

Vignettes in Verse

Matilda Betham

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Vignettes:

IN VERSE.

BY MATILDA BETHAM.

1818.

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TO
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As far as the seventy-fourth page, these Poems have been printed about two years; during which many things happened likely to prevent their ever appearing. The time, however, is now come, and I have to-day found the remainder, up to where the lines end with

"Its unpolluted birthright."

On reading the whole over, they struck me with much surprise, as they appear in a singular manner prophetic. I wrote them with a general, and somewhat undefined view; and they now take the aspect of speaking on what has since happened to myself--a long seclusion, during which I was bereft of the common means of study, having given rise to one that has turned out far more important than I at first imagined, and which I have continued since, to the exclusion of every other pursuit.

Stonkam, May 10th, 1818.

Vignettes.

I.

If writing Journals were my task,
From cottagers to kings--
A little book I'd only ask,
And fill it full of wings!

Each pair should represent a day:
On some the sun should rise,
While others bent their mournful way
Through cold and cloudy skies.

And here I would the light'ning bring
With threatening, forked glare;
And there the hallowed rainbow fling
Across the troubled air.

Some faint and wearily should glide
Their broken flight along--
While some high in the air should ride
Dilated, bold, and strong.

Some agitated and adrift,
Against their will should rove;
Some, steering forward, sure and swift,
Should scarcely seem to move--

While others, happiest of their kind!
Should in the ether soar,
As if no care would ever find,
No sorrow reach them more;

When soon an arrow from below
Should wound them in their flight,
And many a crimson drop should flow
Before they fell in sight.

The rapid and abrupt descent,
The stain'd and ruffled plume,

Would seem as if they were not meant
Their ardour to resume.

But soon their beauty and their force
Sweet hours of rest renew;
Full soon their light, their varied course
Careering they pursue.

Alternately to rise and fall,
Or float along the day--
And this is Fortune--This is all
I would vouchsafe to say!

II.

Lucy, I think not of thy beauty,
I praise not each peculiar grace;
To see thee in the path of duty,
And with that happy, smiling face,
Conveys more pleasure to thy friend,
Than any outward charm could lend.

I see thy graceful babes caress thee,
I mark thy wise, maternal care,
And sadly do the words impress me,
The magic words--that thou art fair.
I wonder that a tongue is found
To utter the unfeeling sound!

For, art thou not above such praises?
And is this all that they can see?
Poor is the joy such flattery raises,
And, oh! how much unworthy thee!
Unworthy one whose heart can feel
The voice of truth, the warmth of zeal!

O Lucy, thou art snatch'd from folly,
Become too tender to be vain,
The world, it makes me melancholy,
The world would lure thee back again!
And it would cost me many sighs,
To see it win so bright a prize!

Though passing apprehensions move me,
I know thou hast a noble heart;
But, Lucy, I so truly love thee,
So much admire thee as thou art,
That, but the shadow of a fear,
Wakes in my breast a pang sincere.

III.

THE ARTISAN.

This twilight gloom. This lone retreat--
This silence to my soul is sweet!
Awhile escap'd from toil and strife,

And all the lesser ills of life,
Here only at the evening's close,
My weary spirit finds repose;
My sinking heart its freedom gains,
Which poverty had bound in chains!

For here unheard the moments fly--
And so secure, so happy I,
That, often at the very last,
I feel not that my dream is past.
The little hour of bliss I spend,
With thee, my chosen, only friend!
That transient hour the heart sustains,
Which poverty has bound in chains!

And for this dear, this precious hour,
I would not, if I had the power,
Exchange a worldling's life of ease,
Whom all around him seek to please.
I have no other friend beside,
But here I safely may confide.
Suspicion ne'er the bosom stains,
Which poverty has bound in chains!

How oft I wonder at my lot!
How oft are all but thee forgot!
While in this half-despairing breast,
Love builds a little, quiet nest,
To hover o'er with joyous wing,
Nay, sometimes soar aloft and sing!
'Tis this alone the heart sustains,
Which poverty has bound in chains!

IV.

"Come, Edmund, now the sun goes down,
Thy many wanderings tell!
Say, after all thine eyes have seen,
If home appears so well!"

"So well! alas! ye do not know
How absence can endear!
In every hill, in every tree,
A thousand charms appear.

"The verdure of these English fields
Seems in my heart to glow--
There, as this shaded river winds,
I feel its waters flow.

"For, though I ventured forth so bold,
So long, so far did roam,
Affection, like a wayward child,
Still wept and murmur'd, _home!_

"I persevered, yet still I strained
The pleader to my breast;
I hush'd her cries, but as I chid
More fondly still carest.

"And when I met with foreign dames

Of grace and beauty rare--
I fancied one dear village girl
Like them: but oh! how fair!

"My early playmate! oft I humm'd
The lays she lisping sung!
And sigh'd when looking on the arm,
Where she at parting hung.

"Then, joy! within my native vale
To find my Ellen free!
To fancy others pleas'd her not,
Because she thought on me!

