

John Clare

Selected Poems



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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 20th 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 anckle 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 flittering 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 tease 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 mournd 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 overpowered 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 turned as black as ink
And the leaves being scorched so much
Even crumble at the touch
Drowning 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 o'er 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

clozen = 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 tye 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 bye
He comes and hears – they let the strongest loose
The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry
And the old hare half wounded buzzes bye
They get a forked stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town
And bait him all the day with many dogs
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs
He runs along and bites at all he meets
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets

He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door
The frequent stone is hurled where'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 suncrackt upland's russet swells adorns

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

The pewit swopping up and down
And screaming round the passer bye
Or running 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 panned



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 uptorn 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 warmèd 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 thumb'd 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 throng the dusty road
Grunting and gabbling in contention round
The barley ears that litter on the ground
What printing traces mark the waggon's way
What busy bustling wakens echo round
How drive the sun's warm beams the mist away
How labour sweats and toils and dreads the sultry day

His scythe the mower o'er his shoulder leans
And whetting jars with sharp and tinkling sound
Then sweeps again 'mong corn and crackling beans
And swath by swath flops lengthening o'er the ground
While 'neath some friendly heap, snug 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 flitches decorate the walls
Moore's Almanack where wonders never cease
All smeared with candle snuff and bacon grease

Notes

rusty = discoloured; rancid

flitches = 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
odding = 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 cloathed 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 sward close before it
The greenest ever found
There is not a woodland nigh nor is there a green grove
Yet stood the fair maid nigh me and told me all her love

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 mouldiwarps hang sweeing to the wind
On the only aged willow that in all the field remains
And nature hides her face while they're sweeing in their chains
And in a silent murmuring complains

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

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

By Langley Bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill
On Cowper Green I stray – tis a desert strange and chill
And the spreading Lea Close oak ere decay had penned its will
To the axe of the spoiler and self-interest fell a prey
And Crossberry Way and old Round Oak's narrow lane

With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again
Enclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
And hung the moles for traitors – though the brook is running still
It runs a sicker brook cold and chill

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

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 childern 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 oerflows 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 stragglng ribs of ivy sere
There the glad bird makes home for half the year
But take these several beings from their homes
Each beauteous 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 natures 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 eer I go
There's none where boyhood made a swee
Or clambered up to rob a crow
No hollow tree or woodland bower
Well known when joy was beating high
Where beauty ran to shun a shower
And love took pains to keep her dry

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

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

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

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

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

There little lambtoe bunches springs
In red tinged and begolden dye
For ever and like China kings
They come but never seem to die
There may-bloom with its little threads
Still comes upon the thorny bowers
And 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 shallows 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 by
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

close = 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/>

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