BOWLES WILLIAM LISLE

THE POETICAL WORKS OF WILLIAM LISLE BOWLES VOL. 2

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Содержание

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MEMOIR AND CRITICISM ON THE WORKS OF THE REV. W. L. BOWLES

The poetry of each age may be considered as vitally connected with, and as vividly reflective of, its character and progress, as either its politics or its religion. You see the nature of the soil of a garden in its tulips and roses, as much as in its pot-herbs and its towering trees. We purpose, accordingly, to compare briefly the poetry of the past and of the present centuries, as indices of some of the points of contrast between the two, and to show also how, and through what causes, the one grew into the other. This will be a fitting introduction to a consideration of the life and writings of the first of the poets of this century included in our series, the more as he was in a measure the father of modern poetry.

It is impossible to take up a volume of the poetry of the eighteenth century, such as, for instance, Churchill's, or Pope's, or Johnson's, and to compare it with some of the leading

poetical works of the present, such as the poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron, and not to feel as if you were reading the productions of two different races of beings – so different are the style, the sentiments, the modes of thought, the imagery, the temperament, and the spirit of the poets and the poetry. It is like stepping, we will not say from the frigid, but from the temperate into the torrid zone. In the one class of authors you find the prevalence of strong sense, flanked by wit and by fancy, but without much that can be called imaginative or romantic. In the other, imagination or fancy is the regnant faculty; and if wit and sense are there too, they are there as slaves, the "Slaves of the lamp," to the imperious imaginative power. The style of the one is clear, masculine, sententious, and measured; that of the other is bold, unmeasured, diffuse, fervid, and sometimes obscure. The one style may be compared to a clear crescent; the other to a full, but partially eclipsed, moon. The sentiment of the one is chiefly the sublimation of passion: bitter contempt, noble indignation, a proud, stern patriotism, sometimes united with a sombre, but manly melancholy, are the principal feelings expressed; that of the other, although occasionally morbid, is far more varied, more profound, purer, on the whole, and more poetical. The thought of the one is acute and logical; that of the other aspires to the deep, if not to the mystical and the transcendental. The subjects of the poets of the eighteenth century are generally of a dignified cast (except in the case of satirical productions), such as "The Temple of Fame," "The Pleasures of Imagination,"

"The Traveller," "London," and "The Vanity of Human Wishes." The subjects of the other class are as varied as their mode of treatment is often daringly peculiar. The leech-gatherer on his lonely moor, the pedlar on his humble rounds, the tinker linked by a "fellow-feeling" to the animal he beats and starves, a mad mariner, a divorced wife, a wandering roué – such characters as these have called forth the utmost stretch of the powers of our best modern poets. The images of the former race of poets are limited to what are called classical subjects – including in this term the ancient mythologies, the incidents in Grecian and Roman story, the more beautiful objects of nature, and the more popular productions of art. Those of modern poets acknowledge no boundary – from the firmament to the fungus, from Niagara to the nearest puddle, from the cold scalp of Mont Blanc to the snowball of the schoolboy – all things are free and open to the step of their genius, which, like the moonbeam, touches and beautifies every object on which it rests. The temperament of the two races is as distinct as their sentiment and style; that of the one seeming somewhat curbed, if not cold, while that of the other is ardent always, and often enthusiastic and rapturous. Different also their spirit; the one being confined and sectarian, alike in politics, in literature, and in religion; the other, in some of their number, being liberal to latitudinarianism, and genial to a vice.

We are not at present seeking to settle the precedence of these two schools of poetry. We love and honour much in both, and think the criticism small and captious which can be blind to the

peculiar merits of either – to the terseness, condensation, force of single lines, vigour of logical thought, and general correctness of the one; or to the boldness, brilliant diffusion, breadth, and variety of mood and music, of subject and of treatment, which distinguish the other. It is more specially our object at present to show how each sprang naturally and inevitably out of the different ages when they appeared.

Poetry is an age in flower; and the poetry of the nineteenth century has been a more gorgeous and more tropical flower, because warmer suns have shone on it, warmer winds blown on it, and larger rains watered its roots. Indeed, it is almost a wonder that the first half, at least, and the middle of the eighteenth century, produced so much and such good poetry. That age was, on the whole, a stagnant and uninteresting one. There was nothing very deeply to rouse the passions and imaginations of men. There was, indeed, the usual amount of political squabbles; but when a Bolingbroke was the most eloquent and admired of parliamentary orators, what moral grandeur could be expected? There was a Jacobite faction, perpetually undermining and sometimes breaking out into open rebellion; but their enthusiasm, save in Scotland, was mingled with no poetical elements, although there certainly it produced many exquisite strains of ballad poetry. Twice or thrice the popular passions broke forth, and reared up an idol for themselves in the shape of a private man, exalted for the nonce into a hero; but it is significant to remember that the two principal of these idols