"So closely round a glowing heart
Did never flowers entwine!
Oh! ne'er was mortal spirit lull'd
With visions sweet as mine!"

V.

VALENTINE

FROM A YOUNG LADY TO HER MOTHER.

1811.

It is a custom, in some parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, to send little presents with verses on Valentine's Day, to relatives and friends.

Hope has her emblem, so has Love,
But I have vainly sought
For one, that might entirely prove
The picture of my thought.

If violets, when fresh with dew,
Could amaranthine be,
Their soothing, deep, and glowing hue
Would justly speak for me.

Or to some plant with tendrils fine,
With blossoms sweet and gay,
This office I would now assign;
But flowers will all decay!

A bird would suit my purpose more,
With filial heart endued;
But, ere their little life is o'er,
Birds lose their gratitude!

No emblem of the love I feel
Appears within my view;
Less ardent, or less pure the zeal,
Less tender, or less true!

All I can do is to avow,
My services are thine;
And that my spirit still shall bow,

Before my Valentine.

VI.

THE LOVER'S APOLOGY.

I look'd into her eyes,
And saw something divine,
For there, like summer lightning,
Swift coruscations shine.

Still flashing, and still changing,
Attemper'd soft and bright,
Through each expression ranging,
From pity to delight.

From high or zealous feeling,
From arch, excursive grace,
From all with which a lovely mind
Endows the human face.

Perhaps a new and careless eye
May not those beauties see,
And wonder to behold the power
Belinda has with me.

The spell which holds this captive soul
She never would possess,
Were not her varying features rul'd
By sparkling playfulness,

But when with aimless, trackless skill
Is twin'd a mazy chain,
In the warm foldings of a heart,
Perforce it must remain.

VII.

Come, Magdalen, and bind my hair,
And put me on my sad array;
I to my father's house repair,
And hear his final doom to-day.

But wrap me in that cypress veil;
At first his eye I would not brave,
'Till he shall bid the mourner hail,
And knows I come from Edwin's grave.

I, late his boast, his heir, his pride,
Must like a guilty vassal kneel;
I, who was gallant Edwin's bride,
Must to my widow'd state appeal!

Closely within my heart must keep
His praise for whom that heart is riv'n,
And let each fond resentment sleep,
For I must die or be forgiven.

VIII.

The Spanish Lady's Farewell, 1809.

Manuel, I do not shed a tear,
Our parting to delay!
I dare not listen to my fear!
I dare not bid thee stay!

The heart may shrink, the spirit fail,
But Spaniards must be free;
And pride and duty shall prevail
O'er all my love for thee!

Then go! and round that gallant head,
Like banners in the air,
Shall float full many a daring hope,
And many a tender prayer!

Should freedom perish--at thy death,
'Twere folly to repine--
And I should every feeling lose,
Except the wish for mine!

But if the destiny of Spain,
Be once again to rise,
Oh! grant me heaven, to read the tale,
In Manuel's joyful eyes!

IX.

SONNET.

I am unskill'd in speech: my tongue is slow
The graceful courtesies of life to pay;
To deck kind meanings up in trim array,
Keeping the mind's soft tone: words such as flow
From Complaisance, when she alone inspires!
And Caution, with a care that never tires,
Marshals each tribe of thoughts in such a way
That all are ready for their needful task,
The moment the occasion comes to ask,
All prompt to hear, to answer and obey;
When mine, undisciplin'd, their cause betray,
By coward falterings, or rebellious zeal!--
And Art, though subtle, though sublime thy sway,
I doubt if thou canst rule us, when we feel!

X.

ALL' AMICA.

And didst thou think that worldly art
Would mould anew this shrinking heart?
No! as a bird, by storms opprest,
Is sheltered in its silent nest,
I nurse and soothe it in the strife,
Screen from the bleakest airs of life,
And bring it all that once you knew,
As kind, as timid, and as true!

But how could I so foolish be,
As not to feel a doubt of thee?—
This joy to find me still the same
Takes from my lip the power to blame;
Else, but forgive me, else I find
A mist has stolen o'er thy mind,
And veil'd my prospect; dimm'd that light
Which once was warm, and clear, and bright.

XI.

TO THE SAME.

Go forth, my voice, through the wild air,
In the lone stillness of the night,
Beneath the cold moon's pale blue light;
Seek Eugenia, and declare,
As warmth and promise lurk below
A waste of lifeless, drifted snow;

So, while my lips inertly move,
While many heavy fetters bind,
And press upon my languid mind,
Oh! tell her not to doubt my love!
Affection still her hold shall keep,
Although her weary servants sleep.

Friendship to me is like a flower,
Yielding a balm for human woe,
I less than ever could forego;
More prized, more needed every hour!
Perchance it dies for want of care,
But as it withers, I despair!

XII.

To the late Lady Rouse Boughton.

'Tis said, that jealous of a name
We all would praise confine,
And choke the leading path to fame
In our peculiar line.

