  
 With acrid salts; his very heart athirst  
 To gaze at Nature in her green array,  
 Upon the ship's tall side he stands, possess'd 450  
 With visions prompted by intense desire:  
 Fair fields appear below, such as he left  
 Far distant, such as he would die to find—  
 He seeks them headlong, and is seen no more.  
 The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns; 455  
 The lowering eye, the petulance, the frown,  
 And sullen sadness, that o'ershade, distort,  
 And mar the face of Beauty, when no cause  
 For such immeasurable woe appears,  
 These Flora banishes, and gives the fair 460  
 Sweet smiles, and bloom less transient than her own.  
 It is the constant revolution, stale

And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,  
That palls and satiates, and makes languid life  
A pedlar's pack, that bows the bearer down. 465  
Health suffers, and the spirits ebb; the heart  
Recoils from its own choice—at the full feast  
Is famish'd—finds no music in the song,  
No smartness in the jest; and wonders why,  
Yet thousands still desire to journey on, 470  
Though halt, and weary of the path they tread.  
The paralytic, who can hold her cards,  
But cannot play them, borrows a friend's hand  
To deal and shuffle, to divide and sort  
Her mingled suits and sequences; and sits, 475  
Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad  
And silent cipher, while her proxy plays.  
Others are dragg'd into the crowded room  
Between supporters; and, once seated, sit,  
Through downright inability to rise, 480  
Till the stout bearers lift the corpse again.  
These speak a loud memento. Yet e'en these  
Themselves love life, and cling to it, as he  
That overhangs a torrent to a twig.  
They love it, and yet loathe it; fear to die, 485  
Yet scorn the purposes for which they live.  
Then wherefore not renounce them? No—the dread,  
The slavish dread of solitude, that breeds  
Reflection and remorse, the fear of shame,  
And their inveterate habits, all forbid. 490

Whom call we gay? That honour has been long  
 The boast of mere pretenders to the name.  
 The innocent are gay—the lark is gay,  
 That dries his feathers, saturate with dew,  
 Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams 495  
 Of dayspring overshoot his humble nest.  
 The peasant too, a witness of his song,  
 Himself a songster, is as gay as he.  
 But save me from the gaiety of those  
 Whose headaches nail them to a noonday bed; 500  
 And save me too from theirs whose haggard eyes  
 Flash desperation, and betray their pangs  
 For property stripp'd off by cruel chance;  
 From gaiety, that fills the bones with pain,  
 The mouth with blasphemy, the heart with woe. 505  
 The earth was made so various, that the mind  
 Of desultory man, studious of change,  
 And pleased with novelty, might be indulged.  
 Prospects, however lovely, may be seen  
 Till half their beauties fade; the weary sight, 510  
 Too well acquainted with their smiles, slides off  
 Fastidious, seeking less familiar scenes.  
 Then snug enclosures in the shelter'd vale,  
 Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,  
 Delight us; happy to renounce awhile, 515  
 Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,  
 That such short absence may endear it more.  
 Then forests, or the savage rock, may please,

That hides the seamew in his hollow clefts  
 Above the reach of man. His hoary head, 520  
 Conspicuous many a league, the mariner,  
 Bound homeward, and in hope already there,  
 Greets with three cheers exulting. At his waist  
 A girdle of half-wither'd shrubs he shows,  
 And at his feet the baffled billows die. 525

The common, overgrown with fern, and rough  
 With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd,  
 And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,  
 And decks itself with ornaments of gold,  
 Yields no unpleasing ramble; there the turf 530  
 Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs  
 And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense  
 With luxury of unexpected sweets.

There often wanders one, whom better days  
 Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimm'd. 535  
 With lace, and hat with splendid riband bound.  
 A serving maid was she, and fell in love  
 With one who left her, went to sea, and died.  
 Her fancy follow'd him through foaming waves  
 To distant shores; and she would sit and weep 540  
 At what a sailor suffers; fancy too,  
 Delusive most where warmest wishes are,  
 Would oft anticipate his glad return,  
 And dream of transports she was not to know.  
 She heard the doleful tidings of his death— 545  
 And never smiled again! and now she roams



The dreary waste ; there spends the livelong day.  
 And there, unless when charity forbids,  
 The livelong night. A tatter'd apron hides,  
 Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown 550  
 More tatter'd still; and both but ill conceal  
 A bosom heaved with never ceasing sighs.  
 She begs an idle pin of all she meets,  
 And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,  
 Though press'd with hunger oft, or comelier clothes, 555  
 Though pinch'd with cold, asks never.—Kate is crazed

I see a column of slow rising smoke  
 O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild:  
 A vagabond and useless tribe there eat  
 Their miserable meal. A kettle, slung 560  
 Between two poles upon a stick transverse,  
 Receives the morsel—flesh obscene of dog,  
 Or vermin, or at best of cock purloin'd  
 From his accustom'd perch. Hard-faring race!  
 They pick their fuel out of every hedge, 565  
 Which, kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquench'd  
 The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide  
 Their fluttering rags, and shows a tawny skin,  
 The vellum of the pedigree they claim.  
 Great skill have they in palmistry, and more 570  
 To conjure clean away the gold they touch,  
 Conveying worthless dross into its place;  
 Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.  
 Strange! that a creature rational, and cast

In human mould, should brutalize by choice 575  
 His nature ; and, though capable of arts,  
 By which the world might profit, and himself,  
 Self-banish'd from society, prefer  
 Such squalid sloth to honourable toil !  
 Yet even these, though, feigning sickness oft, 580  
 They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb,  
 And vex their flesh with artificial sores,  
 Can change their whine into a mirthful note  
 When safe occasion offers ; and with dance,  
 And music of the bladder and the bag, 585  
 Beguile their woes, and make the woods resound.  
 Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy  
 The houseless rovers of the sylvan world ;  
 And, breathing wholesome air, and wandering much,  
 Need other physic none to heal the effects 590  
 Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold.

Blest he, though undistinguish'd from the crowd  
 By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure,  
 Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside  
 His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn, 595  
 The manners and the arts of civil life.  
 His wants indeed are many ; but supply  
 Is obvious, placed within the easy reach  
 Of temperate wishes and industrious hands.  
 Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil ; 600  
 Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,  
 And terrible to sight, as when she springs

(If e'er she spring spontaneous) in remote  
 And barbarous climes, where violence prevails,  
 And strength is lord of all; but gentle, kind, 605  
 By culture tamed, by liberty refresh'd,  
 And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.  
 War and the chase engross the savage whole;  
 War follow'd for revenge, or to supplant  
 The envied tenants of some happier spot: 610  
 The chase for sustenance, precarious trust!  
 His hard condition with severe constraint  
 Binds all his faculties, forbids all growth  
 Of wisdom, proves a school, in which he learns  
 Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate, 615  
 Mean self-attachment, and scarce aught beside.  
 Thus fare the shivering natives of the north,  
 And thus the rangers of the western world,  
 Where it advances far into the deep,  
 Towards the antarctic. E'en the favour'd isles, 620  
 So lately found, although the constant sun  
 Cheer all their seasons with a grateful smile,  
 Can boast but little virtue; and, inert  
 Through plenty, lose in morals what they gain  
 In manners—victims of luxurious ease. 625  
 These therefore I can pity, placed remote  
 From all that science traces, art invents,  
 Or inspiration teaches; and enclosed  
 In boundless oceans, never to be pass'd  
 By navigators uninform'd as they, 630

Or plough'd perhaps by British bark again :  
 But far beyond the rest, and with most cause,  
 Thee, gentle savage !\* whom no love of thee  
 Or thine, but curiosity, perhaps,  
 Or else vain glory, prompted us to draw 635

Forth from thy native bowers, to show thee here  
 With what superior skill we can abuse

The gifts of Providence, and squander life.

The dream is past ; and thou hast found again  
 Thy cocoas and bananas, palms and yams, 640  
 And homestall thatch'd with leaves. But hast thou  
 found

Their former charms ? and having seen our state,  
 Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp  
 Of equipage, our gardens, and our sports,  
 And heard our music ; are thy simple friends, 645

Thy simple fare, and all thy plain delights  
 As dear to thee as once ? And have thy joys  
 Lost nothing by comparison with ours ?

Rude as thou art (for we return'd thee rude  
 And ignorant, except of outward show), 650

I cannot think thee yet so dull of heart  
 And spiritless, as never to regret  
 Sweets tasted here, and left as soon as known.

Methinks I see thee straying on the beach,  
 And asking of the surge that bathes thy foot, 655  
 If ever it has wash'd our distant shore.

\* Omai.

I see thee weep, and thine are honest tears,  
 A patriot's for his country: thou art sad  
 At thought of her forlorn and abject state,  
 From which no power of thine can raise her up. 660  
 Thus fancy paints thee, and, though apt to err,  
 Perhaps errs little when she paints thee thus.  
 She tells me, too, that duly every morn  
 Thou climb'st the mountain top, with eager eye  
 Exploring far and wide the watery waste 665  
 For sight of ship from England. Every speck  
 Seen in the dim horizon turns thee pale  
 With conflict of contending hopes and fears.  
 But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,  
 And sends thee to thy cabin, well prepared 670  
 To dream all night of what the day denied.  
 Alas! expect it not. We found no bait  
 To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,  
 Disinterested good, is not our trade.  
 We travel far, 'tis true, but not for nought; 675  
 And must be bribed to compass earth again  
 By other hopes and richer fruits than yours.  
 But though true worth and virtue in the mild  
 And genial soil of cultivated life  
 Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there, 680  
 Yet not in cities oft: in proud, and gay,  
 And gain-devoted cities. Thither flow,  
 As to a common and most noisome sewer,  
 The dregs and feculence of every land.

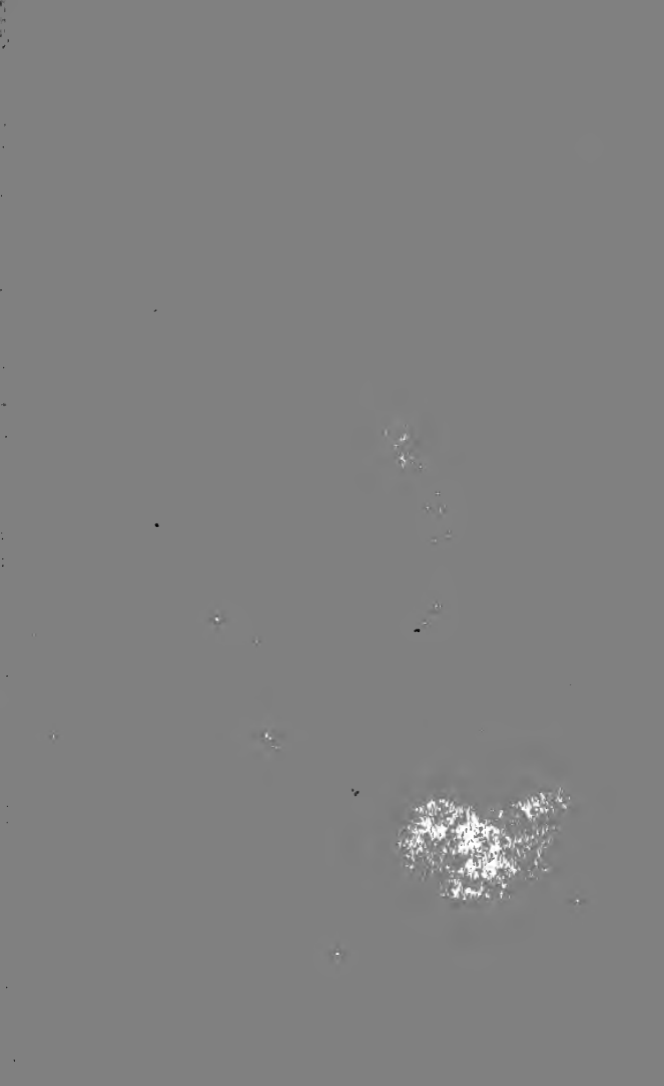
In cities foul example on most minds 685  
 Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds,  
 In gross and pamper'd cities, sloth, and lust,  
 And wantonness, and gluttonous excess.  
 In cities vice is hidden with most ease,  
 Or seen with least reproach; and virtue, taught 690  
 By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there  
 Beyond the achievement of successful flight.  
 I do confess them nurseries of the arts,  
 In which they flourish most; where, in the beams  
 Of warm encouragement, and in the eye 695  
 Of public note, they reach their perfect size.  
 Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaim'd  
 The fairest capital of all the world,  
 By riot and incontinence the worst.  
 There, touch'd by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes 700  
 A lucid mirror, in which Nature sees  
 All her reflected features. Bacon there  
 Gives more than female beauty to a stone,  
 And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.  
 Nor does the chisel occupy alone 705  
 The powers of sculpture, but the style as much;  
 Each province of her art her equal care.  
 With nice incision of her guided steel  
 She ploughs a brazen field, and clothes a soil  
 So sterile with what charms soe'er she will, 710  
 The richest scenery and the loveliest forms.  
 Where finds Philosophy her eagle eye,

With which she gazes at yon burning disk  
 Undazzled, and detects and counts his spots?  
 In London: where her implements exact, 715  
 With which she calculates, computes, and scans  
 All distance, motion, magnitude, and now  
 Measures an atom, and now girds a world?  
 In London. Where has commerce such a mart,  
 So rich, so throng'd, so drain'd, and so supplied, 720  
 As London—opulent, enlarged, and still  
 Increasing London? Babylon of old  
 Not more the glory of the earth than she,  
 A more accomplish'd world's chief glory now.  
 She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two, 725  
 That so much beauty would do well to purge;  
 And show this queen of cities, that so fair  
 May yet be foul; so witty, yet not wise.  
 It is not seemly, nor of good report,  
 That she is slack in discipline; more prompt 730  
 To avenge than to prevent the breach of law:  
 That she is rigid in denouncing death  
 On petty robbers, and indulges life  
 And liberty, and ofttimes honour too,  
 To peculators of the public gold: 735  
 That thieves at home must hang; but he, that puts  
 Into his overgorged and bloated purse  
 The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.  
 Nor is it well, nor can it come to good,  
 That, through profane and infidel contempt 740

Of holy writ, she has presumed to annul  
 And abrogate, as roundly as she may,  
 The total ordinance and will of God ;  
 Advancing Fashion to the post of Truth,  
 And centring all authority in modes 745  
 And customs of her own, till Sabbath rites  
 Have dwindled into unrespected forms,  
 And knees and hassocks are well nigh divorced.  
 \* God made the country, and man made the town.  
 What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts 750  
 That can alone make sweet the bitter draught  
 That life holds out to all, should most abound  
 And least be threaten'd in the fields and groves ?  
 † Possess ye, therefore, ye who, borne about  
 In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue 755  
 But that of idleness, and taste no scenes  
 But such as art contrives, possess ye still  
 Your element ; there only can ye shine ;  
 There only minds like yours can do no harm.  
 Our groves were planted to console at noon 760  
 The pensive wanderer in their shades. At eve  
 The moonbeam, sliding softly in between  
 The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,  
 Birds warbling all the music. We can spare  
 The splendour of your lamps ; they but eclipse 765  
 Our softer satellite. Your songs confound  
 Our more harmonious notes : the thrush departs  
 Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.



There is a public mischief in your mirth ;  
It plagues your country. Folly such as yours, 770  
Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,  
Has made, what enemies could ne'er have done,  
Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,  
A mutilated structure, soon to fall.



THE TASK. BOOK II.

THE TIME-PIECE.

## ARGUMENT.

REFLECTIONS suggested by the conclusion of the former book. Peace among the nations recommended on the ground of their common fellowship in sorrow. Prodigies enumerated. Sicilian earthquakes. Man rendered obnoxious to these calamities by sin. God the agent in them. The philosophy that stops at secondary causes reproved. Our own late miscarriages accounted for. Satirical notice taken of our trips to Fontainbleau. But the pulpit, not satire, the proper engine of reformation. The Reverend Advertiser of engraved sermons. Petit-maître parson. The good preacher. Picture of a theatrical clerical coxcomb. Story tellers and jesters in the pulpit reproved. Apostrophe to popular applause. Retailers of ancient philosophy expostulated with. Sum of the whole matter. Effects of sacerdotal mismanagement on the laity. Their folly and extravagance. The mischiefs of profusion. Profusion itself, with all its consequent evils, ascribed, as to its principal cause, to the want of discipline in the universities.

## THE TASK. BOOK II.

### THE TIME-PIECE.

OH for a lodge in some vast wilderness, ✕  
Some boundless contiguity of shade,  
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,  
Of unsuccessful or successful war,  
Might never reach me more. My ear is pain'd, 5  
My soul is sick, with every day's report  
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill'd.  
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,  
It does not feel for man; the natural bond  
Of brotherhood is sever'd as the flax 10  
That falls asunder at the touch of fire.  
He finds his fellow guilty of a skin  
Not colour'd like his own; and having power  
To enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause  
Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey. 15  
Lands intersected by a narrow frith  
Abhor each other. Mountains interposed  
Make enemies of nations, who had else  
Like kindred drops been mingled into one. ✕  
Thus man devotes his brother, and destroys; 20  
And, worse than all, and most to be deplored,

As human nature's broadest, foulest blot,  
 Chains him, and tasks him, and exacts his sweat  
 With stripes, that Mercy, with a bleeding heart,  
 Weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast. 25  
 Then what is man? And what man, seeing this,  
 And having human feelings, does not blush,  
 And hang his head to think himself a man?  
 I would not have a slave to till my ground,  
 To carry me, to fan me while I sleep, 30  
 And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth  
 That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.  
 No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's  
 Just estimation prized above all price,  
 I had much rather be myself the slave, 35  
 And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.  
 We have no slaves at home:—Then why abroad?  
 And they themselves once ferried o'er the wave  
 That parts us are emancipate and loosed.  
 Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs 40  
 Receive our air, that moment they are free;  
 They touch our country, and their shackles fall.  
 That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud  
 And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,  
 And let it circulate through every vein 45  
 Of all your empire; that where Britain's power  
 Is felt mankind may feel her mercy too.

Sure there is need of social intercourse,  
 Benevolence, and peace, and mutual aid,

Between the nations in a world that seems 50  
 To toll the deathbell of its own decease,  
 And by the voice of all its elements  
 To preach the general doom.\* When were the winds  
 Let slip with such a warrant to destroy?  
 When did the waves so haughtily o'erleap 55  
 Their ancient barriers, deluging the dry?  
 Fires from beneath, and meteors† from above,  
 Portentous, unexampled, unexplain'd,  
 Have kindled beacons in the skies; and the old  
 And crazy earth has had her shaking fits 60  
 More frequent, and foregone her usual rest.  
 Is it a time to wrangle, when the props  
 And pillars of our planet seem to fail,  
 And Nature‡ with a dim and sickly eye  
 To wait the close of all? But grant her end 65  
 More distant, and that prophecy demands  
 A longer respite, unaccomplish'd yet;  
 Still they are frowning signals, and bespeak  
 Displeasure in His breast who smites the earth  
 Or heals it, makes it languish or rejoice. 70  
 And 'tis but seemly, that, where all deserve  
 And stand exposed by common peccancy

\* Alluding to the calamities in Jamaica.

† August 18, 1783.

‡ Alluding to the fog that covered both Europe and Asia during the whole summer of 1783.

To what no few have felt, there should be peace,  
And brethren in calamity should love.

Alas for Sicily! rude fragments now 75  
Lie scatter'd where the shapely column stood.  
Her palaces are dust. In all her streets  
The voice of singing and the sprightly chord  
Are silent. Revelry, and dance, and show  
Suffer a syncope and solemn pause; 80  
While God performs upon the trembling stage  
Of his own works his dreadful part alone.  
How does the earth receive him?—with what signs  
Of gratulation and delight her King?  
Pours she not all her choicest fruits abroad, 85  
Her sweetest flowers, her aromatic gums,  
Disclosing Paradise where'er he treads?  
She quakes at his approach. Her hollow womb,  
Conceiving thunders, through a thousand deeps  
And fiery caverns, roars beneath his foot. 90  
The hills move lightly, and the mountains smoke,  
For he has touch'd them. From the extremest point  
Of elevation down into the abyss  
His wrath is busy, and his frown is felt.  
The rocks fall headlong, and the valleys rise, 95  
The rivers die into offensive pools,  
And, charged with putrid verdure, breathe a gross  
And mortal nuisance into all the air.  
What solid was, by transformation strange,  
Grows fluid; and the fix'd and rooted earth, 100



Tormented into billows, heaves and swells,  
 Or with vortiginous and hideous whirl  
 Sucks down its prey insatiable. Immense  
 The tumult and the overthrow, the pangs  
 And agonies of human and of brute. 105  
 Multitudes, fugitive on every side,  
 And fugitive in vain. The sylvan scene  
 Migrates uplifted; and, with all its soil  
 Alighting in far distant fields, finds out  
 A new possessor, and survives the change. 110  
 Ocean has caught the frenzy, and, upwrought  
 To an enormous and o'erbearing height,  
 Not by a mighty wind, but by that voice  
 Which winds and waves obey, invades the shore  
 Resistless. Never such a sudden flood, *of upon* 115  
 Upridged so high, and sent on such a charge,  
 Possess'd an inland scene. Where now the throng  
 That press'd the beach, and, hasty to depart, *depart*  
 Look'd to the sea for safety? They are gone,  
 Gone with the refluent wave into the deep— 120  
 A prince with half his people! Ancient towers,  
 And roofs embattled high, the gloomy scenes  
 Where beauty oft and letter'd worth consume  
 Life in the unproductive shades of death,  
 Fall prone: the pale inhabitants come forth, 125  
 And, happy in their unforeseen release  
 From all the rigours of restraint, enjoy  
 The terrors of the day that sets them free.

Who then, that has thee, would not hold thee fast,  
 Freedom ! whom they that lose thee so regret, 130  
 That e'en a judgment, making way for thee,  
 Seems in their eyes a mercy for thy sake.

Such evil Sin hath wrought ; and such a flame  
 Kindled in Heaven, that it burns down to earth,  
 And, in the furious inquest that it makes 135  
 On God's behalf, lays waste his fairest works.  
 The very elements, though each be meant  
 The minister of man, to serve his wants,  
 Conspire against him. With his breath he draws  
 A plague into his blood ; and cannot use 140  
 Life's necessary means, but he must die.  
 Storms rise to o'erwhelm him : or if stormy winds  
 Rise not, the waters of the deep shall rise,  
 And, needing none assistance of the storm,  
 Shall roll themselves ashore, and reach him there. 145  
 The earth shall shake him out of all his holds,  
 Or make his house his grave : nor so content,  
 Shall counterfeit the motions of the flood,  
 And drown him in her dry and dusty gulfs.  
 What then !—were they the wicked above all, 150  
 And we the righteous, whose fast-anchor'd isle  
 Moved not, while theirs was rocked, like a light skiff,  
 The sport of every wave ? No : none are clear,  
 And none than we more guilty. But, where all  
 Stand chargeable with guilt, and to the shafts 155  
 Of wrath obnoxious, God may choose his mark :

May punish, if he please, the less, to warn  
 The more malignant. If he spared not them,  
 Tremble and be amazed at thine escape,  
 Far guiltier England, lest he spare not thee ! 160

Happy the man who sees a God employ'd  
 In all the good and ill that chequer life !  
 Resolving all events, with their effects  
 And manifold results, into the will  
 And arbitration wise of the Supreme. 165

Did not his eye rule all things, and intend  
 The least of our concerns (since from the least  
 The greatest oft originate); could chance  
 Find place in his dominion, or dispose  
 One lawless particle to thwart his plan; 170

Then God might be surprised, and unforeseen  
 Contingence might alarm him, and disturb  
 The smooth and equal course of his affairs.  
 This truth Philosophy, though eagle-eyed  
 In nature's tendencies, oft overlooks; 175

And, having found his instrument, forgets,  
 Or disregards, or, more presumptuous still,  
 Denies the power that wields it. God proclaims  
 His hot displeasure against foolish men,  
 That live an atheist life: involves the Heaven 180

In tempests; quits his grasp upon the winds,  
 And gives them all their fury; bids a plague  
 Kindle a fiery boil upon the skin,  
 And putrefy the breath of blooming Health.

He calls for Famine, and the meagre fiend 185  
 Blows mildew from between his shrivel'd lips,  
 And taints the golden ear. He springs his mines,  
 And desolates a nation at a blast.  
 Forth steps the spruce philosopher, and tells  
 Of homogeneal and discordant springs 190  
 And principles; of causes, how they work  
 By necessary laws their sure effects;  
 Of action and reaction. He has found  
 The source of the disease that nature feels,  
 And bids the world take heart and banish fear. 195  
 Thou fool! will thy discovery of the cause  
 Suspend the effect, or heal it? Has not God  
 Still wrought by means since first he made the world?  
 And did he not of old employ his means  
 To drown it? What is his creation less 200  
 Than a capacious reservoir of means  
 Form'd for his use, and ready at his will?  
 Go, dress thine eyes with eyesalve; ask of him,  
 Or ask of whomsoever he has taught;  
 And learn, though late, the genuine cause of all. 205  
 \*England; with all thy faults, I love thee still—  
 My country! and, while yet a nook is left  
 Where English minds and manners may be found,  
 Shall be constrain'd to love thee. Though thy clime  
 Be fickle, and thy year most part deform'd 210  
 With dripping rains, or wither'd by a frost,  
 I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies,

And fields without a flower, for warmer France  
 With all her vines; nor for Ausonia's groves  
 Of golden fruitage, and her myrtle bowers. 215  
 To shake thy senate, and from heights sublime  
 Of patriot eloquence to flash down fire  
 Upon thy foes, was never meant my task:  
 But I can feel thy fortunes, and partake  
 Thy joys and sorrows, with as true a heart 220  
 As any thunderer there. And I can feel  
 Thy follies too; and with a just disdain  
 Frown at effeminates, whose very looks  
 Reflect dishonour on the land I love.  
 How, in the name of soldiership and sense, 225  
 Should England prosper, when such things, as smooth  
 And tender as a girl, all essenc'd o'er  
 With odours, and as profligate as sweet;  
 Who sell their laurel for a myrtle wreath,  
 And love when they should fight; when such as  
 these 230  
 Presume to lay their hands upon the ark  
 Of her magnificent and awful cause?  
 Time was when it was praise and boast enough  
 In every clime, and travel where we might,  
 That we were born her children. Praise enough 235  
 To fill the ambition of a private man,  
 That Chatham's language was his mother tongue,  
 And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own.  
 Farewell those honours, and farewell with them

The hope of such hereafter! They have fallen 240  
 Each in his field of glory; one in arms  
 And one in council—Wolfe upon the lap  
 Of smiling Victory that moment won,  
 And Chatham heart-sick of his country's shame!  
 They made us many soldiers. Chatham, still 245  
 Consulting England's happiness at home,  
 Secured it by an unforgiving frown,  
 If any wronged her. Wolfe, where'er he fought,  
 Put so much of his heart into his act,  
 That his example had a magnet's force, 250  
 And all were swift to follow whom all loved.  
 Those suns are set. Oh, rise some other such,  
 Or all that we have left is empty talk  
 Of old achievements, and despair of new.  
 Now hoist the sail, and let the streamers float 255  
 Upon the wanton breezes. Strew the deck  
 With lavender, and sprinkle liquid sweets,  
 That no rude savour maritime invade  
 The nose of nice nobility! Breathe soft,  
 Ye clarionets; and softer still, ye flutes; 260  
 That winds and waters, lull'd by magic sounds,  
 May bear us smoothly to the Gallic shore!  
 True, we have lost an empire—let it pass.  
 True; we may thank the perfidy of France,  
 That pick'd the jewel out of England's crown, 265  
 With all the cunning of an envious shrew.  
 And let that pass—'twas but a trick of state!