were *calves*– Sacheverel, namely, and Jack Wilkes. The wars in that age were almost entirely destitute of imaginative interest; those of Marlborough, such as Blenheim and Ramilies, were just large games of chess, played on a blood-red board – who now ever thinks or talks about the battles of Fontenoy or Minden? – some tolerable sea-fights, indeed, there were; on the heights of Abraham a brave man expired in the arms of victory, and a glory still lingers on the field of Prestonpans and on the bloody plains of Culloden; but there was no Trafalgar, no Waterloo, and no Inkermann. The manners of the age were not only dissolute, but grossly and brutally so. In England, there was no Burns to cast a gleam of poetry even on the orgies of dissipation; all was as coarse as it was corrupt; it was a drunken dance of naked satyrs: and disgust at this state of things, we believe, principally made Burke, contrasting the Continent with England, to utter the paradox, that vice, by losing all its grossness, lost half its evil. Foreigners were then, as they are still, more depraved in morals and filthier in personal habits than we; but they had, and have, a grace, a politeness, a reticence, and an ease, which gilded, if they did not lessen, the abominations. The religion of the country was reduced to a very low point of depression; the churches were filled with drowsy divines, drowsily reading what they never wrote, to yet drowsier congregations; many of the upper classes, and of the literary men, were avowed infidels; till the rise of Methodism, religious enthusiasm in any class did not exist – even in Scotland the load of patronage had nearly extinguished the

old fires of Covenanting zeal – the state of the lower classes was deplorable, so far, at least, as mental culture and morality were concerned; cock-fighting, grinning through collars, bull-baiting, and hard drinking, were their main amusements; the hallowing and spiritualising influences of the Sabbath-day were scarcely known; and the upper ranks had no feeling that they were in some measure responsible for the ignorance and the vice of the lower, and were bound to circulate education and religion amidst their masses; indeed, how could they be expected, since they themselves had little education and less religion to circulate? In science, philosophy, and general literature, there prevailed a partial syncope and pause. Newton was dead, and had left no successor; Locke was dead, and had left no successor. The wits of Queen Anne's reign, Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, Steele, and Addison, were dropping off one by one, and for a season none arose adequate to supply their place. It had altogether become an age of mediocrity; neither an age of stern conflict, like that of the Puritans, nor even a fiercely lawless and riotous age, like that of Charles the Second, nor a transition age, like that of the Revolution, but an age of a negative and slumbrous character; its only positive qualities were a generally diffused laxity of principle and corruption of practice; but its vices, as well as its virtues, were small; it had not virtue to be greatly good, nor daring to be greatly wicked.

All this told on its poetry; and our wonder, we repeat, is, that it did not tell more. That it did not, was probably owing

to the continued prevalence of the power of classical literature. That, increased by the influence of the universities and the great schools, and by the translations made of its masterpieces by Dryden and Pope, contributed to produce and maintain purity of taste, in the midst of general depravation of manners, and to touch many opening minds with the chaste and manly inspiration of a long past age. Hence the poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century, while inferior in force and richness to that of the end of the seventeenth, is superior in good taste, and is much freer from impurities. To this the imitation of French models, too, contributed. Still we see the traces of the period very distinctly marked in its works of art and in its poetry. The paintings of Hogarth, next to the infinite richness of the painter's invention, and the accuracy of his observation and touch, testify to the corruption of these times. They are everlasting libels – as true, however, as they are libellous – on the age of the first two Georges; and we are astonished how such an age produced such a genius, as well as grieved to see how such a genius had no better materials to work on than were furnished by such an age. It is much the same with the novels of Smollett and Fielding, and with parts of the poetry of Churchill, Lloyd, and others. The formal wars of that day, too, were certain to produce formal poetry, and Blenheim was fitly celebrated in Addison's "Campaign." The sceptical philosophy then prevalent was faithfully mirrored in Pope's "Essay on Man," which, exquisite as a work of art, is, in thought, a system of naturalism set to music; and, while its

art is the poet's own, its doctrine comes from the "fell genius" of St John (Bolingbroke). Up to Thomson's fine "Ode on the Death of Sir Isaac Newton," and the "Night Thoughts," the great discoveries of astronomy obtained no poetical recognition. Religious poetry, properly speaking, there was none; for the hymns of Watts, although full of piety, can scarcely be called poems; and the most popular poetry of the time was either founded on the Latin, or written in imitation of Pope. Johnson's "London" and "Vanity of Human Wishes" are instances of the former; and of the latter, specimens too numerous to mention abounded.