But vainly should detraction preach
If once I made it known,
The art of pleasing thou would'st teach
Acknowledg'd for thy own.

XIII.

Yes! I can suffer, sink with pain,
With anguish I can ill sustain;
Till not a hope has strength to spring,
Till scarce a prayer can lift its wing;
Yet in my inmost heart there lies
A living fount that will arise,
And, of itself, diffuse a balm,
A healing and refreshing calm,
A pure delight, a cooling glow,
Which Hate and Meanness cannot know!

Yes! I can faint, and I can fear,
The power of petty creatures here,
Who trick dark deeds in gay disguise,
And weave their web of brooded lies,
With so few threads made smooth and fair,
All seems plain sense and reason there;
And yet I would not learn their art,
Nor have their paltry spells by heart,
Their rankling blood within my veins,
For all the treasure earth contains!

Of, panic-struck, I sink, dismay'd,
Call, with expiring faith, for aid;
When all my efforts useless seem,
Emptied of force as in a dream,
My courage knows to persevere,
Entwin'd, o'ergrown, o'ertowered by fear!
As he who summoned in the night,
At sudden wreck, in wild affright,
Once throws his arms around a mast,
Continues still to hold it fast,
When sight and strength and aim are flown,
When cold, benumb'd, and senseless grown,
My soul, by hurrying tempests driven,
Though blinded from the light of Heaven,
Clinging, all hope, all comfort o'er,
Must yet awaken on the shore!

XIV.

TO MR. AND MRS. EVERARD,

On their only Son's being in the Navy, 1811.

Talent and beauty, and the heart's warm glow,
Gilding with Heavenly light his path below,
Few with such rare felicity have won,
In that rich prize, a dear and only son;
And fewer but those faculties would doom
To the soft prison of a pamper'd home;
Check his bold wishes when they soar'd on high,
And see well-pleas'd each early vision die;
But ye, enweaving, as to me appears,

With his bright hopes, those of maturer years,
Hallowing the web, with all that parents feel,
The saintly trust in Heav'n, the patriot's zeal,
The aching doubts, that still tenacious wind
Around the lofty and the tender mind;
Ye, with a more than Roman virtue, yield,
To the proud strife of Albion's liquid field,
This darling; and, in whispers, bid him wear
The finest wreath that buds and blossoms there;
And I could almost say I heard a strain
Pronounce—the sacrifice should not be vain!

XV.

TO THE HON. LADY J—,

With the Picture of her Grand-daughter, the present Lady Petre.

1813.

Behold the semblance of thy flower!
I could not fill its leaves with dew,
Shew its tints varying with the hour,
Its motion as the zephyrs blew.

And beauty too were more complete,
Appearing on the native stem,
In midst of buds and blossoms sweet,
And catching graces, charms from them.

Or blooming under eyes like thine,
Whose fond, soft gaze, whose tender tear,
Must also, losing power divine,
Awake no answering sweetness here.

For much of loveliness must sleep,
E'en when inspir'd and led by truth;
The faithful pencil aims to keep
Mildness and innocence and youth.

XVI.

To MRS. A.

An Hour was before me, no creature more bright,
More airy, more joyous, e'er sprang on my sight.
To catch and to fetter I instantly tried,
And "thou art my slave, pretty vagrant," I cried.

I had hold, and securely I thought, of its wing,
O! how I shall glory, so lovely a thing
To place by the cradle of friendship, and see,
With the aid of my captive, if I can be free.

Oh! while she is with me, some means may be found
To temper the air and to hallow the ground—
To make those entangling bind-weeds decay,

Drive Suspicion, who rear'd them, for ever away,
And leave all around, kind, and healthful, and gay!

When this can be compass'd, I'll build me a bower,
And twine in the trellice each sweet-scented flower--
Rare, delicate plants, whose large, fresh leaves shall fling
Green shadows, where birds in the stillness may sing.

A place of repose, when the spirit is faint,
And the heart wants to utter a passing complaint:
Of safety; for pure and serene be the air,
And nothing unkind or unholy be there!

In this sacred retreat I my cares would confide,
And there my half-forming opinions should hide;
If true, gather strength for the brightness of day--
If false, in the shade, unprov'd, die away!

How fondly I nourish'd these hopes, but in vain!
The calm and the stillness I could not retain;
My Hour fled away, every wish unfulfill'd,
And warm'd not the Friendship Suspicion had chill'd!

XVII.

LINES

Sent to a Brother on his leaving England.

May 2, 1816.

FANCIFUL BOUQUET.

Hopes all glowing, _Wishes_ rare,
Blessings mixed with many a _Prayer_,
Flowers as yet beyond compare,
Though flourishing in northern air.

Farewells twined with tender _Fears_,
Golden day-dreams, gemm'd with tears,
Affections nurtur'd many years,
Before this perfect bloom appears.

Thoughts of fondness and of pride,
Love-vanities we need not hide;
Heart-blossoms, in its crimson dyed,
For you, are here together tied.