A brave man knows no malice, but at once  
 Forgets in peace the injuries of war,  
 And gives his direst foe a friend's embrace. 270  
 And, shamed as we have been, to the very beard  
 Braved and defied, and in our own sea proved  
 Too weak for those decisive blows that once  
 Ensured us mastery there, we yet retain  
 Some small pre-eminence; we justly boast 275  
 At least superior jockeyship, and claim  
 The honours of the turf as all our own!  
 Go then, well worthy of the praise ye seek,  
 And show the shame ye might conceal at home  
 In foreign eyes!—be grooms, and win the plate 280  
 Where once your noble fathers won a crown!—  
 'Tis generous to communicate your skill  
 To those that need it! Folly is soon learn'd:  
 And under such preceptors who can fail?  
 There is a pleasure in poetic pains 285  
 Which only poets know. The shifts and turns,  
 The expedients and inventions multiform,  
 To which the mind resorts, in chase of terms  
 Though apt, yet coy, and difficult to win—  
 To arrest the fleeting images that fill 290  
 The mirror of the mind, and hold them fast,  
 And force them sit till he has pencil'd off  
 A faithful likeness of the forms he views;  
 Then to dispose his copies with such art,  
 That each may find its most propitious light, 295

And shine by situation, hardly less  
 Than by the labour and the skill it cost ;  
 Are occupations of the poet's mind  
 So pleasing, and that steal away the thought  
 With such address from themes of sad import, 300  
 That, lost in his own musings, happy man !  
 He feels the anxieties of life, denied  
 Their wonted entertainment, all retire.  
 Such joys has he that sings. But ah ! not such,  
 Or seldom such, the hearers of his song. 305  
 Fastidious, or else listless, or perhaps  
 Aware of nothing arduous in a task  
 They never undertook, they little note  
 His dangers or escapes, and haply find  
 Their least amusement where he found the most. 310  
 But is amusement all ? Studios of song,  
 And yet ambitious not to sing in vain,  
 I would not trifle merely, though the world  
 Be loudest in their praise who do no more.  
 Yet what can satire, whether grave or gay ? 315  
 It may correct a foible, may chastise  
 The freaks of fashion, regulate the dress,  
 Retrench a swordblade, or displace a patch ;  
 But where are its sublimer trophies found ?  
 What vice has it subdued ? whose heart reclaim'd 320  
 By rigour ? or whom laugh'd into reform ?  
 Alas ! Leviathan is not so tamed :  
 Laugh'd at, he laughs again ; and stricken hard,



Turns to the stroke his adamantine scales,  
That fear no discipline of human hands. 325

The pulpit, therefore (and I name it fill'd  
With solemn awe, that bids me well beware  
With what intent I touch that holy thing)—  
The pulpit (when the satirist has at last,  
Strutting and vapouring in an empty school, 330  
Spent all his force, and made no proselyte)—

I say the pulpit (in the sober use  
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers)  
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,  
The most important and effectual guard, 335  
Support, and ornament of virtue's cause.

There stands the messenger of truth : there stands  
The legate of the skies !—His theme divine,  
His office sacred, his credentials clear.

By him the violated law speaks out 340  
Its thunders ; and by him, in strains as sweet  
As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.

He stablishes the strong, restores the weak,  
Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,  
And, arm'd himself in panoply complete 345  
Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms  
Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule  
Of holy discipline, to glorious war

The sacramental host of God's elect !  
Are all such teachers ?—would to heaven all were ! 350  
But hark—the doctor's voice !—fast wedged between

Two empirics he stands, and with swoln cheeks  
 Inspires the news, his trumpet. Keener far  
 Than all invective is his bold harangue,  
 While through that public organ of report 355  
 He hails the clergy; and, defying shame,  
 Announces to the world his own and theirs!  
 He teaches those to read, whom schools dismiss'd,  
 And colleges, untaught; sells accent, tone,  
 And emphasis in score, and gives to prayer 360  
 The adagio and andante it demands.  
 He grinds divinity of other days  
 Down into modern use; transforms old print  
 To zigzag manuscript, and cheats the eyes  
 Of gallery critics by a thousand arts. 365  
 Are there who purchase of the doctor's ware?  
 O, name it not in Gath! it cannot be,  
 That grave and learned clerks should need such aid.  
 He doubtless is in sport, and does but droll,  
 Assuming thus a rank unknown before— 370  
 Grand caterer and drynurse of the church!  
 I venerate the man whose heart is warm,  
 Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,  
 Coincident, exhibit lucid proof  
 That he is honest in the sacred cause. 375  
 To such I render more than more respect,  
 Whose actions say that they respect themselves.  
 But loose in morals, and in manners vain,  
 In conversation frivolous, in dress

Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse ; 380  
 Frequent in park with lady at his side,  
 Ambling and prattling scandal as he goes ;  
 But rare at home, and never at his books,  
 Or with his pen, save when he scrawls a card ;  
 Constant at routs, familiar with a round 385  
 Of ladyships—a stranger to the poor ;  
 Ambitious of preferment for its gold,  
 And well prepared, by ignorance and sloth,  
 By infidelity and love of world,  
 To make God's work a sinecure ; a slave 390  
 To his own pleasures and his patron's pride :—  
 From such apostles, O ye mitred heads,  
 Preserve the church ! and lay not careless hands  
 On skulls that cannot teach, and will not learn.  
 Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul, 395  
 Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own—  
 Paul should himself direct me. I would trace  
 His master strokes, and draw from his design.  
 I would express him simple, grave, sincere :  
 In doctrine uncorrupt : in language plain, 400  
 And plain in manner ; decent, solemn, chaste,  
 And natural in gesture ; much impress'd  
 Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,  
 And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds  
 May feel it too ; affectionate in look, 405  
 And tender in address, as well becomes  
 A messenger of grace to guilty men. *guilty men*

Behold the picture?—Is it like?—Like whom?  
 The things that mount the rostrum with a skip,  
 And then skip down again; pronounce a text; 410  
 Cry—hem; and reading what they never wrote  
 Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,  
 And with a well bred whisper close the scene!

In man or woman, but far most in man,  
 And most of all in man that ministers 415  
 And serves the altar, in my soul I loathe  
 All affectation. 'Tis my perfect scorn;  
 Object of my implacable disgust.

What!—will a man play tricks, will he indulge  
 A silly fond conceit of his fair form, 420  
 And just proportion, fashionable mien,  
 And pretty face, in presence of his God?  
 Or will he seek to dazzle me with tropes,  
 As with the diamond on his lily hand,  
 And play his brilliant parts before my eyes, 425  
 When I am hungry for the bread of life?

He mocks his Maker, prostitutes and shames  
 His noble office, and, instead of truth,  
 Displaying his own beauty, starves his flock!  
 Therefore, avaunt all attitude, and stare, 430  
 And start theatric, practised at the glass!

I seek divine simplicity in him  
 Who handles things divine; and all besides,  
 Though learn'd with labour, and though much admired  
 By curious eyes and judgments ill inform'd, 435

To me is odious as the nasal twang *nasal twang*  
 Heard at conventicle, where worthy men,  
 Misled by custom, strain celestial themes  
 Through the press'd nostril, spectacle-bestrid.  
 Some, decent in demeanour while they preach, 440  
 That task perform'd, relapse into themselves;  
 And, having spoken wisely, at the close  
 Grow wanton, and give proof to every eye,  
 Whoe'er was edified, themselves were not!  
 Forth comes the pocket mirror.—First we stroke 445  
 An eyebrow; next compose a straggling lock;  
 Then with an air most gracefully perform'd  
 Fall back into our seat, extend an arm,  
 And lay it at its ease with gentle care,  
 With handkerchief in hand depending low: 450  
 The better hand more busy gives the nose  
 Its bergamot, or aids the indebted eye  
 With opera glass to watch the moving scene,  
 And recognise the slow retiring fair.—  
 Now this is fulsome; and offends me more 455  
 Than in a churchman slovenly neglect  
 And rustic coarseness would. A heavenly mind  
 May be indifferent to her house of clay,  
 And slight the hovel as beneath her care;  
 But how a body so fantastic, trim, 460  
 And quaint, in its deportment and attire,  
 Can lodge a heavenly mind—demands a doubt.  
 He that negotiates between God and man,

As God's ambassador, the grand concerns  
 Of judgment and of mercy, should beware 465  
 Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful  
 To court a grin, when you should woo a soul ;  
 To break a jest, when pity would inspire  
 Pathetic exhortation ; and to address  
 The skittish fancy with facetious tales, 470  
 When sent with God's commission to the heart !  
 So did not Paul. Direct me to a quip  
 Or merry turn in all he ever wrote,  
 And I consent you take it for your text,  
 Your only one, till sides and benches fail. 475  
 No : he was serious in a serious cause,  
 And understood too well the weighty terms  
 That he had taken in charge. He would not stoop  
 To conquer those by jocular exploits  
 Whom truth and soberness assail'd in vain. 480  
 Oh Popular Applause ! what heart of man  
 Is proof against thy sweet seducing charms ?  
 The wisest and the best feel urgent need  
 Of all their caution in thy gentlest gales ;  
 But swell'd into a gust—who then, alas ! 485  
 With all his canvas set, and inexpert,  
 And therefore heedless, can withstand thy power ?  
 Praise from the rivel'd lips of toothless, bald  
 Decrepitude, and in the looks of lean  
 And craving Poverty, and in the bow 490  
 Respectful of the smutch'd artificer,

Is oft too welcome, and may much disturb  
 The bias of the purpose. How much more,  
 Pour'd forth by beauty splendid and polite,  
 In language soft as Adoration breathes? 495

Ah, spare your idol! think him human still.  
 Charms he may have, but he has frailties too!  
 Dote not too much, nor spoil what ye admire.

All truth is from the sempiternal source  
 Of Light Divine. But Egypt, Greece, and Rome 500  
 Drew from the stream below. More favour'd, we  
 Drink, when we choose it, at the fountain head.

To them it flow'd much mingled and defil'd  
 With hurtful error, prejudice, and dreams  
 Illusive of philosophy, so call'd, 505

But falsely. Sages after sages strove  
 In vain to filter off a crystal draught  
 Pure from the lees, which often more enhanced  
 The thirst than slaked it, and not seldom bred  
 Intoxication and delirium wild. 510

In vain they push'd inquiry to the birth  
 And springtime of the world; ask'd, Whence is man?  
 Why form'd at all? and wherefore as he is?  
 Where must he find his Maker? with what rites  
 Adore him? Will he hear, accept, and bless? 515  
 Or does he sit regardless of his works?  
 Has man within him an immortal seed?  
 Or does the tomb take all? If he survive  
 His ashes, where? and in what weal or woe?

Knots worthy of solution, which alone 520  
 A Deity could solve. Their answers, vague  
 And all at random, fabulous and dark,  
 Left them as dark themselves. Their rules of life,  
 Defective and unsanction'd, proved too weak  
 To bind the roving appetite, and lead 525  
 Blind nature to a God not yet reveal'd.  
 'Tis Revelation satisfies all doubts,  
 Explains all mysteries, except her own,  
 And so illuminates the path of life,  
 That fools discover it, and stray no more. 530  
 Now tell me, dignified and sapient sir,  
 My man of morals, nurtured in the shades  
 Of Academus—is this false or true?  
 Is Christ the abler teacher, or the schools? 535  
 If Christ, then why resort at every turn  
 To Athens or to Rome, for wisdom short  
 Of man's occasions, when in Him reside  
 Grace, knowledge, comfort—an unfathom'd store?  
 How oft, when Paul has served us with a text,  
 Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preached! 540  
 Men that, if now alive, would sit content  
 And humble learners of a Saviour's worth,  
 Preach it who might. Such was their love of truth,  
 Their thirst of knowledge, and their candour too!  
 And thus it is.—The pastor, either vain 545  
 By nature, or by flattery made so, taught  
 To gaze at his own splendour, and to exalt



Absurdly, not his office, but himself ;  
 Or unenlightened, and too proud to learn ;  
 Or vicious, and not therefore apt to teach ; 550  
 Perverting often, by the stress of lewd  
 And loose example, whom he should instruct ;  
 Exposes, and holds up to broad disgrace,  
 The noblest function, and discredits much  
 The brightest truths that man has ever seen. 555  
 For ghostly counsel ; if it either fall  
 Below the exigence, or be not back'd  
 With show of love, at least with hopeful proof  
 Of some sincerity on the giver's part ;  
 Or be dishonour'd in the exterior form 560  
 And mode of its conveyance by such tricks  
 As move derision, or by foppish airs  
 And histrionic mummery, that let down  
 The pulpit to the level of the stage ;  
 Drops from the lips a disregarded thing. 565  
 The weak perhaps are moved, but are not taught,  
 While prejudice in men of stronger minds  
 Takes deeper root, confirm'd by what they see.  
 A relaxation of religion's hold  
 Upon the roving and untutor'd heart 570  
 Soon follows, and, the curb of conscience snapp'd,  
 The laity run wild.—But do they now ?  
 Note their extravagance, and be convinced.  
 As nations, ignorant of God, contrive  
 A wooden one, so we, no longer taught 575

By monitors that mother church supplies,  
 Now make our own. Posterity will ask  
 (If e'er posterity see verse of mine)  
 Some fifty or a hundred lustrums hence,  
 What was a monitor in George's days? 580  
 My very gentle reader, yet unborn,  
 Of whom I needs must augur better things,  
 Since Heaven would sure grow weary of a world  
 Productive only of a race like ours,  
 A monitor is wood—plank shaven thin. 585  
 We wear it at our backs. There, closely braced  
 And neatly fitted, it compresses hard  
 The prominent and most unsightly bones,  
 And binds the shoulders flat. We prove its use  
 Sovereign and most effectual to secure 590  
 A form, not now gymnastic as of yore,  
 From rickets and distortion, else our lot.  
 But thus admonish'd, we can walk erect—  
 One proof at least of manhood! while the friend  
 Sticks close, a Mentor worthy of his charge. 595  
 Our habits, costlier than Lucullus wore,  
 And by caprice as multiplied as his,  
 Just please us while the fashion is at full,  
 But change with every moon. The sycophant,  
 Who waits to dress us, arbitrates their date; 600  
 Surveys his fair reversion with keen eye;  
 Finds one ill made, another obsolete,  
 This fits not nicely, that is ill conceived;

And, making prize of all that he condemns,  
 With our expenditure defrays his own. 605  
 Variety's the very spice of life,  
 That gives it all its flavour. We have run  
 Through every change that Fancy, at the loom  
 Exhausted, has had genius to supply;  
 And, studious of mutation still, discard 610  
 A real elegance, a little used,  
 For monstrous novelty and strange disguise.  
 We sacrifice to dress, till household joys  
 And comforts cease. Dress drains our cellar dry,  
 And keeps our larder lean; puts out our fires; 615  
 And introduces hunger, frost, and woe,  
 Where peace and hospitality might reign.  
 What man that lives, and that knows how to live,  
 Would fail to exhibit at the public shows  
 A form as splendid as the proudest there, 620  
 Though appetite raise outcries at the cost?  
 A man of the town dines late, but soon enough,  
 With reasonable forecast and dispatch,  
 To insure a sidebox station at half price.  
 You think, perhaps, so delicate his dress, 625  
 His daily fare as delicate. Alas!  
 He picks clean teeth, and, busy as he seems  
 With an old tavern quill, is hungry yet!  
 The rout is Folly's circle, which she draws  
 With magic wand. So potent is the spell, 630  
 That none, decoy'd into that fatal ring,

Unless by Heaven's peculiar grace, escape.  
 There we grow early gray, but never wise ;  
 There form connexions, but acquire no friend ;  
 Solicit pleasure, hopeless of success ; 635  
 Waste youth in occupations only fit  
 For second childhood, and devote old age  
 To sports which only childhood could excuse.  
 There they are happiest who dissemble best  
 Their weariness ; and they the most polite 640  
 Who squander time and treasure with a smile,  
 Though at their own destruction. She that asks  
 Her dear five hundred friends contemns them all,  
 And hates their coming. They (what can they less ?)  
 Make just reprisals ; and with cringe and shrug, 645  
 And bow obsequious, hide their hate of her.  
 All catch the frenzy, downward from her grace,  
 Whose flambeaux flash against the morning skies,  
 And gild our chamber ceilings as they pass,  
 To her, who, frugal only that her thrift 650  
 May feed excesses she can ill afford,  
 Is hackney'd home unlackey'd ; who, in haste  
 Alighting, turns the key in her own door,  
 And, at the watchman's lantern borrowing light,  
 Finds a cold bed her only comfort left. 655  
 Wives beggar husbands, husbands starve their wives,  
 On Fortune's velvet altar offering up  
 Their last poor pittance—Fortune, most severe  
 Of goddesses yet known, and costlier far

Than all that held their routs in Juno's heaven.— 660

So fare we in this prison house, the World ;

And 'tis a fearful spectacle to see

So many maniacs dancing in their chains.

They gaze upon the links that hold them fast

With eyes of anguish, execrate their lot, 665

Then shake them in despair, and dance again !

Now basket up the family of plagues

That waste our vitals ; peculation, sale

Of honour, perjury, corruption, frauds

By forgery, by subterfuge of law, 670

By tricks and lies as numerous and as keen

As the necessities their authors feel ;

Then cast them, closely bundled, every brat

At the right door. Profusion is the sire.

Profusion unrestrain'd with all that's base 675

In character has litter'd all the land,

And bred, within the memory of no few,

A priesthood such as Baal's was of old,

A people such as never was till now.

It is a hungry vice :—it eats up all 680

That gives society its beauty, strength,

Convenience, and security, and use :

Makes men mere vermin, worthy to be trapp'd

And gibbeted, as fast as catchpole claws

Can seize the slippery prey ; unties the knot 685

Of union, and converts the sacred band,

That holds mankind together, to a scourge.

Profusion, deluging a state with lusts  
 Of grossest nature and of worst effects,  
 Prepares it for its ruin : hardens, blinds, 690  
 And warps the consciences of public men,  
 Till they can laugh at virtue ; mock the fools  
 That trust them ; and in the end disclose a face  
 That would have shock'd Credulity herself,  
 Unmask'd, vouchsafing this their sole excuse— 695  
 Since all alike are selfish, why not they ?  
 This does profusion, and the accursed cause  
 Of such deep mischief has itself a cause.

In colleges and halls in ancient days,  
 When learning, virtue, piety, and truth 700  
 Were precious, and inculcated with care,  
 There dwelt a sage called Discipline. His head,  
 Not yet by time completely silver'd o'er,  
 Bespoke him past the bounds of freakish youth,  
 But strong for service still, and unimpair'd. 705  
 His eye was meek and gentle, and a smile  
 Play'd on his lips ; and in his speech was heard  
 Paternal sweetness, dignity, and love.  
 The occupation dearest to his heart  
 Was to encourage goodness. He would stroke 710  
 The head of modest and ingenuous worth,  
 That blush'd at its own praise ; and press the youth  
 Close to his side that pleased him. Learning grew  
 Beneath his care a thriving vigorous plant ;  
 The mind was well inform'd, the passious held 715

Subordinate, and diligence was choice.  
 If e'er it changed, as sometimes chance it must,  
 That one among so many overleap'd  
 The limits of control, his gentle eye  
 Grew stern, and darted a severe rebuke : 720  
 His frown was full of terror, and his voice  
 Shook the delinquent with such fits of awe  
 As left him not, till penitence had won  
 Lost favour back again, and closed the breach.  
 But Discipline, a faithful servant long, 725  
 Declined at length into the vale of years :  
 A palsy struck his arm ; his sparkling eye  
 Was quench'd in rheums of age ; his voice, unstrung,  
 Grew tremulous, and moved derision more  
 Than reverence in perverse rebellious youth. 730  
 So colleges and halls neglected much  
 Their good old friend ; and Discipline at length,  
 O'erlook'd and unemploy'd, fell sick, and died.  
 Then Study languish'd, Emulation slept,  
 And Virtue fled. The schools became a scene 735  
 Of solemn farce, where Ignorance in stilts,  
 His cap well lined with logic not his own,  
 With parrot tongue perform'd the scholar's part,  
 Proceeding soon a graduated dunce.  
 Then compromise had place, and scrutiny 740  
 Became stone blind ; precedence went in truck,  
 And he was competent whose purse was so.  
 A dissolution of all bonds ensued ;

The curbs invented for the mulish mouth  
 Of headstrong youth were broken; bars and bolts 745  
 Grew rusty by disuse; and massy gates  
 Forgot their office, opening with a touch;  
 Till gowns at length are found mere masquerade,  
 The tassel'd cap and the spruce band a jest,  
 A mockery of the world! What need of these 750  
 For gamesters, jockeys, brothellers impure,  
 Spendthrifts, and booted sportsmen, oftener seen  
 With belted waist and pointers at their heels  
 Than in the bounds of duty? What was learn'd,  
 If aught was learn'd in childhood, is forgot; 755  
 And such expense, as pinches parents blue,  
 And mortifies the liberal hand of love,  
 Is squander'd in pursuit of idle sports  
 And vicious pleasures; buys the boy a name  
 That sits a stigma on his father's house, 760  
 And cleaves through life inseparably close  
 To him that wears it. What can aftergames  
 Of riper joys, and commerce with the world,  
 The lewd vain world, that must receive him soon,  
 Add to such erudition, thus acquired, 765  
 Where science and where virtue are profess'd?  
 They may confirm his habits, rivet fast  
 His folly, but to spoil him is a task  
 That bids defiance to the united powers  
 Of fashion, dissipation, taverns, stews. 770  
 Now blame we most the nurslings or the nurse?



The children, crook'd, and twisted, and deform'd,  
Through want of care; or her, whose winking eye  
And slumbering oscitancy mars the brood?

The nurse, no doubt. Regardless of her charge, 775  
She needs herself correction; needs to learn  
That it is dangerous sporting with the world,  
With things so sacred as a nation's trust,  
The nurture of her youth, her dearest pledge.

All are not such. I had a brother once— 780  
Peace to the memory of a man of worth,  
A man of letters, and of manners too!

Of manners sweet as Virtue always wears,  
When gay good nature dresses her in smiles.  
He graced a college,\* in which order yet 785

Was sacred; and was honour'd, loved, and wept  
By more than one, themselves conspicuous there.

Some minds are temper'd happily, and mix'd  
With such ingredients of good sense and taste  
Of what is excellent in man, they thirst 790

With such a zeal to be what they approve,  
That no restraints can circumscribe them more  
Than they themselves by choice, for wisdom's sake.

Nor can example hurt them: what they see  
Of vice in others but enhancing more 795  
The charms of virtue in their just esteem.

If such escape contagion, and emerge  
Pure from so foul a pool to shine abroad,

\* Benet College, Cambridge.

And give the world their talents and themselves,  
 Small thanks to those whose negligence or sloth 800  
 Exposed their inexperience to the snare,  
 And left them to an undirected choice.

See then the quiver broken and decay'd,  
 In which are kept our arrows! Rusting there  
 In wild disorder, and unfit for use, 805  
 What wonder, if discharged into the world,  
 They shame their shooters with a random flight,  
 Their points obtuse, and feathers drunk with wine!  
 Well may the church wage unsuccessful war,  
 With such artillery arm'd. Vice parries wide 810  
 The undreaded volley with a sword of straw,  
 And stands an impudent and fearless mark.

Have we not track'd the felon home, and found  
 His birthplace and his dam? The country mourns,  
 Mourns because every plague that can infest 815  
 Society, and that saps and worms the base  
 Of the edifice that Policy has raised,  
 Swarms in all quarters; meets the eye, the ear,  
 And suffocates the breath at every turn.  
 Profusion breeds them; and the cause itself 820  
 Of that calamitous mischief has been found:  
 Found too where most offensive, in the skirts  
 Of the robed pedagogue! Else let the arraign'd  
 Stand up unconscious, and refute the charge.  
 So when the Jewish leader stretch'd his arm, 825  
 And waved his rod divine, a race obscene,

Spawn'd in the muddy beds of Nile, came forth,  
Polluting Egypt: gardens, fields, and plains  
Were cover'd with the pest; the streets were fill'd;  
The croaking nuisance lurk'd in every nook; 830  
Nor palaces, nor even chambers, 'scaped;  
And the land stank—so numerous was the fry.



THE TASK. BOOK III.

THE GARDEN.

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## ARGUMENT.

SELF-RECOLLECTION and reproof. Address to domestic happiness. Some account of myself. The vanity of many of their pursuits who are reputed wise. Justification of my censures. Divine illumination necessary to the most expert philosopher. The question, What is truth? answered by other questions. Domestic happiness addressed again. Few lovers of the country. My tame hare. Occupations of a retired gentleman in his garden. Pruning. Framing. Green-house. Sowing of flower seeds. The country preferable to the town even in the winter. Reasons why it is deserted at that season. Ruinous effects of gaming and of expensive improvement. Book concludes with an apostrophe to the metropolis.