Thus it continued till about the middle of the century, when there began to appear symptoms of a change. First of all, a "fine fat fellow" from Scotland, who had derived inspiration from the breezes of the Tweed and the Jed, wrote that noble strain, "The Seasons," with its daguerreotypic painting of nature, and its generous, healthy enthusiasm, and the "Castle of Indolence," with its exquisite sketches of character and scenery, and its rich reproduction of an antique style of poetry. Thomson's voice did not, indeed, produce a revolution in taste, but it obtained an audience for a species of writing entirely different from what then prevailed. Young, next, in a bolder spirit, having broken the trammels of Pope, which had confined him, soared up through Night and all its worlds, and brought down genuine inspiration on his adventurous wing. Dr Johnson, although considerably hampered in his verse by undue admiration of the mechanical

poets, allowed himself greater liberty in his prose, which glowed with a deep, if somewhat turbid life, and rolled on in a strong and solemn current, which often seemed that of high imagination. Collins, smitten with a true "gadfly," born as one out of due time, and, alas! "blasted with the celestial fire," he brought, anticipated, in part, some of the miraculous effects of more modern poetry. Gray, Mason, and Beattie, three men of unequal name, all wrote in a different style from Addison, Swift, and Pope, and two of them displayed genuine, if not very powerful, genius. Then came Percy, with his "Reliques of Ancient Poetry," which showed what wonders our rude forefathers had wrought by the force of simple nature; and to the same end contributed Ossian's Poems, which, whatever their defects, awakened and startled the literary world, here, in France, and in Germany, by a panoramic view of that "land of mountain and of flood," which was yet to attract so many visitors, and to inspire so many bards. The impulse lent to our prose style by Johnson was followed up by Junius and by Burke, both of whom shot into the discussions of politics and of passing events much of the spirit and the power of poetry. Burke especially, even before the French Revolution effectually roused the world, had given specimens of fervid prose, combining with matter of fact and the most compact wisdom, the graces, the spirit, the imagery, and the language of the highest imagination. Cowper, too, had come, setting religion to rhythm; and, although "veiling all the lightnings of his song in sorrow," yet circulating the power of

his genius, even more extensively than the contagion of his grief. Burns, in Scotland, had exhibited his vein of ardent native genius. And lastly, the French Revolution lifted up its volcano voice, and said to the world of literature and song, as well as to the world at large, "*Sleep no more.*"

From this date the character of poetry was changed, and began to assume that antagonistic attitude to the school of Dryden and Pope which we described in our commencing remarks, and which yet continues. Britain got engaged in a Titanic warfare, an earthshaking contest – a war of opinion, not of treaties – of peoples, not of kings; and instead of "Campaigns," our poets indited Odes to France, to the Departing Year, hymns to "Carnage, God's Daughter," and "Visions of Don Roderick." Our religion became more intense and earnest, and this produced, on the one hand, the fine religious verses of a Montgomery, the poetical prose of a Foster and a Hall, and the rapt effusions of a Coleridge and Wordsworth; and, on the other hand, told even on our scepticism, which became more impassioned too, and wielded against religion a bar of burning iron, like "Queen Mab," instead of a piece of polished wood, like the "Essay on Man." Our morality improved, in outward decorum, at least, and the last remains of the indecency of former times were swept away – to re-appear, indeed, afterwards partially in "Don Juan." Poetry, too, after coquetting for a little, not very gracefully, with Science in Darwin's "Botanic Garden," and "Temple of Nature," aspired to the hand of Philosophy; and the Lake poets

and others not merely found a poetic worship in nature, but set to song many of the wondrous speculations of modern psychology. A taste for ancient, simple poetic writers spread widely, and produced Scott's brilliant imitations of ballad poetry, and Wordsworth's early lyrical strains. Popular principles began to prevail, and knowledge to circulate among the lower classes; and they learned not only to read poems with relish, but their "poor dumb mouths" ever and anon were opened to utter a stern and vigorous poetry of their own. Along with these and other beneficial changes, there were, indeed, much extravagance and exaggeration introduced. With the formality and stiffness, much of the point, pith, and correctness of the old school was lost – a good deal of false enthusiasm and pretence, mingled with the real inspiration; jackdaws and mocking-birds, as well as doves and eagles, abounded. But, on the whole, we question if any age of the world has equalled the early part of the nineteenth century, in the quantity, or in the quality, in the power, depth, brilliance, or variety of its poetry.