And yet they all appear too poor,
Though goodness can ensure no more;
Though monarchs, whom the world adore,
Would purchase such with all their store.

And while this charmed gift we send,
We know where'er your footsteps bend,
The looks and tones that win the friend,
That kindness, nature, truth, attend,

Are yours, and must be with you still,
Angelic guards, go where they will,
To ward off much surrounding ill,
And happiest destinies fulfil.

XVIII.

_Written jointly with a particular Friend, after a conversation
similar to the subject, with the Damon of the Story_.

Believing love was all a bubble,
And wooing but a needless trouble,
Damon grew fond of posied rings,
And many such romantic things;
But whether it were Fortune's spite,
That study wound his brain too tight,
Or that his fancy play'd him tricks,
He could not on the lady fix.
 He look'd around,
 And often found,
A damsel passing fair;
 "_She's good enough,_" he then would cry,
 And rub his hands, and wink his eye,
 "_I'll be enamour'd there!_"

He thus resolved; but had not power
To hold the humour "_half an hour_"--
And critics, vers'd in Cupid's laws,
Pretended they had found a clause,
 In an old volume on the shelf;--
Which said, if arrows chanc'd to fly,
When no bright nymph was passing by,
And lighted on a vacant breast;
The swain, Narcissus-like possest,
 Strait doated on himself!

If so, his anxious friends declar'd
All future trouble might be spar'd:
A heart thus pierc'd would never rove,
Nor meanly seek a second love;
No distance e'er could give him pain--
No rivalry torment his brain.
Self-love will bear a many knocks,
A thousand mortifying shocks;
One moment languish in despair,
The next alert and debonair.

Poor Damon bit his nails and sigh'd,
But still he was not satisfied;
He could not rest, nor be content,
Until to Cupid's court he went.
Of rules establish'd in the place,
Or, how to enter with a grace,
He own'd he neither knew nor car'd,
But thought _such nonsense better spar'd_,
And went undaunted and alone
To place himself before the throne.
He kiss'd no hand, he bent no knee,

Nor measur'd steps of one, two, three,
But made a careless, slouching bow,
And said, "Your highness will allow,
That I am personable, tall,
A rather handsome face withal,
And fit to serve as volunteer,
At least as any present here!
Purblind, and deaf, and long and short,
Without distinction here resort;
Whilst I, neglected and forgot,
Sate daily watching in my cot;
And scarcely stirr'd, for fear there might,
Arrive that morning or that night
A captaincy, or some commission,
For I confess I have ambition,
And think if none had done me wrong
I had not been o'erlook'd so long.
To come then, Sir, I thought my duty,
Oh! make me sensible to beauty!
The ice about my bosom melt!
Infuse a warmth it never felt!
I come uncall'd! excuse my boldness!
In truth I could not bear the coldness!"

Half piqued to see him thus intrude,
And question in a way so rude;
Half tickled at the strange address,
Cupid said gravely, "We confess
There may be reason in your plea;
But still we very much admire
Your entering in such strange attire!
We cannot such omissions see,
And countenance—it should appear,
You know not we are sovereign here!
The soldiers of our chosen band
Approach not till we give command.
We every look and action sway,
And they with prompt delight obey.
For height, and size, and such like things,
We care far less than other kings;
But station, learning, no pretence,
Can make us with our power dispense.
The warrior must not here look big,
The lawyer doffs his forked wig,
The portly merchant rich and free,
Forgets his pride and bends the knee;
The doctor gives his terrors scope,
And, like a patient, whines for hope;
In short the wise have childish fits,
And fools and madmen find their wits.
"Then go—this silly pride subdue,
And thou shall be our servant too!
Acquire the courtly way of speech,
Not, 'do you hear?' but, 'I beseech.'
And let a suitor's voice and air,
Thy grievances and zeal declare,
We never scorn a humble prayer!"

Expecting then a heart submiss,
He held him forth his hand to kiss;
For petrified the while he spoke,
With troubled wonder in his look
Poor Damon stood; aghast, suspended,
But gain'd his senses as he ended;
Abruptly turning on his toe,

