

**John Clare**  
**Selected Poems**



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## **Table of Contents**

Nb. To return to the contents list at any time, click the ↑ symbol above each poem.

### [Introduction](#)

## **Spring**

[February – a thaw](#)

[First Sight of Spring](#)

[From March](#)

[Wood Pictures in Spring](#)

[From the Days of April](#)

[Home Pictures in May](#)

[From May](#)

## **Summer**

[From June](#)

[From July](#)

[Noon](#)

[Beans in Blossom](#)

[From Summer Evening \(1820\)](#)

[Summer Evening \(MS poems\)](#)

[The Wheat Ripening](#)

[From August](#)

[A Gloomy Day in Summer](#)

## **Autumn**

[Autumn Morning](#)

[Autumn \(I love the fitful gust\)](#)

[From September](#)

[Nutting](#)

[Autumn \(The thistledown's flying\)](#)

[Autumn Change](#)

[From October](#)

[From November](#)

[Martinmass](#)

## **Winter**

[Signs of Winter](#)

[From: Address to Plenty in Winter](#)

[Emmonsails Heath in Winter](#)

[Wood Pictures in Winter](#)

[The Winter's Spring](#)

[Snow Storm](#)

[The Old Year](#)

[From January](#)

## **Birds and Animals**

[Autumn Birds](#)

[The Thrush's Nest](#)

[The Fern Owl's Nest](#)

[The Firetail's Nest](#)

[The Raven's Nest](#)  
[The Sandmartin](#)  
[Crows in Spring](#)  
[From Badger](#)  
[From The Hedgehog](#)  
[The Marten](#)  
[Clock a Clay](#)

### **Trees and plants**

[From May](#)  
[Water-lilies](#)  
[From Spear-thistle](#)  
[Wood Rides](#)  
[The Crab Tree](#)  
[The Shepherd's Tree](#)  
[From The Fallen Elm](#)  
[Firwood](#)

### **Scenes**

[From Rural Morning](#)  
[The Morning Wind](#)  
[Heavy Dew](#)  
[The Flood](#)  
[From A Rhapsody](#)  
[Mist in the Meadows](#)  
[Nightwind](#)  
[From A Sunday with Shepherds and Herdboys](#)  
[The Harvest Morning](#)  
[From The Fens](#)  
[From Rural Evening](#)

### **People**

[Farm Breakfast](#)  
[From The Cottager](#)  
[The Shepherd's Fire](#)  
[Happiness of Evening](#)  
[From The Woodman](#)  
[The Village Boy](#)  
[From Rustic Fishing](#)  
[From Angling](#)  
[Song \(She tied up her few things\)](#)  
[Country Letter](#)  
[From The Cellar Door](#)

### **Memories and Feelings**

[My Early Home](#)  
[Where She Told Her Love](#)  
[Ballad \(A faithless shepherd courted me\)](#)  
[To Mary](#)  
[Song \(I wish I was where I would be\)](#)

[\*From Effusion\*](#)

[I Am](#)

[Remembrances](#)

[\*From Shadows of Taste\*](#)

[\*From I'll Dream upon the Days to Come\*](#)

[The Flitting](#)

**Endings**

[Decay](#)

[Approaching Night](#)

[A Vision](#)

[The Poet's Death](#)

[Invitation to Eternity](#)

[Note on sources and copyright](#)

## Introduction

John Clare was born in 1793, the son of a farm labourer in the rural county of Northamptonshire in England. He attended evening school and began to read and write poetry while employed as a ploughman, a gardener and then a lime-kiln worker.

A meeting with a bookseller led to the publication of his first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenes*, in 1820. The book gained good reviews and sold well; despite this, it earned him no money, and Clare returned to farm work. His second volume, *The Village Minstrel, and Other Poems*, was published in 1821, but sold less well than the first.

Becoming anxious about money (for by this time he was married with children), Clare started to suffer from mental illness. As his condition improved, he began to write *The Shepherd's Calendar*, which came out in 1827 but sold very few copies. Constantly struggling to earn a living by a combination of writing and farming, Clare prepared a volume of poems to be called *The Midsummer Cushion*. Whilst trying to arrange its publication, he again fell ill with what was described as an attack of insanity, during which he did not recognise his family. On his recovery, his new publishers, Whittaker, brought out a volume of poetry, *The Rural Muse* (1835), which finally brought him a small income.

However, his mental health remained unsteady, and after a delusional period he was admitted to an asylum at Epping Forest. He was allowed to roam the forest and fields (though not to write) but his delusions continued.

Missing his family, in 1841 he left the asylum and walked the ninety miles home in the belief that he was married to his first love there. Despite the efforts of his wife Patty to care for him, later that year he was again committed to an asylum, this time in Northampton.

Here Clare was treated as a "gentleman patient" and was able to write, giving away many of his manuscript poems to visitors. He was allowed to visit the town of Northampton until, after some years, his increasing illness meant he was confined to the asylum grounds. He seems to have been well-treated, and not unhappy. He died at the asylum in 1864.

John Clare wrote about 3,000 poems as well as a substantial body of prose, mainly essays and journals. Although he was briefly famous as "the Peasant Poet" during his lifetime, his work then fell into obscurity until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when new editions of his work were published. He is nowadays highly regarded as a poet of nature and rural life.

The predominant subject of his poems is the countryside, with its wildlife, workers and daily round of labour. Although this was a very familiar scene to Clare, his best poems see it with a continually fresh and curious eye. Like a painter, he revisited the same landscape many times in different moods and seasons. While his early verse was sometimes mannered, after the fashion of the day, his later style became freer and simpler, giving his poems an appealing immediacy and naturalness. Many of his asylum poems are entwined with haunting memories of love and longing.

There are ninety poems and excerpts in this selection. They are arranged thematically, grouping together poems about seasons, birds and animals, people, etc. Clare used a number of dialect words, which are explained in occasional notes after each poem.

## **A note on punctuation and spelling**

In both his poetry and prose, Clare preferred not to use punctuation. This was not through lack of education, but rather because of a dislike of formal rules. He wrote:

“I do not use that awkward squad of pointings called commas colons semicolons etc... they even set gramarians at loggerheads and no one can assign them the proper places...” (quoted in *Clare, Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. E. Robinson and G. Summerfield).

Nonetheless, editors throughout his life and beyond saw fit to add their own punctuation to his works. Older editions of his poetry came fully punctuated until Edmund Blunden’s 1920 collection, which was more sparing. The definitive edition of Clare’s work by Prof. Eric Robinson contains practically no punctuation in the poems. I have not used Prof. Robinson’s versions for copyright reasons (see [the note on sources and copyright](#) at the end of this book.) However, in accordance with current thinking about Clare’s intentions, I have kept little or no punctuation even where my sources did so.

Clare’s spelling was also ‘corrected’ to different degrees by various editors. As I have not attempted to restore the original spellings, in this collection the spelling therefore varies from poem to poem.

Emma Laybourn

## Spring



### February - A Thaw

The snow is gone from cottage tops  
The thatch moss glows in brighter green  
And eves in quick succession drops  
Where grinning icles once hath been  
Pit patting wi a pleasant noise  
In tubs set by the cottage door  
And ducks and geese wi happy joys  
Douse in the yard pond brimming o'er

The sun peeps thro the window pane  
Which childern mark wi laughing eye  
And in the wet street steal again  
To tell each other spring is nigh  
And as young hope the past recalls  
In playing groups will often draw  
Building beside the sunny walls  
Their spring-play-huts of sticks or straw

And oft in pleasure's dreams they hie  
Round homesteads by the village side  
Scrattin the hedgrow mosses bye  
Where painted pooty shells abide  
Mistaking oft the ivy spray  
For leaves that come wi budding spring  
And wondering in their search for play  
Why birds delay to build and sing

The milkmaid singing leaves her bed  
As glad as happy thoughts can be  
While magpies chatter o'er her head  
As jocund in the change as she  
Her cows around the closes stray  
Nor lingering wait the foddering boy  
Tossing the molehills in their play  
And staring round in frolic joy

Ploughmen go whistling to their toils  
And yoke again the rested plough  
And mingling o'er the mellow soils  
Boys' shouts and whips are noising now  
The shepherd now is often seen  
By warm banks o'er his work to bend  
Or o'er a gate or stile to lean  
Chattering to a passing friend



Odd hive bees fancying winter o'er  
And dreaming in their combs of spring  
Creeps on the slab beside their door  
And strokes its legs upon its wing  
While wild ones half asleep are humming  
Round snowdrop bells a feeble note  
And pigeons coo of summer coming  
Picking their feathers on the cote

The barking dogs by lane and wood  
Drive sheep afield from foddering ground  
And echo in her summer mood  
Briskly mocks the cheery sound  
The flocks as from a prison broke  
Shake their wet fleeces in the sun  
While following fast a misty smoke  
Reeks from the moist grass as they run

Nor more behind his master's heels  
The dog creeps o'er his winter pace  
But cocks his tail and o'er the fields  
Runs many a wild and random chase  
Following in spite of chiding calls  
The startled cat wi harmless glee  
Scaring her up the weed green walls  
Or mossy mottled apple tree

As crows from morning perches flye  
He barks and follows them in vain  
Een larks will catch his nimble eye  
And off he starts and barks again  
Wi breathless haste and blinded guess  
Oft following where the hare hath gone  
Forgetting in his joy's excess  
His frolic puppy days are done

The gossips saunter in the sun  
As at the spring from door to door  
Of matters in the village done  
And secret newsings muttered o'er  
Young girls when they each other meet  
Will stand their tales of love to tell  
While going on errands down the street  
Or fetching water from the well

A calm of pleasure listens round  
And almost whispers winter bye  
While fancy dreams of summer sounds  
And quiet rapture fills the eye

The sun beams on the hedges lye  
The south wind murmurs summer soft  
And maids hang out white cloaths to dry  
Around the eldern skirted croft

Each barn's green thatch reeks in the sun  
Its mate the happy sparrow calls  
And as nest building spring begun  
Peeps in the holes about the walls  
The wren a sunny side the stack  
Wi short tail ever on the strunt  
Cocked gadding up above his back  
Again for dancing gnats will hunt

The gladdened swine bolt from the sty  
And round the yard in freedom run  
Or stretching in their slumbers lye  
Beside the cottage in the sun  
The young horse whinneys to its mate  
And sickens from the thresher's door  
Rubbing the straw yard's banded gate  
Longing for freedom on the moor