William Lisle Bowles – whom we have ventured to call the father of modern poetry, since not only was he first in the field, but since his sonnets inspired the more powerful muse of Coleridge – was descended from an ancient and respectable family in Wiltshire. His grandfather and father were both clergymen in the Church of England. The poet was born in King's Sutton, and baptized there on the 25th of September 1762. In the year 1776 he was placed on the Wykeham foundation at

Winchester. His master was Dr Joseph Warton, who, seeing genius disguised under the veil of his pupil's boyish timidity, encouraged him in his efforts, was warmly loved by Bowles in return, and transmitted to him his very moderate estimate of the poetry and character of Pope. Bowles has testified his gratitude to his teacher in his very pleasing "Monody on the Death of Dr Warton." During the last year he passed at Winchester, Bowles was captain of the school. In the year 1781, he was elected a scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, having selected this college, because the brother of his old master, Thomas Warton, was residing there. In 1783, he gained the Chancellor's prize for Latin verse – "Calpe Obessa; or, The Siege of Gibraltar," being the subject of the poem. At college he got no fellowship, nor did he procure his degree till 1792. At an early age, he is said to have been unsuccessful in his suit to a Miss Romilly, a niece of Sir Samuel Romilly; and this rejection it was which first stung him into rhyme and rambling; for, in order to deaden his feelings, he traversed the north of England, Scotland, and parts of the Continent. His first production consisted of fourteen sonnets, published in 1789, and was followed the same year by "Verses to John Howard." In 1790, he reprinted these and various other pieces written in the interval, and in 1798 they were reproduced with illustrations. They became so popular, that by the year 1805 they had reached a ninth edition.

Almost every year from 1798 till the end of his life, Mr Bowles was adding to his works new poems of various merit. In 1798,

appeared his "Coombe Ellen, and St Michael's Mount;" in 1799, "The Battle of the Nile;" in 1801, "The Sorrows of Switzerland;" in 1803, "The Picture;" in 1805, the "Spirit of Discovery;" in 1806, "Bowden Hill;" in 1815, "The Missionary of the Andes;" in 1822, "The Grave of the Last Saxon;" in 1823, "Ellen Gray;" in 1828, "Days Departed;" in 1833, "St John in Patmos;" and in 1837, a volume entitled "Scenes and Shadows of Days Departed, a Narrative;" besides "The Village Verse-book," a very popular selection of simple poetry.

The events of this gentleman's private and professional life were of no particular interest. Having entered holy orders, he resided for many years as curate in Donhead St Andrew, in Wilts, where he remained till 1804, when he was appointed vicar of Bremhill – a situation which he continued to fill till the end of his long life. In 1792, he was presented to the vicarage of Checklade, in Wiltshire, which he resigned, after an incumbency of five years, on receiving another presentation to the rectory of Dumbleton, Gloucestershire. This living he retained till his death, although he never resided at either Dumbleton or Checklade. In 1804, through Archbishop Moore, he was made vicar of Bremhill, and, the same year, prebend of Stratford in the cathedral church of Salisbury. In 1828, he was elected canon-residentiary. He had, in 1818, been appointed chaplain to the Prince Regent. He resided constantly at Bremhill for twenty-five years. After he was elected canon, however, he abode partly, and in the latter years of his life principally, in the town of Salisbury.

In 1797, he married Magdalene, daughter of the Rev. Charles Wake, D.D., prebendary of Westminster, and grand-daughter of Archbishop Wake. She died some years before her husband, and left no family. Bowles himself expired at Salisbury, after a gradual decay of the vital powers, April 7, 1850, aged eighty-eight years. His life is about to be written at large by his kinsman, Dr J. Bowles, assisted by Mr Alaric Watts, to whom the publisher is indebted for the means of supplying a complete copyright edition of the poet's works.

Bowles was a diligent pastor, an eloquent preacher, an active justice, and in every way an estimable man. Even Byron, who met him at Mr Rogers', in London, speaks of him as a "pleasant, gentlemanly man – a good fellow for a parson." Moore, in his Diary, speaks with delight of his mixture of talent and simplicity. In his introduction to "Scenes and Shadows," Bowles gives some interesting particulars of his early life. In *Blackwood*, for August 1828, there is a very entertaining account of Bremhill Parsonage.

As an author, he appears in three aspects – as a writer on typography, as an editor and controversialist, and as a poet. In 1828, he produced a volume entitled "The Parochial History of Bremhill," and shortly afterwards, his "History of Lacock Abbey," containing much interesting antiquarian lore. To this succeeded a still more ingenious and recondite work, entitled "Hermes Britannicus," besides some less important writings of a similar kind. His "Life of Bishop Ken," which appeared in 1830 and 1831, might be considered as belonging to the same category

of learned antiquarian lucubrations.

In 1807, he published an edition of Pope, in ten volumes, for which he received £300. The life prefixed to this edition led to the celebrated controversy between Bowles, on the one hand, and Campbell, Byron, Roscoe, Octavius Gilchrist, and the *Quarterly Review*, on the other. In our life of Pope, we hope to devote a few pages to the principal questions which were mooted in this controversy. We may simply say, at present, that we think Bowles was, in the main, right, although he laid himself open to retort at many points, and displayed an *animus* against Pope, both as a man and a poet, which he in vain sought to disclaim, and which somewhat detracted from the value of his criticisms. He gained, however, the three objects at which he aimed: – he proved that Pope was only at the head of the *second* rank of poets – that, as a man, he was guilty of many meannesses, and had a prurient imagination and pen – and that the objects of artificial life are, *per se*, less fitted for the purposes of poetry than those of nature, and than the passions of the human heart. In this controversy, as well as in some after-skirmishes, – in his letters to Lord Brougham, "On the Position and Incomes of the Cathedral Clergy," – in a letter to Sir James Mackintosh, on the Increase of Crime, – and in a sharp fight with the Rev. Edward Duke, F.S.A., on the Antiquities of Wiltshire – Bowles displayed amazing PLUCK, and no small controversial acuteness and dexterity. Like another Ajax, he took enemy after enemy on his single shield, and by his pertinacity and perseverance, he