## THE TASK. BOOK III.

### THE GARDEN.

As one who, long in thickets and in brakes  
Entangled, winds now this way and now that  
His devious course uncertain, seeking home ;  
Or, having long in miry ways been foil'd,  
And sore discomfited, from slough to slough 5  
Plunging, and half despairing of escape ;  
If chance at length he find a greensward smooth  
And faithful to the foot, his spirits rise,  
He cherups brisk his ear-erecting steed,  
And winds his way with pleasure and with ease ; 10  
So I, designing other themes, and call'd  
To adorn the Sofa with eulogium due,  
To tell its slumbers, and to paint its dreams,  
Have rambled wide. In country, city, seat  
Of academic fame (how'er deserved), 15  
Long held, and scarcely disengaged at last.  
But now with pleasant pace a cleanlier road  
I mean to tread. I feel myself at large,  
Courageous, and refresh'd for future toil,  
If toil await me, or if dangers new. 20

Since pulpits fail, and sounding boards reflect  
 Most part an empty ineffectual sound,  
 What chance that I, to fame so little known,  
 Nor conversant with men or manners much,  
 Should speak to purpose, or with better hope 25  
 Crack the satiric throng? 'Twere wiser far  
 For me, enamour'd of sequester'd scenes,  
 And charm'd with rural beauty, to repose,  
 Where chance may throw me, beneath elm or vine,  
 My languid limbs, when summer sears the plains; 30  
 Or, when rough winter rages, on the soft  
 And shelter'd Sofa, while the nitrous air  
 Feeds a blue flame, and makes a cheerful hearth;  
 There, undisturb'd by Folly, and apprised  
 How great the danger of disturbing her, 35  
 To muse in silence, or at least confine  
 Remarks that gall so many to the few  
 My partners in retreat. Disgust concealed  
 Is ofttimes proof of wisdom, when the fault  
 Is obstinate, and cure beyond our reach. 40

Domestic Happiness, thou only bliss  
 Of Paradise that hast survived the fall!  
 Though few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,  
 Or tasting long enjoy thee! too infirm,  
 Or too incautious, to preserve thy sweets 45  
 Unmix'd with drops of bitter, which neglect  
 Or temper sheds into thy crystal cup;  
 Thou art the nurse of Virtue, in thine arms



She smiles, appearing, as in truth she is,  
 Heaven-born, and destined to the skies again. 50  
 Thou art not known where Pleasure is adored,  
 That reeling goddess with the zoneless waist  
 And wandering eyes, still leaning on the arm  
 Of Novelty, her fickle, frail support ;  
 For thou art meek and constant, hating change, 55  
 And finding in the calm of truth-tried love  
 Joys that her stormy raptures never yield.  
 Forsaking thee what shipwreck have we made  
 Of honour, dignity, and fair renown !  
 Till prostitution elbows us aside 60  
 In all our crowded streets ; and senates seem  
 Convened for purposes of empire less  
 Than to release the adultress from her bond.  
 The adultress ! what a theme for angry verse !  
 What provocation to the indignant heart, 65  
 That feels for injur'd love ! but I disdain  
 The nauseous task, to paint her as she is,  
 Cruel, abandon'd, glorying in her shame !  
 No :—let her pass, and, charioted along  
 In guilty splendour, shake the public ways ; 70  
 The frequency of crimes has wash'd them white !  
 And verse of mine shall never brand the wretch,  
 Whom matrons now, of character unsmirch'd,  
 And chaste themselves, are not ashamed to own.  
 Virtue and vice had boundaries in old time, 75  
 Not to be pass'd : and she, that had renounced

Her sex's honour, was renounced herself  
 By all that prized it; not for prudery's sake,  
 But dignity's, resentful of the wrong.  
 'Twas hard perhaps on here and there a waif, 80  
 Desirous to return, and not received;  
 But was a wholesome rigour in the main,  
 And taught the unblemish'd to preserve with care  
 That purity, whose loss was loss of all.  
 Men too were nice in honour in those days, 85  
 And judged offenders well. Then he that sharp'd,  
 And pocketed a prize by fraud obtain'd,  
 Was mark'd and shunn'd as odious. He that sold  
 His country, or was slack when she required  
 His every nerve in action and at stretch, 90  
 Paid, with the blood that he had basely spared,  
 The price of his default. But now—yes, now  
 We are become so candid and so fair,  
 So liberal in construction, and so rich  
 In Christian charity, (good-natured age!) 95  
 That they are safe, sinners of either sex,  
 Transgress what laws they may. Well-dress'd, well-bred,  
 Well equipaged, is ticket good enough  
 To pass us readily through every door.  
 Hypocrisy, detest her as we may 100  
 (And no man's hatred ever wrong'd her yet),  
 May claim this merit still—that she admits  
 The worth of what she mimics with such care,  
 And thus gives virtue indirect applause;

But she has burnt her mask, not needed here, 105  
Where vice has such allowance, that her shifts  
And specious semblances have lost their use.

I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
Long since: with many an arrow deep infix'd  
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew, 110  
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.

There was I found by one who had himself  
Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,  
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
With gentle force soliciting the darts, 115  
He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live.

Since then, with few associates, in remote  
And silent woods I wander, far from those  
My former partners of the peopled scene;  
With few associates, and not wishing more. 120

Here much I ruminatè, as much I may,  
With other views of men and manners now  
Than once, and others of a life to come.  
I see that all are wanderers, gone astray  
Each in his own delusions; they are lost 125

In chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd  
And never won. Dream after dream ensues;  
And still they dream, that they shall still succeed;  
And still are disappointed. Rings the world  
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind, 130  
And add two thirds of the remaining half,  
And find the total of their hopes and fears

Dreams, empty dreams. The million flit as gay  
As if created only like the fly,  
That spreads his motley wings in the eye of noon, 135  
To sport their season, and be seen no more.  
The rest are sober dreamers, grave and wise,  
And pregnant with discoveries new and rare.  
Some write a narrative of wars, and feats  
Of heroes little known; and call the rant 140  
A history: describe the man, of whom  
His own coevals took but little note;  
And paint his person, character, and views,  
As they had known him from his mother's womb.  
They disentangle from the puzzled skein, 145  
In which obscurity has wrapp'd them up,  
The threads of politic and shrewd design  
That ran through all his purposes, and charge  
His mind with meanings that he never had,  
Or having, kept conceal'd. Some drill and bore 150  
The solid earth, and from the strata there  
Extract a register, by which we learn,  
That he who made it, and reveal'd its date  
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.  
Some, more acute, and more industrious still, 155  
Contrive creation; travel nature up  
To the sharp peak of her sublimest height,  
And tell us whence the stars: why some are fix'd,  
And planetary some; what gave them first  
Rotation, from what fountain flow'd their light. 160

Great contest follows, and much learned dust  
 Involves the combatants; each claiming truth,  
 And truth disclaiming both. And thus they spend  
 The little wick of life's poor shallow lamp  
 In playing tricks with nature, giving laws 165  
 To distant worlds, and trifling in their own.  
 Is't not a pity now, that tickling rheums  
 Should ever tease the lungs, and blear the sight  
 Of oracles like these? ' Great pity too,  
 That having wielded the elements, and built 170  
 A thousand systems, each in his own way,  
 They should go out in fume, and be forgot?/  
 Ah! what is life thus spent? and what are they  
 But frantic who thus spend it? all for smoke—  
 Eternity for bubbles proves at last 175  
 A senseless bargain. When I see such games  
 Play'd by the creatures of a Power who swears  
 That he will judge the earth, and call the fool  
 To a sharp reckoning that has lived in vain;  
 And when I weigh this seeming wisdom well, 180  
 And prove it in the infallible result  
 So hollow and so false—I feel my heart  
 Dissolve in pity, and account the learn'd,  
 If this be learning, most of all deceived.  
 Great crimes alarm the conscience, but it sleeps 185  
 While thoughtful man is plausibly amused.  
 Defend me therefore, common sense, say I,  
 From reveries so airy, from the toil

Of dropping buckets into empty wells,  
 And growing old in drawing nothing up ! 190  
 'Twere well, says one sage erudite, profound,  
 Terribly arch'd, and aquiline his nose,  
 And overbuilt with most impending brows,  
 'Twere well, could you permit the world to live  
 As the world pleases : what's the world to you ? 195  
 Much. I was born of woman, and drew milk  
 As sweet as charity from human breasts.  
 I think, articulate, I laugh and weep,  
 And exercise all functions of a man.  
 How then should I and any man that lives 200  
 Be strangers to each other ? Pierce my vein,  
 Take of the crimson stream meandering there,  
 And catechize it well ; apply thy glass,  
 Search it, and prove now if it be not blood  
 Congenial with thine own : and, if it be, 205  
 What edge of subtlety canst thou suppose  
 Keen enough, wise and skilful as thou art,  
 To cut the link of brotherhood, by which  
 One common Maker bound me to the kind ?  
 True ; I am no proficient, I confess, 210  
 In arts like yours. I cannot call the swift  
 And perilous lightnings from the angry clouds,  
 And bid them hide themselves in earth beneath ;  
 I cannot analyze the air, nor catch  
 The parallax of yonder luminous point, 215  
 That seems half quench'd in the immense abyss :

Such powers I boast not—neither can I rest  
 A silent witness of the headlong rage,  
 Or heedless folly, by which thousands die,  
 Bone of my bone, and kindred souls to mine. 220

God never meant that man should scale the Heavens  
 By strides of human wisdom. In his works,  
 Though wondrous, he commands us in his word  
 To seek him rather where his mercy shines.  
 The mind indeed, enlighten'd from above, 225  
 Views him in all; ascribes to the grand cause  
 The grand effect; acknowledges with joy  
 His manner, and with rapture tastes his style.  
 But never yet did philosophic tube,  
 That brings the planets home into the eye 230  
 Of Observation, and discovers, else  
 Not visible, his family of worlds,  
 Discover him that rules them; such a veil  
 Hangs over mortal eyes, blind from the birth,  
 And dark in things divine. Full often too 235  
 Our wayward intellect, the more we learn  
 Of nature, overlooks her author more;  
 From instrumental causes proud to draw  
 Conclusions retrograde, and mad mistake.  
 But if his word once teach us, shoot a ray 240  
 Through all the heart's dark chambers, and reveal  
 Truths undiscern'd but by that holy light,  
 Then all is plain. Philosophy, baptized  
 In the pure fountain of eternal love,

Has eyes indeed ; and, viewing all she sees 245  
 As meant to indicate a God to man,  
 Gives him his praise, and forfeits not her own.  
 Learning has borne such fruit in other days  
 On all her branches : piety has found  
 Friends in the friends of science, and true prayer 250  
 Has flow'd from lips wet with Castalian dews.  
 Such was thy wisdom, Newton, childlike sage !  
 Sagacious reader of the works of God,  
 And in his word sagacious. Such too thine,  
 Milton, whose genius had angelic wings, 255  
 And fed on manna ! And such thine, in whom  
 Our British Themis gloried with just cause,  
 Immortal Hale ! for deep discernment praised,  
 And sound integrity, not more than famed  
 For sanctity of manners undefiled. 260

'All flesh is grass, and all its glory fades  
 Like the fair flower dishevell'd in the wind ;  
 Riches have wings, and grandeur is a dream.  
 The man we celebrate must find a tomb,  
 And we that worship him ignoble graves. | 265  
 Nothing is proof against the general curse  
 Of vanity, that seizes all below.  
 The only amaranthine flower on earth  
 Is virtue ; the only lasting treasure, truth. †  
 But what is truth ? 'Twas Pilate's question put 270  
 To Truth itself, that deign'd him no reply.  
 And wherefore ? will not God impart his light



To them that ask it?—Freely—'tis his joy,  
His glory, and his nature to impart.

But to the proud, uncandid, insincere, 275  
Or negligent inquirer, not a spark.

What's that which brings contempt upon a book,  
And him who writes it, though the style be neat,  
The method clear, and argument exact?

That makes a minister in holy things 280

The joy of many, and the dread of more,  
His name a theme for praise and for reproach?—  
That, while it gives us worth in God's account,  
Depreciates and undoes us in our own?

What pearl is it that rich men cannot buy, 285

That learning is too proud to gather up;  
But which the poor, and the despised of all,  
Seek and obtain, and often find unsought?  
Tell me—and I will tell thee what is truth.

O, friendly to the best pursuits of man, 290

Friendly to thought, to virtue, and to peace,  
Domestic life in rural pleasure pass'd!  
Few know thy value, and few taste thy sweets;

Though many boast thy favours, and affect  
To understand and choose thee for their own. 295

But foolish man foregoes his proper bliss,  
E'en as his first progenitor, and quits,  
Though placed in Paradise (for earth has still  
Some traces of her youthful beauty left),  
Substantial happiness for transient joy. 300

Scenes form'd for contemplation, and to nurse  
 The growing seeds of wisdom ; that suggest,  
 By every pleasing image they present,  
 Reflections such as meliorate the heart,  
 Compose the pass'ons, and exalt the mind ; 305  
 Scenes such as these 'tis his supreme delight  
 To fill with riot, and defile with blood.  
 Should some contagion, kind to the poor brutes  
 We persecute, annihilate the tribes  
 That draw the sportsman over hill and dale, 310  
 Fearless and rapt away from all his cares ;  
 Should never game-fowl hatch her eggs again,  
 Nor baited hook deceive the fish's eye ;  
 Could pageantry and dance, and feast and song,  
 Be quell'd in all our summer months' retreat ; 315  
 How many self-deluded nymphs and swains,  
 Who dream they have a taste for fields and groves,  
 Would find them hideous nurseries of the spleen,  
 And crowd the roads, impatient for the town !  
 They love the country, and none else, who seek 320  
 For their own sake its silence and its shade.  
 Delights which who would leave, that has a heart  
 Susceptible of pity, or a mind  
 Cultured and capable of sober thought,  
 For all the savage din of the swift pack 325  
 And clamours of the field ?—Detested sport,  
 That owes its pleasures to another's pain ;  
 That feeds upon the sobs and dying shrieks

Of harmless nature, dumb, but yet endued  
 With eloquence, that agonies inspire, 330  
 Of silent tears and heart-distending sighs?  
 Vain tears, alas, and sighs that never find  
 A corresponding tone in jovial souls!  
 Well—one at least is safe. One shelter'd hare  
 Has never heard the sanguinary yell 335  
 Of cruel man, exulting in her woes.  
 Innocent partner of my peaceful home,  
 Whom ten long years' experience of my care  
 Has made at last familiar; she has lost  
 Much of her vigilant instinctive dread, 340  
 Not needful here, beneath a roof like mine.  
 Yes—thou mayst eat thy bread, and lick the hand  
 That feeds thee; thou mayst frolic on the floor  
 At evening, and at night retire secure  
 To thy straw couch, and slumber unalarm'd; 345  
 For I have gain'd thy confidence, have pledged  
 All that is human in me, to protect  
 Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.  
 If I survive thee, I will dig thy grave;  
 And, when I place thee in it, sighing say, 350  
 I knew at least one hare that had a friend.

How various his employments whom the world  
 Calls idle; and who justly in return  
 Esteems that busy world an idler too!  
 Friends, books, a garden, and perhaps his pen, 355

Delightful industry enjoy'd at home,  
 And Nature in her cultivated trim  
 Dress'd to his taste, inviting him abroad—  
 Can he want occupation who has these?  
 Will he be idle who has much to enjoy? 360  
 Me therefore studious of laborious ease,  
 Not slothful, happy to deceive the time,  
 Not waste it, and aware that human life  
 Is but a loan to be repaid with use,  
 When He shall call his debtors to account, 365  
 From whom are all our blessings, business finds  
 E'en here: while sedulous I seek to improve,  
 At least neglect not, or leave unemploy'd,  
 The mind he gave me; driving it, though slack  
 Too oft, and much impeded in its work 370  
 By causes not to be divulged in vain,  
 To its just point—the service of mankind.  
 He, that attends to his interior self,  
 That has a heart, and keeps it; has a mind  
 That hungers, and supplies it; and who seeks 375  
 A social, not a dissipated life,  
 Has business; feels himself engaged to achieve  
 No unimportant, though a silent, task.  
 A life all turbulence and noise may seem  
 To him that leads it wise, and to be praised; 380  
 But wisdom is a pearl with most success  
 Sought in still water and beneath clear skies.  
 He that is ever occupied in storms,

Or dives not for it, or brings up instead,  
Vainly industrious, a disgraceful prize. 385

The morning finds the self-sequester'd man  
Fresh for his task, intend what task he may.  
Whether inclement seasons recommend  
His warm but simple home, where he enjoys  
With her, who shares his pleasures and his heart, 390  
Sweet converse, sipping calm the fragrant lymph,  
Which neatly she prepares; then to his book  
Well chosen, and not sullenly perused  
In selfish silence, but imparted oft,  
As aught occurs, that she may smile to hear, 395  
Or turn to nourishment, digested well.

Or if the garden with its many cares,  
All well repaid, demand him, he attends  
The welcome call, conscious how much the hand  
Of lubbard Labour needs his watchful eye, 400  
Oft loitering lazily, if not o'erseen,  
Or misapplying his unskilful strength.

Nor does he govern only or direct,  
But much performs himself. No works, indeed,  
That ask robust, tough sinews, bred to toil, 405  
Servile employ; but such as may amuse,  
Not tire, demanding rather skill than force.  
Proud of his well spread walls, he views his trees,  
That meet no barren interval between,  
With pleasure more than e'en their fruits afford; 410  
Which, save himself who trains them, none can feel.

These therefore are his own peculiar charge;  
 No meaner hand may discipline the shoots,  
 None but his steel approach them. What is weak,  
 Distemper'd, or has lost prolific powers, 415  
 Impair'd by age, his unrelenting hand  
 Dooms to the knife: nor does he spare the soft  
 And succulent, that feeds its giant growth,  
 But barren, at the expense of neighbouring twigs  
 Less ostentatious, and yet studded thick 420  
 With hopeful gems. The rest, no portion left  
 That may disgrace his art, or disappoint  
 Large expectation, he disposes neat  
 At measured distances, that air and sun,  
 Admitted freely, may afford their aid, 425  
 And ventilate and warm the swelling buds.  
 Hence Summer has her riches, Autumn hence,  
 And hence e'en Winter fills his wither'd hand  
 With blushing fruits, and plenty not his own.\*  
 Fair recompense of labour well bestow'd, 430  
 And wise precaution; which a clime so rude  
 Makes needful still, whose Spring is but the child  
 Of churlish Winter, in her froward moods  
 Discovering much the temper of her sire.  
 For oft, as if in her the stream of mild 435  
 Maternal nature had reversed its course,  
 She brings her infants forth with many smiles;  
 But, once deliver'd, kills them with a frown.

\* *Miraturque novos fructus et non sua poma.—Virg.*

He therefore, timely warn'd himself, supplies  
 Her want of care, screening and keeping warm 440  
 The plenteous bloom, that no rough blast may sweep  
 His garlands from the boughs. Again, as oft  
 As the sun peeps and vernal airs breathe mild,  
 The fence withdrawn, he gives them every beam,  
 And spreads his hopes before the blaze of day. 445

To raise the prickly and green coated gourd,  
 So grateful to the palate, and when rare  
 So coveted, else base and disesteem'd—  
 Food for the vulgar merely—is an art  
 That toiling ages have but just matured, 450  
 And at this moment unassay'd in song.

Yet gnats have had, and frogs and mice, long since,  
 Their eulogy; those sang the Mantuan bard,  
 And these the Grecian, in ennobling strains;  
 And in thy numbers, Phillips, shines for aye 455  
 The solitary shilling: Pardon then,  
 Ye sage dispensers of poetic fame,

The ambition of one meaner far, whose powers,  
 Presuming an attempt not less sublime,  
 Pant for the praise of dressing to the taste 460  
 Of critic appetite, no sordid fare,  
 A cucumber, while costly yet and scarce.

The stable yields a stercoraceous heap,  
 Impregnated with quick fermenting salts,  
 And potent to resist the freezing blast: 465  
 For, ere the beech and elm have cast their leaf

Deciduous, when now November dark  
 Checks vegetation in the torpid plant  
 Exposed to his cold breath, the task begins.  
 Warily therefore, and with prudent heed, 470  
 He seeks a favour'd spot; that where he builds  
 The agglomerated pile his frame may front  
 The sun's meridian disk, and at the back  
 Enjoy close shelter, wall, or reeds, or hedge  
 Impervious to the wind. First he bids spread 475  
 Dry fern or litter'd hay, that may imbibe  
 The ascending damps; then leisurely impose,  
 And lightly, shaking it with agile hand  
 From the full fork, the saturated straw.  
 What longest binds the closest forms secure 480  
 The shapely side, that as it rises takes,  
 By just degrees, an overhanging breadth,  
 Sheltering the base with its projected eaves :  
 The uplifted frame, compact at every joint,  
 And overlaid with clear translucent glass, 485  
 He settles next upon the sloping mount,  
 Whose sharp declivity shoots off secure  
 From the dash'd pane the deluge as it falls.  
 He shuts it close, and the first labour ends.  
 Thrice must the voluble and restless earth 490  
 Spin round upon her axle, ere the warmth,  
 Slow gathering in the midst, through the square mass  
 Diffused, attain the surface : when, behold !  
 A pestilent and most corrosive steam,



Like a gross fog Bœotian, rising fast, 495  
 And fast condensed upon the dewy sash,  
 Asks egress; which obtain'd, the overcharged  
 And drench'd conservatory breathes abroad,  
 In volumes wheeling slow, the vapour dank;  
 And, purified, rejoices to have lost 500  
 Its foul inhabitant. But to assuage  
 The impatient fervour, which it first conceives  
 Within its reeking bosom, threatening death  
 To his young hopes, requires discreet delay.  
 Experience, slow preceptress, teaching oft 505  
 The way to glory by miscarriage foul,  
 Must prompt him, and admonish how to catch  
 The auspicious moment, when the temper'd heat,  
 Friendly to vital motion, may afford  
 Soft fomentation, and invite the seed. 510  
 The seed, selected wisely, plump, and smooth,  
 And glossy, he commits to pots of size  
 Diminutive, well fill'd with well prepared  
 And fruitful soil, that has been treasured long,  
 And drunk no moisture from the dripping clouds. 515  
 These on the warm and genial earth, that hides  
 The smoking manure, and o'erspreads it all,  
 He places lightly, and, as time subdues  
 The rage of fermentation, plunges deep  
 In the soft medium, till they stand immersed. 520  
 Then rise the tender germs, upstarting quick,  
 And spreading wide their spongy lobes; at first

Pale, wan, and livid ; but assuming soon,  
 If fann'd by balmy and nutritious air,  
 Strain'd through the friendly mats, a vivid green. 525

Two leaves produced, two rough indented leaves,  
 Cautious he pinches from the second stalk  
 A pimple, that portends a future sprout,  
 And interdicts its growth. Thence straight succeed  
 The branches, sturdy to his utmost wish ; 530  
 Prolific all, and harbingers of more.

The crowded roots demand enlargement now,  
 And transplantation in an ampler space.  
 Indulged in what they wish, they soon supply  
 Large foliage, overshadowing golden flowers, 535  
 Blown on the summit of the apparent fruit.

These have their sexes ; and, when summer shines,  
 The bee transports the fertilizing meal  
 From flower to flower, and e'en the breathing air  
 Wafts the rich prize to its appointed use. 540

Not so when winter scowls. Assistant art  
 Then acts in Nature's office, brings to pass  
 The glad espousals, and insures the crop.

Grudge not, ye rich (since Luxury must have  
 His dainties, and the World's more numerous half 545  
 Lives by contriving delicates for you),

Grudge not the cost. Ye little know the cares,  
 The vigilance, the labour, and the skill,  
 That day and night are exercised, and hang  
 Upon the ticklish balance of suspense, 550

That ye may garnish your profuse regales  
 With summer fruits, brought forth by wintry suns.  
 Ten thousand dangers lie in wait to thwart  
 The process. Heat, and cold, and wind, and steam,  
 Moisture, and drought, mice, worms, and swarming  
     flies, 555

Minute as dust, and numberless, oft work  
 Dire disappointment, that admits no cure,  
 And which no care can obviate. It were long,  
 Too long, to tell the expedients and the shifts  
 Which he that fights a season so severe 560

Devises, while he guards his tender trust;  
 And oft at last in vain. The learn'd and wise  
 Sarcastic would exclaim, and judge the song  
 Cold as its theme, and like its theme the fruit  
 Of too much labour, worthless when produced. 565

Who loves a garden loves a greenhouse too.  
 Unconscious of a less propitious clime,  
 There blooms exotic beauty, warm and snug,  
 While the winds whistle, and the snows descend.  
 The spiry myrtle with unwithering leaf 570  
 Shines there, and flourishes. The golden boast  
 Of Portugal and western India there,  
 The ruddier orange, and the paler lime,  
 Peep through their polish'd foliage at the storm,  
 And seem to smile at what they need not fear. 575  
 The amomum there with intermingling flowers  
 And cherries hangs her twigs. Geranium boasts

Her crimson honours ; and the spangled beau,  
 Ficoides, glitters bright the winter long.  
 All plants, of every leaf, that can endure 580  
 The winter's frown, if screen'd from his shrewd bite,  
 Live there, and prosper. Those Ausonia claims,  
 Levantine regions these ; the Azores send  
 Their jessamine, her jessamine remote  
 Caffraria : foreigners from many lands, 585  
 They form one social shade, as if convened  
 By magic summons of the Orphean lyre.  
 Yet just arrangement, rarely brought to pass  
 But by a master's hand, disposing well  
 The gay diversities of leaf and flower, 590  
 Must lend its aid to illustrate all their charms,  
 And dress the regular yet various scene.  
 Plant behind plant aspiring, in the van  
 The dwarfish, in the rear retired, but still  
 Sublime above the rest, the statelier stand. 595  
 So once were ranged the sons of ancient Rome,  
 A noble show ! while Roscius trod the stage ;  
 And so, while Garrick, as renown'd as he,  
 The sons of Albion ; fearing each to lose  
 Some note of Nature's music from his lips, 600  
 And covetous of Shakspeare's beauty, seen  
 In every flash of his far beaming eye.  
 Nor taste alone and well contrived display  
 Suffice to give the marshal'd ranks the grace  
 Of their complete effect. Much yet remains 605

Unsung, and many cares are yet behind,  
 And more laborious; cares on which depends  
 Their vigour, injured soon, not soon restored.  
 The soil must be renew'd, which often wash'd  
 Loses its treasure of salubrious salts, 610  
 And disappoints the roots; the slender roots  
 Close interwoven, where they meet the vase,  
 Must smooth be shorn away; the sapless branch  
 Must fly before the knife; the wither'd leaf  
 Must be detach'd, and where it strews the floor 615  
 Swept with a woman's neatness, breeding else  
 Contagion, and disseminating death.

Discharge but these kind offices (and who  
 Would spare, that loves them, offices like these?)  
 Well they reward the toil. The sight is pleased, 620  
 The scent regaled, each odoriferous leaf,  
 Each opening blossom freely breathes abroad  
 Its gratitude, and thanks him with its sweets.

So manifold, all pleasing in their kind,  
 All healthful, are the employs of rural life, 625  
 Reiterated as the wheel of time

Runs round; still ending, and beginning still.  
 Nor are these all. To deck the shapely knoll,  
 That softly swell'd and gaily dress'd appears  
 A flowery island, from the dark green lawn 630  
 Emerging, must be deem'd a labour due  
 To no mean hand, and asks the touch of taste.  
 Here also grateful mixture of well match'd

And sorted hues (each giving each relief,  
 And by contrasted beauty shining more) 635  
 Is needful. Strength may wield the ponderous spade,  
 May turn the clod, and wheel the compost home ;  
 But elegance, chief grace the garden shows,  
 And most attractive, is the fair result  
 Of thought, the creature of a polish'd mind. 640  
 Without it all is gothic as the scene  
 To which the insipid citizen resorts  
 Near yonder heath ; where Industry misspent,  
 But proud of his uncouth ill chosen task, 644  
 Has made a heaven on earth ; with suns and moons  
 Of close ramm'd stones has charg'd the encumber'd soil,  
 And fairly laid the zodiac in the dust.  
 He therefore, who would see his flowers disposed  
 Sightly and in just order, ere he gives  
 The beds the trusted treasure of their seeds, 650  
 Forecasts the future whole ; that when the scene  
 Shall break into its preconceived display,  
 Each for itself, and all as with one voice  
 Conspiring, may attest his bright design.  
 Nor even then, dismissing as perform'd 655  
 His pleasant work, may he suppose it done.  
 Few self-supported flowers endure the wind  
 Uninjured, but expect the upholding aid  
 Of the smooth-shaven prop, and, neatly tied,  
 Are wedded thus, like beauty to old age, 660  
 For interest sake, the living to the dead.