Hens leave their roosts wi cackling calls  
To see the barn door free from snow  
And cocks flye up the mossy walls  
To clap their spangled wings and crow  
About the steeple's sunny top  
The jackdaw flocks resemble spring  
And in the stone arched windows pop  
Wi summer noise and wanton wing

The small birds think their wants are o'er  
To see the snow hills fret again  
And from the barn's chaff littered door  
Betake them to the greening plain  
The woodman's robin startles coy  
Nor longer at his elbow comes  
To peck wi hunger's eager joy  
'Mong mossy stulps the littered crumbs

Neath hedge and walls that screen the wind  
The gnats for play will flock together  
And een poor flyes odd hopes will find  
To venture in the mocking weather  
From out their hiding holes again  
Wi feeble pace they often creep  
Along the sun warmed window pane  
Like dreaming things that walk in sleep

The mavis thrush wi wild delight  
Upon the orchard's dripping tree  
Mutters to see the day so bright  
Spring scraps of young hope's poesy  
And oft dame stops her burring wheel  
To hear the robin's note once more  
That tutles while he pecks his meal  
From sweet briar hips beside the door

The hedgehog from its hollow root  
Sees the wood moss clear of snow  
And hunts each hedge for fallen fruit  
Crab hip and winter bitten sloe  
And oft when checked by sudden fears  
As shepherd dog his haunt espies  
He rolls up in a ball of spears  
And all his barking rage defies

Thus nature of the spring will dream  
While south winds thaw but soon again  
Frost breaths upon the stiffening stream  
And numbs it into ice – the plain  
Soon wears its merry garb of white  
And icicles that fret at noon  
Will eke their icy tails at night  
Beneath the chilly stars and moon

Nature soon sickens of her joys  
And all is sad and dumb again  
Save merry shouts of sliding boys  
About the frozen furrowed plain  
The foddering boy forgets his song  
And silent goes wi folded arms  
And croodling shepherds bend along  
Crouching to the whizzing storms

*Notes*

pooty = snail

foddering boy = boy who feeds the livestock

strunt = strut

stulps = stumps

crabs = crab-apples

croodling = huddling



## **First Sight of Spring**

The hazel-blooms in threads of crimson hue  
Peep through the swelling buds foretelling Spring  
Ere yet a white-thorn leaf appears in view  
Or March finds throstles pleased enough to sing  
To the old touchwood tree woodpeckers cling  
A moment and their harsh-toned notes renew  
In happier mood the stockdove claps his wing  
The squirrel sputters up the powdered oak  
With tail cocked o'er his head and ears erect  
Startled to hear the woodman's understroke  
And with the courage which his fears collect  
He hisses fierce half malice and half glee—  
Leaping from branch to branch about the tree  
In winter's foliage moss and lichens drest

### *Note*

touchwood = old, dry wood



## **From March**

The stooping ditcher in the water stands  
Letting the furrowd lakes from off the lands  
Or splashing cleans the pasture brooks of mud  
Where many a wild weed freshens into bud  
And sprouting from the bottom purple green  
The water cresses neath the wave is seen  
Which the old woman gladly drags to land  
Wi reaching long rake in her tottering hand  
The ploughman mawls along the doughy sloughs  
And often stop their songs to clean their ploughs  
From teasing twitch that in the spongy soil  
Clings round the colter terryfying toil  
The sower striding oer his dirty way  
Sinks ankle deep in pudgy sloughs and clay  
And oer his heavy hopper stoutly leans  
Strewing wi swinging arms the pattering beans  
Which soon as aprils milder weather gleams  
Will shoot up green between the furroed seams...

...While ground larks on a sweeing clump of rushes  
Or on the top twigs of the oddling bushes  
Chirp their 'cree creeing' note that sounds of spring  
And sky larks meet the sun wi fluttering wing  
Soon as the morning opes its brightning eye  
Large clouds of sturnels blacken thro the sky  
From oizer holts about the rushy fen

And reedshaw borders by the river Nen  
And wild geese regiments now agen repair  
To the wet bosom of broad marshes there  
In marching coloms and attention all  
Listning and following their ringleaders call

*Notes*

colter = blade of a ploughshare  
sweeing = swaying  
oddling = occasional, scattered  
sturnels = starlings  
oizer holts = willow beds



**Wood Pictures in Spring**

The rich brown-umber hue the oaks unfold  
When spring's young sunshine bathes their trunks in gold  
So rich so beautiful so past the power  
Of words to paint my heart aches for the dower  
The pencil gives to soften and infuse  
This brown luxuriance of unfolding hues  
This living luscious tinting woodlands give  
Into a landscape that might breathe and live  
And this old gate that claps against the tree  
The entrance of spring's paradise should be  
Yet paint itself with living nature fails  
The sunshine threading through these broken rails  
In mellow shades no pencil e'er conveys  
And mind alone feels fancies and portrays



**From The Days of April**

Daisies burn April grass with silver fires  
And pilewort in the green lane blazes out  
Enough to burn the fingers 'neath the briers  
Where village boys will scrat dead leaves about  
To look for pooties – every eye admires  
The lovely picture that the spring brings out  
Meadows of burning cowslips – what mind tires  
To see them dancing in the emerald grass  
And brawling crystal brook as clear as glass  
Laughing groaning guggling on for miles  
That waves the silver blades of swimming grass  
Upon the surface while the glad sun smiles  
Such are the sights the showers and sunshine bring  
To three or four bright days the first of spring

*Notes*

pilewort = a medicinal herb (fireweed or lesser celandine)

pooties = snails



**Home Pictures in May**

The sunshine bathes in clouds of many hues  
And morning's feet are gemmed with early dews  
Warm daffodils about the garden beds  
Peep through their pale slim leaves their golden heads  
Sweet earthly nuns of Spring – the gosling broods  
In coats of sunny green about the road  
Waddle in extasy and in rich moods  
The old hen leads her flickering chicks abroad  
Oft scuttling 'neath her wings to see the kite  
Hang wavering o'er them in the spring's blue light  
The sparrows round their new nests chirp with glee  
And sweet the robin Spring's young luxury shares  
Tootling its song in feathery gooseberry tree  
While watching worms the gardener's spade unbares



**From May**

Each hedge is loaded thick wi green  
And where the hedger late hath been  
Tender shoots begin to grow  
From the mossy stumps below  
While sheep and cow that teaze the grain  
Will nip them to the root again  
They lay their bill and mittens bye  
And on to other labours hie  
While wood men still on spring intrudes  
And thins the shadow solitudes  
Wi sharp axes felling down  
The oak trees budding into brown  
Where as they crash upon the ground  
A crowd of labourers gather round  
And mix among the shadows dark  
To rip the crackling staining bark  
From off the tree and lay when done  
The rolls in lares to meet the sun  
Depriving yearly where they come  
The green wood pecker of its home  
That early in the spring began  
Far from the sight of troubling man

And bord their round holes in each tree  
In fancy's sweet security  
Till startld wi the woodman's noise  
It wakes from all its dreaming joys  
The blue bells too that thickly bloom  
Where man was never feared to come  
And smell smocks that from view retires  
Mong rustling leaves and bowing briars  
And stooping lilys of the valley  
That comes wi shades and dews to dally  
White beady drops on slender threads  
Wi broad hood leaves above their heads  
Like white robd maids in summer hours  
Neath umberellas shunning showers  
These neath the barkmens' crushing treads  
Oft perish in their blooming beds  
Thus stript of boughs and bark in white  
Their trunks shine in the mellow light  
Beneath the green surviving trees  
That wave above them in the breeze  
And waking whispers slowly bends  
As if they mourn'd their fallen friends...

...The thresher dull as winter days  
And lost to all that spring displays  
Still mid his barn dust forcd to stand  
Swings his frail round wi weary hand  
While oer his head shades thickly creep  
And hides the blinking owl asleep  
And bats in cobweb corners bred  
Sharing till night their murky bed  
The sunshine trickles on the floor  
Thro every crevice of the door  
And makes his barn where shadows dwell  
As irksome as a prisoner's cell...

...The yellow hammer builds its nest  
By banks where sun beams earliest rest  
That dries the dews from off the grass  
Shading it from all that pass  
Save the rude boy wi ferret gaze  
That hunts thro evry secret maze  
He finds its pencild eggs agen  
All streakd wi lines as if a pen  
By nature's freakish hand was took  
To scrawl them over like a book  
And from these many mozzling marks  
The school boy names them 'writing larks'  
Bum-barrels twit on bush and tree  
Scarse bigger then a bumble bee

And in a white thorn's leafy rest  
It builds its curious pudding-nest  
Wi hole beside as if a mouse  
Had built the little barrel house  
Toiling full many a lining feather  
And bits of grey tree moss together  
Amid the noisey rooky park  
Beneath the firdale's branches dark  
The little golden crested wren  
Hangs up his glowing nest agen  
And sticks it to the furry leaves  
As martins theirs beneath the eaves  
The old hens leave the roost betimes  
And o'er the garden pailing climbs  
To scrat the garden's fresh turnd soil  
And if unwatchd his crops to spoil...

#### *Notes*

lares = beds (?)

smell stocks = either wood anemone or cuckoo flower (aka lady-smock)

frail = flail

bum-barrels = long-tailed tits

## **Summer**



### ***From June***

Now Summer is in flower and Nature's hum  
Is never silent round her bounteous bloom  
Insects as small as dust have never done  
With glittering dance and reeling in the sun  
And green wood-fly and blossom-haunting bee  
Are never weary of their melody...

...The ploughman sweats along the fallow vales  
And down the sun-cracked furrow slowly trails  
Oft seeking when athirst the brook's supply  
Where brushing eagerly the bushes by  
For coolest water he disturbs the rest  
Of ring-dove brooding o'er its idle nest  
The shepherd's leisure hours are over now  
No more he loiters 'neath the hedge-row bough  
On shadow-pillowed banks and lolling stile  
The wilds must lose their summer friend awhile.  
With whistle, barking dogs and chiding scold  
He drives the bleating sheep from fallow fold  
To wash-pools where the willow shadows lean



Dashing them in their stained coats to clean  
Then on the sunny sward when dry again  
He brings them homeward to the clipping pen  
Of hurdles formed where elm or sycamore  
Shut out the sun – or to some threshing-floor



***From July***

Noon gathers wi its blistering breath  
Around and day dyes still as death  
The breeze is stopt the lazy bough  
Hath not a leaf that dances now  
The totter grass upon the hill  
And spiders' threads is hanging still  
The feathers dropt from morehens' wings  
Upon the water's surface clings  
As stedfast and as heavy seem  
As stones beneath them in the stream  
Hawkweed and groundsel's fairey downs  
Unruffld keep their seeding crowns  
And in the oven heated air  
Not one light thing is floating there  
Save that to the earnest eye  
The restless heat swims twittering bye  
The swine run restless down the street  
Anxious some pond or ditch to meet  
From day's hot swoonings to retire  
Wallowing in the weeds and mire...