succeeded in beating them all. He stood at first alone, and had very formidable opponents. But he bated not one jot of heart or hope; and, by and by, Southey, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and others, came to his aid, and, finally, William Hazlitt saw, with his inevitable eye, the real merits of the case, and (substantially inclining to the Bowles side) settled, by a paper in the *London Magazine*, the question for ever. As a controversialist, Bowles is rather noisy, flippant, and fierce; and his reply to Byron, while superior to the noble bard's letter in argument, is far inferior in easy and trenchant vigour of style. His writings on the Pope controversy consist of "A Letter to Thomas Campbell," "Two Letters to Lord Byron," "A Final Appeal to the Public relative to Pope," and (more last words!), "Lessons in Criticism to William Roscoe, and Farther Lessons to a Quarterly Reviewer." All are exceedingly readable and clever.

It is curious contrasting the spirit of Bowles' prose – his severity – his pugnacity – his irritability, with the mild qualities of his poetry. The leading element in all his poetical works is sentiment, – warm, mellow, tender, and often melancholy sentiment. He has no profound thought – no powerful pictures of passion – no creative imagination – but over all his poetry lies a sweet autumnal moonlight of pensive and gentle feeling. In his larger poems, he is often diffuse and verbose, and you see more effort than energy. But in his smaller, and especially in his sonnets, and his pieces descriptive of nature, Bowles is always true to his own heart, and therefore always successful.

How delightful such sonnets as his "Morning Bells," "Absence," "Bereavement," and his poems entitled, "Monody at Matlock," "Coombe-Ellen," "On Hearing the 'Messiah,'" *etc.*! We trust that many, after reading these and the others (some of which were never before published) contained in our volumes, will be ready to express the gratitude of their hearts through the medium of the following beautiful sonnet: —

"SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE TO WILLIAM LISLE BOWLES

"My heart has thanked thee, Bowles! for those soft strains,
Whose sadness soothes me like the murmuring
Of wild bees in the sunny showers of spring!
For hence, not callous to the mourner's pains,
Through youth's gay prime and thornless paths I went:
And when the mightier throes of mind began,
And drove me forth a thought-bewildered man,
Their mild and manliest melancholy lent
A mingled charm, such as the pang consigned
To slumber, though the big tear it renewed;
Bidding a strange mysterious pleasure brood
Over the wavy and tumultuous mind,
As the Great Spirit erst with plastic sweep
Moved on the darkness of the unformed deep."

His larger poems are perhaps more distinguished by the ambition of their themes than by the success of their treatment. His particular theory about the superiority of the works of nature as poetical subjects perhaps led him to a too uniform selection of its grander features, while undoubtedly his genius fitted him better for depicting its softer and smaller objects. He excels far more in interpreting the language of the bells, now of Ostend, and now of Oxford – in describing the dingles of Coombe Ellen – in echoing the fall of the river Avon, heard in his sick-chamber at Bath – or in catching on his mind-mirror the "Distant View of England from the Sea" – than in coping with the dark recesses of the American forest, following the daring Gama round his Cape of Storms, standing with Noah on the brow of the tremendous mountain Caff, the hill of demons and griffins, and seeing the globe at his feet, or in walking beside the Seer of all time, in that "isle which is called Patmos,"

> "Placed far amid the melancholy main."

He is more at home in the beautiful than in the sublime – more a Warton than a Milton – and may be rather likened to a bee murmuring her dim music in the bells of flowers, than to an eagle dallying with the tempest, and binding distant oceans and chains of mountains together by the living link of his swift and strong pinion. Yet his "Spirit of Discovery" contains some bold fancy. Take this, for instance: —

"Andes, sweeping the horizon's tract,
Mightiest of mountains! whose eternal snows
Feel not the nearer sun; whose umbrage chills
The murmuring ocean; whose *volcanic fires*
A thousand nations view, hung, like the moon,
High in the middle waste of heaven."