"I thank you, Master Cupid, no!
I am a freeman and a brave,
And will not stoop to be a slave.
Your rules will never do for me,
I'd rather learn the rule of three--
"And since I find it is the plan,
To make me an automaton,
I'll case my heart in triple mail,
And fence it so completely round,
That all this vaunted skill shall fail,
Those blunted arrows back rebound;
For know, usurper! from this hour,
I scorn thy laws, abjure thy power!
From this dear moment I despise
The whole artillery of eyes;
Reason alone shall be my guide,
And Reason's voice shall win my bride.
Some bonny lass shall say I can
Love you as well as any man;
I will the self-same troth accord,
Most gladly take her at her word;
And we may just as happy prove
Without the fooleries of love.
She must not ask so much attention,
As many ladies I could mention;
But when I do not want to sway,
I'll always let her have her way;
And study to oblige her too,
When I have nothing else to do;
And am not tired, or wish to rest,
Or like some other plan the best,
For, more than this would be a task,
None but thy votaries would ask.
She must have riches, beauty, grace,
And modest sweetness in her face."
Just then he saw a scornful sneer
Upon Dan Cupid's face appear;
While courtiers whispered with a grin,
"Poor fellow, he'll be taken in!
The finest birds are always shy,
The rarest at a distance fly,
And Reason cannot soar so high."
"Aye, you may laugh, to prove her mind
At once exalted and refined,
I'll watch her skill in music's art;
By ear and fingers judge the heart,
And then it will not be believ'd
I can be easily deceiv'd.
I only grieve that in my prime
I've wasted so much precious time,
For long ere this I might have married,
Had I not so unwisely tarried,
And vex'd my brains in looking round
For that which never could be found."

"And would'st thou wish," the monarch cried,
"To set our gentle laws aside?
Thou hast no friend in Common Sense,
In such affairs she thinks it wisest,
To stand aside without pretence,
And sanction laws which thou despisest.
But try the plan, it merits praise,
Success may crown its winning ways!
The lady must be blind indeed,
With whom such offers of neglect,

And cool, habitual disrespect
Would not succeed.
But come no longer here to flout us,
Since, truly, thou canst do without us;
For dignity is lost in sport,
An outlaw for contempt of court;
We banish thee with all thy pride
Until thy heart be rarified."

XIX.

ABSENCE.

Written in Derbyshire, by the same Friend.

When recollection brings to mind,
The kindred ties I've left behind,
The converse gentle and refin'd,
I grieve!

Deep the regret, the pain extreme,
And yet I fondly love the dream,
And find the sad, delightful theme
Relieve.

It bids all present forms decay,
All present feelings fade away;
Impeding distance, long delay
Are o'er!

Fancy, so active in the gloom,
Till some one enters in the room,
Can all the images of home
Restore.

Alas! when weeks, and months are past,
Shall I that home behold at last,
Which even the dark clouds overcast
Endear?

Lest one of all the cares that dart
Like arrows round each thoughtful heart,
May pierce ere then some vital part
I fear!

XX.

_On reading in Savary's Travels the death of Ali Bey, who, it is
there represented, in the midst of enlightened and benevolent efforts
to benefit his country, was repeatedly betrayed, and at length taken
captive by his brother-in-law, whom he had advanced and loved, and
who, till the very last, he could not believe to be his enemy_.

O generous Ali! while thy fate inspires
Indignant pity, with a patriot's fires,

I mourn for Egypt, and with equal zeal,
For her, for thee, and ruin'd science feel:
Admire the confidence my heart deplores
And blame the weakness it almost adores!

Pride of thy race! before my mental eyes,
I see thee, like another Alfred rise;
See honour splendent on thy ample brow,
While Thought and Genius fill the orbs below;
Those beaming orbs! where lofty sweetness shone,
And where the soul sate smiling on her throne:
Depriv'd too soon of that benignant ray,
Which impious Dahab shudder'd to survey.
Pale, bleeding, conquer'd, dying, and forlorn,
I see thee view the wretch with silent scorn!
See thy cheek flush at the false tears he shed,
And proudly turn away the languid head,
With mingled anger, sorrow, and disdain,
That he should dare to tempt thy love again!

Oh! yet within the tent I see thee lie,
The victor, like a coward, crouching by;
O'erawed, rebuked, and humbled in the hour,
The plenitude of his success and power!
A pain the guilty never make us know,
In all the miseries they cause below;
A pain which they in every triumph feel,
A humbling sense no glory yet could heal,
The want of conscious worth, the poignant thought,
That inwardly sets all pretence at naught!
That curbs all self-applause—tears all disguise—
When the subdued, the ruin'd can _despise_;
And, in the arms of death, can yet be free,
To say, "Let me be any thing but thee!"

Ambition! while thy zeal the good inflame,
And make a noble nature sigh for fame,
We deem thee of a more than royal line,
For self-devotion tendeth to divine!
But when, like Dahab's demon, selfish, vain,
It loosens Gratitude's mysterious chain;
When broken Faith aloud, but vainly calls;
When the warm friend, the king, the brother falls;
Instead of honours, and a conqueror's fame,
Hatred shall haunt, and curses brand thy name!

XXI.

LINES.

Written for a Young Gentleman to speak at the Audit at St. Saviour's
School, Southwark, after the Battle of Trafalgar.

While others, from the Greek and Roman page,
Declare the prudent councils of the sage;
Or, in recital of achievements bold,
Retrace the motives and the deeds of old,
I, in the accents of my native clime,
And, at the moment, shaking hands with Time,

I, whom our recent loss forbids to roam,
Shall plant my mourning standard nearer home!
At the sad shrine where gallant Nelson sleeps,
Where Britain bends her lofty head and weeps,
Deeply lamenting that she cannot prove,
The fond excess of dearly purchas'd love.