...When the sun is sinking down  
And dyes more deep the shadows brown  
And gradual into slumber glooms  
How sweet the village evening comes  
To weary hinds from toil releasd  
And panting sheep and torturd beast  
The shepherd long wi heat opprest  
Betakes him to his cottage rest  
And his tird dog that plods along  
Wi panting breath and lolling tongue  
Runs eager as the brook appears  
And dashes in head over ears

*Note*

totter grass = quaking grass



## Noon

All how silent and how still  
Nothing heard but yonder mill  
While the dazzled eye surveys  
All around a liquid blaze  
And amid the scorching gleams  
If we earnest look it seems  
As if crooked bits of glass  
Seemed repeatedly to pass  
Oh for a puffing breeze to blow  
But breezes are all strangers now  
Not a twig is seen to shake  
Nor the smallest bent to quake  
From the river's muddy side  
Not a curve is seen to glide  
And no longer on the stream  
Watching lies the silver bream  
Forcing from repeated springs  
Verges in successive rings  
Bees are faint and cease to hum  
Birds are overpowerd and dumb  
Rural voices all are mute  
Tuneless lie the pipe and flute  
Shepherds with their panting sheep  
In the swaliest corner creep  
And from the tormenting heat  
All are wishing to retreat  
Huddled up in grass and flowers  
Mowers wait for cooler hours  
And the cow-boy seeks the sedge  
Ramping in the woodland hedge  
While his cattle o'er the vales  
Scamper with uplifted tails  
Others not so wild and mad  
That can better bear the gad  
Underneath the hedge-row lunge  
Or if nigh in waters plunge  
Oh to see how flowers are took  
How it grieves me when I look  
Ragged-robins once so pink  
Now are turnd as black as ink  
And the leaves being scorched so much  
Even crumble at the touch  
Drowking lies the meadow-sweet  
Flopping down beneath one's feet  
While to all the flowers that blow  
If in open air they grow  
Th' injurious deed alike is done

By the hot relentless sun  
E'en the dew is parched up  
From the teasel's jointed cup  
O poor birds where must ye fly  
Now your water-pots are dry?  
If ye stay upon the heath  
Ye'll be choakd and clammd to death  
Therefore leave the shadeless goss  
Seek the spring-head lined with moss  
There your little feet may stand  
Safely printing on the sand  
While in full possession where  
Purling eddies ripple clear  
You with ease and plenty blest  
Sip the coolest and the best  
Then away and wet your throats  
Cheer me with your warbling notes  
T'will hot noon the more revive  
While I wander to contrive  
For myself a place as good  
In the middle of a wood  
There aside some mossy bank  
Where the grass in bunches rank  
Lifts its down on spindles high  
Shall be where I'll choose to lie  
Fearless of the things that creep  
There I'll think and there I'll sleep  
Caring not to stir at all  
Till the dew begins to fall

*Notes*

bent = grass stalk  
swaliest = shadiest  
drowking = drooping  
clammd = parched  
goss = gorse



**Beans in Blossom**

The south-west wind – how pleasant in the face  
It breathes while sauntering in a musing pace  
I roam these new ploughed fields or by the side  
Of this old wood where happy birds abide  
And the rich blackbird through his golden bill  
Utters wild music when the rest are still  
Luscious the scent comes of the blossomed bean  
As o'er the path in rich disorder lean  
Its stalks when bees in busy rows and toils  
Load home luxuriantly their yellow spoils

The herd-cows toss the molehills in their play  
And often stand the stranger's steps at bay  
Mid clover blossoms red and tawny white  
Strong scented with the summer's warm delight



***From Summer Evening*** (1820)

Bats flit by in hood and cowl  
Through the barn-hole pops the owl  
From the hedge in drowsy hum  
Heedless buzzing beetles bum  
Haunting every bushy place  
Flopping in the labourer's face  
Now the snail hath made his ring  
And the moth with snowy wing  
Circles round in winding whirls  
Through sweet evening's sprinkled pearls  
On each nodding rush besprent  
Dancing on from bent to bent  
Now to downy grasses clung  
Resting for a while he's hung  
Strong to ferry o'er the stream  
Vanishing as flies a dream  
Playful still his hours to keep  
Till his time has come to sleep

*Note*

bent = grass stalk



***Summer Evening*** (from Manuscript Poems)

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



## **The Wheat Ripening**

What time the wheat-field tinges rusty brown  
And barley bleaches in its mellow grey  
Tis sweet some smooth mown baulk to wander down  
Or cross the fields on footpath's narrow way  
Just in the mealy light of waking day  
As glittering dewdrops moist the maiden's gown  
And sparkling bounces from her nimble feet  
Journeying to milking from the neighbouring town  
Making life light with song – and it is sweet  
To mark the grazing herds and list the clown  
Urge on his ploughing team with cheering calls  
And merry shepherd's whistling toils begun  
And hoarse tongued bird-boy whose unceasing calls  
Join the lark's ditty to the rising sun

### *Notes*

baulk = a strip of grass between ploughed fields

clown = rustic, farm labourer

bird boy = boy who frightens birds away from crops



## **From August**

The barley's beard is grey and wheat is brown  
And wakens toil betimes to leave the town  
The reapers leave their beds before the sun  
And gleaners follow when home toils are done  
To pick the littered ear the reaper leaves  
And glean in open fields among the sheaves  
The ruddy child nursed in the lap of care  
In toils rude ways to do its little share  
Beside its mother poddles oer the land  
Sun burnt and stooping with a weary hand  
Picking its tiney glean of corn or wheat  
While crackling stubbles wound its legs and feet  
Full glad it often is to sit awhile  
Upon a smooth green baulk to ease its toil  
And feign would spend an idle hour to play  
With insects, strangers to the moiling day  
Creeping about each rush and grassy stem  
And often wishes it was one of them...

...When day declines and labour meets repose  
The bawling boy his evening journey goes  
At toil's unwearied call the first and last  
He drives his horses to their night's repast  
In dewey close or meadow to sojourn

And often ventures on his still return  
O'er garden pales or orchard walls to hie  
When sleep's safe key hath locked up danger's eye  
All but the mastiff watching in the dark  
Who snuffs and knows him and forbears to bark  
With fearful haste he climbs each loaded tree  
And picks for prizes which the ripest be  
Pears plumbs or filberts covered o'er in leams  
While the pale moon creeps high in peaceful dreams  
And o'er his harvest theft in jealous light  
Fills empty shadows with the power to fright  
And owlet screaming as it bounces nigh  
That from some barn hole pops and hurries bye  
Scard at the cat upon her nightly watch  
For rats that come for dew upon the thatch  
He hears the noise and trembling to escape  
While every object grows a dismal shape  
Drops from the tree in fancy's swiftest dread  
By ghosts pursued and scampers home to bed  
Quick tumbling oer the mossy mouldering wall  
And looses half his booty in the fall  
Where soon as ere the morning opes its eyes  
The restless hogs will happen on the prize  
And crump adown the mellow and the green  
And makes all seem as nothing ne'er had been

*Notes*

moiling = full of toil, wearisome

leam = husk (of a nut)



**A Gloomy Day in Summer**

A dull gloom hangs above the peaceful fields  
And in the moody mist the houses sleep  
Still as if tenantless – the vapour shields  
The heavens like a secret that would keep  
The doom sealed over our dull hours of sleep  
The evening comes as something not forgiven  
The clouds hang lowly but forbear to weep  
Noontide and evening hold the balance even  
And gloom shuts Hope's eyes from the sight of Heaven

## Autumn



### Autumn Morning

The autumn morning waked by many a gun  
Throws o'er the fields her many-coloured light  
Wood wildly touched close-tanned and stubbles dun  
A motley paradise for earth's delight  
Clouds ripple as the darkness breaks to light  
And clover fields are hid with silver mist  
One shower of cobwebs o'er the surface spread  
And threads of silk in strange disorder twist  
Round every leaf and blossom's bottly head  
Hares in the drowning herbage scarcely steal  
But on the battered pathway squat abed  
And by the cart-rut nip their morning meal  
Look where we may the scene is strange and new  
And every object wears a changing hue

*Note*

bottly = close-packed



### Autumn

I love the fitful gust that shakes  
The casement all the day  
And from the glossy elm tree takes  
The faded leaves away  
Twirling them by the window pane  
With thousand others down the lane

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

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

The feather from the raven's breast  
Falls on the stubble lea

The acorns near the old crow's nest  
Drop pattering down the tree  
The grunting pigs that wait for all  
Scramble and hurry where they fall

*Note*

cottage rig = ridge of roof

↑

### **From September**

From night's dull prison comes the duck  
Waddling eager thro the muck  
Squeezing thro the orchard pales  
Where morning's bounty rarely fails  
Eager gobbling as they pass  
Dew worms thro the padded grass  
Where blushing apples round and red  
Load down the boughs and pat the head  
Of longing maid that hither goes  
To hang on lines the drying cloaths  
Who views them oft with tempted eye  
And steals one as she passes bye...

...A few whom waning toil reprieves  
Thread the forest's sea of leaves  
Where the pheasant loves to hide  
And the darkest glooms abide  
Beneath the old oaks mossd and grey  
Whose shadows seem as old as they  
Where time hath many seasons won  
Since aught beneath them saw the sun.  
Within these brambly solitudes  
The ragged noisy boy intrudes  
To gather nuts that ripe and brown  
As soon as shook will patter down  
Thus harvest ends its busy reign  
And leaves the fields their peace again

↑

### **Nutting**

The Sun had stooped his westward clouds to win  
Like weary traveler seeking for an inn  
When from the hazelly wood we glad descried  
The ivied gateway by the pasture side  
Long had we sought for nuts amid the shade  
Where Silence fled the rustle that we made



When torn by briars and brushed by sedges rank  
We left the wood and on the velvet bank  
Of short sward pasture-ground we sat us down  
To shell our nuts before we reached the town  
The near-hand stubble-field with mellow glower  
Showed the dimmed blaze of poppies still in flower  
And sweet the mole-hills were we sat upon  
Again the thyme's in bloom but where is Pleasure gone?