"The Missionary" (of which Byron writes in some playful verses to Murray,

"I've read the Missionary,
Pretty! Very!")

contains much vivid description and interesting narrative; and "St John in Patmos," if scarcely up to the mark of the transcendent theme, has a good deal of picturesque and striking poetry. Perhaps the most interesting of all his minor poems is that entitled "Childe Harold's Last Pilgrimage," quoted, we remember, in Moore's Life of Byron. As proceeding from one whom the angry and unhappy Childe had often insulted in public and laughed at in private, it was as graceful in spirit as it is elegant in composition. "Revenge," it has been said, "is a feast for the gods;" and the saying is true if meant of that species of revenge which gains its end by forgiveness. An act so noble and generous as the writing of this, is calculated to set the memory of Bowles still higher than all his poetry.

BANWELL HILL; A LAY OF THE SEVERN SEA

PREFACE. [1]

The estimation of a Poem of this nature must depend, first, on its arrangement, plan, and disposition; secondly, on the judgment, propriety, and feeling with which – in just and proper succession and relief – picture, pathos, moral and religious reflections, historical notices, or affecting incidents, are interwoven. The reader will, in the next place, attend to the versification, or music, in which the thoughts are conveyed. Shakspeare and Milton are the great masters of the verse I have adopted. But who can be heard after them? The reader, however, will at least find no specimens of sonorous harmony ending with such significant words as "of," "and," "if," "but," *etc* of which we have had lately some splendid examples. I would therefore only request of him to observe, that when such passages occur in this poem as "vanishing," "hush!" *etc.* it was from design, and not from want of ear.[2]

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[1] This poem, published in 1829, was dedicated to Dr Henry Law, the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

[2] Of blank verse of the kind to which I have alluded, I am tempted to give a specimen:

An intermixture of images and characters from common life might be thought, at first sight, out of keeping with the higher tone of general colouring; but the interspersion of the comic, provided the due mock-heroic stateliness be kept up in the language, has often the effect of light and shade, as will be apparent on looking at Cowper's exquisite "Task," although he has often "offended against taste." The only difficulty is happily to steer "from grave to gay."

So far respecting the plan, the execution, the versification, and style. As to the sentiments conveyed in this poem, and in the notes, I must explicitly declare, that when I am convinced, as a clergyman and a magistrate, that there has been an increase of crime, owing, among other causes, to the system pursued by some "nominal Christians," who *will not* preach "these three" (faith, hope, and charity) according to the order of St Paul, but keep two of these graces, and the greatest of all, out of sight, upon any human plea or pretension; when they do *not* preach, "Add to your faith virtue;" when they will *not* preach, Christ died for the sins of "the *world*, and not for *ours* only;" when, from any pleas of their own, or persuaded by any sophistry or faction, they become, most emphatically, "dumb dogs" to the sublime and affecting moral parts of that gospel which they have engaged before God to deliver; and above all, when crimes, as I am verily

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—"'Twas summer, and we sailed to Greenwich inA four-oared boat. The sun was shining, andThe scenes delightful; while we gazed onThe river winding, till we landed atThe Ship."

persuaded have been, are, and must be, the consequence of such public preaching, – leaving others to "stand or fall" to their own God; I shall be guided by my own understanding, and the plain Word of God, as I find it earnestly, simply, beautifully, and divinely set before me by Christ and his Apostles; and so feeling, I shall as fearlessly deliver my own opinions, being assured, whether popular or unpopular, whether they offend this man or that, this sect or that sect, they will not easily be shaken.

I might ask, why did St Paul add, so emphatically, "these three," when he enumerated the Christian graces? Doubtless, because he thought the distinction very important. Why did St Peter say, "Add to your faith virtue"? Because he thought it equally important and essential. Why did St John say, "Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and not for ours only"? Because he thought it equally important and necessary.

Never omitting the atonement, justification by faith, the fruits of the Spirit, and never separating faith from its hallowed fellowship, we shall find all other parts of the gospel unite in harmonious subordination; but if we shade the moral parts down, leave them out, contradict them, by insidious sophistry, the Scripture, so far from being "rightly divided," will be discordant and clashing. The man, be he whom he may, who preaches "faith" without charity; who preaches "faith without virtue," is as pernicious and false an expounder of the divine message, as he who preaches "good works," without their legitimate and only foundation – Christian faith.

One would suppose, from the language of some preachers, the "civil," "decent," "moral" people, from the times of Baxter to the present, want amendment most. We all know that mere morals, which have no Christian basis, are not the gospel of Christ; but I might tell Richard, with great respect notwithstanding, for I respect his sincerity and his heart, that, at least, "decent," and "civil," and "moral" people,[3] are not worse than indecent, immoral, and uncivil people; and when there are so many of these last, I think a word or two of reproof would not much hurt them, let the "decent," "moral," and "civil" be as *wicked* as they may.