Some clothe the soil that feeds them, far diffused  
 And lowly creeping, modest and yet fair,  
 Like virtue, thriving most where little seen ;  
 Some, more aspiring, catch the neighbour shrub 665  
 With clasping tendrils, and invest his branch  
 Else unadorn'd, with many a gay festoon  
 And fragrant chaplet, recompensing well  
 The strength they borrow with the grace they lend.  
 All hate the rank society of weeds, 670  
 Noisome, and ever greedy to exhaust  
 The impoverish'd earth ; an overbearing race,  
 That, like the multitude, made faction-mad,  
 Disturb good order, and degrade true worth.  
 O blest seclusion from a jarring world, 675  
 Which he, thus occupied, enjoys ! Retreat  
 Cannot indeed to guilty man restore  
 Lost innocence, or cancel follies past ;  
 But it has peace, and much secures the mind  
 From all assaults of *evil* ; proving still 680  
 A faithful barrier, not o'erleap'd with ease  
 By vicious Custom, raging uncontroll'd  
 Abroad, and desolating public life.  
 When fierce temptation, seconded within  
 By traitor Appetite, and arm'd with darts 685  
 Temper'd in hell, invades the throbbing breast,  
 To combat may be glorious, and success  
 Perhaps may crown us ; but to fly is safe.  
 Had I the choice of sublunary good,

What could I wish, that I possess not here? 690  
Health, leisure, means to improve it, friendship, peace,  
No loose or wanton, though a wandering muse,  
And constant occupation without care.  
Thus blest I draw a picture of that bliss;  
Hopeless indeed, that dissipated minds, 695  
And profligate abusers of a world  
Created fair so much in vain for them,  
Should seek the guiltless joys that I describe,  
Allured by my report: but sure no less,  
That self-condemn'd they must neglect the prize, 700  
And what they will not taste must yet approve.  
What we admire we praise; and, when we praise,  
Advance it into notice, that, its worth  
Acknowledged, others may admire it too.  
I therefore recommend, though at the risk 705  
Of popular disgust, yet boldly still,  
The cause of piety and sacred truth,  
And virtue, and those scenes, which God ordain'd  
Should best secure them, and promote them most;  
Scenes that I love, and with regret perceive 710  
Forsaken, or through folly not enjoy'd.  
Pure is the nymph, though liberal of her smiles,  
And chaste, though unconfined, whom I extol.  
Not as the prince in Shushan, when he call'd,  
Vainglorious of her charms, his Vashti forth, 715  
To grace the full pavilion. His design  
Was but to boast his own peculiar good,



Which all might view with envy, none partake.  
 My charmer is not mine alone; my sweets,  
 And she, that sweetens all my bitters too, 720  
 Nature, enchanting Nature, in whose form  
 And lineaments divine I trace a hand  
 That errs not, and find raptures still renew'd,  
 Is free to all men—universal prize.  
 Strange that so fair a creature should yet want 725  
 Admirers, and be destined to divide  
 With meaner objects e'en the few she finds!  
 Stripp'd of her ornaments, her leaves, and flowers,  
 She loses all her influence. Cities then  
 Attract us, and neglected Nature pines, 730  
 Abandon'd, as unworthy of our love.  
 But are not wholesome airs, though unperfumed  
 By roses; and clear suns, though scarcely felt;  
 And groves, if unharmonious, yet secure  
 From clamour, and whose very silence charms; 735  
 To be preferr'd to smoke, to the eclipse  
 That metropolitan volcanoes make,  
 Whose Stygian throats breathe darkness all day long;  
 And to the stir of Commerce, driving slow,  
 And thundering loud, with his ten thousand wheels?  
 They would be, were not madness in the head, 741  
 And folly in the heart; were England now  
 What England was, plain, hospitable, kind,  
 And undebauch'd. But we have bid farewell  
 To all the virtues of those better days, 745

And all their honest pleasures. Mansions once  
Knew their own masters; and laborious hinds,  
Who had survived the father, served the son.

Now the legitimate and rightful lord

Is but a transient guest, newly arrived, 750

And soon to be supplanted. He that saw

His patrimonial timber cast its leaf,

Sells the last scantling, and transfers the price

To some shrewd sharper, ere it buds again.

Estates are landscapes, gazed upon awhile, 755

Then advertised, and auctioneer'd away.

▶ The country starves, and they that feed the o'ercharged

And surfeited lewd town with her fair dues,

By a just judgment strip and starve themselves.

The wings, that waft our riches out of sight, 760

Grow on the gamester's elbows; and the alert

And nimble motion of those restless joints,

That never tire, soon fans them all away.

Improvement too, the idol of the age,

Is fed with many a victim. Lo, he comes! 765

The omnipotent magician, Brown, appears!

Down falls the venerable pile, the abode

Of our forefathers—a grave whisker'd race,

But tast less. Springs a palace in its stead,

But in a distant spot; where more exposed 770

It may enjoy the advantage of the north,

And aguish east, till time shall have transform'd

Those naked acres to a sheltering grove.

He speaks. The lake in front becomes a lawn ;  
 Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise ; 775  
 And streams, as if created for his use,  
 Pursue the track of his directing wand,  
 Sinuous or straight, now rapid and now slow,  
 Now murmuring soft, now roaring in cascades—  
 E'en as he bids ! The enraptured owner smiles. 780  
 'Tis finish'd, and yet, finish'd as it seems,  
 Still wants a grace, the loveliest it could show,  
 A mine to satisfy the enormous cost.  
 Drain'd to the last poor item of his wealth, 784  
 He sighs, departs, and leaves the accomplish'd plan,  
 That he has touch'd, retouch'd, many a long day  
 Labour'd, and many a night pursued in dreams,  
 Just when it meets his hopes, and proves the heaven  
 He wanted, for a wealthier to enjoy !  
 And now perhaps the glorious hour is come, 790  
 When, having no stake left, no pledge to endear  
 Her interests, or that gives her sacred cause  
 A moment's operation on his love,  
 He burns with most intense and flagrant zeal,  
 To serve his country. Ministerial grace 795  
 Deals him out money from the public chest ;  
 Or, if that mine be shut, some private purse  
 Supplies his need with a usurious loan,  
 To be refunded duly, when his vote  
 Well managed shall have earn'd its worthy price. 800  
 O innocent, compared with arts like these,

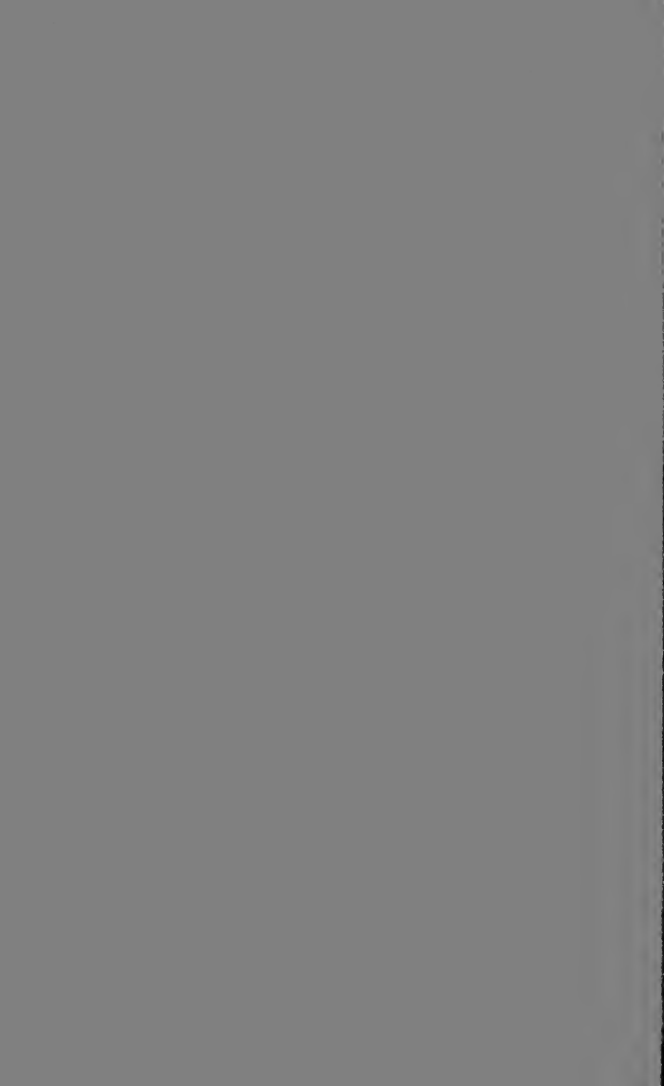
Crape, and cock'd pistol, and the whistling ball  
 Sent through the traveller's temples? He that finds  
 One drop of Heaven's sweet mercy in his cup,  
 Can dig, beg, rot, and perish, well content, 805  
 So he may wrap himself in honest rags  
 At his last gasp; but could not for a world  
 Fish up his dirty and dependent bread  
 From pools and ditches of the commonwealth,  
 Sordid and sickening at his own success. 810  
 Ambition, avarice, penury incurr'd  
 By endless riot, vanity, the lust  
 Of pleasure and variety, dispatch,  
 As duly as the swallows disappear, 814  
 The world of wandering knights and squires to town.  
 London engulfs them all! The shark is there,  
 And the shark's prey; the spendthrift, and the leech  
 That sucks him; there the sycophant, and he  
 Who, with bareheaded and obsequious bows,  
 Begg a warm office, doom'd to a cold jail 820  
 And groat per diem, if his patron frown.  
 The levee swarms, as if in golden pomp  
 Were character'd on every statesman's door,  
 "Batter'd and bankrupt fortunes mended here."  
 These are the charms that sully and eclipse 825  
 The charms of nature. 'Tis the cruel gripe  
 That lean hard-handed Poverty inflicts,  
 The hope of better things, the chance to win,  
 The wish to shine, the thirst to be amused,

That at the sound of Winter's hoary wing 830  
Unpeople all our counties of such herds  
Of fluttering, loitering, cringing, begging, loose,  
And wanton vagrants, as make London, vast  
And boundless as it is, a crowded coop.

O thou, resort and mart of all the earth, 835  
Chequer'd with all complexions of mankind,  
And spotted with all crimes; in whom I see  
Much that I love, and more that I admire,  
And all that I abhor; thou freckled fair,

That pleasest and yet shock'st me, I can laugh, 840  
And I can weep, can hope, and can despond,  
Feel wrath and pity, when I think on thee!

Ten righteous would have saved a city once,  
And thou hast many righteous.—Well for thee—  
That salt preserves thee; more corrupted else, 845  
And therefore more obnoxious, at this hour,  
Than Sodom in her day had power to be,  
For whom God heard his Abraham plead in vain.



THE TASK. BOOK IV.

THE

WINTER EVENING.

(107)

## ARGUMENT.

THE post comes in. The newspaper is read. The world contemplated at a distance. Address to Winter. The rural amusements of a winter evening compared with the fashionable ones. Address to Evening. A brown study. Fall of snow in the evening. The wagoner. A poor family piece. The rural thief. Public-houses. The multitude of them censured. The farmer's daughter: what she was—what she is. The simplicity of country manners almost lost. Causes of the change. Desertion of the country by the rich. Neglect of Magistrates. The militia principally in fault. The new recruit and his transformation. Reflection on bodies corporate. The love of rural objects natural to all, and never to be totally extinguished.



THE TASK. BOOK IV.

THE WINTER EVENING.

HARK! 'tis the twanging horn o'er yonder bridge,  
That with its wearisome but needful length  
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon  
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright;—  
He comes, the herald of a noisy world, 5  
With spatter'd boots, strapp'd waist, and frozen locks;  
News from all nations lumbering at his back.  
True to his charge, the close pack'd load behind,  
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern  
Is to conduct it to the destined inn; 10  
And, having dropp'd the expected bag, pass on.  
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,  
Cold and yet cheerful: messenger of grief  
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some;  
To him indifferent whether grief or joy. 15  
Houses in ashes, and the fall of stocks,  
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet  
With tears, that trickled down the writer's cheeks  
Fast as the periods from his fluent quill,  
Or charged with amorous sighs of absent swains, 20

Or nymphs responsive, equally affect  
 His horse and him, unconscious of them all.  
 But O the important budget! usher'd in  
 With such heart-shaking music, who can say  
 What are its tidings? have our troops awaked? 25  
 Or do they still, as if with opium drugg'd,  
 Snore to the murmurs of the Atlantic wave?  
 Is India free? and does she wear her plumed  
 And jewel'd turban with a smile of peace,  
 Or do we grind her still? The grand debate, 30  
 The popular harangue, the tart reply,  
 The logic, and the wisdom, and the wit,  
 And the loud laugh—I long to know them all;  
 I burn to set the imprison'd wranglers free,  
 And give them voice and utterance once again. 35  
 Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,  
 Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,  
 And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn  
 Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,  
 That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each, 40  
 So let us welcome peaceful evening in.  
 Not such his evening, who with shining face  
 Sweats in the crowded theatre, and, squeezed  
 And bored with elbow points through both his sides,  
 Outscolds the ranting actor on the stage: 45  
 Nor his, who patient stands till his feet throb,  
 And his head thumps, to feed upon the breath  
 Of patriots, bursting with heroic rage,

Or placemen, all tranquillity and smiles.  
 This folio of four pages, happy work ! 50  
 Which not e'en critics criticise ; that holds  
 Inquisitive attention, while I read,  
 Fast bound in chains of silence, which the fair,  
 Though eloquent themselves, yet fear to break ;  
 What is it but a map of busy life, 55  
 Its fluctuations, and its vast concerns ?  
 Here runs the mountainous and craggy ridge  
 That tempts Ambition. On the summit see  
 The seals of office glitter in his eyes ;  
 He climbs, he pants, he grasps them ! At his heels,  
 Close at his heels, a demagogue ascends, 61  
 And with a dexterous jerk soon twists him down,  
 And wins them, but to lose them in his turn.  
 Here rills of oily eloquence in soft  
 Meanders lubricate the course they take ; 65  
 The modest speaker is ashamed and grieved  
 To engross a moment's notice ; and yet begs,  
 Begg a propitious ear for his poor thoughts,  
 However trivial all that he conceives.  
 Sweet bashfulness ! it claims at least this praise ; 70  
 The dearth of information and good sense,  
 That it foretells us, always comes to pass.  
 Cataracts of declamation thunder here ;  
 There forests of no meaning spread the page,  
 In which all comprehension wanders lost ; 75  
 While fields of pleasantry amuse us there

With merry descants on a nation's woes.  
 The rest appears a wilderness of strange  
 But gay confusion ; roses for the cheeks,  
 And lilies for the brows of faded age, 80  
 Teeth for the toothless, ringlets for the bald,  
 Heaven, earth, and ocean, plunder'd of their sweets,  
 Nectareous essences, Olympian dews,  
 Sermons, and city feasts, and favourite airs,  
 Æthereal journeys, submarine exploits, 85  
 And Katerfelto, with his hair on end  
 At his own wonders, wondering for his bread.  
 'Tis pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat,  
 To peep at such a world ; to see the stir  
 Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd ; 90  
 To hear the roar she sends through all her gates  
 At a safe distance, where the dying sound  
 Falls a soft murmur on the uninjured ear.  
 Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease  
 The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced 95  
 To some secure and more than mortal height,  
 That liberates and exempts me from them all.  
 It turns submitted to my view, turns round  
 With all its generations ; I behold  
 The tumult, and am still. The sound of war 100  
 Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me ;  
 Grieves, but alarms me not. I mourn the pride  
 And avarice that make man a wolf to man ;  
 Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats,

By which he speaks the language of his heart, 105  
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.

He travels and expatiates, as the bee  
From flower to flower, so he from land to land ;  
The manners, customs, policy of all  
Pay contribution to the store he gleans ; 110

He sucks intelligence in every clime,  
And spreads the honey of his deep research  
At his return—a rich repast for me.

He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,  
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes 115  
Discover countries, with a kindred heart  
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes ;  
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,  
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.

O Winter, ruler of the inverted year, 120  
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet like ashes fill'd,  
Thy breath congeal'd upon thy lips, thy cheeks  
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows  
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapp'd in clouds,  
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne 125  
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,

But urged by storms along its slippery way,  
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,  
And dreaded as thou art ! Thou hold'st the sun  
A prisoner in the yet undawning east, 130  
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,  
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,

Down to the rosy west; but kindly still  
 Compensating his loss with added hours  
 Of social converse and instructive ease, 135  
 And gathering, at short notice, in one group  
 The family dispersed, and fixing thought,  
 Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.  
 I crown thee king of intimate delights,  
 Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness, 140  
 And all the comforts that the lowly roof  
 Of undisturb'd Retirement, and the hours  
 Of long uninterrupted evening know.  
 No rattling wheels stop short before these gates;  
 No powder'd pert proficient in the art 145  
 Of sounding an alarm assaults these doors  
 Till the street rings; no stationary steeds  
 Cough their own knell, while, heedless of the sound,  
 The silent circle fan themselves, and quake:  
 But here the needle plies its busy task, 150  
 The pattern grows, the well depicted flower,  
 Wrought patiently into the snowy lawn,  
 Unfolds its bosom; buds, and leaves, and sprigs,  
 And curling tendrils, gracefully disposed,  
 Follow the nimble finger of the fair; 155  
 A wreath, that cannot fade, of flowers that blow  
 With most success when all besides decay.  
 The poet's or historian's page by one  
 Made vocal for the amusement of the rest;  
 The sprightly lyre, whose treasure of sweet sounds 160

The touch from many a trembling chord shakes out ;  
 And the clear voice, symphonious, yet distinct,  
 And in the charming strife triumphant still,  
 Beguile the night, and set a keener edge  
 On female industry : the threaded steel 165  
 Flies swiftly, and unfelt the task proceeds.  
 The volume closed, the customary rites  
 Of the last meal commence. A Roman meal,  
 Such as the mistress of the world once found  
 Delicious, when her patriots of high note, 170  
 Perhaps by moonlight, at their humble doors,  
 And under an old oak's domestic shade,  
 Enjoy'd, spare feast ! a radish and an egg !  
 Discourse ensues, not trivial, yet not dull,  
 Nor such as with a frown forbids the play 175  
 Of fancy, or proscribes the sound of mirth :  
 Nor do we madly, like an impious world,  
 Who deem religion frenzy, and the God  
 That made them an intruder on their joys,  
 Start at his awful name, or deem his praise 180  
 A jarring note. Themes of a graver tone,  
 Exciting oft our gratitude and love,  
 While we retrace with Memory's pointing wand,  
 That calls the past to our exact review,  
 The dangers we have 'scaped, the broken snare, 185  
 The disappointed foe, deliverance found  
 Unlook'd for, life preserved, and peace restored,  
 Fruits of omnipotent eternal love.

O evenings worthy of the gods! exclaim'd  
 The Sabine bard. O evenings, I reply, 190  
 More to be prized and coveted than yours,  
 As more illumined, and with nobler truths,  
 That I, and mine, and those we love, enjoy.

Is Winter hideous in a garb like this?  
 Needs he the tragic fur, the smoke of lamps, 195  
 The pent-up breath of an unsavoury throng,  
 To thaw him into feeling; or the smart  
 And snappish dialogue, that flippant wits  
 Call comedy, to prompt him with a smile?

The self-complacent actor, when he views 200  
 (Stealing a sidelong glance at a full house)  
 The slope of faces, from the floor to the roof  
 (As if one master spring controll'd them all),  
 Relax'd into a universal grin,

Sees not a countenance there that speaks of joy 205  
 Half so refined or so sincere as ours.

Cards were superfluous here, with all the tricks  
 That idleness has ever yet contrived  
 To fill the void of an unfurnish'd brain,  
 To palliate dullness, and give time a shove. 210

Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing,  
 Unsoil'd, and swift, and of a silken sound;  
 But the World's Time is Time in masquerade!  
 Theirs, should I paint him, has his pinions fledged  
 With motley plumes; and, where the peacock shows  
 His azure eyes, is tintured black and red 216



With spots quadrangular of diamond form,  
 Ensanguined hearts, clubs typical of strife,  
 And spades, the emblem of untimely graves.  
 What should be, and what was an hourglass once, 220  
 Becomes a dicebox, and a billiard mace  
 Well does the work of his destructive scythe.  
 Thus deck'd, he charms a world whom Fashion blinds  
 To his true worth, most pleased when idle most;  
 Whose only happy are their wasted hours. 225  
 E'en misses, at whose age their mothers wore  
 The backstring and the bib, assume the dress  
 Of womanhood, fit pupils in the school  
 Of card devoted Time, and night by night  
 Placed at some vacant corner of the board, 230  
 Learn every trick, and soon play all the game.  
 But truce with censure. Roving as I rove,  
 Where shall I find an end, or how proceed?  
 As he that travels far oft turns aside,  
 To view some rugged rock or mouldering tower, 235  
 Which seen delights him not; then, coming home,  
 Describes and prints it, that the world may know  
 How far he went for what was nothing worth;  
 So I, with brush in hand and pallet spread,  
 With colours mix'd for a far different use, 240  
 Paint cards and dolls, and every idle thing  
 That fancy finds in her excursive flights.

Come, Evening, once again, season of peace;  
 Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!

Methinks I see thee in the streaky west, 245  
 With matron step slow moving, while the Night  
 Treads on thy sweeping train ; one hand employ'd  
 In letting fall the curtain of repose  
 On bird and beast, the other charged for man  
 With sweet oblivion of the cares of day : 250  
 Not sumptuously adorn'd, not needing aid,  
 Like homely featured Night, of clustering gems ;  
 A star or two, just twinkling on thy brow,  
 Suffices thee ; save that the moon is thine  
 No less than hers, not worn indeed on high 255  
 With ostentatious pageantry, but set  
 With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,  
 Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.  
 Come then, and thou shalt find thy votary calm,  
 Or make me so. Composure is thy gift : 260  
 And, whether I devote thy gentle hours  
 To books, to music, or the poet's toil ;  
 To weaving nets for bird-alluring fruit ;  
 Or twining silken threads round ivory reels, 264  
 When they command whom man was born to please ;  
 I slight thee not, but make thee welcome still.  
 Just when our drawingrooms begin to blaze  
 With lights, by clear reflection multiplied  
 From many a mirror, in which he of Gath,  
 Goliath, might have seen his giant bulk 270  
 Whole without stooping, towering crest and all,  
 My pleasures too begin. But me perhaps

The glowing hearth may satisfy awhile  
With faint illumination, that uplifts  
The shadows to the ceiling, there by fits 275  
Dancing uncouthly to the quivering flame.  
Not undelightful is an hour to me  
So spent in parlour twilight: such a gloom  
Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind,  
The mind contemplative, with some new theme 280  
Pregnant, or indisposed alike to all.  
Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial powers,  
That never felt a stupor, know no pause,  
Nor need one; I am conscious, and confess,  
Fearless, a soul that does not always think. 285  
Me oft has Fancy ludicrous and wild  
Soothed with a waking dream of houses, towers,  
Trees, churches, and strange visages, express'd  
In the red cinders, while with poring eye  
I gazed, myself creating what I saw. 290  
Nor less amused, have I quiescent watch'd  
The sooty films that play upon the bars,  
Pendulous, and foreboding in the view  
Of superstition, prophesying still, 294  
Though still deceived, some stranger's near approach.  
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose  
In indolent vacuity of thought,  
And sleeps and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face  
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask  
Of deep deliberation, as the man 300

Were task'd to his full strength, absorb'd and lost.  
Thus oft, reclined at ease, I lose an hour  
At evening, till at length the freezing blast,  
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home  
The recollected powers; and, snapping short 305  
The glassy threads with which the Fancy weaves  
Her brittle toils, restores me to myself.  
How calm is my recess; and how the frost,  
Raging abroad, and the rough wind endear  
The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within! 310  
I saw the woods and fields at close of day  
A variegated show; the meadows green,  
Though faded; and the lands, where lately waved  
The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,  
Upturn'd so lately by the forceful share. 315  
I saw far off the weedy fallows smile  
With verdure not unprofitable, grazed  
By flocks, fast feeding, and selecting each  
His favourite herb; while all the leafless groves,  
That skirt the horizon, wore a sable hue, 320  
Scarce noticed in the kindred dusk of eve.  
To-morrow brings a change, a total change!  
Which even now, though silently perform'd,  
And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face  
Of universal nature undergoes. 325  
Fast falls a fleecy shower: the downy flakes  
Descending, and with never ceasing lapse,  
Softly alighting upon all below,

Assimilate all objects. Earth receives  
 Gladly the thickening mantle; and the green 330  
 And tender blade, that fear'd the chilling blast,  
 Escapes unhurt beneath so warm a veil.

In such a world, so thorny, and where none  
 Finds happiness unblighted; or, if found,  
 Without some thistly sorrow at its side; 335

It seems the part of wisdom, and no sin  
 Against the law of love, to measure lots  
 With less distinguish'd than ourselves; that thus  
 We may with patience bear our moderate ills,  
 And sympathize with others suffering more. 340

Ill fares the traveller now; and he that stalks  
 In ponderous boots beside his reeking team.  
 The wain goes heavily, impeded sore  
 By congregated loads adhering close  
 To the clogg'd wheels; and in its sluggish pace 345  
 Noiseless appears a moving hill of snow.

The toiling steeds expand the nostril wide,  
 While every breath, by respiration strong  
 Forced downward, is consolidated soon  
 Upon their jutting chests. He, form'd to bear 350

The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night,  
 With half-shut eyes, and pucker'd cheeks, and teeth  
 Presented bare against the storm, plods on.  
 One hand secures his hat, save when with both  
 He brandishes his pliant length of whip, 355  
 Resounding oft, and never heard in vain.