### **Autumn**

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

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

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

#### *Notes*

bents = grass stalks

gossamers twitter = spiders' webs glitter



### **Autumn Change**

The leaves of autumn drop by twos and threes  
And the black cloud hung o'er the old low church  
Is fixed as is a rock that never stirs  
But look again and you may well perceive  
The weathercock is in another sky  
And the cloud passing leaves the blue behind

Crimson and yellow blotched with iron-brown  
The autumn tans and variegates the leaves  
The nuts are ripe in woods about the town  
Russet the cleared fields where the bindweed weaves  
Round stubbles and still flowers – the trefoil seeds  
And troubles all the lands from rig to furrow  
There's nothing left but rubbish and foul weeds

I love to see the rabbit's snug-made burrow  
Under the old hedge-bank or huge mossed oak  
Claspt fast with ivy – there the rabbit breeds  
Where the kite peeews and the ravens croak  
And hares and rabbits at their leisure feed  
As varying autumn through her changes runs  
Season of sudden storms and brilliant suns



### ***From October***

Oft dames in faded cloak of red or grey  
Loiters along the morning's dripping way  
Wi wicker basket on their witherd arms  
Searching the hedges of home close or farms  
Where brashy elder trees to autum fade  
Each cotter's mossy hut and garden shade  
Whose glossy berrys picturesquely weaves  
Their swathy bunches mid the yellow leaves  
Where the pert sparrow stains his little bill  
And tutling robin picks his meals at will  
Black ripening to the wan sun's misty ray  
Here the industrious huswives wend their way  
Pulling the brittle branches carefull down  
And hawking loads of berrys to the town  
Wi unpretending skill yet half divine  
To press and make their eldern berry wine  
That bottld up becomes a rousing charm  
To kindle winters icy bosom warm

#### *Note*

swathy = swarthy, dark(?)



### ***From November***

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

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

The owlet leaves her hiding-place at noon  
And flaps her grey wings in the doubling light  
The hoarse jay screams to see her out so soon  
And small birds chirp and startle with affright  
Much doth it scare the superstitious wight  
Who dreams of sorry luck and sore dismay  
While cow-boys think the day a dream of night  
And oft grow fearful on their lonely way  
Fancying that ghosts may wake and leave their graves by day

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

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

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

*Notes*

knaps = bites, gnaws(?)

wight = person

elting = muddy, damp



**Martinmass**

Tis Martinmass from rig to rig  
Ploughed fields and meadow lands are blea  
In hedge and field each restless twig  
Is dancing on the naked tree  
Flags in the dykes are bleached and brown  
Docks by its sides are dry and dead  
All but the ivy boughs are brown  
Upon each leaning dotterels head

Crimsoned with hawes the hawthorns bend  
O'er meadow dykes and rising floods  
The wild geese seek the reedy fen  
And dark the storm comes o'er the woods  
The crowds of lapwings load the air  
With buzzes of a thousand wings  
There flocks of starnels too repair  
When morning o'er the valley springs

*Notes*

rig = ridge, space between ploughed furrows

blea = bleak

dotterels = pollarded trees

starnels = starlings

**Winter**



**Signs of Winter**

'Tis winter plain the images around  
Protentious tell us of the closing year  
Short grows the stupid day – the moping fowl  
Go roost at noon. Upon the mossy barn  
The thatcher hangs and lays the frequent yaum  
Nudged close to stop the rain that drizzling falls  
With scarce one interval of sunny sky  
For weeks still leeking on that sulky gloom  
Muggy and close a doubt twixt night and day  
The sparrow rarely chirps – the thresher pale

Twanks with sharp measured raps the weary flail  
Thump after thump right tiresome to the ear  
The hedger lonesome bustles at his toil  
And shepherds trudge the fields without a song  
The cat runs races with her tail – the dog  
Leaps over the orchard hedge and knarls the grass  
The swine run round and grunt and play with straw  
Snatching out hasty mouthfuls from the stack  
Sudden upon the elm tree tops the crows  
Unceremonious visit pays and croaks  
Then swoops away. From mossy barn the owl  
Bobs hasty out – wheels round and scared as soon  
As hastily retires – the ducks grow wild  
And from the muddy pond fly up and wheel  
A circle round the village and soon tired  
Plunge in the pond again. The maids in haste  
Snatch from the orchard hedge the mizled cloaths  
And laughing hurry in to keep them dry

*Notes*

yaum = layer of straw for thatch  
knarls = gnaws  
mizled = damp from drizzle



**From: Address to Plenty in Winter**

Toiling in the naked fields  
Where no bush a shelter yields  
Needy Labour dithering stands  
Beats and blows his numbing hands  
And upon the crumping snows  
Stamps in vain to warm his toes  
Leaves are fled that once had power  
To resist a summer shower  
And the wind so piercing blows  
Winnowing small the drifting snows  
The summer shade of loaded bough  
Would vainly boast a shelter now  
Piercing snows so searching fall  
They sift a passage through them all  
Though all's vain to keep him warm  
Poverty must brave the storm  
Friendship none its aid to lend  
Health alone his only friend  
Granting leave to live in pain  
Giving strength to toil in vain  
To be while winter's horrors last  
The sport of every pelting blast

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



### **Emmonsail's Heath in Winter**

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

#### *Notes*

oddling = single, occasional

closen = pastures

bumbarrels = long-tailed tits



### **Wood Pictures in Winter**

The woodland swamps with mosses varified  
And bullrush forests bowing by the side  
Of shagroot sallows that snug shelter make  
For the coy more-hen in her bushy lake  
Into whose tide a little runnel weaves  
Such charms for silence through the choking leaves

And whimpering melodies that but intrude  
As lullabies to ancient solitude  
–The wood-grass plats which last year left behind  
Weaving their feathery lightness to the wind  
Look now as picturesque amid the scene  
As when the summer glossed their stems in green  
While hasty hare brunts through the creepy gap  
Seeks their soft beds and squats in safety's lap

*Notes*

sallows = willows

plats = plots

brunts through = pushes or barges through



**The Winter's Spring**

The winter comes I walk alone  
I want no bird to sing  
To those who keep their hearts their own  
The winter is the spring  
No flowers to please – no bees to hum  
The coming spring's already come

I never want the Christmas rose  
To come before its time  
The seasons each as God bestows  
Are simple and sublime  
I love to see the snowstorm hing  
'Tis but the winter garb of spring

I never want the grass to bloom  
The snowstorm's best in white  
I love to see the tempest come  
And love its piercing light  
The dazzled eyes that love to cling  
O'er snow-white meadows sees the spring

I love the snow the crumpling snow  
That hangs on everything  
It covers everything below  
Like white dove's brooding wing  
A landscape to the aching sight  
A vast expanse of dazzling light

It is the foliage of the woods  
That winters bring the dress  
White Easter of the year in bud  
That makes the winter Spring  
The frost and snow his posies bring  
Nature's white spurts of the spring

*Note*

hing = hang; threaten or portend



### **Snow Storm**

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

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

*Note*

beesom = broom





## **The Old Year**

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

All nothing everywhere  
Mists we on mornings see  
Have more of substance when they're here  
And more of form than he  
He was a friend by every fire  
In every cot and hall  
A guest to every heart's desire  
And now he's nought at all

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

*Note*

cot = cottage



## **From January**

The thresher first thro darkness deep  
Awakes the morning's winter sleep  
Scaring the owlet from her prey  
Long before she dreams of day  
That blinks above head on the snow  
Watching the mice that squeaks below  
And foddering boys sojourn again  
By rime hung hedge and frozen plain  
Shuffling thro the sinking snows  
Blowing his fingers as he goes  
To where the stock in bellowings hoarse

Call for their meals in dreary close  
And print full many a hungry track  
Round circling hedge that guards the stack  
Wi higgling tug he cuts the hay  
And bears the forkful loads away  
And morn and evening daily throws  
The little heaps upon the snows...

...(Schoolboys) hurrying rambles eager take  
To skait upon the meadow lake  
Scaring the snipe from her retreat  
From shelving banks' unfrozen seat  
Or running brook where icy spars  
Which the pale sunlight specks wi stars  
Shoots crizzling oer the restless tide  
To many a likness petrified  
Were fancy often stoops to pore  
And turns again to wonder more  
The more-hen too wi fear opprest  
Starts from her reedy sheltered rest  
Bustling to get from foes away  
And scarcely flies more fast than they  
Skaiting along wi curving springs  
Wi arms spread out like herons' wings  
They race away for pleasure's sake  
A hunter's speed along the lake  
And oft neath trees where ice is thin  
Meet narrow scapes from breaking in

#### *Notes*

foddering boys = boys who feed the livestock  
higgling = slow and laborious; working to and fro (?)  
crizzling = freezing, crystallizing

## **Birds and Animals**



### **Autumn Birds**

The wild duck startles like a sudden thought  
And heron slow as if it might be caught  
The flopping crows on weary wings go by  
And grey beard jackdaws noising as they fly  
The crowds of starnels whizz and hurry by  
And darken like a clod the evening sky  
The larks like thunder rise and suthy round  
Then drop and nestle in the stubble ground  
The wild swan hurries hight and noises loud

With white neck peering to the evening cloud  
The weary rooks to distant woods are gone  
With lengths of tail the magpie winnows on  
To neighbouring tree and leaves the distant crow  
While small birds nestle in the edge below

*Note*

starnels = starlings

suthy = sigh, rustle



### **The Thrush's Nest**

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



### **The Fern Owl's Nest (i.e. Nightjar)**

The weary woodman rocking home beneath  
His tightly banded faggot wonders oft  
While crossing over the furze-crowded heath  
To hear the fern owl's cry that whews aloft  
In circling whirls and often by his head  
Whizzes as quick as thought and ill and rest  
As through the rustling ling with heavy tread  
He goes nor heeds he tramples near its nest  
That underneath the furze or squatting thorn  
Lies hidden on the ground and teasing round  
That lonely spot she wakes her jarring noise  
To the unheeding waste till mottled morn  
Fills the red East with daylight's coming sounds  
And the heath's echoes mock the herding boys