I hope it is not necessary for me to disclaim, in speaking of facts, the most remote idea of throwing a slight on the sincerely pious of any portion of the community; but, if religion does not invigorate the higher feelings and principles of moral obligation; if a heartless and hollow jargon is often substituted for the fundamental laws of Christian obedience; if ostentatious affectation supersedes the meek, unobtrusive character of feminine devotion; if a petty peculiarity of system, a kind of conventional code of godliness, usurps the place of the specific righteousness, visible in its fruits, "of whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely;" if, to be fluent and flippant in the jargon of this petty peculiarity of code, is made the criterion of exclusive godliness; when, by thousands and thousands, after the example of Hawker, and others of the same school, Christianity is represented as

[3] Baxter's "Saints' Rest."

having neither "an *if*, or *but*," the conclusion being left for the innumerable disciples of such a gospel school; when, because none – "no, not one" – is *without sin*, and none can stand upright in the sight of Him whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity, they who have exercised themselves to "have a conscience void of offence toward God and man," though sensible of innumerable offences, are considered, by implication, before God, as no better than Burkes or Thurtles, for the imputation of utter depravity must mean this, or be mere hollow *verba et voces*; when amusements, or recreations, vicious only in their excess, are proclaimed as national abominations, while real abominations stalk abroad, as is the case in large manufacturing towns, with "the Lord," "the Lord," on the lips of some of the most depraved; when, from these causes, I do sincerely believe the heart has been hardened, and the understanding deteriorated, the wide effects being visible on the great criminal body of the nation, – I conceive I do a service to Evangelical Religion by speaking as I feel of that ludicrous caricature which so often in society usurps its name, and apes and disgraces its divine character.

I am not among those who divide the clergy of the Church of England into classes; and I think it my duty ingenuously to declare, that the opinions I have expressed of the effects of such public doctrines as I have described, be they preached or published by whom they may, were written without communication with any one living. I think it right to declare this, most explicitly, lest the distinguished person to whom this

poem is inscribed, might be supposed to have any participation in such sentiments; though, I trust, no possible objection could be made to the manly avowal of my opinion of the injurious effects of Antinomian, or shades of Antinomian doctrines.

Further, the object of my remarks is *not* piety, but ostentatious publicity and affectation, – far more disgusting in the assumed garb of female piety than under any shape; and often attended by *acting* far more disgusting than any acting on any stage.

BANWELL CAVE

The following extract of a letter from Mr Warner will enable the reader to form his own opinion concerning the vast accumulation of bones in this cave: —

"The sagacity of Mr Beard having detected the existence of the cavern, and his perseverance effected a precipitous descent into it, the objects offered to his notice were of the most astonishing and paradoxical description – 'an antre vast,' rude from the hand of nature, of various elevations, and branching into several recesses; its floor overspread with a huge mingled mass of bones and mud, black earth (or decomposed animal matter), and sand from the Severn sea, which flows about six miles to the northward of Banwell village. The quantity of bones, and the mode by which they could be conveyed to, and deposited in, the place they occupied, were points of equal difficulty to be explained: as the former amounted to several waggon loads;

and as no access to the cavern appeared to exist, except a fissure from above, utterly incapable, from its narrow dimensions, of admitting the falling in of any animal larger than a common sheep; whereas it was evident that huge quadrupeds, such as unknown beasts of the ox tribe, bears, wolves, and probably hyenas and tigers, had perished in the cave. But, though the questions *how* and *when* were unanswerable, *this* conclusion was irresistibly forced upon the mind, by the phenomena submitted to the eye, that, as the receptacle was infinitely too small to contain such a crowd of animals in their living state, they must necessarily have occupied it in succession: one portion of them after another paying the debt of nature, and (leaving their bones only, as a memorial of their existence on the spot) thus making room in the cavern for a succeeding set of inhabitants, of similarly ferocious habits to themselves. The difficulty, indeed, of the ingress of such beasts into the cave did not long continue to be invincible; as Mr Beard discovered and cleared out a lateral aperture in it, sufficiently inclining from the perpendicular, and sufficiently large in its dimensions, to admit of the easy descent into this subterraneous apartment of one of its unwieldy tenants, though loaded with its prey.

"From the circumstances premised, you will probably anticipate my thoughts on these remarkable phenomena; if not, they are as follow: – I consider the cavern to have been formed at the period of the original deposition and consolidation of the matter constituting the mountain limestone in which it is found;