Is there a callous mind, that does not feel
An anxious interest in the public weal!
Is there a heart that pities not the brave!
To whom luxuriant laurels hide the grave!
A grief unwing'd, yet unconsol'd by pride!
A tongue that said not, when our hero died,
While bitter tears that glorious loss deplore,
The man who _lov'd his country_ is no more?
No! in each eye the glowing trophies fade;
Each sign of triumph seems a vain parade!
The aching sigh to conquering shouts succeeds,
And Victory assumes a widow's weeds.

Some wily chieftain, building up a name,
May fight for immortality and fame;
Time may embalm his valour, or his art,
And History shew the coldness of a heart,
Which, emulous of grandeur and a throne,
Acts for itself, "_its own low self_" alone;
And, in the inner chambers of the mind,
Broods over plans to subjugate mankind:
There fondly bends each nation to his sway,
That he may rule, and all beside obey.
Haply the mighty fabric may arise,
Vast in its bulk, and aiming at the skies,
Till Wisdom, viewing the enormous pile,
Admires the madness of a man the while,
Who labours with incessant toil and skill;
To feed Ambition, discontented still;
And for that serpent in his bosom curl'd,
Erects a temple fit to hold the world!

Though such a chief a deathless wreath may crown,
Though he may win a sterile, hard renown,
His name shall ne'er a sudden glow impart,
Nor make the tear of admiration start;
Ne'er in his plaudits shall warm blessings join!
None cry, "The triumph of that man is mine!"
But, when his greatness crumbles in the dust,
Coldly exclaim, "Lo! Providence is just!"
Far different is the patriot warrior's lot!
He may in Time's long journey be forgot;
Though many generations shall decay,
Ere England's love to Nelson wears away!
But if at length successive years should cast
The mist of distance upon ages past,
And fathers what themselves have witness'd tell,
Of those who yet shall serve their country well--
Memory and Knowledge shall dispel the gloom,
And shed strong light on every honour'd tomb--
To lift the spirit when our courage fail,
When worth departed, future ages hail!

And ye, compeers, who in the classic page,
Do homage to the hero and the sage,
Whose hearts at base and cruel actions bleed,
But rise triumphant at a noble deed--
Forbear from Duty's anxious side to stray,

But follow bravely when she leads the way;
Follow with head and heart, as Nelson fought;
Be vigilant like him in act and thought;
Then, as the lark mounts upwards in the skies,
Early in life's fair morning will you rise,
Expand bold pinions nearest to the sun,
And claim the meed of glory fairly won.

XXII.

TO THE HETMAN, PLATOFF.

O ancient warrior! as we hail thee,
And behold thy cordial smile,
We hope that greetings ne'er may fail thee,
Such as those of Britain's isle.

They are, although so seeming rude,
Given only where we think them due;
Most courteous, e'en when they intrude,
Too vehement, but always true!

Applauses which no art can fashion,
Which speak the feelings and no more;
Which give respect the glow of passion,
When worth and valour we adore;

Blest is the hero in receiving!
And pride may scoff at, or despise,
What if but once sincere believing,
Is grateful to the good and wise.

XXIII.

On the Death of Master Frederic Thomson.

1810.

In the first dawn of youth I much admire
The lively boy of ruddy countenance,
Strong-built, and bold, and hardy, with black hair,
And dark brown eye, contrasting its blue-white,
Somewhat abruptly; save in the bright hour
Of inward passion, or of sudden joy;
When, as a monarch, gracious and renown'd,
Amid a crowd of subjects, diverse all,
Thrills with one deep, soft feeling every heart;
Or, as the sun throws his pervading beams
At once on bleak harsh mountains and the sky;
The soul, by union of its light and heat,
Clears and irradiates all, and gives to strength
A mellow sweetness; hues late undefin'd
Grow more intense, or, if discordant, lose
Their coarseness, and become diaphanous.
This I admire, but still methinks I look

With a serener pleasure on the head
Crested by flaxen curls; or where soft locks,
Like to long coiling leaves that lose their edge,
Shine silken on the cheek, and parting smooth
Above a fair and modest countenance,
Harmonize with its pure, its tender bloom.
Still lovelier when with that infusion sweet
Of saint or angel spirit, resident
In the calm circle of a blue eye fring'd
With sable lashes! I remember once
A face like this, ere sickness took away
Its freshness, in whose looks there also dwelt,
If one may speak it of a thing so young,
And not subdue our warm belief to say
The prophecy of all these qualities,
Refinement, gentleness, and mild resolve;
Fitted to stem the evil of this world,
And hold with patient intrepidity,
The shield of calm resistance to its power.
It seem'd as if no anger e'er could dwell
Within his bosom; no blind prejudice
Distract his judgment; and no folly call
For a reproof: as if Affection were
Too soon allied to Thought, and tempered so
His morning, that the ministry of Time,
The chast'ning trial of Remorse and Grief,
And of stern Disappointment, all were spar'd.