*Note*

ling = heather



### **The Firetail's Nest** (i.e. Redstart)

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

*Note*

bluecap = blue tit



### **The Raven's Nest**

Upon the collar of a hugh old oak  
Year after year boys mark a curious nest  
Of twigs made up a faggot near in size  
And boys to reach it try all sorts of schemes  
But not a twig to reach with hand or foot  
Sprouts from the pillared trunk and as to try  
To swarm the massy bulk tis all in vain  
They scarce one effort make to hitch them up  
But down they sluther soon as ere they try  
So long hath been their dwelling there – old men  
When passing bye will laugh and tell the ways  
They had when boys to climb that very tree  
And as it so would seem that very nest  
That ne'er was missing from that selfsame spot  
A single year in all their memorys  
And they will say that the two birds are now  
The very birds that owned the dwelling then  
Some think it strange yet certainty's at loss  
And cannot contradict it so they pass  
As old birds living the wood's patriarchs  
Old as the oldest men so famed and known  
That even men will thirst onto the fame  
Of boys and get at schemes that now and then  
May captivate a young one from the tree  
With iron clamms and bands adventuring up  
The mealy trunk or else by waggon ropes

Slung over the hugh grains and so drawn up  
By those at bottom one ascends secure  
With foot rope stirruped – still a perillous way  
So perillous that one and only one  
In memorys of the oldest men was known  
To wear his boldness to intention's end  
And reach the raven's nest – and thence achieved  
A theme that wonder treasured for surprise  
By every cottage hearth the village through  
Not yet forgot though other darers come  
With daring times that scale the steeple's top  
And tie their kerchiefs to the weather cock  
As trophies that the dangerous deed was done  
Yet even now in these adventurous days  
No one is bold enough to dare the way  
Up the old monstrous oak where every spring  
Finds the two ancient birds at their old task  
Repairing the hugh nest – where still they live  
Through changes winds and storms and are secure  
And like a landmark in the chronicles  
Of village memorys treasured up yet lives  
The hugh old oak that wears the ravens nest

*Notes*

hugh = huge

clamms = clamps(?)

grains = forks of a tree



**The Sand Martin**

Thou hermit haunter of the lonely glen  
And common wild and heath the desolate face  
Of rude waste landscapes far away from men  
Where frequent quarries give thee dwelling place  
With strangest taste and labour undeterred  
Drilling small holes along the quarry's side  
More like the haunts of vermin than a bird  
And seldom by the nesting boy descried  
I've seen thee far away from all thy tribe  
Flirting about the unfrequented sky  
And felt a feeling that I can't describe  
Of lone seclusion and a hermit joy  
To see thee circle round nor go beyond  
That lone heath and its melancholy pond



## Crows in Spring

The crow will tumble up and down  
At the first sight of spring  
And in old trees around the town  
Brush winter from its wing

No longer flapping far away  
To naked fen they fly  
Chill fare as on a winter's day  
But field and valley nigh

Where swains are stirring out to plough  
And woods are just at hand  
They seek the upland's sunny brow  
And strut from land to land

And often flap their sooty wing  
And sturt to neighbouring tree  
And seem to try all ways to sing  
And almost speak in glee

The ploughman hears and turns his head  
Above to wonder why  
And there a new nest nearly made  
Proclaims the winter by

### *Notes*

swain = country youth

sturt = move suddenly



## From **Badger**

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

He turns about to face the loud uproar  
And drives the rebels to their very door  
The frequent stone is hurled where'er they go  
When badgers fight then every one's a foe  
The dogs are clapt and urged to join the fray  
The badger turns and drives them all away  
Though scarcely half as big, demure and small  
He fights with dogs for bones and beats them all  
The heavy mastiff savage in the fray  
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away  
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold  
The badger grins and never leaves his hold  
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels  
And bites them through – the drunkard swears and reels



### **From The Hedgehog**

The hedgehog hides beneath the rotten hedge  
And makes a great round nest of grass and sedge  
Or in a bush or in a hollow tree  
And many often stoop and say they see  
Him roll and fill his prickles full of crabs  
And creep away and where the magpie dabs  
His wing at muddy dyke in aged root  
He makes a nest and fills it full of fruit  
On the hedge bottom hunts for crabs and sloes  
And whistles like a cricket as he goes  
It rolls up like a ball or shapeless hog  
When gipsies hunt it with their noisy dog  
I've seen it in their camps – they call it sweet  
Though black and bitter and unsavoury meat

*Note*

crabs = crab-apples



### **The Marten**

The marten cat long shagged of courage good  
Of weasel shape a dweller in the wood  
With badger hair long shagged and darting eyes  
And lower than the common cat in size  
Small head and running on the stoop  
Snuffing the ground and hind parts shouldered up  
He keeps one track and hides in lonely shade  
Where print of human foot is never made

Save when the woods are cut – the beaten track  
The woodman's dog will snuff cock-tailed and black  
Red legged and spotted over either eye  
Snuffs barks and scrats the lice and passes by  
The great brown hornèd owl looks down below  
And sees the shaggy marten come and go

The marten hurries through the woodland gaps  
And poachers shoot and make his skin for caps  
When any woodmen come and pass the place  
He looks at dogs and scarcely mends his pace  
And gipsies often and birdnesting boys  
Look in the hole and hear a hissing noise  
They climb the tree such noise they never heard  
And think the great owl is a foreign bird  
When the grey owl her young ones cloaked in down  
Seizes the boldest boy and drives him down  
They try agen and pelt to start the fray  
The grey owl comes and drives them all away  
And leaves the marten twisting round his den  
Left free from boys and dogs and noisy men

*Notes*

lice = woodlice

pelt = throw (stones etc)



**Clock a Clay** (i.e. ladybird)

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

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

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



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

*Note*

pips (or peeps) = corolla, petals

## **Trees and plants**

[↑](#)

### ***From May***

My wild field catalogue of flowers  
Grows in my rhymes as thick as showers  
Tedious and long as they may be  
To some, they never weary me  
The wood and mead and field of grain  
I could hunt oer and oer again  
And talk to every blossom wild  
Fond as a parent to a child

And cull them in my childish joy  
By swarms and swarms and never cloy

[↑](#)

### **Water-lilies**

The water-lilies on the meadow stream  
    Again spread out their leaves of glossy green  
And some yet young of a rich copper gleam  
    Scarce open in the sunny stream are seen  
Throwing a richness upon leisure's eye  
    That thither wanders in a vacant joy  
While on the sloping banks luxuriantly  
    Tending of horse and cow the chubby boy  
In self-delighted whims will often throw  
    Pebbles to hit and splash their sunny leaves  
Yet quickly dry again they shine and glow  
    Like some rich vision that his eye deceives  
Spreading above the water day by day  
In dangerous deeps yet out of danger's way



## ***From Spear Thistle***

Where the broad sheepwalk bare and brown  
[Yields] scant grass pining after showers  
And winds go fanning up and down  
The little strawy bents and nodding flowers  
There the huge thistle spurred with many thorns  
The suncrack't upland's russet swells adorns

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

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

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

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

### *Notes*

bents = grass stems

swopping = swooping

copple = tufted



## Wood Rides

Who hath not felt the influence that so calms  
The weary mind in summer's sultry hours  
When wandering thickest woods beneath the arms  
Of ancient oaks and brushing nameless flowers  
That verge the little ride – who hath not made  
A minute's waste of time and sat him down  
Upon a pleasant swell to gaze awhile  
On crowding ferns bluebells and hazel leaves  
And showers of ladysmocks so called by toil  
When boys sprout gathering sit on stulps and weave  
Garlands while barkmen pill the fallen tree  
–Then mid the green variety to start  
Who hath [not] met that mood from turmoil free  
And felt a placid joy refreshed at heart

### *Notes*

sprout = twig  
stulps = stumps  
pill = peel



## The Crab-Tree

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

### *Note*

pooty = snail



### **The Shepherd's Tree**

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



### **From The Fallen Elm**

Old elm that murmured in our chimney top  
The sweetest anthem autumn ever made  
And into mellow whispering calms would drop  
When showers fell on thy many coloured shade  
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made  
While darkness came as it would strangle light  
With the black tempest of a winter night  
That rocked thee like a cradle in thy root  
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid  
Thy strength without while all within was mute  
It seasoned comfort to our hearts' desire  
We felt thy kind protection like a friend  
And edged our chairs up closer to the fire  
Enjoying comfort that was never penned



### **Firwood**

The fir trees taper into twigs and wear  
The rich blue green of summer all the year  
Softening the roughest tempest almost calm  
And offering shelter ever still and warm  
To the small path that towels underneath  
Where loudest winds – almost as summer's breath—  
Scarce fan the weed that lingers green below  
When others out of doors are lost in frost and snow

And sweet the music trembles on the ear  
As the wind suthers through each tiny spear  
Makeshifts for leaves and yet so rich they show  
Winter is almost summer where they grow

*Notes*

towels = trails, winds(?)  
suthers = rustles

## Scenes



### ***From Rural Morning***

Industry's bustling din once more devours  
The soothing peace of morning's early hours  
The grunt of hogs freed from their nightly dens  
And constant cacklings of new-laying hens  
And ducks and geese that clamorous joys repeat  
The splashing comforts of the pond to meet  
And chirping sparrows dropping from the eaves  
For offal kernels that the poultry leaves  
Oft signal-calls of danger chittering high  
At skulking cats and dogs approaching nigh  
And lowing steers that hollow echoes wake  
Around the yard their nightly fast to break  
As from each barn the lumping flail rebounds  
In mingling concert with the rural sounds  
While oer the distant fields more faintly creep  
The murmuring bleatings of unfolding sheep  
And ploughman's callings that more hoarse proceed  
Where industry still urges labour's speed  
The bellowing of cows with udders full  
That wait the welcome halloo of 'come mull'  
And rumbling waggons deafening again  
Rousing the dust along the narrow lane  
And cracking whips and shepherd's hooting cries  
From woodland echoes urging sharp replies.

*Note*

unfolding sheep = sheep leaving the fold



## **The Morning Wind**

There's more than music in this early wind  
Awaking like a bird refreshed from sleep  
And joy what Adam might in Eden find  
When he with angels did communion keep  
It breathes all balm and incense from the sky  
Blessing the husbandman with freshening powers  
Joy's manna from its wings doth fall and lie  
Harvests for early wakers with the flowers  
The very grass in joy's devotion moves  
Cowslips in adoration and delight  
This way and that bow to the breath they love  
Of the young winds that with the dew pearls play  
Till smoking chimneys sicken the young light  
And feeling's fairy visions fade away



## **Heavy Dew**

The night hath hung the morning smile in showers  
The kingcups burnished all so rich within  
Hang down their slender branches on the grass  
The bumble-bees on the huge thistle flowers  
Cling as half sleeping yet and motion lack  
Not even stirring as I closely pass  
Save that they lift their legs above their backs  
In trembling dread when touched – yet still they lye  
Fearful of danger without power to fly  
The shepherd makes a mort of crooked tracks  
His dog half-drowned and dripping to the skin  
Stops oft and shakes his shaggy hide in vain  
Wading through grass like rivers to the chin  
Then snorts and barks and rushes on again

### *Note*

mort = large number



## The Flood

1.