O happy ; and, in my account, denied  
 That sensibility of pain with which  
 Refinement is endued, thrice happy thou !  
 Thy frame, robust and hardy, feels indeed 360  
 The piercing cold, but feels it unimpair'd.  
 The learned finger never need explore  
 Thy vigorous pulse ; and the unhealthful east,  
 That breathes the spleen, and searches every bone  
 Of the infirm, is wholesome air to thee. 365  
 Thy days roll on exempt from household care ;  
 Thy wagon is thy wife ; and the poor beasts,  
 That drag the dull companion to and fro,  
 Thine helpless charge, dependent on thy care.  
 Ah, treat them kindly ! rude as thou appear'st, 370  
 Yet show that thou hast mercy ! which the great,  
 With needless hurry whirl'd from place to place,  
 Humane as they would seem, not always show.  
 Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,  
 Such claim compassion in a night like this, 375  
 And have a friend in every feeling heart.  
 Warm'd, while it lasts, by labour, all day long  
 They brave the season, and yet find at eve,  
 Ill clad, and fed but sparingly, time to cool.  
 The frugal housewife trembles when she lights 380  
 Her scanty stock of brushwood, blazing clear,  
 But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys.  
 The few small embers left she nurses well ;  
 And, while her infant race, with outspread hands,

And crowded knees, sit cowering o'er the sparks, 385  
 Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd.  
 The man feels least, as more inured than she  
 To winter, and the current in his veins  
 More briskly moved by his severer toil ;  
 Yet he too finds his own distress in theirs. 390  
 The taper soon extinguish'd, which I saw  
 Dangled along at the cold finger's end  
 Just when the day declined ; and the brown loaf  
 Lodged on the shelf, half eaten without sauce  
 Of savoury cheese, or butter, costlier still ; 395  
 Sleep seems their only refuge : for, alas,  
 Where penury is felt the thought is changed,  
 And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few !  
 With all this thrift they thrive not. All the care,  
 Ingenious Parsimony takes, but just 400  
 Saves the small inventory, bed, and stool,  
 Skillet, and old carved chest, from public sale.  
 They live, and live without extorted alms  
 From grudging hands ; but other boast have none  
 To soothe their honest pride, that scorns to beg, 405  
 Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love.  
 I praise you much, ye meek and patient pair,  
 For ye are worthy ; choosing rather far  
 A dry but independent crust, hard earn'd,  
 And eaten with a sigh, than to endure 410  
 The rugged frowns and insolent rebuffs  
 Of knaves in office, partial in the work

Of distribution ; liberal of their aid  
 To clamorous importunity in rags,  
 But ofttimes deaf to suppliants, who would blush 415  
 To wear a tatter'd garb however coarse,  
 Whom famine cannot reconcile to filth :  
 These ask with painful shyness, and, refused  
 Because deserving, silently retire !  
 But be ye of good courage ! time itself 420  
 Shall much befriend you. Time shall give increase ;  
 And all your numerous progeny, well train'd,  
 But helpless, in few years shall find their hands,  
 And labour too. Meanwhile ye shall not want  
 What, conscious of your virtues, we can spare, 425  
 Nor what a wealthier than ourselves may send.  
 I mean the man who, when the distant poor  
 Need help, denies them nothing but his name.  
 But poverty with most, who whimper forth  
 Their long complaints, is self-inflicted woe ; 430  
 The effect of laziness or sottish waste.  
 Now goes the nightly thief prowling abroad  
 For plunder ; much solicitous how best  
 He may compensate for a day of sloth  
 By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong. 435  
 Woe to the gardener's pale, the farmer's hedge,  
 Plash'd neatly, and secured with driven stakes  
 Deep in the loamy bank. Uptorn by strength,  
 Resistless in so bad a cause, but lame  
 To better deeds, he bundles up the spoil, 440



An ass's burden, and, when laden most  
 And heaviest, light of foot steals fast away.  
 Nor does the boarded hovel better guard  
 The well stack'd pile of riven logs and roots  
 From his pernicious force. Nor will he leave 445  
 Unwrench'd the door, however well secured,  
 Where Chanticleer amidst his harem sleeps  
 In unsuspecting pomp. Twitch'd from the perch,  
 He gives the princely bird, with all his wives,  
 To his voracious bag, struggling in vain, 450  
 And loudly wondering at the sudden change.  
 Nor this to feed his own! 'Twere some excuse,  
 Did pity of their sufferings warp aside  
 His principle, and tempt him into sin  
 For their support, so destitute. But they 455  
 Neglected pine at home; themselves, as more  
 Exposed than others, with less scruple made  
 His victims, robb'd of their defenceless all.  
 Cruel is all he does. 'Tis quenchless thirst  
 Of ruinous ebriety that prompts 460  
 His every action, and imbrates the man.  
 O for a law to noose the villain's neck  
 Who starves his own; who persecutes the blood  
 He gave them in his children's veins, and hates  
 And wrongs the woman he has sworn to love! 465  
 Pass where we may, through city or through town,  
 Village, or hamlet, of this merry land,  
 Though lean and beggar'd, every twentieth pace

Conducts the unguarded nose to such a whiff  
 Of stale debauch, forth issuing from the styes 470  
 That law has licensed, as makes temperance reel.  
 There sit, involved and lost in curling clouds  
 Of Indian fume, and guzzling deep, the boor,  
 The lackey, and the groom: the craftsman there  
 Takes a Lethean leave of all his toil; 475  
 Smith, cobbler, joiner, he that plies the shears,  
 And he that kneads the dough; all loud alike,  
 All learned, and all drunk! the fiddle screams  
 Plaintive and piteous, as it wept and wail'd  
 Its wasted tones, and harmony unheard: 480  
 Fierce the dispute whate'er the theme; while she,  
 Fell Discord, arbitress of such debate,  
 Perch'd on the signpost, holds with even hand  
 Her undecisive scales. In this she lays  
 A weight of ignorance; in that, of pride; 485  
 And smiles delighted with the eternal poise.  
 Dire is the frequent curse, and its twin sound,  
 The cheek distending oath, not to be praised  
 As ornamental, musical, polite,  
 Like those which modern senators employ, 490  
 Whose oath is rhetoric, and who swear for fame!  
 Behold the schools in which plebeian minds,  
 Once simple, are initiated in arts,  
 Which some may practise with politer grace,  
 But none with readier skill!—'tis here they learn 495  
 The road that leads from competence and peace

To indigence and rapine ; till at last  
 Society, grown weary of the load,  
 Shakes her encumber'd lap, and casts them out.  
 But censure profits little : vain the attempt 500  
 To advertise in verse a public pest,  
 That like the filth, with which the peasant feeds  
 His hungry acres, stinks, and is of use.  
 The excise is fatten'd with the rich result  
 Of all this riot ; and ten thousand casks, 505  
 For ever dribbling out their base contents,  
 Touch'd by the Midas finger of the state,  
 Bleed gold for ministers to sport away.  
 Drink, and be mad then ; 'tis your country bids !  
 Gloriously drunk, obey the important call ! 510  
 Her cause demands the assistance of your throats ;—  
 Ye all can swallow, and she asks no more.  
 Would I had fallen upon those happier days  
 That poets celebrate ; those golden times,  
 And those Arcadian scenes, that Maro sings, 515  
 And Sidney, warbler of poetic prose.  
 Nymphs were Dianas then, and swains had hearts  
 That felt their virtues : Innocence, it seems,  
 From courts dismiss'd, found shelter in the groves ;  
 The footsteps of Simplicity, impress'd 520  
 Upon the yielding herbage (so they sing),  
 Then were not all effaced : then speech profane,  
 And manners profligate, were rarely found,  
 Observed as prodigies, and soon reclaim'd.

Vain wish! those days were never: airy dreams 525  
 Sat for the picture: and the poet's hand,  
 Imparting substance to an empty shade,  
 Imposed a gay delirium for a truth.  
 Grant it:—I still must envy them an age  
 That favour'd such a dream; in days like these 530  
 Impossible, when virtue is so scarce,  
 That to suppose a scene where she presides,  
 Is tramontane, and stumbles all belief.  
 No: we are polished now! The rural lass,  
 Whom once her virgin modesty and grace, 535  
 Her artless manners, and her neat attire,  
 So dignified, that she was hardly less  
 Than the fair shepherdess of old romance,  
 Is seen no more. The character is lost!  
 Her head, adorn'd with lappets pinn'd aloft, 540  
 And ribands streaming gay, superbly raised,  
 And magnified beyond all human size,  
 Indebted to some smart wig-weaver's hand  
 For more than half the tresses it sustains;  
 Her elbows ruffled, and her tottering form 545  
 Ill propp'd upon French heels; she might be deem'd  
 (But that the basket dangling on her arm  
 Interprets her more truly) of a rank  
 Too proud for dairy work, or sale of eggs.  
 Expect her soon with footboy at her heels, 550  
 No longer blushing for her awkward load,  
 Her train and her umbrella all her care!

The town has tinged the country; and the stain  
 Appears a spot upon a vestal's robe,  
 The worse for what it soils. The fashion runs 555  
 Down into scenes still rural; but, alas,  
 Scenes rarely graced with rural manners now!  
 Time was when in the pastoral retreat  
 The unguarded door was safe; men did not watch  
 To invade another's right, or guard their own. 560  
 Then sleep was undisturb'd by fear, unscared  
 By drunken howlings; and the chilling tale  
 Of midnight murder was a wonder heard  
 With doubtful credit, told to frighten babes.  
 But farewell now to unsuspecting nights, 565  
 And slumbers unalarm'd! Now, ere you sleep,  
 See that your polish'd arms be primed with care,  
 And drop the night-bolt;—ruffians are abroad;  
 And the first larum of the cock's shrill throat  
 May prove a trumpet, summoning your ear 570  
 To horrid sounds of hostile feet within.  
 E'en daylight has its dangers; and the walk  
 Through pathless wastes and woods, unconscious once  
 Of other tenants than melodious birds,  
 Or harmless flocks, is hazardous and bold. 575  
 Lamented change! to which full many a cause  
 Inveterate, hopeless of a cure, conspires.  
 The course of human things from good to ill,  
 From ill to worse, is fatal, never fails.  
 Increase of power begets increase of wealth; 580

Wealth luxury, and luxury excess ;  
 Excess, the scrofulous and itchy plague,  
 That seizes first the opulent, descends  
 To the next rank contagious, and in time  
 Taints downward all the graduated scale 585  
 Of order, from the chariot to the plough.  
 The rich, and they, that have an arm to check  
 The license of the lowest in degree,  
 Desert their office ; and themselves, intent  
 On pleasure, haunt the capital, and thus 590  
 To all the violence of lawless hands  
 Resign the scenes their presence might protect.  
 Authority herself not seldom sleeps,  
 Though resident, and witness of the wrong.  
 The plump convivial parson often bears 595  
 The magisterial sword in vain, and lays  
 His reverence and his worship both to rest  
 On the same cushion of habitual sloth.  
 Perhaps timidity restrains his arm ;  
 When he should strike he trembles, and sets free, 600  
 Himself enslaved by terror of the band,  
 The audacious convict, whom he dares not bind.  
 Perhaps, though by profession ghostly pure,  
 He too may have his vice, and sometimes prove  
 Less dainty than becomes his grave outside 605  
 In lucrative concerns. Examine well  
 His milkwhite hand ; the palm is hardly clean—  
 But here and there an ugly smutch appears.

Foh! 'twas a bribe that left it: he has touch'd  
 Corruption! Whoso seeks an audit here 610  
 Propitious, pays his tribute, game or fish,  
 Wild-fowl or venison; and his errand speeds.

But faster far, and more than all the rest,  
 A noble cause, which none, who bears a spark  
 Of public virtue, ever wish'd removed, 615  
 Works the deplored and mischievous effect.

'Tis universal soldiership has stabb'd  
 The heart of merit in the meaner class.  
 Arms, through the vanity and brainless rage  
 Of those that bear them, in whatever cause, 620  
 Seem most at variance with all moral good,  
 And incompatible with serious thought.

The clown, the child of nature, without guile,  
 Blest with an infant's ignorance of all  
 But his own simple pleasures; now and then 625  
 A wrestling match, a foot-race, or a fair;  
 Is balloted, and trembles at the news:

Sheepish he doffs his hat, and mumbling swears  
 A bible-oath to be whate'er they please,  
 To do he knows not what. The task perform'd, 630  
 That instant he becomes the sergeant's care,  
 His pupil, and his torment, and his jest.

His awkward gait, his introverted toes,  
 Bent knees, round shoulders, and dejected looks  
 Procure him many a curse. By slow degrees, 635  
 Unapt to learn, and form'd of stubborn stuff,

He yet by slow degrees puts off himself,  
 Grows conscious of a change, and likes it well :  
 He stands erect ; his slouch becomes a walk ;  
 He steps right onward, martial in his air, 640  
 His form, and movement ; is as smart above  
 As meal and larded locks can make him ; wears  
 His hat, or his plumed helmet, with a grace ;  
 And, his three years of heroship expired,  
 Returns indignant to the slighted plough. 645  
 He hates the field, in which no fife or drum  
 Attends him ; drives his cattle to a march ;  
 And sighs for the smart comrades he has left.  
 'Twere well if his exterior change were all—  
 But with his clumsy port the wretch has lost 650  
 His ignorance and harmless manners too.  
 To swear, to game, to drink ; to show at home  
 By lewdness, idleness, and Sabbath breach,  
 The great proficiency he made abroad ;  
 To astonish and to grieve his gazing friends ; 655  
 To break some maiden's and his mother's heart ;  
 To be a pest where he was useful once ;  
 Are his sole aim, and all his glory now.  
 Man in society is like a flower  
 Blown in its native bed : 'tis there alone 660  
 His faculties, expanded in full bloom,  
 Shine out ; there only reach their proper use.  
 But man, associated and leagued with man  
 By regal warrant, or self-join'd by bond



For interest sake, or swarming into clans 665  
 Beneath one head for purposes of war,  
 Like flowers selected from the rest, and bound  
 And bundled close to fill some crowded vase,  
 Fades rapidly, and, by compression marr'd,  
 Contracts defilement not to be endured. 670  
 Hence charter'd boroughs are such public plagues;  
 And burghers, men immaculate perhaps  
 In all their private functions, once combined,  
 Become a loathsome body, only fit  
 For dissolution, hurtful to the main. 675  
 Hence merchants, unimpeachable of sin  
 Against the charities of domestic life,  
 Incorporated, seem at once to lose  
 Their nature; and, disclaiming all regard  
 For mercy and the common rights of man, 680  
 Build factories with blood, conducting trade  
 At the sword's point, and dyeing the white robe  
 Of innocent commercial Justice red.  
 Hence too the field of glory, as the world  
 Mideems it, dazzled by its bright array, 685  
 With all its majesty of thundering pomp,  
 Enchanting music, and immortal wreaths,  
 Is but a school, where thoughtlessness is taught  
 On principle, where foppery atones  
 For folly, gallantry for every vice. 690

But slighted as it is, and by the great  
 Abandon'd, and, which still I more regret,

Infected with the manners and the modes  
 It knew not once, the country wins me still.  
 I never framed a wish, or form'd a plan, 695  
 That flatter'd me with hopes of earthly bliss,  
 But there I laid the scene. There early stray'd  
 My fancy, ere yet liberty of choice  
 Had found me, or the hope of being free.  
 My very dreams were rural; rural too 700  
 The firstborn efforts of my youthful muse,  
 Sportive and jingling her poetic bells,  
 Ere yet her ear was mistress of their powers.  
 No bard could please me but whose lyre was tuned  
 To Nature's praises. Heroes and their feats 705  
 Fatigued me, never weary of the pipe  
 Of Tityrus, assembling, as he sang,  
 The rustic throng beneath his favourite beech.  
 Then Milton had indeed a poet's charms;  
 New to my taste his Paradise surpass'd 710  
 The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue  
 To speak its excellence. I danced for joy.  
 I marvel'd much that, at so ripe an age  
 As twice seven years, his beauties had then first  
 Engaged my wonder; and admiring still, 715  
 And still admiring, with regret supposed  
 The joy half lost, because not sooner found.  
 There too, enamour'd of the life I loved,  
 Pathetic in its praise, in its pursuit  
 Determined, and possessing it at last 720

With transports, such as favour'd lovers feel,  
 I studied, prized, and wish'd that I had known  
 Ingenious Cowley! and, though now reclaim'd  
 By modern lights from an erroneous taste,  
 I cannot but lament thy splendid wit 725  
 Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools.  
 I still revere thee, courtly though retired;  
 Though stretch'd at ease in Chertsey's silent bowers,  
 Not unemploy'd; and finding rich amends  
 For a lost world in solitude and verse. 730  
 'Tis born with all: the love of Nature's works  
 Is an ingredient in the compound man,  
 Infused at the creation of the kind.  
 And though the Almighty Maker has throughout  
 Discriminated each from each, by strokes 735  
 And touches of his hand, with so much art  
 Diversified, that two were never found  
 Twins at all points—yet this obtains in all,  
 That all discern a beauty in his works,  
 And all can taste them: minds that have been form'd  
 And tutor'd, with a relish more exact, 741  
 But none without some relish, none unmoved.  
 It is a flame that dies not even there,  
 Where nothing feeds it: neither business, crowds,  
 Nor habits of luxurious city life, 745  
 Whatever else they smother of true worth  
 In human bosoms, quench it or abate.  
 The villas with which London stands begirt,

Like a swarth Indian with his belt of beads,  
 Prove it. A breath of unadulterate air, 750  
 The glimpse of a green pasture, how they cheer  
 The citizen, and brace his languid frame!  
 E'en in the stifling bosom of the town  
 A garden, in which nothing thrives, has charms  
 That soothe the rich possessor; much consoled, 755  
 That here and there some sprigs of mournful mint,  
 Of nightshade, or valerian, grace the well  
 He cultivates. These serve him with a hint  
 That nature lives; that sight-refreshing green  
 Is still the livery she delights to wear, 760  
 Though sickly samples of the exuberant whole.  
 What are the casements lined with creeping herbs,  
 The prouder sashes fronted with a range  
 Of orange, myrtle, or the fragrant weed,  
 The Frenchman's darling?\* are they not all proofs  
 That man, immured in cities, still retains 766  
 His inborn inextinguishable thirst  
 Of rural scenes, compensating his loss  
 By supplemental shifts the best he may?  
 The most unfurnish'd with the means of life, 770  
 And they that never pass their brick-wall bounds  
 To range the fields, and treat their lungs with air,  
 Yet feel the burning instinct: over head  
 Suspend their crazy boxes, planted thick,  
 And water'd dully. There the pitcher stands, 775

\* Mignonetto.

A fragment, and the spoutless teapot there ;  
 Sad witnesses how close-pent man regrets  
 The country, with what ardour he contrives  
 A peep at Nature, when he can no more.

Hail, therefore, patroness of health and ease, 780  
 And contemplation, heart-consoling joys,  
 And harmless pleasures, in the throng'd abode  
 Of multitudes unknown ! hail, rural life !

Address himself who will to the pursuit  
 Of honours, or emolument, or fame ; 785

I shall not add myself to such a chase,  
 Thwart his attempts, or envy his success.  
 Some must be great. Great offices will have  
 Great talents. And God gives to every man

The virtue, temper, understanding, taste, 790  
 That lifts him into life, and lets him fall  
 Just in the niche he was ordain'd to fill.

To the deliverer of an injured land  
 He gives a tongue to enlarge upon, a heart  
 To feel, and courage to redress her wrongs ; 795  
 To monarchs dignity ; to judges sense ;  
 To artists ingenuity and skill ;

To me an unambitious mind, content  
 In the low vale of life, that early felt  
 A wish for ease and leisure, and ere long 800  
 Found here that leisure and that ease I wish'd.



THE TASK. BOOK V.

THE WINTER MORNING WALK.

(139)

## ARGUMENT.

A FROSTY morning. The foddering of cattle. The woodman and his dog. The poultry. Whimsical effects of frost at a waterfall. The Empress of Russia's palace of ice. Amusements of monarchs. War, one of them. Wars, whence. And whence monarchy. The evils of it. English and French loyalty contrasted. The Bastille, and a prisoner there. Liberty the chief recommendation of this country. Modern patriotism questionable, and why. The perishable nature of the best human institutions. Spiritual liberty not perishable. The slavish state of man by nature. Deliver him, Deist, if you can. Grace must do it. The respective merits of patriots and martyrs stated. Their different treatment. Happy freedom of the man whom grace makes free. His relish of the works of God. Address to the Creator.



## THE TASK. BOOK V.

### THE WINTER MORNING WALK.

'Tis morning ; and the sun, with ruddy orb  
Ascending, fires the horizon ; while the clouds,  
That crowd away before the driving wind,  
More ardent as the disk emerges more,  
Resemble most some city in a blaze, 5  
Seen through the leafless wood. His slanting ray  
Slides ineffectual down the snowy vale,  
And, tinging all with his own rosy hue,  
From every herb and every spiry blade  
Stretches a length of shadow o'er the field. 10  
Mine, spindling into longitude immense,  
In spite of gravity and sage remark,  
That I myself am but a fleeting shade,  
Provokes me to a smile. With eye askance  
I view the muscular proportion'd limb 15  
Transform'd to a lean shank. The shapeless pair,  
As they design'd to mock me, at my side  
Take step for step ; and, as I near approach  
The cottage, walk along the plaster'd wall,  
Preposterous sight ! the legs without the man. 20

The verdure of the plain lies buried deep  
Beneath the dazzling deluge; and the bents,  
And coarser grass, upspringing o'er the rest,  
Of late unsightly and unseen, now shine  
Conspicuous, and in bright apparel clad, 25  
And fledged with icy feathers, nod superb.  
The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence  
Screens them, and seem half petrified to sleep  
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait  
Their wonted fodder; not like hungering man, 30  
Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,  
And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.  
He from the stack carves out the accustom'd load,  
Deep plunging, and again deep plunging oft,  
His broad keen knife into the solid mass: 35  
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,  
With such undeviating and even force  
He severs it away: no needless care,  
Lest storms should overset the leaning pile  
Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight. 40  
Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd  
The cheerful haunts of man; to wield the axe  
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,  
From morn to eve his solitary task.  
Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears 45  
And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur,  
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel  
Now creeps he slow; and now, with many a frisk

Wide scampering, snatches up the drifted snow  
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout; 50  
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.  
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl  
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught,  
But now and then with pressure of his thumb  
To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube, 55  
That fumes beneath his nose: the trailing cloud  
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.  
Now from the roost, or from the neighbouring pale,  
Where, diligent to catch the first faint gleam  
Of smiling day, they gossip'd side by side, 60  
Come trooping at the housewife's well known call  
The feather'd tribes domestic. Half on wing,  
And half on foot, they brush the fleecy flood,  
Conscious and fearful of too deep a plunge.  
The sparrows peep, and quit the sheltering eaves, 65  
To seize the fair occasion; well they eye  
The scatter'd grain, and thievishly resolved  
To escape the impending famine, often scared  
As oft return, a pert voracious kind.  
Clean riddance quickly made, one only care 70  
Remains to each, the search of sunny nook,  
Or shed impervious to the blast. Resign'd  
To sad necessity, the cock foregoes  
His wonted strut; and, wading at their head  
With well consider'd steps, seems to resent 75  
His alter'd gait and stateliness retrench'd.

How find the myriads, that in summer cheer  
 The hills and valleys with their ceaseless songs,  
 Due sustenance, or where subsist they now?  
 Earth yields them nought: the imprison'd worm is safe  
 Beneath the frozen clod; all seeds of herbs 81  
 Lie cover'd close; and berry-bearing thorns,  
 That feed the thrush, (whatever some suppose)  
 Afford the smaller minstrels no supply.  
 The long protracted rigour of the year 85  
 Thins all their numerous flocks. In chinks and holes  
 Ten thousand seek an unmolested end,  
 As instinct prompts; self-buried ere they die.  
 The very rooks and daws forsake the fields,  
 Where neither grub, nor root, nor earth-nut, now 90  
 Repays their labour more; and perch'd aloft  
 By the wayside, or stalking in the path,  
 Lean pensioners upon the traveller's track,  
 Pick up their nauseous dole, though sweet to them,  
 Of voided pulse or half-digested grain. 95  
 The streams are lost amid the splendid blank,  
 O'erwhelming all distinction. On the flood,  
 Indurated and fix'd, the snowy weight  
 Lies undissolv'd; while silently beneath,  
 And unperceived, the current steals away. 100  
 Not so where, scornful of a check, it leaps  
 The mill-dam, dashes on the restless wheel,  
 And wantons in the pebbly gulf below:  
 No frost can bind it there; its utmost force

Can but arrest the light and smoky mist 105  
 That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide.  
 And see where it has hung the embroider'd banks  
 With forms so various, that no powers of art,  
 The pencil or the pen, may trace the scene !  
 Here glittering turrets rise, upbearing high 110  
 (Fantastic misarrangement!) on the roof  
 Large growth of what may seem the sparkling trees  
 And shrubs of fairy land. The crystal drops  
 That trickle down the branches, fast congeal'd,  
 Shoot into pillars of pellucid length, 115  
 And prop the pile they but adorn'd before.  
 Here grotto within grotto safe defies  
 The sunbeam; there, emboss'd and fretted wild,  
 The growing wonder takes a thousand shapes  
 Capricious, in which fancy seeks in vain 120  
 The likeness of some object seen before.  
 Thus Nature works as if to mock at Art,  
 And in defiance of her rival powers ;  
 By these fortuitous and random strokes  
 Performing such inimitable feats 125  
 As she with all her rules can never reach.  
 Less worthy of applause, though more admired,  
 Because a novelty, the work of man,  
 Imperial mistress of the fur-clad Russ !  
 Thy most magnificent and mighty freak, 130  
 The wonder of the North. No forest fell  
 When thou wouldst build; no quarry sent its stores

To enrich thy walls: but thou didst hew the floods,  
 And make thy marble of the glassy wave.  
 In such a palace Aristæus found 135  
 Cyrene, when he bore the plaintive tale  
 Of his lost bees to her maternal ear:  
 In such a palace Poetry might place  
 The armoury of Winter; where his troops,  
 The gloomy clouds, find weapons, arrowy sleet, 140  
 Skin-piercing volley, blossom-bruising hail,  
 And snow, that often blinds the traveller's course,  
 And wraps him in an unexpected tomb.  
 Silently as a dream the fabric rose;  
 No sound of hammer or of saw was there. 145  
 Ice upon ice, the well adjusted parts  
 Were soon conjoined; nor other cement ask'd  
 Than water interfused to make them one.  
 Lamps gracefully disposed, and of all hues,  
 Illumined every side: a watery light 150  
 Gleam'd through the clear transparency, that seem'd  
 Another moon new risen, or meteor fallen  
 From Heaven to Earth, of lambent flame serene.  
 So stood the brittle prodigy; though smooth  
 And slippery the materials, yet frost-bound 155  
 Firm as a rock. Nor wanted aught within,  
 That royal residence might well befit,  
 For grandeur or for use. Long wavy wreaths  
 Of flowers, that fear'd no enemy but warmth,  
 Blush'd on the panels. Mirror needed none 160

Where all was vitreous; but in order due  
 Convivial table and commodious seat  
 (What seem'd at least commodious seat) were there;  
 Sofa, and couch, and high built throne august,  
 The same lubricity was found in all, 165  
 And all was moist to the warm touch; a scene  
 Of evanescent glory, once a stream,  
 And soon to slide into a stream again.  
 Alas ! 'twas but a mortifying stroke  
 Of undesign'd severity, that glanced 170  
 (Made by a monarch) on her own estate,  
 On human grandeur and the courts of kings.  
 'Twas transient in its nature, as in show  
 'Twas durable; as worthless, as it seem'd  
 Intrinsically precious; to the foot 175  
 Treacherous and false; it smiled, and it was cold.  
 Great princes have great playthings. Some have  
 play'd  
 At hewing mountains into men, and some  
 At building human wonders mountain high.  
 Some have amused the dull sad years of life 180  
 (Life spent in indolence, and therefore sad)  
 With schemes of monumental fame; and sought  
 By pyramids and mausolean pomp,  
 Short-lived themselves, to immortalize their bones.  
 Some seek diversion in the tented field, 185  
 And make the sorrows of mankind their sport.  
 But war's a game which, were their subjects wise,

Kings would not play at. Nations would do well  
 To extort their truncheons from the puny hands  
 Of heroes, whose infirm and baby minds 190  
 Are gratified with mischief, and who spoil,  
 Because men suffer it, their toy the World.