XXIV.

On the Death of Herbert Southey: addressed to his Father.

Knowing the nature of thy grief,
Too deep, too recent for relief,
Oh! why impatient must I press
So early on a friend's distress!
Why am I eager thus to prove,
To him who feels excess of love,
The tender liking we bestow
On fair and guileless things below?
On Love and Joy without pretence,
On kind and playful Innocence!
The pleas'd idea Memory kept,
The partial glance which never slept,
When hopes arose oft render'd vain,
Of seeing Keswick yet again.

Never but once a child had won
So much upon me as thy son;
And, for each wild and winning art,
That, nestling, fastens in the heart;
For graces that light tendrils fling
Around each nerve's tenacious string;
Caprices beautiful, that strike
The heart, and captive fancy, like
Those of a tame, young bird at play,
That carols near, then flits away,
Will on a sudden upward soar,
Then give its little wanderings o'er,
For fondling, gentle, sweet repose,

When tapering pinions softly close,
Slight, warmth--pervaded quills are prest,
And head shrunk closely to the breast:
All sleeping but that lovely eye,
Which speaks delight, and asks reply:
Oh! with such graces never one
Was so much gifted as thy son!
In each variety of tone,
Each wayward charm, he stood alone;
And all too nicely pois'd to press,
Or ruffle tranquil happiness.

If thus a stranger thinks, who knew
Him but an infant--if he grew
With all the promise that appear'd
So brightly then, still more endear'd--
If, as the Honey with the Bee,
Affection dwells with poesy:
If that Affection is comprest,
And hoarded in a Father's breast,
Whose very soul doth blessings shed
Upon a grateful darling's head;
While every look is treasur'd there,
Till Thought itself becomes a prayer,
And Hopes hang on him full and gay.
"As blossoms on a bough in May"[1]--
Shall any venture to intrude
On thee? Oh! not with footstep rude,
But with a timorous zeal I come,
Just hang this wreath upon his tomb--
Record fond wishes sadly o'er,
To see my little favourite more!

* * * * *

[Footnote 1:
As many hopes hang on his noble head
As blossoms on a bough in May; and sweet ones!
--_Beaumont and Fletcher._]

XXV.

Fear has to do with sacred things,
And more than all from Pity springs.
Two school-girls once--the time is past,
But ever will the memory last--
This moral to my fancy drew,
In colours brilliant, deep, and true.

Mute, blooming, one all-wondering stands,
The elder kisses oft her hands,
Bends o'er with fainting, fond caress,
And languishes in strong distress.
Clings to her shoulder, were it meet,
Seems wishing to embrace her feet;
Like one impatient to implore,
Who dreads the time is nearly o'er,
To ask or to receive a boon,
Which must be known and granted soon.
A boon with life itself entwined,
One that her lips refus'd to name,

However oft the impulse came.
Such was the picture--but her mind
Forgetting self--could not arise,
To look in those unconscious eyes!
The zeal that prompted, were she free
To serve her friend on bended knee,
Shrunk from the orphan's gaze, just hurl'd,
Lonely and poor upon the world--
Unknowing yet her loss, endeared,
By its excess, and therefore fear'd!

Thus has it ever seem'd to me,
That Pity made a Deity
Of Mortal Suffering--that her ray
Melted all blame, all scorn away!
That when her arms the dying fold,
When her pure hands the loathsome hold,
Disgust and Dread, their power forego,
The Aegis drops from Human Woe,
Whose false and cruel glare alone
Turned other living hearts to stone.

XXVI.

ELEGY ON EDWARD BETHAM,

Lost in the Duchess of Gordon East Indiaman, off the Cape of Good Hope.

Lovely as are the wide and sudden calms
Upon a lake, when all the waters rise,
To smooth each undulation, and present
A plain of molten silver--is the hope,
Dear Edward, of thy safety--which now comes
To fill, expand, and elevate my heart--
String every nerve, and give to every vein,
A warmer and a sweeter sense of life!

Welcome, oh! welcome, that most healing hope,
Pouring abroad an efficacious ray
Into the aching bosom!--Tidings sweet
Those of such prompt return, with wisdom gain'd
By suffering, but with all thy innocence,
All thy accustomed gaiety of heart,
And all thy deep, quick sensibilities!
Those gems of virtue, which concentrate still
In narrow limits, stores of moral wealth
Beyond all estimate--whose value known,
The dealer sells his other merchandize;
His ivory and curious workmanship,
The silkworm's product and the cloth of gold,
To purchase that imperishable store,
More highly prized than all!--Possessing all
The properties, most precious of the rest,
In a superior measure and degree,
Without alloy, sparkling with inward light!
Unseen, untraced the process of his growth!--
No aid from any human hand or care!--
No nourishment from any earthly dews!

No ripening from our bright, material sun!
But secretly supplied by Providence
With some more pure, diviner aliment,
And with more heavenly, searching radiance fill'd;
For the superior comfort, higher bliss
Of that in-drinking eye the soul of man!