On Lolham Brigs in wild and lonely mood  
I've seen the winter floods their gambols play  
Through each old arch that trembled while I stood  
Bent o'er its wall to watch the dashing spray  
As their old stations would be washed away  
Crash came the ice against the joints and then  
A shudder jarred the arches – yet once more  
It breasted raving waves and stood again  
To wait the shock as stubborn as before  
White foam brown crested with the russet soil  
As washed from new ploughed lands would dart beneath  
Then round and round a thousand eddies boil  
On t'other side – then pause as if for breath  
One minute – and engulfed like life in death

2.

Whose wrecked stains dart on the floods away  
More swift than shadows in a stormy day  
Straws trail and turn and steady – all in vain  
The engulfing arches shoot them quickly through  
The feather dances flutters and again  
Darts through the deepest dangers still afloat  
Seeming as fairies whisked it from the view  
And danced it o'er the waves as pleasures boat  
Light hearted as a merry thought in May  
Trays upturned bushes fence-demolished rails  
Loaded with weeds in sluggish motions stray  
Like water monsters lost, each winds and trails  
Till near the arches – then as in affright  
It plunges reels and shudders out of sight

3.

Waves trough rebound and fury boil again  
Like plunging monsters rising underneath  
Who at the top curl up a shaggy main  
A moment catching at a surer breath  
Then plunging headlong down and down and on  
Each following boil the shadow of the last  
And other monsters rise when those are gone  
Crest their fringed waves plunge onward and are past  
The chill air comes around me ocean-blea  
From bank to bank the water-strife is spread  
Strange birds like snow-spots o'er the huzzing sea  
Hang where the wild duck hurried past and fled  
On roars the flood all restless to be free  
Like trouble wandering to eternity

*Note*

trays = hurdles, fence posts  
ocean-blea = bleak or cold as the ocean  
huzzing = hissing, noisy

↑

### ***From A Rhapsody***

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

The sunshine's gone and now an April evening  
Commences with a dim and mackerel sky  
Gold light and woolpacks in the west are leaving  
And leaden streaks their splendid place supply  
Sheep ointment seems to daub the dead-hued sky  
And night shuts up the lightsomeness of day  
All dark and absent as a corpse's eye  
Flower tree and bush like all the shadows grey  
In leaden hue of desolation fade away

*Note*

tottergrass = quaking grass

↑

### ***Mist in the Meadows***

The evening o'er the meadow seems to stoop  
More distant lessens the diminished spire  
Mist in the hollows reaks and curdles up  
Like fallen clouds that spread – and things retire  
Less seen and less – the shepherd passes near  
And little distant most grotesquely shades  
As walking without legs – lost to his knees  
As through the rawky creeping smoke he wades  
Now half-way up the arches disappear  
And small the bits of sky that glimmer through  
Then trees loose all but tops – I meet the fields  
And now the indistinctness passes by  
The shepherd all his length is seen again  
And further on the village meets the eye



*Notes*

reaks = steams

rawky = foggy, damp and cold

↑

### **Nightwind**

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

*Notes*

glabber = chatter

flaze = smoky flame

↑

### **From A Sunday with Shepherds and Herdboys**

The shepherds and the herding swains  
Keep their sabbaths on the plains  
For them the church bells vainly call  
Fields are their church and house and all  
They'll lie and catch the passing sound  
That comes from steeples shining round  
Enjoying in the service time  
The happy bells' delightful chime  
And if they sit on rising ground  
To view the landscape spreading round  
Swimming from the following eye  
In greens and stems of every dye  
O'er wood and vale and fen's smooth lap  
Like a richly coloured map  
Square plots of clover red and white  
Scented with summer's warm delight  
And cinquefoil of a fresher stain  
And different greens of warmed grain  
Wheat spindles bursting into ear

And browning gently – grasses sere  
In swathy seed-pods dried by heat  
Rustling when brushed by passing feet  
And beans and peas of deadening green  
And cornland's ribbon strips between  
And stretching villages that lie  
Like light spots in a deeper sky  
And from the fields they'll often steal  
The green peas for a Sunday meal  
And in snug nooks their huts beside  
The gipsy blazes they provide  
Shaking the rotten from the trees  
While some sit round to shell the peas  
Or pick from hedges pilfered wood  
To boil on props their stolen food  
Sitting on stones or heaps of brakes  
Each of the wild repast partakes  
Telling to pass the hours along  
Tales that to fitter days belong  
While one within his scrip contains  
A shattered Bible's thumbed remains  
O'er whose blank leaf with pious care  
A host of names is scribbled there



### **The Harvest Morning**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Notes*

teem = pour out

barley-horn = barleycorn

bevering = drinking

horn = drinking-vessel



***From The Fens***

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

...Here's little save the river scene  
And grounds of oats in rustling green  
And crowded growth of wheat and beans  
That with the hope of plenty leans  
And cheers the farmer's gazing brow  
Who lives and triumphs in the plough  
One sometimes meets a pleasant sward  
Of swarthy grass and quickly marred  
The plough soon turns it into brown  
And when again one rambles down  
The path, small hillocks burning lie  
And smoke beneath a burning sky  
Green paddocks have but little charms  
With gain the merchandise of farms  
And muse and marvel where we may

Gain mars the landscape every day  
The meadow grass turned up and copt  
The trees to stumpy dotterels lopt  
The hearth with fuel to supply  
For rest to smoke and chatter bye  
Giving the joy of home delights  
The warmest mirth on coldest nights  
And so for gain that joy's repay  
Change cheats the landscape every day  
Nor trees nor bush about it grows  
That from the hatchet can repose  
And the horizon stooping smiles  
O'er treeless fens of many miles  
Spring comes and goes and comes again  
And all is nakedness and fen

*Note*

copt = heaped

dotterels = pollarded trees

↑

### ***From Rural Evening***

The sun now sinks behind the woodland green  
And twittering spangles glow the leaves between  
So bright and dazzling on the eye it plays  
As if noon's heat had kindled to a blaze  
But soon it dims in red and heavier hues  
And shows wild fancy cheated in her views  
A mist-like moisture rises from the ground  
And deeper blueness stains the distant round  
The eye each moment as it gazes o'er  
Still loses objects which it mark'd before  
The woods at distance changing like to clouds  
And spire-points croodling under evening's shrouds  
Till forms of things and hues of leaf and flower  
In deeper shadows as by magic power  
With light and all in scarce-perceiv'd decay  
Put on mild evening's sober garb of grey

Now in the sleepy gloom that blackens round  
Dies many a lulling hum of rural sound  
From cottage door, farm-yard and dusty lane  
Where home the cart-house tolters with the swain  
Or padded holm where village boys resort  
Bawling enraptur'd o'er their evening sport  
Till night awakens superstition's dread  
And drives them prisoners to a restless bed...

### *Notes*

twittering = glittering

croodling = huddling

tolters = struggles, moves with difficulty

padded = marked with paths

holm = river island, land once covered with water

## **People**



### **Farm Breakfast**

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

### *Notes*

rusty = discoloured; rancid

fitches = sides of bacon



### **From The Cottager**

True as the church clock hand the hour pursues  
He plods about his toils and reads the news  
And at the blacksmith's shop his hour will stand  
To talk of 'Lunun' as a foreign land  
For from his cottage door in peace or strife  
He ne'er went fifty miles in all his life  
His knowledge with old notions still combined  
Is twenty years behind the march of mind  
He views new knowledge with suspicious eyes  
And thinks it blasphemy to be so wise  
On steam's almighty tales he wondering looks  
As witchcraft gleaned from old blackletter books

Life gave him comfort but denied him wealth  
He toils in quiet and enjoys his health  
He smokes a pipe at night and drinks his beer  
And runs no scores on tavern screens to clear

*Notes*

blackletter books = books in old Gothic script  
runs no scores = has no debts



**The Shepherd's Fire**

On the rude heath yclad in furze and ling  
And oddling thorn that thick and prickly grows  
Shielding the shepherd when the rude wind blows  
And boys that sit right merry in a ring  
Round fires upon a molehill toasting sloes  
And crabs that froth and frizzle on the coals  
Loud is the gabble and the laughter loud  
The rabbits scarce dare peep from out their holes  
Unwont to mix with such a noisey crowd  
Some run to eke the fire – while many a cloud  
Of smoke curls up, some on their haunches squat  
With mouth for bellows puffing till it flares  
Or if that fail one fans his napless hat  
And when the feast is done they squabble for their shares

*Notes*

ling = heather  
oddling = single, solitary  
crabs = crab-apples



**Happiness of Evening**

The winter wind with strange and fearful gust  
Stirs the dark wood and in the lengthy night  
Howls in the chimney top while fear's mistrust  
Listens the noise by the small glimmering light  
Of cottage hearth where warm a circle sits  
Of happy dwellers telling morts of tales  
Where some long memory wakens up by fits  
Laughter and fear and over all prevails  
Wonder predominant – they sit and hear  
The very hours to minutes and the song  
Or story be the subject what it may  
Is ever found too short and never long  
While the uprising tempest loudly roars  
And boldest hearts fear stirring out of doors

*Note*

morts = large numbers

↑

***From The Woodman***

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

The early winter's morn is dark as pitch  
The wary wife from tinder brought at night  
With flint and steel and many a sturdy twitch  
Sits up in bed to strike her man a light  
And as the candle shows the rapturous sight  
Aside his wife his rosy sleeping boy  
He smacks his lips with exquisite delight  
With all a father's feelings, father's joy  
Then bids his wife good-bye and hies to his employ

His breakfast water-porridge – humble food  
A barley-crust he in his wallet flings  
On this he toils and labours in the wood  
And chops his faggot, twists his band and sings  
As happily as princes and as kings  
With all their luxury and blest is he  
Can but the little which his labour brings  
Make both ends meet and from long debts keep free  
And neat and clean preserve his numerous family

Far o'er the dreary fields the woodland lies  
Rough is the journey which he daily goes  
The woolly clouds that hang the frowning skies  
Keep winnowing down their drifting sleet and snows  
And thro' his doublet keen the north wind blows  
While hard as iron the cemented ground  
And smooth as glass the glibbed pool is froze  
His nailed boots with clenching tread rebound  
And dithering echo starts and mocks the clamping sound