When Babel was confounded, and the great  
 Confederacy of projectors wild and vain  
 Was split into diversity of tongues, 195

Then, as a shepherd separates his flock,  
 These to the upland, to the valley those,  
 God drave asunder, and assign'd their lot  
 To all the nations. Ample was the boon  
 He gave them, in its distribution fair 200

And equal; and he bade them dwell in peace.  
 Peace was awhile their care: they plough'd and sow'd,  
 And reap'd their plenty without grudge or strife.  
 But violence can never longer sleep

Than human passions please. In every heart 205  
 Are sown the sparks that kindle fiery war;  
 Occasion needs but fan them, and they blaze.

Cain had already shed a brother's blood;  
 The deluge wash'd it out; but left unquench'd  
 The seeds of murder in the breast of man. 210

Soon by a righteous judgment in the line  
 Of his descending progeny was found  
 The first artificer of death; the shrewd  
 Contriver, who first sweated at the forge  
 And forced the blunt and yet unblooded steel 215



To a keen edge, and made it bright for war.  
 Him, Tubal named, the Vulcan of old times,  
 The sword and falchion their inventor claim ;  
 And the first smith was the first murderer's son.  
 His art survived the waters ; and ere long, 220  
 When man was multiplied and spread abroad  
 In tribes and clans, and had begun to call  
 These meadows and that range of hills his own,  
 The tasted sweets of property begat  
 Desire of more ; and industry in some, 225  
 To improve and cultivate their just demesne,  
 Made others covet what they saw so fair.  
 Thus war began on earth : these fought for spoil,  
 And those in self-defence. Savage at first  
 The onset, and irregular. At length 230  
 One eminent above the rest for strength,  
 For stratagem, or courage, or for all,  
 Was chosen leader ; him they served in war,  
 And him in peace, for sake of warlike deeds  
 Reverenced no less. Who could with him compare ?  
 Or who so worthy to control themselves, 236  
 As he, whose prowess had subdued their foes ?  
 Thus war, affording field for the display  
 Of virtue, made one chief, whom times of peace,  
 Which have their exigencies too, and call 240  
 For skill in government, at length made king.  
 King was a name too proud for man to wear  
 With modesty and meekness ; and the crown,

So dazzling in their eyes who set it on,  
Was sure to intoxicate the brows it bound. 245  
It is the abject property of most,  
That, being parcel of the common mass,  
And destitute of means to raise themselves,  
They sink, and settle lower than they need.  
They know not what it is to feel within 250  
A comprehensive faculty that grasps  
Great purposes with ease, that turns and wields,  
Almost without an effort, plans too vast  
For their conception, which they cannot move.  
Conscious of impotence, they soon grow drunk 255  
With gazing, when they see an able man  
Step forth to notice ; and, besotted thus,  
Build him a pedestal, and say, " Stand there,  
And be our admiration and our praise."  
They roll themselves before him in the dust, 260  
Then most deserving in their own account,  
When most extravagant in his applause,  
As if exalting him they raised themselves.  
Thus by degrees, self-cheated of their sound  
And sober judgment, that he is but man, 265  
They demideify and fume him so,  
That in due season he forgets it too.  
Inflated and astrut with self-conceit,  
He gulps the windy diet ; and ere long,  
Adopting their mistake, profoundly thinks 270  
The world was made in vain, if not for him.

Thenceforth they are his cattle : drudges, born  
To bear his burdens, drawing in his gears,  
And sweating in his service, his caprice  
Becomes the soul that animates them all. 275  
He deems a thousand, or ten thousand lives,  
Spent in the purchase of renown for him,  
An easy reckoning ; and they think the same.  
Thus kings were first invented, and thus kings  
Were burnish'd into heroes, and became 280  
The arbiters of this terraqueous swamp ;  
Storks among frogs, that have but croak'd and died.  
Strange, that such folly, as lifts bloated man  
To eminence, fit only for a god,  
Should ever drivel out of human lips, 285  
E'en in the cradled weakness of the world !  
Still stranger much, that when at length mankind  
Had reach'd the sinewy firmness of their youth,  
And could discriminate and argue well  
On subjects more mysterious, they were yet 290  
Babes in the cause of freedom, and should fear  
And quake before the gods themselves had made.  
But above measure strange, that neither proof  
Of sad experience, nor examples set  
By some, whose patriot virtue has prevail'd, 295  
Can even now, when they are grown mature  
In wisdom, and with philosophic deeds  
Familiar, serve to emancipate the rest !  
Such dupes are men to custom, and so prone

To reverence what is ancient, and can plead 300  
 A course of long observance for its use,  
 That even servitude, the worst of ills,  
 Because delivered down from sire to son,  
 Is kept and guarded as a sacred thing!  
 But is it fit, or can it bear the shock 305  
 Of rational discussion, that a man,  
 Compounded and made up like other men  
 Of elements tumultuous, in whom lust  
 And folly in as ample measure meet,  
 As in the bosoms of the slaves he rules, 310  
 Should be a despot absolute, and boast  
 Himself the only freeman of his land?  
 Should, when he pleases, and on whom he will,  
 Wage war, with any or with no pretence  
 Of provocation given, or wrong sustain'd, 315  
 And force the beggarly last doit by means,  
 That his own humour dictates, from the clutch  
 Of Poverty, that thus he may procure  
 His thousands, weary of penurious life,  
 A splendid opportunity to die? 320  
 Say ye, who (with less prudence than of old  
 Jotham ascribed to his assembled trees  
 In politic convention) put your trust  
 In the shadow of a bramble, and, reclined  
 In fancied peace beneath his dangerous branch, 325  
 Rejoice in him, and celebrate his sway,  
 Where find ye passive fortitude? Whence springs

Your self-denying zeal, that holds it good  
To stroke the prickly grievance, and to hang  
His thorns with streamers of continual praise ? 330  
We too are friends to loyalty. We love  
The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,  
And reigns content within them : him we serve  
Freely and with delight, who leaves us free :  
But recollecting still that he is man, 335  
We trust him not too far. King though he be,  
And king in England too, he may be weak,  
And vain enough to be ambitious still ;  
May exercise amiss his proper powers,  
Or covet more than freemen choose to grant : 340  
Beyond that mark is treason. He is ours,  
To administer, to guard, to adorn the state,  
But not to warp or change it. We are his,  
To serve him nobly in the common cause,  
True to the death, but not to be his slaves. 345  
Mark now the difference, ye that boast your love  
Of kings, between your loyalty and ours.  
We love the man, the paltry pageant you :  
We the chief patron of the commonwealth,  
You the regardless author of its woes : 350  
We for the sake of liberty a king,  
You chains and bondage for a tyrant's sake.  
Our love is principle, and has its root  
In reason, is judicious, manly, free ;  
Yours, a blind instinct, crouches to the rod, 355

And licks the foot that treads it in the dust.  
 Were kingship as true treasure as it seems,  
 Sterling, and worthy of a wise man's wish,  
 I would not be a king to be beloved  
 Causeless, and daub'd with undiscerning praise, 360  
 Where love is mere attachment to the throne,  
 Not to the man who fills it as he ought.

Whose freedom is by sufferance, and at will  
 Of a superior, he is never free.  
 Who lives, and is not weary of a life 365  
 Exposed to manacles, deserves them well.  
 The state that strives for liberty, though foil'd,  
 And forced to abandon what she bravely sought,  
 Deserves at least applause for her attempt,  
 And pity for her loss. But that's a cause 370  
 Not often unsuccessful : power usurp'd  
 Is weakness when opposed ; conscious of wrong,  
 'Tis pusillanimous and prone to flight.  
 But slaves, that once conceive the glowing thought  
 Of freedom, in that hope itself possess 375  
 All that the contest calls for ; spirit, strength,  
 The scorn of danger, and united hearts ;  
 The surest presage of the good they seek.\*

\* The author hopes that he shall not be censured for unnecessary warmth upon so interesting a subject. He is aware that it is become almost fashionable to stigmatize such sentiments as no better than empty declamation ; but it is an ill symptom, and peculiar to modern times.

Then shame to manhood, and opprobrious more  
To France than all her losses and defeats, 380  
Old or of later date, by sea or land,  
Her house of bondage, worse than that of old  
Which God avenged on Pharaoh—the Bastille.  
Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts;  
Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair, 385  
That monarchs have supplied from age to age  
With music, such as suits their sovereign ears,  
The sighs and groans of miserable men!  
There's not an English heart that would not leap  
To hear that ye were fallen at last; to know 390  
That e'en our enemies, so oft employ'd  
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.  
For he who values Liberty confines  
His zeal for her predominance within  
No narrow bounds; her cause engages him 395  
Wherever pleaded. 'Tis the cause of man.  
There dwell the most forlorn of human kind,  
Immured though unaccused, condemn'd untried,  
Cruelly spared, and hopeless of escape!  
There, like the visionary emblem seen 400  
By him of Babylon, life stands a stump,  
And, filleted about with hoops of brass,  
Still lives, though all his pleasant boughs are gone,  
To count the hour-bell, and expect no change;  
And ever, as the sullen sound is heard, 405  
Still to reflect, that though a joyless note

To him, whose moments have all one dull pace,  
 Ten thousand rovers in the world at large  
 Account it music; that it summons some  
 To theatre, or jocund feast, or ball; 410  
 The wearied hireling finds it a release  
 From labour; and the lover, who has chid  
 Its long delay, feels every welcome stroke  
 Upon his heart-strings, trembling with delight—  
 To fly for refuge from distracting thought 415  
 To such amusements as ingenious woe  
 Contrives, hard shifting, and without her tools—  
 To read engraven on the mouldy walls,  
 In staggering types, his predecessor's tale,  
 A sad memorial, and subjoin his own— 420  
 To turn purveyor to an overgorged  
 And bloated spider, till the pamper'd pest  
 Is made familiar, watches his approach,  
 Comes at his call, and serves him for a friend—  
 To wear out time in numbering to and fro 425  
 The studs that thick emboss his iron door;  
 Then downward and then upward; then aslant,  
 And then alternative; with a sickly hope  
 By dint of change to give his tasteless task  
 Some relish; till the sum, exactly found 430  
 In all directions, he begins again—  
 Oh comfortless existence! hemm'd around  
 With woes, which who that suffers would not kneel  
 And beg for exile, or the pangs of death?



That man should thus encroach on fellow man, 435  
 Abridge him of his just and native rights,  
 Eradicate him, tear him from his hold  
 Upon the endearments of domestic life  
 And social, nip his fruitfulness and use,  
 And doom him for perhaps a heedless word 440  
 To barrenness, and solitude, and tears,  
 Moves indignation, makes the name of king  
 (Of king whom such prerogative can please)  
 As dreadful as the Manichean god,  
 Adored through fear, strong only to destroy. 445

'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower  
 Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume ;  
 And we are weeds without it. All constraint,  
 Except what wisdom lays on evil men,  
 Is evil ; hurts the faculties, impedes 450  
 Their progress in the road of science ; blinds  
 The eyesight of Discovery ; and begets,  
 In those that suffer it, a sordid mind  
 Bestial, a meagre intellect, unfit  
 To be the tenant of man's noble form. 455

Thee therefore still, blameworthy as thou art,  
 With all thy loss of empire, and though squeezed  
 By public exigence, till annual food  
 Fails for the craving hunger of the state,  
 Thee I account still happy, and the chief 460  
 Among the nations, seeing thou art free :  
 My native nook of earth ! Thy clime is rude,

Replete with vapours, and disposes much  
All hearts to sadness, and none more than mine :  
Thine unadulterate manners are less soft 465  
And plausible than social life requires,  
And thou hast need of discipline and art  
To give thee what politer France receives  
From nature's bounty—that humane address  
And sweetness, without which no pleasure is 470  
In converse, either starved by cold reserve,  
Or flushed with fierce dispute, a senseless brawl.  
Yet being free I love thee : for the sake  
Of that one feature can be well content,  
Disgraced as thou hast been, poor as thou art, 475  
To seek no sublunary rest beside.  
But once enslaved, farewell ! I could endure  
Chains nowhere patiently ; and chains at home,  
Where I am free by birthright, not at all.  
Then what were left of roughness in the grain 480  
Of British natures, wanting its excuse  
That it belongs to freemen, would disgust  
And shock me. I should then with double pain  
Feel all the rigour of thy fickle clime ;  
And, if I must bewail the blessing lost, 485  
For which our Hampdens and our Sidneys bled,  
I would at least bewail it under skies  
Milder, among a people less austere ;  
In scenes which, having never known me free,  
Would not reproach me with the loss I felt. 490

Do I forbode impossible events,  
 And tremble at vain dreams? Heaven grant I may!  
 But the age of virtuous politics is past,  
 And we are deep in that of cold pretence.  
 Patriots are grown too shrewd to be sincere, 495  
 And we too wise to trust them. He that takes  
 Deep in his soft credulity the stamp  
 Design'd by loud declaimers on the part  
 Of liberty, themselves the slaves of lust,  
 Incurs derision for his easy faith 500  
 And lack of knowledge, and with cause enough:  
 For when was public virtue to be found  
 Where private was not? Can he love the whole  
 Who loves no part? He be a nation's friend  
 Who is, in truth, the friend of no man there? 505  
 Can he be strenuous in his country's cause  
 Who slights the charities for whose dear sake  
 That country, if at all, must be beloved?  
 'Tis therefore sober and good men are sad  
 For England's glory, seeing it wax pale 510  
 And sickly, while her champions wear their hearts  
 So loose to private duty, that no brain,  
 Healthful and undisturb'd by factious fumes,  
 Can dream them trusty to the general weal.  
 Such were not they of old, whose temper'd blades 515  
 Dispersed the shackles of usurp'd control,  
 And hew'd them link from link; then Albion's sons  
 Were sons indeed; they felt a filial heart

Beat high within them at a mother's wrongs ;  
 And, shining each in his domestic sphere, 520  
 Shone brighter still, once call'd to public view.

'Tis therefore many, whose sequester'd lot  
 Forbids their interference, looking on,  
 Anticipate perforce some dire event ;  
 And, seeing the old castle of the state, 525  
 That promised once more firmness, so assail'd  
 That all its tempest-beaten turrets shake,  
 Stand motionless expectants of its fall.

All has its date below ; the fatal hour  
 Was register'd in Heaven ere time began. 530

We turn to dust, and all our mightiest works  
 Die too : the deep foundations that we lay,  
 Time ploughs them up, and not a trace remains.

We build with what we deem eternal rock :  
 A distant age asks where the fabric stood ; 535  
 And in the dust, sifted and search'd in vain,  
 The undiscoverable secret sleeps.

But there is yet a liberty, unsung  
 By poets, and by senators unpraised,  
 Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the powers 540  
 Of earth and hell confederate take away :

A liberty which persecution, fraud,  
 Oppression, prisons, have no power to bind :  
 Which whoso tastes can be enslaved no more.

'Tis liberty of heart, derived from Heaven, 545  
 Bought with his blood who gave it to mankind,

And seal'd with the same token. It is held  
 By charter, and that charter sanction'd sure  
 By the unimpeachable and awful oath  
 And promise of a God. His other gifts 550  
 All bear the royal stamp that speaks them his,  
 And are august; but this transcends them all.  
 His other works, the visible display  
 Of all-creating energy and might,  
 Are grand, no doubt, and worthy of the word 555  
 That, finding an interminable space  
 Unoccupied, has fill'd the void so well,  
 And made so sparkling what was dark before.  
 But these are not his glory. Man, 'tis true,  
 Smit with the beauty of so fair a scene, 560  
 Might well suppose the artificer divine  
 Meant it eternal, had he not himself  
 Pronounced it transient, glorious as it is,  
 And, still designing a more glorious far,  
 Doom'd it as insufficient for his praise. 565  
 These, therefore, are occasional, and pass;  
 Form'd for the confutation of the fool,  
 Whose lying heart disputes against a God;  
 That office served, they must be swept away.  
 Not so the labours of his love: they shine 570  
 In other heavens than these that we behold,  
 And fade not. There is Paradise that fears  
 No forfeiture, and of its fruits he sends  
 Large prelibation oft to saints below.

Of these, the first in order, and the pledge 575  
 And confident assurance of the rest,  
 Is liberty: a flight into his arms,  
 Ere yet mortality's fine threads give way.  
 A clear escape from tyrannizing lust,  
 And full immunity from penal woe. 580  
 Chains are the portion of revolted man,  
 Stripes, and a dungeon; and his body serves  
 The triple purpose. In that sickly, foul,  
 Opprobrious residence he finds them all.  
 Propense his heart to idols, he is held 585  
 In silly dotage on created things,  
 Careless of their Creator. And that low  
 And sordid gravitation of his powers  
 To a vile clod so draws him, with such force  
 Resistless from the centre he should seek, 590  
 That he at last forgets it. All his hopes  
 Tend downward; his ambition is to sink,  
 To reach a depth profounder still, and still  
 Profounder, in the fathomless abyss  
 Of folly, plunging in pursuit of death. 595  
 But, ere he gain the comfortless repose  
 He seeks, and acquiescence of his soul,  
 In heaven-renouncing exile, he endures—  
 What does he not, from lusts opposed in vain,  
 And self-reproaching conscience? He foresees 600  
 The fatal issue to his health, fame, peace,  
 Fortune, and dignity; the loss of all

That can ennoble man, and make frail life,  
Short as it is, supportable. Still worse,  
Far worse than all the plagues, with which his sins  
Infect his happiest moments, he forebodes 606  
Ages of hopeless misery. Future death,  
And death still future. Not a hasty stroke,  
Like that which sends him to the dusty grave;  
But unrepealable enduring death. 610  
Scripture is still a trumpet to his fears :  
What none can prove a forgery may be true ;  
What none but bad men wish exploded must.  
That scruple checks him. Riot is not loud  
Nor drunk enough to drown it. In the midst 615  
Of laughter his compunctions are sincere ;  
And he abhors the jest by which he shines.  
Remorse begets reform. His master-lust  
Falls first before his resolute rebuke, 619  
And seems dethroned and vanquish'd. Peace ensues,  
But spurious and short-lived ; the puny child  
Of self-congratulating pride, begot  
On fancied innocence. Again he falls,  
And fights again ; but finds his best essay  
A presage ominous, portending still 625  
Its own dishonour by a worse relapse.  
Till Nature, unavailing Nature, foil'd  
So oft, and wearied in the vain attempt,  
Scoffs at her own performance. Reason now  
Takes part with appetite, and pleads the cause 630

Perversely, which of late she so condemn'd ;  
 With shallow shifts and old devices, worn  
 And tatter'd in the service of debauch,  
 Covering his shame from his offended sight.

“Hath God indeed given appetites to man, 635  
 And stored the earth so plenteously with means  
 To gratify the hunger of his wish ;  
 And doth he reprobate, and will he damn  
 The use of his own bounty ? making first  
 So frail a kind, and then enacting laws 640  
 So strict, that less than perfect must despair ?  
 Falsehood ! which whoso but suspects of truth  
 Dishonours God, and makes a slave of man.  
 Do they themselves, who undertake for hire  
 The teacher's office, and dispense at large 645  
 Their weekly dole of edifying strains,  
 Attend to their own music ? have they faith  
 In what, with such solemnity of tone  
 And gesture, they propound to our belief ?  
 Nay—conduct hath the loudest tongue. The voice 650  
 Is but an instrument, on which the priest  
 May play what tune he pleases. In the deed,  
 The unequivocal, authentic deed,  
 We find sound argument, we read the heart.”

Such reasonings (if that name must needs belong  
 To excuses in which reason has no part) 656  
 Serve to compose a spirit well inclined  
 To live on terms of amity with vice,



And sin without disturbance. Often urged,  
 (As often as libidinous discourse 660  
 Exhausted, he resorts to solemn themes  
 Of theological and grave import)  
 They gain at last his unreserved assent ;  
 Till, harden'd his heart's temper in the forge  
 Of lust, and on the anvil of despair, 665.  
 He slights the strokes of conscience. Nothing moves,  
 Or nothing much, his constancy in ill ;  
 Vain tampering has but foster'd his disease ;  
 'Tis desperate, and he sleeps the sleep of death.  
 Haste now, philosopher, and set him free. 670  
 Charm the deaf serpent wisely. Make him hear  
 Of rectitude and fitness, moral truth  
 How lovely, and the moral sense how sure,  
 Consulted and obeyed, to guide his steps  
 Directly to the First and Only Fair. 675  
 Spare not in such a cause. Spend all the powers  
 Of rant and rhapsody in virtue's praise :  
 Be most sublimely good, verbosely grand,  
 And with poetic trappings grace thy prose,  
 Till it outmantle all the pride of verse. 680  
 Ah, tinkling cymbal, and high sounding brass,  
 Smitten in vain ! such music cannot charm  
 The eclipse that intercepts truth's heavenly beam,  
 And chills and darkens a wide wandering soul.  
 The still small voice is wanted. He must speak, 685

Whose word leaps forth at once to its effect;  
 Who calls for things that are not, and they come.

Grace makes the slave a freeman. 'Tis a change  
 That turns to ridicule the turgid speech  
 And stately tone of moralists, who boast, 690  
 As if, like him of fabulous renown,  
 They had indeed ability to smooth  
 The shag of savage nature, and were each  
 An Orpheus, and omnipotent in song:  
 But transformation of apostate man 695  
 From fool to wise, from earthly to divine,  
 Is work for Him that made him. He alone,  
 And he by means in philosophic eyes  
 Trivial and worthy of disdain, achieves  
 The wonder; humanizing what is brute 700  
 In the lost kind, extracting from the lips  
 Of asps their venom, overpowering strength  
 By weakness, and hostility by love.

Patriots have toil'd, and in their country's cause  
 Bled nobly; and their deeds, as they deserve, 705  
 Receive proud recompense. We give in charge  
 Their names to the sweet lyre. The historic Muse,  
 Proud of the treasure, marches with it down  
 To latest times; and Sculpture, in her turn,  
 Gives bond in stone and ever during brass 710  
 To guard them, and to immortalize her trust:  
 But fairer wreaths are due, though never paid,  
 To those who, posted at the shrine of Truth,

Have fallen in her defence. A patriot's blood,  
 Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed, 715  
 And for a time insure, to his loved land  
 The sweets of liberty and equal laws;  
 But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,  
 And win it with more pain. Their blood is shed  
 In confirmation of the noblest claim— 720  
 Our claim to feed upon immortal truth,  
 To walk with God, to be divinely free,  
 To soar, and to anticipate the skies.  
 Yet few remember them. They lived unknown  
 Till Persecution dragg'd them into fame, 725  
 And chased them up to Heaven. Their ashes flew  
 —No marble tells us whither. With their names  
 No bard embalms and sanctifies his song:  
 And history, so warm on meaner themes,  
 Is cold on this. She execrates indeed 730  
 The tyranny that doom'd them to the fire,  
 But gives the glorious sufferers little praise.\*  
 He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,  
 And all are slaves beside. There's not a chain  
 That hellish foes, confederate for his harm, 735  
 Can wind around him, but he casts it off  
 With as much ease as Samsos his green withes.  
 He looks abroad into the varied field  
 Of nature, and, though poor perhaps compared  
 With those whose mansions glitter in his sight, 740

\* See Hume.

Calls the delightful scenery all his own.  
 His are the mountains, and the valleys his,  
 And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy  
 With a propriety that none can feel,  
 But who, with filial confidence inspired, 745  
 Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,  
 And smiling say—"My Father made them all!"  
 Are they not his by a peculiar right,  
 And by an emphasis of interest his,  
 Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy, 750  
 Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind  
 With worthy thoughts of that unwearied love  
 That plann'd, and built, and still upholds a world  
 So clothed with beauty for rebellious man?  
 Yes—ye may fill your garners, ye that reap 755  
 The loaded soil, and ye may waste much good  
 In senseless riot; but ye will not find,  
 In feasts, or in the chase, in song or dance,  
 A liberty like his who, unimpeach'd  
 Of usurpation, and to no man's wrong, 760  
 Appropriates nature as his Father's work,  
 And has a richer use of yours than you.  
 He is indeed a freeman. Free by birth  
 Of no mean city; plann'd or ere the hills  
 Were built, the fountains open'd, or the sea 765  
 With all his roaring multitude of waves.  
 His freedom is the same in every state;  
 And no condition of this changeful life,

So manifold in cares, whose every day  
 Brings its own evil with it, makes it less ; 770  
 For he has wings that neither sickness, pain,  
 Nor penury, can cripple or confine.  
 No nook so narrow but he spreads them there  
 With ease, and is at large. The oppressor holds  
 His body bound ; but knows not what a range 775  
 His spirit takes, unconscious of a chain ;  
 And that to bind him is a vain attempt,  
 Whom God delights in, and in whom he dwells.