Thus sang I, when fallacious hopes were rais'd
Of his dear safety--whom, howe'er belov'd--
However strong in health, and firmly built
Like a fine statue of the antique world,
As if he might have reach'd a century
Without decrepitude, we ne'er again--
Nor we alone, no other human eye--
Can e'er behold! Then had I painted him
Returning, as he lately left our shores,
With all the fairness and the bloom of youth--
The light brown hair, and its soft yellow gleams,
Brightened with silver; thickening into shade,
Now with a dove-like, now a chesnut hue!
The smile of Peace and Love and joyful Hope!
And those blue eyes, through whose dark lash the soul,
Rejoicing, from its kind and happy home,
Look'd forth with rapture, artless, and uncheck'd!
Eyes, where Delight in careless luxury
Lay nestling and indulging blissful thoughts;
With every day-dream, for whose food the world
Offers magnificence and loveliness;
All graceful motions, and all graceful forms.
The ripened nectar of delicious sounds,
The social haunt--the lonely quiet hour;
The Hopes embodying innocent and gay
As those of Childhood, whose soft footstep past
Not long before, not yet forgotten, by!

The letter, dearest, blotted with thy tears,
In answer to a caution--fear--express'd
By much too strongly--often gives my heart
A secret pang--but of remorse for nought
But paining thee--too tender to endure
The thought that self-indulgence, or neglect,
Causing increas'd disquietude and care,
Might, by increased disquietude and care,
Open the grave for him who gave thee birth!
How often and how warmly did'st thou ask,
With epithets of fondness, how I dar'd
Imagine such a horror, and to one
Present, who would have died, or borne extremes
Of any hard endurance, not to give
The slightest anguish to a parent's breast!
Alas! the cruel rashness of reproof--
The busy vigilance of human pride--
Like a too eager partizan, may strike,
To ward off danger from his chieftain's head,
A fellow soldier zealous in the cause!

As of this world, this visible, wide world,
This earth, with all its forests, all its plants,
All its deep mines, its rivers, and its seas,
Yea! all that breathes, and moves, and clings to life
By any subtler impulse, which eludes
Our blunted observation:--as of this,
All that appears and all that is, so much
Remains, in scorn of science, unexplor'd;
So, in the not less wond'rous moral world,

The innermost recesses of the mind,
We see as little; save, Phoenician like,
By petty trade and parley on its coasts,
Talk by interpreters, impatient guess,
Or careless resting in incertitude,
At meanings in a tongue almost unknown;
Or so corrupted by this intercourse,
That all its native harmony is lost,
Its irresistible persuasions o'er!
The clearness and the sweetness of its tones,
Its loftiness, simplicity and truth.

All that we hear is coarse and limited,
And yet we sail along and search no more,
And look no farther, though the ear is pall'd
With the vile din of tame monotony,
The taste perverted, judgment led astray,
By soul-annihilating idleness,
By universal, strengthless poverty,
Which leans upon its neighbour for support,
And lifts the eye for sanction, or assent,
To weakness still more helpless than its own!

Two thousand years the sanctuary's veil
Has now been rent asunder, shewing all
That, to the patient and unsandall'd foot,
Egress and regress freely are allowed
Through that most glorious temple, where abstract,
And long a stranger to the vulgar eye,
Thought held her silent rule, and mission'd forth
Her sealed and unquestion'd messengers.
Yet those who follow nature when the track
Is finer than a hair--those who can cleave
The subtile and combined elements
That form a drop of water--those can shrink
From the more holy alchemy enjoin'd,
Call'd for by that disgust the heart conceives
At the usurping empire of pretence;
At all those useless and disgraceful chains,
Which tie us down, and imp with aptest wings,
Falsehood and selfishness, who ought to creep
In their own reptile slime, and dart away
When eyes perceiv'd their presence. Oh! could those
Adventure in too perilous a path,
If without other guide than the bright stars,
The love of what is lofty and divine,
Or the desire of gaining for mankind,
Now fettered and held down to poison'd food,
Its unpolluted birth-right
--they dared on,
Plunging at once into untravelled realms,
And bringing, as the harvest of their toil,
Arms which will make each potent talisman,
Each charm, and spell, and dire enchantment sink
In endless infamy--without a hope
To trick their bloated, and their wither'd limbs,
In any Proteus vestment of disguise,
Again to awe and ruin the world.

Oh! my dear brother, little did I think
These lines would be prophetic, yet to me
They seem so; for I since have felt deep woe,
And passed through seas of anguish to attain
A view of mysteries wonderful and sad--
Since they are rivetted, through every clime,

With shame, and guilt, and wretchedness on all
That bear what only is the _curse_ of life,
Whilst they remain, which have confronted time,
Wearing the semblance, sporting with the names
Of truth and valour, liberty and God,
Successfully, through each recorded age,
But yet _may_ fall, and will, I trust and hope!

FINIS.

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