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

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

What different changes winter's frowns supply  
The clown no more a loitering hour beguiles  
Nor gaping tracks the clouds along the sky  
As when buds blossom and the warm sun smiles  
And 'Lawrence wages bids' on hills and stiles  
Banks stiles and flowers and skies no longer charm  
Deep drifting snow each summer-seat defiles  
With hasty blundering step and folded arm  
He glad the stable seeks his frost-nip nose to warm

The shepherd haunts no more his spreading oak  
Nor on the sloping pond-head lies at lair  
The arbour he once wattled up is broke  
And left unworthy of his future care  
The ragged plundering stickers have been there  
And pilfer'd it away – he passes by  
His summer dwelling desolate and bare  
And ne'er so much as turns a conscious eye  
But gladly seeks his fire and shuns th' inclement sky

The scene is cloth'd in snow from morn till night  
The woodman's loth his chilly tools to seize  
The crows unroosting as he comes in sight  
Shake down the feathery burden from the trees  
To look at things around he's fit to freeze  
Scar'd from her perch the fluttering pheasant flies  
His hat and doublet whiten by degrees  
He quakes looks round and pats his hands and sighs  
And wishes to himself that the warm sun would rise

*Notes*

twitch = couch-grass (presumably used as a fire-lighter)

glibbed = polished

chittering = shivering

pies = magpies

quirking = grumbling

hurkles = crouches

waffling = woofing, barking

clown = a rustic

'Lawrence wages bids' = is idle (St Lawrence was supposed to be the patron saint of the lazy)

wattled up = made of interlaced branches

stickers = gatherers of sticks



**The Village Boy**

Free from the cottage corner see how wild  
The village boy along the pasture hies  
With every smell and sound and sight beguiled  
That round the prospect meets his wondering eye  
Now stooping eager for the cowslip-pips  
As though he'd get them all – now tired of these  
Across the flaggy brook he eager leaps  
For some new flower his happy rapture sees  
Now tearing 'mid the bushes on his knees  
On woodland banks for bluebell-flowers he creeps  
And now while looking up among the trees  
He spies a nest and down he throws his flowers  
And up he climbs with new-fed extacies  
The happiest object in the summer hours

*Notes*

cowslip pips = petals

flaggy = reedy, rushy



**From Rustic Fishing**

On Sunday mornings freed from hard employ  
How oft I mark the mischievous young boy  
With anxious haste his pole and lines provide  
For make-shifts oft crook'd pins to thread were tied  
And delve his knife with wishes ever warm  
In rotten dunghills for the grub and worm  
The harmless treachery of his hooks to bait  
Tracking the dewy grass with many a mate  
To seek the brook that down the meadows glides  
Where the grey willow shadows by its sides

Where flag and reed in wild disorder spread  
And bending bulrush bows its taper head  
And just above the surface of the floods  
Where water-lilies mount their snowy buds  
On whose broad swimming leaves of glossy green  
The shining dragon-fly is often seen  
Where hanging thorns with roots wash'd bare appear  
That shield the moor-hen's nest from year to year  
While crowding osiers mingling wild among  
Prove snug asylums to her brood when young  
Who when surpris'd by foes approaching near  
Plunge 'neath the weeping boughs and disappear  
There far from terrors that the parson brings  
Or church bell hearing when its summons rings  
Half hid in meadow-sweet and keck's high flowers  
In lonely sport they spend the Sunday hours  
Though ill supplied for fishing seem the brook  
That breaks the mead in many a stinted crook  
Oft choak'd in weeds and foil'd to find a road  
The choice retirement of the snake and toad  
Then lost in shallows dimpling restlessly  
In fluttering struggles murmuring to be free  
O'er gravel stones its depth can scarcely hide  
It runs remnant of its broken tide  
Till seemly weary of each choak'd control  
It rests collected in some gulled hole  
Scoop'd by the sudden floods when winter's snow  
Melts in confusion by a hasty thaw  
There bent in hopeful musings on the brink  
They watch their floating corks that seldom sink  
Save when a wary roach or silver bream  
Nibbles the worm as passing up the stream  
Just urging expectation's hopes to stay  
To view the dodging cork then slink away  
Still hopes keep burning with untir'd delight  
Still wobbling curves keep wavering like a bite...

*Notes*

flag = reed, rush

keck = cow parsley

stinted = kept in check by boundaries

breaks the mead = cuts through the meadow

gulled = with gullies



## **From Angling**

The morn is still and balmy – all that moves  
The trees are south gales which the angler loves  
That stirs the waveing grass in idle whirls  
And flush the cheeks and fan the jetty curls  
Of milking maidens at their morn's employ  
Who sing and wake the dewy fields to joy  
The sun just rising large and round and dim  
Keeps creeping up oer the flat meadow's brim  
As rising from the ground to run its race  
Till up it mounts and shows a ruddy face  
Now is the time the angler leaves his dreams  
In anxious movements for the silent streams  
Frighting the heron from its morning toil  
First at the river watching after coil

Now with the river's bank he winds his way  
For a choice place to spend the quiet day  
Marking its banks how varied things appear  
Now clothed in trees and bushes and now clear  
While steep the bank climbs from the water's edge  
Then almost choaked with rushes flags and sedge  
Then flat and level to the very brink  
Tracked deep by cattle running there to drink  
At length he finds a spot half shade half sun  
That scarcely curves to show the waters run  
Still clear and smooth quick he his line unlaps  
While fish leap up and loud the water claps  
Which fills his mind with pleasures of surprise  
That in the deep hole some old monster lies

### *Notes*

coil = movement

flags = reeds



## **Song**

She tied up her few things  
And laced up her shoe strings  
And put on her bonnet worn through at the crown  
Her apron tied tighter  
Than snow her caps whiter  
She lapt up her earnings and left our old town

The Dog barked again  
All the length o' his chain  
And licked her hand kindly and huffed her good bye  
Old hens prated loudly  
The Cock strutted proudly  
And the horse at the gate turned to let her go bye

The Thrasher man stopping  
The old barn floor wopping  
Wished oer the door cloth her luck and no harm  
Bees hummed round the thistle  
While the red Robins whistle  
And she just one look on the old mossy farm

'Twas Michaelmas season  
They'd got corn and pears in  
And all the Fields cleared save some ruckings and tythes  
Cote pigeon flocks muster  
Round beans shelling cluster  
And done are the whettings o' reap hooks and scythes

Next year's flowers a springing  
Will miss Jinney's singing  
She opened her Bible and turned a leaf down  
In her bosom's forewarnings  
She lapt up her earnings  
And ere the suns set 'll be in her own town

#### *Notes*

wopping = thrashing, sweeping vigorously

ruckings = stacks of hay

tythes = corn-stooks (every tenth stook set aside for tax)



#### **Country Letter**

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

and asks about you kindly as our kin  
and he with this and goody Thompson sends  
Remembrances with those of all our friends  
Father with us sends love untill he hears  
and mother she has nothing but her tears  
Yet wishes you like us in health the same  
and longs to see a letter with your name

So loving brother don't forget to write  
Old Gip lies on the hearth stone every night  
Mother can't bear to turn him out of doors  
and never noises now of dirty floors  
Father will laugh but lets her have her way  
and Gip for kindness get a double pay  
So Robin write and let us quickly see  
You don't forget old friends no more than we  
Nor let my mother have so much to blame  
To go three journeys ere your letter came



### ***From The Cellar Door***

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

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

And my strength for your strength and bar your renown  
I'd soon try your spirit by cracking your crown.  
And the cobbler he tuckt up his apron and spit  
In his hands for a burster – but devil a bit  
Would he move so as yet they made nothing of land

For there lay the knight like a whale in the sand  
Said the tinker, If I could but drink of his vein  
I should just be as strong and as stubborn again  
Push along said the toper, the cellar's adry  
There's nothing to moisten the mouth of a fly

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

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

#### *Notes*

hogshead of stingo = barrel of strong ale

pendil = a short, thick stone

Sir John/Sir Barley = "John Barleycorn", meaning ale

cag = keg

small swipes = small beer, weak ale

## **Memories and Feelings**



### **My Early Home**

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

The redbreast from the sweetbriar bush  
Dropt down to pick the worm  
On the horse-chesnut sang the thrush  
O'er the house where I was born  
The moonlight like a shower of pearls  
Fell o'er this 'bower of bliss'  
And on the bench sat boys and girls—  
My early home was this

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



### **Where She Told Her Love**

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

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

There is a small green place  
Where cowslips early curled  
Which on Sabbath day I trace  
The dearest in the world  
A little oak spreads oer it



And throws a shadow round  
A green sword close before it  
The greenest ever found  
There is not a woodland nigh nor is there a green grove  
Yet stood the fair maid nigh me and told me all her love

*Note*

patten rings = the prints of clogs



### **Ballad (A Faithless Shepherd Courted Me)**

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

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

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

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



### **To Mary**

I sleep with thee and wake with thee  
And yet thou art not there  
I fill my arms with thoughts of thee  
And press the common air  
Thy eyes are gazing upon mine  
When thou art out of sight  
My lips are always touching thine  
At morning noon and night

I think and speak of other things  
To keep my mind at rest  
But still to thee my memory clings

Like love in woman's breast  
I hide it from the world's wide eye  
And think and speak contrary  
But soft the wind comes from the sky  
And whispers tales of Mary

The night wind whispers in my ear  
The moon shines in my face  
A burden still of chilling fear  
I find in every place  
The breeze is whispering in the bush  
And the dews fall from the tree  
All sighing on and will not hush  
Some pleasant tales of thee

↑

### **Song**

I wish I was where I would be  
With love alone to dwell  
Was I but her or she but me  
Then love would all be well

I wish to send my thoughts to her  
As quick as thoughts can fly  
But as the winds the waters stir  
The mirrors change and fly

↑

### ***From Effusion***

Ah little did I think in time that's past  
By summer burnt or numb'd by winter's blast  
Delving the ditch a livelihood to earn  
Or lumping corn out in a dusty barn  
With aching bones returning home at night  
And sitting down with weary hand to write  
Ah little did I think as then unknown  
Those artless rhymes I even blush'd to own  
Would be one day applauded and approv'd  
By learning notic'd and by genius lov'd  
God knows my hopes were many but my pain  
Damp'd all the prospects which I hop'd to gain  
I hardly dar'd to hope – Thou corner-chair  
In which I've oft slung back in deep despair  
Hadst thou expression thou couldst easy tell  
The pains and all that I have known too well...