Acquaint thyself with God, if thou wouldst taste  
 His works. Admitted once to his embrace, 780  
 Thou shalt perceive that thou wast blind before :  
 Thine eye shall be instructed ; and thine heart  
 Made pure shall relish, with divine delight  
 'Till then unfelt, what hands divine have wrought.  
 Brutes graze the mountain-top, with faces prone, 785  
 And eyes intent upon the scanty herb  
 It yields them ; or, recumbent on its brow,  
 Ruminates heedless of the scene outspread  
 Beneath, beyond, and stretching far away  
 From inland regions to the distant main. 790  
 Man views it, and admires ; but rests content  
 With what he views. The landscape has his praise,  
 But not its Author. Unconcern'd who form'd  
 The paradise he sees, he finds it such,  
 And, such well pleased to find it, asks no more. 795  
 Not so the mind that has been touch'd from Heaven,

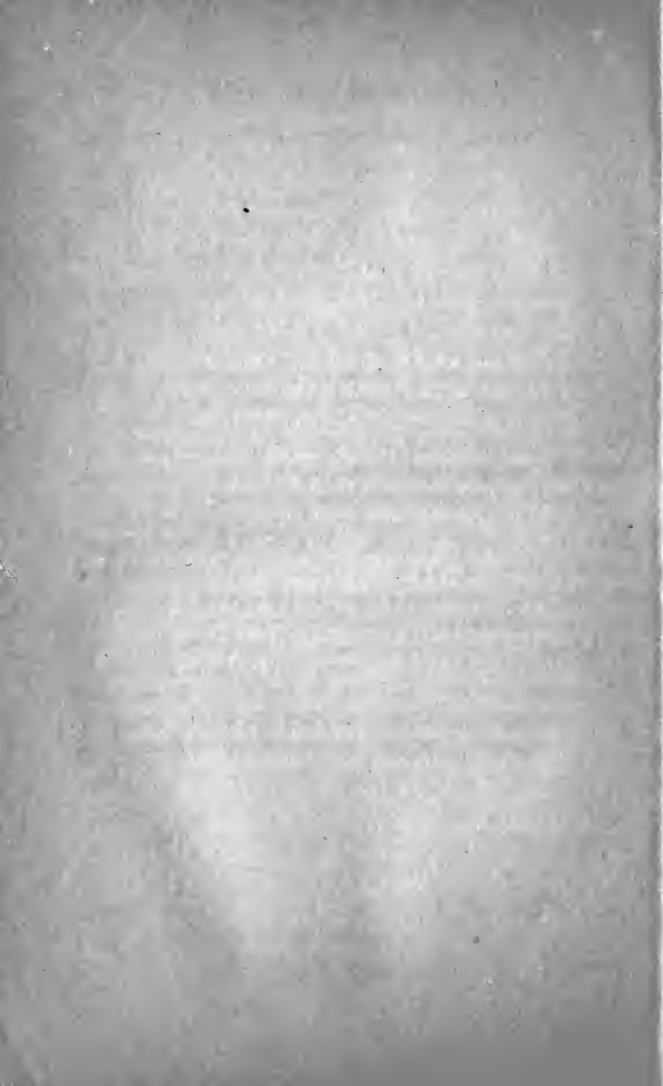
And in the school of sacred wisdom taught  
 To read his wonders, in whose thought the world,  
 Fair as it is, existed ere it was.  
 Not for its own sake merely, but for his 800  
 Much more who fashion'd it, he gives it praise ;  
 Praise that, from earth resulting, as it ought,  
 To earth's acknowledged Sovereign, finds at once  
 Its only just proprietor in Him.  
 The soul that sees him or receives sublimed 805  
 New faculties, or learns at least to employ  
 More worthily the powers she own'd before,  
 Discerns in all things what, with stupid gaze  
 Of ignorance, till then she overlook'd,  
 A ray of heavenly light, gilding all forms 810  
 Terrestrial in the vast and the minute ;  
 The unambiguous footsteps of the God,  
 Who gives its lustre to an insect's wing,  
 And wheels his throne upon the rolling worlds.  
 Much conversant with Heaven, she often holds 415  
 With those fair ministers of light to man,  
 That fill the skies nightly with silent pomp,  
 Sweet conference. Inquires what strains were they  
 With which Heaven rang, when every star, in haste  
 To gratulate the new-created earth, 820  
 Sent forth a voice, and all the sons of God  
 Shouted for joy.—“Tell me, ye shining hosts,  
 That navigate a sea that knows no storms,  
 Beneath a vault unsullied with a cloud,

If from your elevation, whence ye view 825  
Distinctly scenes invisible to man,  
And systems, of whose birth no tidings yet  
Have reach'd this nether world, ye spy a race  
Favour'd as ours; transgressors from the womb,  
And hasting to a grave, yet doomed to rise, 830  
And to possess a brighter Heaven than yours?  
As one who, long detain'd on foreign shores,  
Pants to return, and when he sees afar  
His country's weather-bleach'd and batter'd rocks,  
From the green wave emerging, darts an eye 835  
Radiant with joy towards the happy land;  
So I with animated hopes behold,  
And many an aching wish, your beamy fires,  
That show like beacons in the blue abyss,  
Ordain'd to guide the embodied spirit home 840  
From toilsome life to never ending rest.  
Love kindles as I gaze. I feel desires  
That give assurance of their own success,  
And that, infused from Heaven, must thither tend.”  
So reads he nature, whom the lamp of truth 845  
Illuminates. Thy lamp, mysterious Word!  
Which whoso sees no longer wanders lost,  
With intellects bemazed in endless doubt,  
But runs the road of wisdom. Thou hast built,  
With means that were not till by thee employ'd, 850  
Worlds that had never been hadst thou in strength  
Been less, or less benevolent than strong.

They are thy witnesses, who speak thy power  
 And goodness infinite, but speak in ears  
 That hear not, or receive not their report. 855  
 In vain thy creatures testify of thee,  
 Till thou proclaim thyself. Theirs is indeed  
 A teaching voice : but 'tis the praise of thine  
 That whom it teaches it makes prompt to learn,  
 And with the boon gives talents for its use. 860  
 Till thou art heard, imaginations vain  
 Possess the heart, and fables false as hell ;  
 Yet, deem'd oracular, lure down to death  
 The uninform'd and heedless souls of men.  
 We give to chance, blind chance, ourselves as blind,  
 The glory of thy work ; which yet appears 866  
 Perfect and unimpeachable of blame,  
 Challenging human scrutiny, and proved  
 Then skilful most when most severely judged.  
 But chance is not ; or is not where thou reign'st : 870  
 Thy providence forbids that fickle power  
 (If power she be that works but to confound)  
 To mix her wild vagaries with thy laws.  
 Yet thus we dote, refusing while we can  
 Instruction, and inventing to ourselves 875  
 Gods such as guilt makes welcome ; gods that sleep,  
 Or disregard our follies, or that sit  
 Amused spectators of this bustling stage.  
 Thee we reject, unable to abide  
 Thy purity, till pure as thou art pure ; 880



Made such by thee, we love thee for that cause,  
For which we shunn'd and hated thee before.  
Then we are free. Then liberty, like-day,  
Breaks on the soul, and by a flash from Heaven  
Fires all the faculties with glorious joy. 885  
A voice is heard that mortal ears hear not,  
Till thou hast touch'd them; 'tis the voice of song,  
A loud Hosanna sent from all thy works;  
Which he that hears it with a shout repeats,  
And adds his rapture to the general praise. 890  
In that blest moment Nature, throwing wide  
Her veil opaque, discloses with a smile  
The Author of her beauties, who, retired  
Behind his own creation, works unseen  
By the impure, and hears his power denied. 895  
Thou art the source and centre of all minds,  
Their only point of rest, eternal Word!  
From thee departing they are lost, and rove  
At random without honour, hope, or peace.  
From thee is all that soothes the life of man, 900  
His high endeavour, and his glad success,  
His strength to suffer, and his will to serve.  
But, O thou bounteous giver of all good,  
Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!  
Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor; 905  
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away.



THE TASK. BOOK VI.

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THE WINTER WALK AT NOON.

(175)

## ARGUMENT.

BELLS at a distance. Their effect. A fine noon in winter. A sheltered walk. Meditation better than books. Our familiarity with the course of nature makes it appear less wonderful than it is. The transformation that spring effects in a shrubbery described. A mistake concerning the course of nature corrected. God maintains it by an unremitting act. The amusements fashionable at this hour of the day reproved. Animals happy, a delightful sight. Origin of cruelty to animals. That it is a great crime proved from scripture. That proof illustrated by a tale. A line drawn between the lawful and unlawful destruction of them. Their good and useful properties insisted on. Apology for the encomiums bestowed by the author on animals. Instances of man's extravagant praise of man. The groans of the creation shall have an end. A view taken of the restoration of all things. An invocation and an invitation of Him who shall bring it to pass. The retired man vindicated from the charge of uselessness. Conclusion.

## THE TASK. BOOK VI.

### THE WINTER WALK AT NOON.

THERE is in souls a sympathy with sounds ;  
And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleas'd  
With melting airs, or martial, brisk, or grave :  
Some chord in unison with what we hear  
Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies. 5  
How soft the music of those village bells,  
Falling at intervals upon the ear  
In cadence sweet, now dying all away,  
Now pealing loud again, and louder still,  
Clear and sonorous, as the gale comes on ! 10  
With easy force it opens all the cells  
Where Memory slept. Wherever I have heard  
A kindred melody, the scene recurs,  
And with it all its pleasures and its pains.  
Such comprehensive views the spirit takes, 15  
That in a few short moments I retrace  
(As in a map the voyager his course)  
The windings of my way through many years.  
Short as in retrospect the journey seems,  
It seem'd not always short ; the rugged path, 20

And prospect oft so dreary and forlorn,  
 Moved many a sigh at its disheartening length.  
 Yet feeling present evils, while the past  
 Faintly impress the mind, or not at all,  
 How readily we wish time spent revoked, 25  
 That we might try the ground again, where once  
 (Through inexperience, as we now perceive)  
 We miss'd that happiness we might have found !  
 Some friend is gone, perhaps his son's best friend,  
 A father, whose authority, in show 30  
 When most severe, and mustering all its force,  
 Was but the graver countenance of love :  
 Whose favour, like the clouds of spring, might lower,  
 And utter now and then an awful voice,  
 But had a blessing in its darkest frown, 35  
 Threatening at once and nourishing the plant.  
 We loved, but not enough, the gentle hand  
 That rear'd us. At a thoughtless age, allured  
 By every gilded folly, we renounced  
 His sheltering side, and wilfully forewent 40  
 That converse, which we now in vain regret.  
 How gladly would the man recall to life  
 The boy's neglected sire ! a mother too,  
 That softer friend, perhaps more gladly still,  
 Might he demand them at the gates of death. 45  
 Sorrow has, since they went, subdued and tamed  
 The playful humour ; he could now endure  
 (Himself grown sober in the vale of tears)

And feel a parent's presence no restraint.  
But not to understand a treasure's worth 50  
Till time has stolen away the slighted good,  
Is cause of half the poverty we feel,  
And makes the world the wilderness it is.  
The few that pray at all pray oft amiss,  
And, seeking grace to improve the prize they hold, 55  
Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.

The night was winter in its roughest mood ;  
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon  
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,  
And where the woods fence off the northern blast, 60  
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,  
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue  
Without a cloud, and white without a speck  
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.  
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale ; 65  
And through the trees I view the embattled tower  
Whence all the music. I again perceive  
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,  
And settle in soft musings as I tread  
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms, 70  
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.  
The roof, though movable through all its length  
As the wind sways it, has yet well sufficed,  
And, intercepting in their silent fall  
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me. 75  
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.

The redbreast warbles still, but is content  
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd :  
Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light  
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes 80  
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice  
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.  
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,  
Charms more than silence. Meditation here  
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart  
May give a useful lesson to the head, 86  
And Learning wiser grow without his books.  
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,  
Have ofttimes no connexion. Knowledge dwells  
In heads replete with thoughts of other men ; 90  
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.  
Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,  
The mere materials with which Wisdom builds,  
Till smooth'd, and squared, and fitted to its place,  
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich. 95  
Knowledge is proud that he has learn'd so much ;  
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.  
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,  
By which the magic art of shrewder wits  
Holds an unthinking multitude enthral'd. 100  
Some to the fascination of a name  
Surrender judgment hoodwink'd. Some the style  
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds  
Of error leads them, by a tune entranced.



While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear 105  
 The insupportable fatigue of thought,  
 And swallowing therefore without pause or choice  
 The total grist unsifted, husks and all.  
 But trees, and rivulets, whose rapid course  
 Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer, 110  
 And sheepwalks populous with bleating lambs,  
 And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time  
 Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,  
 Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,  
 Not shy, as in the world, and to be won 115  
 By slow solicitation, seize at once  
 The roving thought, and fix it on themselves.

What prodigies can power divine perform  
 More grand than it produces year by year,  
 And all in sight of inattentive man? 120  
 Familiar with the effect we slight the cause,  
 And, in the constancy of nature's course,  
 The regular return of genial months,  
 And renovation of a faded world,  
 See nought to wonder at. Should God again, 125  
 As once in Gibeon, interrupt the race  
 Of the undeviating and punctual sun,  
 How would the world admire! but speaks it less  
 An agency divine, to make him know  
 His moment when to sink and when to rise, 130  
 Age after age, than to arrest his course?  
 All we behold is miracle; but, seen

So duly, all is miracle in vain.

Where now the vital energy that moved

While summer was, the pure and subtle lymph 135

Through the imperceptible meandering veins

Of leaf and flower? It sleeps; and the icy touch

Of unprolific winter has impress'd

A cold stagnation on the intestine tide.

But let the months go round, a few short months, 140

And all shall be restored. These naked shoots,

Barren as lances, among which the wind

Makes wintry music, sighing as it goes,

Shall put their graceful foliage on again,

And more aspiring, and with ampler spread, 145

Shall boast new charms, and more than they have lost.

Then each, in its peculiar honours clad,

Shall publish, even to the distant eye,

Its family and tribe. Laburnum, rich

In streaming gold; syringa, ivory pure; 150

The scentless and the scented rose; this red,

And of an humbler growth, the other\* tall,

And throwing up into the darkest gloom

Of neighbouring cypress, or more sable yew,

Her silver globes, light as the foamy surf, 155

That the wind severs from the broken wave;

The lilac, various in array, now white,

Now sanguine, and her beauteous head now set

With purple spikes pyramidal, as if,

\* The Guelder rose.

Studious of ornament, yet unresolved 160  
Which hue she most approved, she chose them all;  
Copious of flowers the woodbine, pale and wan,  
But well compensating her sickly looks  
With never cloying odours, early and late ;  
Hypericum all bloom, so thick a swarm 165  
Of flowers, like flies clothing her slender rods,  
That scarce a leaf appears ; mezereon too,  
Though leafless, well attired, and thick beset  
With blushing wreaths, investing every spray ;  
Althæa with the purple eye ; the broom, 170  
Yellow and bright, as bullion unalloy'd,  
Her blossoms ; and luxuriant above all  
The jasmine, throwing wide her elegant sweets,  
The deep dark green of whose unvarnish'd leaf  
Makes more conspicuous, and illumines more 175  
The bright profusion of her scatter'd stars.—  
These have been, and these shall be in their day ;  
And all this uniform uncolour'd scene  
Shall be dismantled of its fleecy load,  
And flush into variety again. 180  
From dearth to plenty, and from death to life,  
Is Nature's progress, when she lectures man  
In heavenly truth ; evincing, as she makes  
The grand transition, that there lives and works  
A soul in all things, and that soul is God. 185  
The beauties of the wilderness are his,  
That makes so gay the solitary place,

Where no eye sees them. And the fairer forms,  
 That cultivation glories in, are his.  
 He sets the bright procession on its way, 190  
 And marshals all the order of the year;  
 He marks the bounds which Winter may not pass,  
 And blunts his pointed fury; in its case,  
 Russet and rude, folds up the tender germ,  
 Uninjured, with inimitable art; 195  
 And, ere one flowery season fades and dies,  
 Designs the blooming wonders of the next.  
 Some say that in the origin of things,  
 When all creation started into birth,  
 The infant elements received a law, 200  
 From which they swerve not since. That under force  
 Of that controlling ordinance they move,  
 And need not his immediate hand, who first  
 Prescribed their course, to regulate it now.  
 Thus dream they, and contrive to save a God 205  
 The incumbrance of his own concerns, and spare  
 The great artificer of all that moves  
 The stress of a continual act, the pain  
 Of unremitted vigilance and care,  
 As too laborious and severe a task. 210  
 So man, the moth, is not afraid, it seems,  
 To span omnipotence, and measure might,  
 That knows no measure, by the scanty rule  
 And standard of his own, that is to-day,  
 And is not ere to-morrow's sun go down. 215

But how should matter occupy a charge,  
 Dull as it is, and satisfy a law  
 So vast in its demands, unless impell'd  
 To ceaseless service by a ceaseless force,  
 And under pressure of some conscious cause? 220  
 The Lord of all, himself through all diffused,  
 Sustains, and is the life of all that lives.  
 Nature is but a name for an effect,  
 Whose cause is God. He feeds the secret fire,  
 By which the mighty process is maintain'd, 225  
 Who sleeps not, is not weary; in whose sight  
 Slow circling ages are as transient days;  
 Whose work is without labour; whose designs  
 No flaw deforms, no difficulty thwarts;  
 And whose beneficence no charge exhausts. 230  
 Him blind antiquity profaned, not served,  
 With self-taught rites, and under various names,  
 Female and male, Pomona, Pales, Pan,  
 And Flora, and Vertumnus; peopling earth  
 With tutelary goddesses and gods 235  
 That were not; and commending as they would  
 To each some province, garden, field, or grove.  
 But all are under one. One spirit, His  
 Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows,  
 Rules universal nature. Not a flower 240  
 But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,  
 Of his unrivall'd pencil. He inspires  
 Their balmy odours, and imparts their hues,

And bathes their eyes with nectar, and includes,  
 In grains as countless as the seaside sands, 245  
 The forms with which he sprinkles all the earth.  
 Happy who walks with him! whom what he finds  
 Of flavour or of scent in fruit or flower,  
 Or what he views of beautiful or grand  
 In nature, from the broad majestic oak 250  
 To the green blade that twinkles in the sun,  
 Prompts with remembrance of a present God.  
 His presence, who made all so fair, perceived  
 Makes all still fairer. As with him no scene  
 Is dreary, so with him all seasons please. 255  
 Though winter had been none, had man been true,  
 And earth be punish'd for its tenant's sake,  
 Yet not in vengeance; as this smiling sky,  
 So soon succeeding such an angry night,  
 And these dissolving snows, and this clear stream 260  
 Recovering fast its liquid music, prove.

Who then, that has a mind well strung and tuned  
 To contemplation, and within his reach  
 A scene so friendly to his favourite task,  
 Would waste attention at the checker'd board, 265  
 His host of wooden warriors to and fro  
 Marching and countermarching, with an eye  
 As fix'd as marble, with a forehead ridged  
 And furrow'd into storms, and with a hand  
 Trembling, as if eternity were hung 270  
 In balance on his conduct of a pin?

Nor envies he aught more their idle sport,  
 Who pant with application misapplied  
 To trivial joys, and, pushing ivory balls  
 Across a velvet level, feel a joy 275

Akin to rapture, when the bauble finds  
 Its destined goal of difficult access.  
 Nor deems he wiser him, who gives his noon  
 To miss, the mercer's plague, from shop to shop  
 Wandering, and littering with unfolded silks 280

The polish'd counter, and approving none,  
 Or promising with smiles to call again.  
 Nor him who, by his vanity seduced,  
 And soothed into a dream that he discerns  
 The difference of a Guido from a daub, 285

Frequents the crowded auction: station'd there  
 As duly as the Langford of the show,  
 With glass at eye, and catalogue in hand,  
 And tongue accomplish'd in the fulsome cant  
 And pedantry that coxcombs learn with ease: 290

Oft as the price-deciding hammer falls,  
 He notes it in his book, then raps his box,  
 Swears 'tis a bargain, rails at his hard fate  
 That he has let it pass—but never bids.

Here unmolested, through whatever sign 295  
 The sun proceeds, I wander. Neither mist,  
 Nor freezing sky nor sultry, checking me,  
 Nor stranger intermeddling with my joy.  
 E'en in the spring and playtime of the year,

That calls the unwonted villager abroad 300  
 With all her little ones, a sportive train,  
 To gather kingcups in the yellow mead,  
 And prink their hair with daisies, or to pick  
 A cheap but wholesome salad from the brook,  
 These shades are all my own. The timorous hare, 305  
 Grown so familiar with her frequent guest,  
 Scarce shuns me; and the stockdove unalarm'd  
 Sits cooing in the pine-tree, nor suspends  
 His long love-ditty for my near approach.  
 Drawn from his refuge in some lonely elm, 310  
 That age or injury has hollow'd deep,  
 Where, on his bed of wool and matted leaves,  
 He has outslept the winter, ventures forth  
 To frisk awhile, and bask in the warm sun,  
 The squirrel, flippant, pert, and full of play: 315  
 He sees me, and at once, swift as a bird,  
 Ascends the neighbouring beech; there whisks his  
     brush,  
 And perks his ears, and stamps, and cries aloud,  
 With all the prettiness of feign'd alarm,  
 And anger insignificantly fierce. 320  
 The heart is hard in nature, and unfit  
 For human fellowship, as being void  
 Of sympathy, and therefore dead alike  
 To love and friendship both, that is not pleased  
 With sight of animals enjoying life, 325  
 Nor feels their happiness augment his own.



The bounding fawn, that darts across the glade  
 When none pursues, through mere delight of heart,  
 And spirits buoyant with excess of glee;  
 The horse as wanton, and almost as fleet, 330  
 That skims the spacious meadow at full speed,  
 Then stops and snorts, and, throwing high his heels,  
 Starts to the voluntary race again;  
 The very kine that gambol at high noon,  
 The total herd receiving first from one 335  
 That leads the dance a summons to be gay,  
 Though wild their strange vagaries, and uncouth  
 Their efforts, yet resolved with one consent  
 To give such act and utterance as they may  
 To ecstasy too big to be suppressed— 340  
 These, and a thousand images of bliss,  
 With which kind Nature graces every scene,  
 Where cruel man defeats not her design,  
 Impart to the benevolent, who wish  
 All that are capable of pleasure pleased, 345  
 A far superior happiness to theirs,  
 The comfort of a reasonable joy.

Man scarce had risen, obedient to his call,  
 Who form'd him from the dust, his future grave,  
 When he was crown'd as never king was since. 350  
 God set the diadem upon his head,  
 And angel choirs attended. Wondering stood  
 The new made monarch, while before him pass'd,  
 All happy, and all perfect in their kind,

The creatures, summon'd from their various haunts  
To see their sovereign, and confess his sway. 356  
Vast was his empire, absolute his power,  
Or bounded only by a law, whose force  
'Twas his sublimest privilege to feel  
And own, the law of universal love. 360  
He ruled with meekness, they obey'd with joy;  
No cruel purpose lurk'd within his heart,  
And no distrust of his intent in theirs.  
So Eden was a scene of harmless sport,  
Where kindness on his part, who ruled the whole, 365  
Begot a tranquil confidence in all,  
And fear as yet was not, nor cause for fear.  
But sin marr'd all; and the revolt of man,  
That source of evils not exhausted yet,  
Was punish'd with revolt of his from him. 370  
Garden of God, how terrible the change  
Thy groves and lawns then witness'd! Every heart,  
Each animal, of every name, conceived  
A jealousy and an instinctive fear,  
And, conscious of some danger, either fled 375  
Precipitate the loathed abode of man,  
Or growl'd defiance in such angry sort,  
As taught him too to tremble in his turn.  
Thus harmony and family accord  
Were driven from Paradise; and in that hour 380  
The seeds of cruelty, that since have swell'd  
To such gigantic and enormous growth

Were sown in human nature's fruitful soil.  
Hence date the persecution and the pain  
That man inflicts on all inferior kinds, 385  
Regardless of their plaints. To make him sport,  
To gratify the frenzy of his wrath,  
Or his base gluttony, are causes good  
And just in his account, why bird and beast  
Should suffer torture, and the streams be dyed 390  
With blood of their inhabitants impaled.  
Earth groans beneath the burden of a war  
Waged with defenceless innocence, while he,  
Not satisfied to prey on all around,  
Adds tenfold bitterness to death by pangs 395  
Needless, and first torments ere he devours.  
Now happiest they that occupy the scenes  
The most remote from his abhorr'd resort,  
Whom once, as delegate of God on earth,  
They fear'd, and as his perfect image loved. 400  
The wilderness is theirs, with all its caves,  
Its hollow glens, its thickets, and its plains,  
Unvisited by man. There they are free,  
And howl and roar as likes them, uncontroll'd ;  
Nor ask his leave to slumber or to play. 405  
Woe to the tyrant, if he dare intrude  
Within the confines of their wild domain :  
The lion tells him—I am monarch here !  
And, if he spare him, spares him on the terms  
Of royal mercy, and through generous scorn 410

To rend a victim trembling at his foot.  
 In measure, as by force of instinct drawn,  
 Or by necessity constrain'd, they live  
 Dependent upon man; those in his fields,  
 These at his crib, and some beneath his roof. 415  
 They prove too often at how dear a rate  
 He sells protection. Witness at his foot  
 The spaniel dying for some venial fault,  
 Under dissection of the knotted scourge;  
 Witness the patient ox, with stripes and yells 420  
 Driven to the slaughter, goaded, as he runs,  
 To madness; while the savage at his heels  
 Laughs at the frantic sufferer's fury, spent  
 Upon the guiltless passenger o'erthrown.  
 He too is witness, noblest of the train 425  
 That wait on man, the flight performing horse;  
 With unsuspecting readiness he takes  
 His murderer on his back, and, push'd all day,  
 With bleeding sides and flanks that heave for life  
 To the far distant goal, arrives and dies. 430  
 So little mercy shows who needs so much!  
 Does law, so jealous in the cause of man,  
 Denounce no doom on the delinquent? None.  
 He lives, and o'er his brimming beaker boasts  
 (As if barbarity were high desert) 435  
 The inglorious feat, and, clamorous in praise  
 Of the poor brute, seems wisely to suppose  
 The honours of his matchless horse his own.

But many a crime deem'd innocent on earth  
 Is register'd in heaven; and these no doubt 440  
 Have each their record, with a curse annex'd.  
 Man may dismiss compassion from his heart,  
 But God will never. When he charged the Jew  
 To assist his foe's down-fallen beast to rise;  
 And when the bush-exploring boy, that seized 445  
 The young, to let the parent bird go free;  
 Proved he not plainly that his meaner works  
 Are yet his care, and have an interest all,  
 All, in the universal Father's love?  
 On Noah, and in him on all mankind, 450  
 The charter was conferr'd, by which we hold  
 The flesh of animals in fee, and claim  
 O'er all we feed on power of life and death.  
 But read the instrument, and mark it well:  
 The oppression of a tyrannous control 455  
 Can find no warrant there. Feed then, and yield  
 Thanks for thy food. Carnivorous, through sin,  
 Feed on the slain, but spare the living brute!  
 The Governor of all, himself to all  
 So bountiful, in whose attentive ear 460  
 The unfledged raven and the lion's whelp  
 Plead not in vain for pity on the pangs  
 Of hunger unassuaged, has interposed,  
 Not seldom, his avenging arm, to smite  
 The injurious trampler upon Nature's law, 465  
 That claims forbearance even for a brute.

He hates the hardness of a Balaam's heart ;  
 And, prophet as he was, he might not strike  
 The blameless animal, without rebuke,  
 On which he rode. Her opportune offence 470  
 Saved him, or the unrelenting seer had died.  
 He sees that human equity is slack  
 To interfere, though in so just a cause ;  
 And makes the task his own. Inspiring dumb  
 And helpless victims with a sense so keen 475  
 Of injury, with such knowledge of their strength,  
 And such sagacity to take revenge,  
 That oft the beast has seem'd to judge the man.  
 An ancient, not a legendary tale,  
 By one of sound intelligence rehearsed 480  
 (If such who plead for Providence may seem  
 In modern eyes), shall make the doctrine clear.  
 Where England, stretch'd towards the setting sun,  
 Narrow and long, o'erlooks the western wave,  
 Dwelt young Misagathus ; a scorner he 485  
 Of God and goodness, atheist in ostent,  
 Vicious in act, in temper savage fierce.  
 He journey'd ; and his chance was as he went  
 To join a traveller, of far different note,  
 Evander, famed for piety, for years 490  
 Deserving honour, but for wisdom more.  
 Fame had not left the venerable man  
 A stranger to the manners of the youth,  
 Whose face too was familiar to his view.

Their way was on the margin of the land, 495  
O'er the green summit of the rocks, whose base  
Beats back the roaring surge, scarce heard so high.  
The charity that warm'd his heart was moved  
At sight of the man monster. With a smile  
Gentle, and affable, and full of grace, 500  
As fearful of offending whom he wish'd  
Much to persuade, he plied his ear with truths  
Not harshly thunder'd forth, or rudely press'd,  
But, like his purpose, gracious, kind, and sweet.  
"And dost thou dream," the impenetrable man 505  
Exclaim'd, "that me the lullabies of age,  
And fantasies of dotards such as thou,  
Can cheat, or move a moment's fear in me?  
Mark now the proof I give thee, that the brave  
Need no such aids as superstition lends, 510  
To steel their hearts against the dread of death."  
He spoke, and to the precipice at hand  
Push'd with a madman's fury. Fancy shrinks,  
And the blood thrills and curdles at the thought  
Of such a gulf as he design'd his grave. 515  
But though the felon on his back could dare  
The dreadful leap, more rational, his steed  
Declined the death, and wheeling swiftly round,  
Or e'er his hoof had press'd the crumbling verge,  
Baffled his rider, saved against his will. 520  
The frenzy of the brain may be redress'd  
By medicine well applied, but without grace

The heart's insanity admits no cure.  
 Enraged the more by what might have reform'd  
 His horrible intent, again he sought 525  
 Destruction, with a zeal to be destroy'd,  
 With sounding whip, and rowels dyed in blood.  
 But still in vain. The Providence, that meant  
 A longer date to the far nobler beast,  
 Spared yet again the ignobler for his sake. 530  
 And now, his prowess proved, and his sincere  
 Incurable obduracy evinced,  
 His rage grew cool; and pleased perhaps to have earn'd  
 So cheaply the renown of that attempt,  
 With looks of some complacence he resumed 535  
 His road, deriding much the blank amaze  
 Of good Evander, still where he was left  
 Fix'd motionless, and petrified with dread.  
 So on they fared. Discourse on other themes  
 Ensuing seem'd to obliterate the past; 540  
 And tamer far for so much fury shown  
 (As is the course of rash and fiery men),  
 The rude companion smiled, as if transform'd.  
 But 'twas a transient calm. A storm was near,  
 An unsuspected storm. His hour was come. 545  
 The impious challenger of power divine  
 Was now to learn that Heaven, though slow to wrath,  
 Is never with impunity defied.  
 His horse, as he had caught his master's mood,  
 Snorting, and starting into sudden rage, 550



Unbidden, and not now to be controll'd,  
 Rush'd to the cliff, and, having reach'd it, stood.  
 At once the shock unseated him : he flew  
 Sheer o'er the craggy barrier ; and, immersed  
 Deep in the flood, found, when he sought it not, 555  
 The death he had deserved, and died alone.  
 So God wrought double justice ; made the fool  
 The victim of his own tremendous choice,  
 And taught a brute the way to safe revenge.

I would not enter on my list of friends 560  
 (Though graced with polish'd manners and fine sense,  
 Yet wanting sensibility) the man  
 Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

An inadvertent step may crush the snail  
 That crawls at evening in the public path ; 565  
 But he that has humanity, forewarn'd,  
 Will tread aside, and let the reptile live.

The creeping vermin, loathsome to the sight,  
 And charged perhaps with venom, that intrudes,  
 A visitor unwelcome, into scenes 570  
 Sacred to neatness and repose, the alcove,  
 The chamber, or refectory, may die :  
 A necessary act incurs no blame.

Not so when, held within their proper bounds,  
 And guiltless of offence, they range the air, 575  
 Or take their pastime in the spacious field :  
 There they are privileged ; and he that hunts  
 Or harms them there is guilty of a wrong,

Disturbs the economy of Nature's realm,  
 Who, when she form'd, design'd them an abode. 580  
 The sum is this. If man's convenience, health,  
 Or safety interfere, his rights and claims  
 Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs.  
 Else they are all—the meanest things that are,  
 As free to live, and to enjoy that life, 585  
 As God was free to form them at the first,  
 Who in his sovereign wisdom made them all.  
 Ye, therefore, who love mercy, teach your sons  
 To love it too. The springtime of our years  
 Is soon dishonour'd and defil'd in most 590  
 By budding ills, that ask a prudent hand  
 To check them. But, alas! none sooner shoots,  
 If unrestrain'd, into luxuriant growth,  
 Than cruelty, most devilish of them all.  
 Mercy to him that shows it is the rule 595  
 And righteous limitation of its act,  
 By which Heaven moves in pardoning guilty man;  
 And he that shows none, being ripe in years,  
 And conscious of the outrage he commits,  
 Shall seek it, and not find it, in his turn. 600  
 Distinguish'd much by reason, and still more  
 By our capacity of grace divine,  
 From creatures that exist but for our sake,  
 Which, having served us, perish, we are held  
 Accountable; and God, some future day, 605  
 Will reckon with us roundly for the abuse

Of what he deems no mean or trivial trust.  
Superior as we are, they yet depend  
Not more on human help than we on theirs.  
Their strength, or speed, or vigilance, were given 610  
In aid of our defects. In some are found  
Such teachable and apprehensive parts,  
That man's attainments in his own concerns,  
Match'd with the expertness of the brutes in theirs,  
Are oftentimes vanquish'd and thrown far behind. 615  
Some show that nice sagacity of smell,  
And read with such discernment, in the port  
And figure of the man, his secret aim,  
That oft we owe our safety to a skill.  
We could not teach, and must despair to learn. 620  
But learn we might, if not too proud to stoop  
To quadruped instructors, many a good  
And useful quality, and virtue too,  
Rarely exemplified among ourselves.  
Attachment never to be wean'd or changed 625  
By any change of fortune; proof alike  
Against unkindness, absence, and neglect;  
Fidelity, that neither bribe nor threat  
Can move or warp; and gratitude for small  
And trivial favours, lasting as the life, 630  
And glistening even in the dying eye.

Man praises man. Desert in arts or arms  
Wins public honour; and ten thousand sit  
Patiently present at a sacred song,

Commemoration mad; content to hear 635  
 (O wonderful effect of music's power!)  
 Messiah's eulogy for Handel's sake.  
 But less, methinks, than sacrilege might serve—  
 (For was it less, what heathen would have dared  
 To strip Jove's statue of his oaken wreath, 640  
 And hang it up in honour of a man?)  
 Much less might serve, when all that we design  
 Is but to gratify an itching ear,  
 And give the day to a musician's praise.  
 Remember Handel? Who, that was not born 645  
 Deaf as the dead to harmony, forgets,  
 Or can, the more than Homer of his age?  
 Yes—we remember him; and while we praise  
 A talent so divine, remember too  
 That His most holy book, from whom it came, 650  
 Was never meant, was never used before,  
 To buckram out the memory of a man.  
 But hush!—the muse perhaps is too severe;  
 And with a gravity beyond the size  
 And measure of the offence, rebukes a deed 655  
 Less impious than absurd, and owing more  
 To want of judgment than to wrong design.  
 So in the chapel of old Ely House,  
 When wandering Charles, who meant to be the third,  
 Had fled from William, and the news was fresh, 660  
 The simple clerk, but loyal, did announce,  
 And eke did rear right merrily, two staves,

Sung to the praise and glory of king George!  
 Man praises man; and Garrick's memory next,  
 When time hath somewhat mellow'd it, and made 665  
 The idol of our worship while he lived  
 The god of our idolatry once more,  
 Shall have its altar; and the world shall go  
 In pilgrimage to bow before his shrine.  
 The theatre, too small, shall suffocate 670  
 Its squeezed contents, and more than it admits  
 Shall sigh at their exclusion, and return  
 Ungratified: for there some noble lord  
 Shall stuff his shoulders with king Richard's bunch,  
 Or wrap himself in Hamlet's inky cloak, 675  
 And strut, and storm, and straddle, stamp, and stare,  
 To show the world how Garrick did not act—  
 For Garrick was a worshipper himself;  
 He drew the liturgy, and framed the rites  
 And solemn ceremonial of the day, 680  
 And call'd the world to worship on the banks  
 Of Avon, famed in song. Ah, pleasant proof  
 That piety has still in human hearts  
 Some place, a spark or two not yet extinct. 684  
 The mulberry-tree was hung with blooming wreaths;  
 The mulberry-tree stood centre of the dance;  
 The mulberry-tree was hymn'd with dulcet airs;  
 And from his touch-wood trunk the mulberry-tree  
 Supplied such relies as devotion holds  
 Still sacred, and preserves with pious care. 690

So 'twas a hallow'd time : decorum reign'd,  
 And mirth without offence. No few return'd,  
 Doubtless, much edified, and all refresh'd.  
 Man praises man. The rabble, all alive  
 From tipping benches, cellars, stalls, and styes, 695  
 Swarm in the streets. The statesman of the day,  
 A pompous and show-moving pageant, comes.  
 Some shout him, and some hang upon his car,  
 To gaze in his eyes, and bless him. Maidens wave  
 Their kerchiefs, and old women weep for joy ; 700  
 While others, not so satisfied, unhorse  
 The gilded equipage, and turning loose  
 His steeds, usurp a place they well deserve.  
 Why? what has charm'd them? Hath he saved the  
 state?  
 No. Doth he purpose its salvation? No. 705  
 Enchanting novelty, that moon at full,  
 That finds out every crevice of the head  
 That is not sound and perfect, hath in theirs  
 Wrought this disturbance. But the wane is near,  
 And his own cattle must suffice him soon. 710  
 Thus idly do we waste the breath of praise,  
 And dedicate a tribute, in its use  
 And just direction sacred, to a thing  
 Doom'd to the dust, or lodged already there.  
 Encomium in old time was poet's work ; 715  
 But poets, having lavishly long since  
 Exhausted all materials of the art,

The task now falls into the public hand ;  
 And I, contented with an humble theme,  
 Have pour'd my stream of panegyric down 720  
 The vale of Nature, where it creeps and winds  
 Among her lovely works with a secure  
 And unambitious course, reflecting clear,  
 If not the virtues, yet the worth of brutes.  
 And I am recompensed, and deem the toils 725  
 Of poetry not lost, if verse of mine  
 May stand between an animal and woe,  
 And teach one tyrant pity for his drudge.

The groans of Nature in this nether world,  
 Which Heaven has heard for ages, have an end. 730  
 Foretold by prophets, and by poets sung,  
 Whose fire was kindled at the prophet's lamp,  
 The time of rest, the promised Sabbath, comes.  
 Six thousand years of sorrow have well nigh  
 Fulfill'd their tardy and disastrous course 735  
 Over a sinful world ; and what remains  
 Of this tempestuous state of human things  
 Is merely as the working of a sea  
 Before a calm, that rocks itself to rest :  
 For he, whose car the winds are, and the clouds 740  
 The dust that waits upon his sultry march,  
 When sin hath moved him, and his wrath is hot,  
 Shall visit earth in mercy ; shall descend  
 Propitious in his chariot paved with love ;

And what his storms have blasted and defaced 745  
For man's revolt, shall with a smile repair.

Sweet is the harp of prophecy; too sweet  
Not to be wrong'd by a mere mortal touch :  
Nor can the wonders it records be sung  
To meaner music, and not suffer loss. 750

But when a poet, or when one like me,  
Happy to rove among poetic flowers,  
Though poor in skill to rear them, lights at last  
On some fair theme, some theme divinely fair,  
Such is the impulse and the spur he feels, 755  
To give it praise proportion'd to its worth,  
That not to attempt it, arduous as he deems  
The labour, were a task more arduous still.

O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,  
Scenes of accomplish'd bliss! which who can see, 760  
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel  
His soul refresh'd with foretaste of the joy?  
Rivers of gladness water all the earth,  
And clothe all climes with beauty; the reproach  
Of barrenness is past. The fruitful field 765  
Laughs with abundance; and the land, once lean,  
Or fertile only in its own disgrace,  
Exults to see its thistly curse repeal'd.  
The various seasons woven into one,  
And that one season an eternal spring, 770  
The garden fears no blight, and needs no fence,  
For there is none to covet, all are full.



The lion, and the libbard, and the bear  
 Graze with the fearless flocks; all bask at noon  
 Together, or all gambol in the shade 775  
 Of the same grove, and drink one common stream.  
 Antipathies are none. No foe to man  
 Lurks in the serpent now: the mother sees,  
 And smiles to see, her infant's playful hand  
 Stretch'd forth to dally with the crested worm, 780  
 To stroke his azure neck, or to receive  
 The lambent homage of his arrowy tongue.  
 All creatures worship man, and all mankind  
 One Lord, one Father. Error has no place;  
 That creeping pestilence is driven away; 785  
 The breath of Heaven has chased it. In the heart  
 No passion touches a discordant string,  
 But all is harmony and love. Disease  
 Is not: the pure and uncontaminate blood  
 Holds its due course, nor fears the frost of age. 790  
 One song employs all nations; and all cry,  
 "Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us!"  
 The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks  
 Shout to each other, and the mountain tops.  
 From distant mountains catch the flying joy; 795  
 Till, nation after nation taught the strain,  
 Earth rolls the rapturous hosanna round.  
 Behold the measure of the promise fill'd;  
 See Salem built, the labour of a God!  
 Bright as a sun the sacred city shines; 800

All kingdoms and all princes of the earth  
 Flock to that light: the glory of all lands  
 Flows into her; unbounded is her joy,  
 And endless her increase. Thy rams are there,  
 Nebaioth, and the flocks of Kedar there;\* 805  
 The looms of Ormus, and the mines of Ind,  
 And Saba's spicy groves, pay tribute there.  
 Praise is in all her gates: upon her walls,  
 And in her streets, and in her spacious courts  
 Is heard salvation. Eastern Java there 810  
 Kneels with the native of the farthest west;  
 And Æthiopia spreads abroad the hand,  
 And worships. Her report has travell'd forth  
 Into all lands. From every clime they come  
 To see thy beauty, and to share thy joy, 815  
 O Sion! an assembly such as earth  
 Saw never, such as Heaven stoops down to see.

Thus Heavenward all things tend. For all were  
 once

Perfect, and all must be at length restored.  
 So God has greatly purposed; who would else 820  
 In his dishonour'd works himself endure  
 Dishonour, and be wrong'd without redress.  
 Haste, then, and wheel away a shatter'd world,  
 Ye slow-revolving seasons! we would see

\* Nebaioth and Kedar, the sons of Ishmael, and progenitors of the Arabs, in the prophetic scripture here alluded to, may be reasonably considered as representatives of the Gentiles at large.

(A sight to which our eyes are strangers yet) 825  
 A world that does not dread and hate his laws,  
 And suffer for its crime; would learn how fair  
 The creature is that God pronounces good,  
 How pleasant in itself what pleases him.  
 Here every drop of honey hides a sting; 830  
 Worms wind themselves into our sweetest flowers;  
 And e'en the joy that haply some poor heart  
 Derives from Heaven, pure as the fountain is,  
 Is sullied in the stream, taking a taint  
 From touch of human lips, at best impure. 835  
 O for a world in principle as chaste  
 As this is gross and selfish! over which  
 Custom and prejudice shall bear no sway,  
 That govern all things here, shouldering aside  
 The meek and modest Truth, and forcing her 840  
 To seek a refuge from the tongue of Strife  
 In nooks obscure, far from the ways of men:  
 Where Violence shall never lift the sword,  
 Nor Cunning justify the proud man's wrong,  
 Leaving the poor no remedy but tears: 845  
 Where he, that fills an office, shall esteem  
 The occasion it presents of doing good  
 More than the perquisite: where Law shall speak  
 Seldom, and never but as Wisdom prompts  
 And Equity; not jealous more to guard 850  
 A worthless form, than to decide aright:—  
 Where Fashion shall not sanctify abuse,

Nor smooth Good-breeding (supplemental grace)  
With lean performance ape the work of Love!

    Come then, and, added to thy many crowns,           855

Receive yet one, the crown of all the Earth,

Thou who alone art worthy! It was thine

By ancient covenant ere Nature's birth;

And thou hast made it thine by purchase since,

And overpaid its value with thy blood.           860

Thy saints proclaim thee king; and in their hearts

Thy title is engraven with a pen

Dipp'd in the fountain of eternal love.

Thy saints proclaim thee king; and thy delay

Gives courage to their foes, who, could they see   865

The dawn of thy last advent, long desired,

Would creep into the bowels of the hills,

And flee for safety to the falling rocks.

The very spirit of the world is tired

Of its own taunting question, ask'd so long,   870

“Where is the promise of your Lord's approach?”

The infidel has shot his bolts away,

Till, his exhausted quiver yielding none,

He gleans the blunted shafts that have recoil'd,

And aims them at the shield of Truth again.   875

The veil is rent, rent too by priestly hands,

That hides divinity from mortal eyes;

And all the mysteries to faith proposed,

Insulted and traduced, are cast aside,

As useless, to the moles and to the bats.   880

They now are deem'd the faithful, and are praised,  
 Who, constant only in rejecting thee,  
 Deny thy Godhead with a martyr's zeal,  
 And quit their office for their error's sake.  
 Blind, and in love with darkness! yet e'en these 885  
 Worthy, compared with sycophants, who knee  
 Thy name adoring, and then preach thee man!  
 So fares thy church. But how thy church may fare  
 The world takes little thought. Who will may preach,  
 And what they will. All pastors are alike 890  
 To wandering sheep, resolved to follow none.  
 Two gods divide them all—Pleasure and Gain:  
 For these they live, they sacrifice to these,  
 And in their service wage perpetual war  
 With Conscience and with thee. Lust in their hearts,  
 And mischief in their hands, they roam the earth 896  
 To prey upon each other: stubborn, fierce,  
 High-minded, foaming out their own disgrace.  
 Thy prophets speak of such; and, noting down  
 The features of the last degenerate times, 900  
 Exhibit every lineament of these,  
 Come then, and, added to thy many crowns,  
 Receive yet one, as radiant as the rest,  
 Due to thy last and most effectual work,  
 Thy word fulfill'd, the conquest of a world! 905

He is the happy man whose life e'en now  
 Shows somewhat of that happier life to come;  
 Who doom'd to an obscure but tranquil state,

Is pleased with it, and, were he free to choose,  
Would make his fate his choice; whom peace, the fruit  
Of virtue, and whom virtue, fruit of faith, 911  
Prepare for happiness; bespeak him one  
Content indeed to sojourn while he must  
Below the skies, but having there his home.  
The world o'erlooks him in her busy search 915  
Of objects, more illustrious in her view;  
And, occupied as earnestly as she,  
Though more sublimely, he o'erlooks the world.  
She scorns his pleasures, for she knows them not;  
He seeks not hers, for he has proved them vain. 920  
He cannot skim the ground like summer birds  
Pursuing gilded flies; and such he deems  
Her honours, her emoluments, her joys.  
Therefore in contemplation is his bliss,  
Whose power is such, that whom she lifts from earth  
She makes familiar with a Heaven unseen, 926  
And shows him glories yet to be reveal'd.  
Not slothful he, though seeming unemployed,  
And censured oft as useless. Stillest streams  
Oft water fairest meadows, and the bird 930  
That flutters least is longest on the wing.  
Ask him, indeed, what trophies he has raised,  
Or what achievements of immortal fame  
He purposes, and he shall answer—None.  
His warfare is within. There unfatigued 935  
His fervent spirit labours. There he fights,

And there obtains fresh triumphs o'er himself,  
And never withering wreaths, compared with which  
The laurels that a Cæsar reaps are weeds.  
Perhaps the self-approving haughty world, 940  
That as she sweeps him with her whistling silks  
Scarce deigns to notice him, or, if she see,  
Deems him a cipher in the works of God,  
Receives advantage from his noiseless hours,  
Of which she little dreams. Perhaps she owes 945  
Her sunshine and her rain, her blooming spring  
And plenteous harvest, to the prayer he makes,  
When, Isaaclike, the solitary saint  
Walks forth to meditate at eventide,  
And think on her, who thinks not for herself. 950  
Forgive him, then, thou bustler in concerns  
Of little worth, an idler in the best,  
If, author of no mischief and some good,  
He seek his proper happiness by means  
That may advance, but cannot hinder, thine. 955  
Nor, though he tread the secret path of life,  
Engage no notice, and enjoy much ease,  
Account him an encumbrance on the state,  
Receiving benefits, and rendering none.  
His sphere though humble, if that humble sphere 960  
Shine with his fair example, and though small  
His influence, if that influence all be spent  
In soothing sorrow and in quenching strife,  
In aiding helpless indigence, in works

From which at least a grateful few derive — — — 965  
 Some taste of comfort in a world of woe ;  
 Then let the supercilious great confess  
 He serves his country, recompenses well  
 The state, beneath the shadow of whose vine  
 He sits secure, and in the scale of life ————— 970  
 Holds no ignoble, though a slighted, place.  
 The man, whose virtues are more felt than seen,  
 Must drop indeed the hope of public praise ;  
 But he may boast, what few that win it can,  
 That, if his country stand not by his skill, ——— 975  
 At least his follies have not wrought her fall.  
 Polite Refinement offers him in vain  
 Her golden tube, through which a sensual world  
 Draws gross impurity, and likes it well,  
 The neat conveyance hiding all the offence. ——— 980  
 Not that he peevishly rejects a mode  
 Because that world adopts it. If it bear  
 The stamp and clear impression of good sense,  
 And be not costly more than of true worth,  
 He puts it on, and, for decorum sake, 985  
 Can wear it e'en as gracefully as she.  
 She judges of refinement by the eye,  
 He by the test of conscience, and a heart  
 Not soon deceived ; aware that what is base  
 No polish can make sterling ; and that vice, 990  
 Though well perfumed and elegantly dress'd,  
 Like an unburied carcass trick'd with flowers,



Is but a garnish'd nuisance, fitter far  
 For cleanly riddance than for fair attire.  
 So life glides smoothly and by stealth away, 995  
 More golden than that age of fabled gold  
 Renown'd in ancient song; not vex'd with care  
 Or stain'd with guilt, beneficent, approved  
 Of God and man, and peaceful in its end.  
 So glide my life away! and so at last, 1000  
 My share of duties decently fulfill'd,  
 May some disease, not tardy to perform  
 Its destined office, yet with gentle stroke,  
 Dismiss me weary to a safe retreat,  
 Beneath the turf that I have often trod. 1005  
 It shall not grieve me, then, that once, when call'd  
 To dress a Sofa with the flowers of verse,  
 I play'd awhile, obedient to the fair,  
 With that light task; but soon, to please her more,  
 Whom flowers alone I know would little please, 1010  
 Let fall the unfinish'd wreath, and roved for fruit;  
 Roved far, and gather'd much: some harsh, 'tis true,  
 Pick'd from the thorns and briers of reproof,  
 But wholesome, well digested; grateful some  
 To palates that can taste immortal truth; 1015  
 Insipid else, and sure to be despised.  
 But all is in His hand, whose praise I seek.  
 In vain the poet sings, and the world hears,  
 If he regard not, though divine the theme.  
 'Tis not in artful measures, in the chime 1020

And idle tinkling of a minstrel's lyre,  
To charm his ear, whose eye is on the heart ;  
Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,  
Whose approbation—prosper even mine.

THE END.

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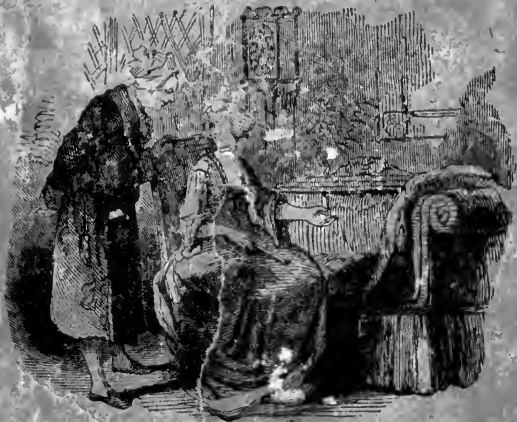






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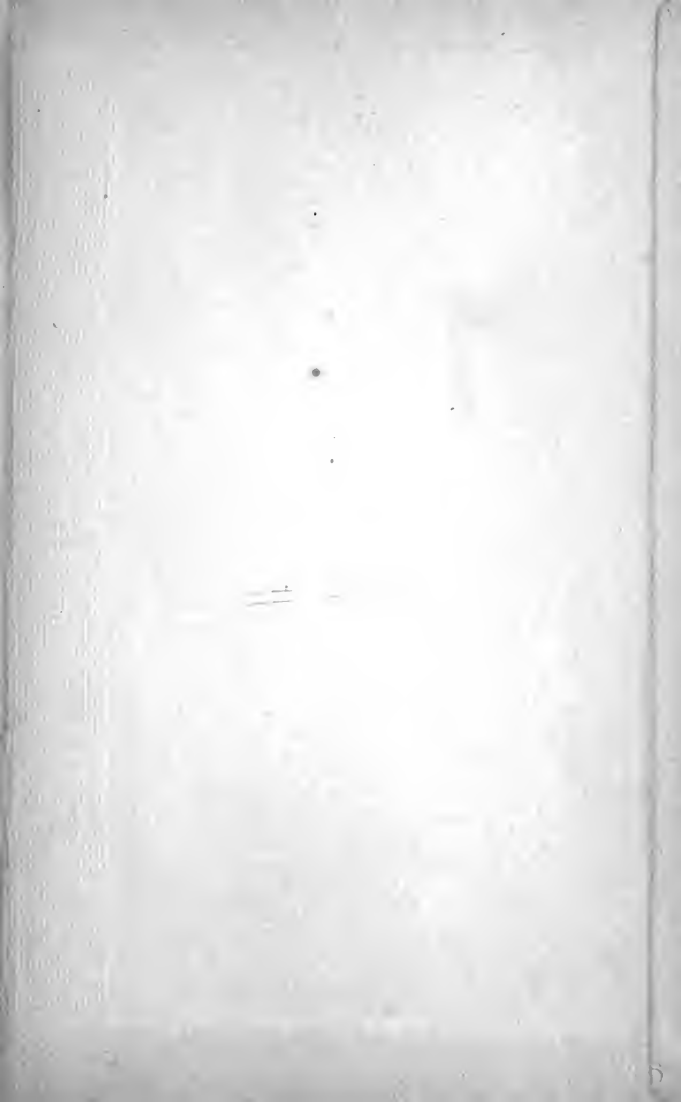
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