## **I Am**

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

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

I long for scenes where man has never trod  
A place where woman never smil'd or wept  
There to abide with my creator God  
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept  
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie  
The grass below above the vaulted sky



## **Remembrances**

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

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

When jumping time away on old Crossberry Way  
And eating awes like sugarplums ere they had lost the may  
And skipping like a leveret before the peep of day  
On the roly poly up and downs of pleasant Swordy Well  
When in Round Oak's narrow lane as the south got black again  
We sought the hollow ash that was shelter from the rain  
With our pockets full of peas we had stolen from the grain  
How delicious was the dinner time on such a showery day  
O words are poor receipts for what time hath stole away  
The ancient pulpit trees and the play

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Notes*

awes = haws

mouldiwarps = moles

sweeing = swaying, swinging

pismires = ants



***From Shadows of Taste***

Taste with as many hues doth hearts engage  
As leaves and flowers do upon nature's page  
Not mind alone the instinctive mood declares  
But buds and flowers and insects are its heir  
Taste is their joyous heritage and they  
All choose for joy in a peculiar way  
Buds own it in the various spots they chuse  
Some live content in low grass gemmed with dews  
The yellowhammer like a tasteful guest  
'Neath picturesque green molehills makes a nest  
Where oft the shepherd with unlearned ken  
Finds strange eggs scribbled as with ink and pen  
He looks with wonder on the learned marks  
And calls them in his memory writing larks  
Birds bolder winged on bushes love to be  
While some choose cradles on the highest tree  
There rocked by winds they feel no moods of fear  
But joy their birthright lives forever near  
And the bold eagle which man's fear enshrouds  
Would could he lodge it house upon the clouds  
While little wrens mistrusting none that come  
In each low hovel meet a sheltered home  
Flowers in the wisdom of creative choice  
Seem blest with feeling and a silent voice

Some on the barren roads delight to bloom  
And others haunt the melancholy tomb  
Where Death the blight of all finds summer's hours  
Too kind to miss him with her host of flowers  
Some flourish in the sun and some the shade  
Who almost in his morning smiles would fade  
These in leaf-darkened woods right timid stray  
And in its green night smile their lives away  
Others in water live and scarcely seem  
To peep their little flowers above the stream  
While water lilies in their glories come  
And spread green isles of beauty round their home  
All share the summer's glory and its good  
And taste of joy in each peculiar mood  
Insects of varied taste in rapture share  
The heyday luxuries which she comes to heir  
In wild disorder various routs they run  
In water, earth, still shade and busy sun  
And in the crowd of green earth's busy claims  
They e'en grow nameless mid so many names  
And man – that noble insect restless man  
Whose thoughts scale heaven in its mighty span  
Pours forth his living soul in many a shade  
And taste runs riot in her every grade...

...The man of science in discovery's moods  
Roams oer the furze-clad heath's leaf-buried woods  
And by the simple brook in rapture finds  
Treasures that wake the laugh of vulgar hinds  
Who see no further in his dark employs  
Than village children seeking after toys  
Then clownish hearts and ever heedless eyes  
Find nought in nature they as wealth can prize  
With them self-interest and the thoughts of gain  
Are nature's beauties – all beside are vain  
But he the man of science and of taste  
Sees wealth far richer in the worthless waste  
Where bits of lichen and a sprig of moss  
Will all the raptures of his mind engross  
And bright-winged insects on the flowers of May  
Shine pearls too wealthy to be cast away  
His joys run riot 'mid each juicy blade  
Of grass where insects revel in the shade  
And minds of different moods will oft condemn  
His taste as cruel such the deeds to them  
While he unconscious gibbets butterflies  
And strangles beetles all to make us wise  
Tastes rainbow vision's own unnumbered hues  
And every shade its sense of taste pursues  
The heedless mind may laugh the clown may stare

They own no soul to look for pleasure there  
Their grosser feelings in a coarser dress  
Mock at the wisdom which they can't possess  
Some in recordless rapture love to breathe  
Nature's wild Eden wood and field and heath  
In common blades of grass his thoughts will raise  
A world of beauty to admire and praise  
Until his heart overflows with swarms of thought  
To that great Being who raised life from nought  
The common weed adds graces to his mind  
And gleams in beauty few beside may find  
Associations sweet each object breeds  
And fine ideas upon fancy feeds  
He loves not flowers because they shed perfumes  
Or butterflies alone for painted plumes  
Or birds for singing although sweet it be  
But he doth love the wild and meadow lea  
There hath the flower its dwelling place and there  
The butterfly goes dancing through the air  
He loves each desolate neglected spot  
That seems in labour's hurry left forgot  
The warped and punished trunk of stunted oak  
Freed from its bonds but by the thunder stroke  
As cramped by straggling ribs of ivy sere  
There the glad bird makes home for half the year  
But take these several beings from their homes  
Each beautiful thing a withered thought becomes  
Association fades and like a dream  
They are but shadows of the things they seem  
Torn from their homes and happiness they stand  
The poor dull captives of a foreign land  
Some spruce and delicate ideas feed  
With them disorder is an ugly weed  
And wood and heath a wilderness of thorns  
No gardener sheers nor fashions nor adorns  
No spots give pleasure so forlorn and bare  
But gravel walks would work rich wonders there  
With such wild nature's beauty's run to waste  
And art's strong impulse mars the truth of taste  
Such are the various moods that taste displays  
Surrounding wisdom in concentrating rays  
Where threads of light from one bright focus run  
As day's proud halo circles round the sun



### **From I'll Dream Upon the Days to Come**

I'll lay me down on the greensward  
Mid yellow cups and speedwell blue  
And pay the world no more regard  
But be to nature loyal and true  
Who breaks the peace of hapless man  
But they who truth and nature wrong?  
I'll hear not more of evil's plan  
But live with nature and her song

Where nature's lights and shades are green  
Where nature's place is strewn with flowers  
Where strife and care are never seen  
There I'll retire to happy hours  
And stretch my body on the green  
And sleep among the flowers in bloom  
By eyes of malice seldom seen  
And dream upon the days to come



### **The Flitting**

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

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

I sit me in my corner chair  
That seems to feel itself from home  
And hear bird music here and there  
From hawthorn hedge and orchard come



I hear but all is strange and new  
I sat on my old bench in June  
The sailing puddock's shrill 'peelew'  
On Royce Wood seemed a sweeter tune

I walk adown the narrow lane  
The nightingale is singing now  
But like to me she seems at loss  
For Royce Wood and its shielding bough  
I lean upon the window sill  
The trees and summer happy seem  
Green sunny green they shine but still  
My heart goes far away to dream

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

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

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

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

I read in books for happiness  
But books are like the sea to joy  
They change – as well give age the glass  
To hunt its visage when a boy  
For books they follow fashions new  
And throw all old esteems away  
In crowded streets flowers never grew  
But many there hath died away

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

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

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

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

And laid the sheaf upon the ground  
To keep her from the dripping grass  
And ran for stocks and set them round  
Till scarce a drop of rain could pass

Through where the maidens they reclined  
And sung sweet ballads now forgot  
Which brought sweet memories to the mind  
But here no memory knows them not

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

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

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

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

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

Give me no high-flown fangled things  
No haughty pomp in marching chime  
Where muses play on golden strings  
And splendour passes for sublime  
Where cities stretch as far as fame  
And fancy's straining eye can go  
And piled until the sky for shame  
Is stooping far away below

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

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

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

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

And why? this shepherd's purse that grows  
In this strange spot in days gone bye  
Grew in the little garden rows  
Of my old home now left and I

Feel what I never felt before  
This weed an ancient neighbour here  
And though I own the spot no more  
Its every trifle makes it dear

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

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

#### *Notes*

beesom = broom (shrub)

ling = heather

puddock = kite or fork-tailed buzzard

closen = pastures

lambtoe = bird's-foot trefoil or kidney vetch

## **Endings**

[↑](#)

### **Decay**

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

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

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

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

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

Mere withered stalks and fading trees  
And pastures spread with hills and rushes  
Are all my fading vision sees  
Gone gone are rapture's flooding gushes  
When mushrooms they were fairy bowers  
Their marble pillars overswelling

And Danger paused to pluck the flowers  
That in their swarthy rings were dwelling  
Yes Poesy is on the wane  
Nor joy nor fear is mine again

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

And Friendship it hath burned away  
Like to a very ember cooling  
A make-believe on April day  
That sent the simple heart a-fooling  
Mere jesting in an earnest way  
Deceiving on and still deceiving  
And Hope is but a fancy-play  
And Joy the art of true believing  
For Poesy is on the wane  
O could I feel her faith again

*Note*

clouted = clothed

[↑](#)

### **Approaching Night**

O take this world away from me  
Its strife I cannot bear to see  
Its very praises hurt me more  
Than e'en its coldness did before  
Its hollow ways torment me now  
And start a cold sweat on my brow  
Its noise I cannot bear to hear  
Its joy is trouble to my ear  
Its ways I cannot bear to see  
Its crowds are solitudes to me  
O how I long to be agen  
That poor and independent man  
With labour's lot from morn to night  
And books to read at candle light  
That followed labour in the field  
From light to dark when toil could yield

Real happiness with little gain  
Rich thoughtless health unknown to pain  
Though leaning on my spade to rest  
I've thought how richer folks were blest  
And knew not quiet was the best



### **A Vision**

I lost the love of heaven above  
I spurned the lust of earth below  
I felt the sweets of fancied love  
And hell itself my only foe

I lost earth's joys but felt the glow  
Of heaven's flame abound in me  
Till loveliness and I did grow  
The bard of immortality

I loved but woman fell away  
I hid me from her faded flame  
I snatched the sun's eternal ray  
And wrote till earth was but a name

In every language upon earth  
On every shore o'er every sea  
I gave my name immortal birth  
And kept my spirit with the free



### **The Poet's Death**

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

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

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



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

↑

### **Invitation to Eternity**

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

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

Say maiden wilt thou go with me  
In this strange death of life to be  
To live in death and be the same  
Without this life or home or name  
At once to be and not to be  
That was and is not yet to see  
Things pass like shadows and the sky  
Above below around us lie



## Sources and Copyright

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The notes were compiled with the aid of Joseph Wright's English Dialect Dictionary (1903) and a useful glossary at: <https://dawnpiper.wordpress.com/land-words/>

[Return to start of book](#)