possibly by the agency of some elastic gas, imprisoned in the mass, which prevented the approximation of its particles to each other; or by some unaccountable interruption to the operation of the usual laws of its crystallization; – that, for a long succession of ages anterior to the Deluge, and previously to man's inhabiting the colder regions of the earth, Banwell Cave had been inhabited by successive generations of beasts of prey; which, as hunger dictated, issued from their den, pursued and slaughtered the gregarious animals, or wilder quadrupeds, in its neighbourhood; and dragged them, either bodily or piecemeal, to this retreat, in order to feast upon them at leisure, and undisturbed; – that the bottom of the cavern thus became a kind of charnel-house, of various and unnumbered beasts; – that this scene of excursive carnage continued till 'the flood came,' blending 'the oppressor with the oppressed,' and mixing the hideous furniture of the den with a quantity of extraneous matter, brought from the adjoining shore, and subjacent lands, by the waters of the Deluge, which rolled, surging (as Kirwan imagines), from the north-western quarter; – that, previously to this total submersion, as the flood increased on the lower grounds, the animals which fed upon them ascended the heights of Mendip, to escape impending death; and with panic rushed (as many as could gain entrance) into this dwelling-place of their worst enemies; – that numberless birds also, terrified by the elemental tumult, flew into the same den, as a place of temporary refuge; – that the interior of the cavern was speedilly filled by the roaring Deluge, whose waters, dashing and

crushing the various substances which they embraced, against the rugged rocks, or against each other; and continuing this violent and incessant action for at least three months, at length tore asunder every connected form, separated every skeleton, and produced that confusion of substances, that scene of *disjecta membra*, that mixture and disjunction of bones, which were apparent on the first inspection of the cavern; and which are now visible in that part of it which has been hitherto untouched."

Respecting the language of the Poem, I had nearly forgotten one remark. In almost all the local poems I have read, there is a confusion of the following nature. A local descriptive poem must consist, first, of the graphic view of the scenery around the spot from whence the view is taken; and, secondly, of the reflections and feelings which that view may be supposed to excite. The feelings of the heart naturally associate themselves with the idea of the tones of the supposed poetical harp; but external scenes are the province of the pencil, for the harp cannot paint woods and hills, and therefore, in almost all descriptive poems, the pencil and the lyre clash. Hence, in one page, the poet speaks of his lyre, and in the next, when he leaves feelings to paint to the eye, before the harp is out of the hand, he turns to the pencil! This fault is almost inevitable; the reader, therefore, will see in the first page of this Poem, that the graphic pencil is assumed, when the tones of the harp were inappropriate.

ARGUMENT

PART FIRST

Introduction – Retrospect – General view – Cave – Bones – Brief sketch of events since the deposit – Egypt – Druid – Roman – Saxon – Dane – Norman – Hill – Campanula – Bleadon – Weston – Steep Holms – Solitary flower on Steep Holms, the Peony – Flat Holms – Three unknown graves – Sea – Sea treacherous in its tranquillity – Mr Elton's children – Packet-boat sunk.

PART SECOND

First sound of the sea – First sight of the sea – Mother – Children – Uphill parsonage – Father – Wells clock – Clock figure – Contrast of village manners – Village maid – Rural nymph before the justices – State of agricultural districts – Cause of crime – Workhouse girl – Manufactory ranters – Prosing parson – Prig parson – Calvinistic commentators, *etc.*– Anti-moral preaching – True and false piety – Crimes passed over by anti-moral preachers – Bible, without note or comment – English Juggernaut – Village picture of Coombe – Village-

school children, educated by Mrs P. Scrope – Annual meeting on the lawn of 140 children – Old nurse – Benevolence of English landlords – Poor widow and daughter – Stourhead – Ken at Longleat – Marston house – Early travels in Switzerland – Compton house – Clergyman's wife – Village clergyman.

PART THIRD

A tale of a Cornish maid – Her prayer-book – Her mother – Widow and son – Tales of sea life – Phantom-ship of the Cape.

PART FOURTH

Solitary sea – Ship – Sea scenes of Southampton contrasted – Solitary sand – Young Lady – Severn – Walton Castle – Picture of Bristol – Congresbury – Brockley-Coombe – Fayland – Cottage – Poor Dinah – Goblin-Coombe – Langford court – Mendip lodge – Wrington – Blagdon – Author of the tune of "Auld Robin Gray" – Auld Robin Gray – Auld Lang Syne.

PART FIFTH

Lang syne – Return to the Deluge – Vision of the Flood – Archangel – Trump – Voice – Phantom-horse – Dove of the Ark – Dove ascending – Conclusion.

BANWELL HILL

PART FIRST

INTRODUCTION – GENERAL VIEW – CAVE – ASCENT – VIEW – STEEP HOLMS – FLAT HOLMS – SEA

If, gazing from this eminence, I wake,
With thronging thoughts, the harp of poesy
Once more, ere night descend, haply with tones
Fainter, and haply with a long farewell;
If, looking back upon the lengthened way
My feet have trod, since, long ago, I left
Those well-known shores, and when mine eyes are filled
With tears, I take the pencil in its turn,
And shading light the landscape spread below,
So smilingly beguile those starting tears;
Something, the feelings of the human heart —
Something, the scene itself, and something more —
A wish to gratify one generous mind —
May plead for pardon.
To this spot I came

To view the dark memorials of a world[4]
Perished at the Almighty's voice, and swept
With all its noise away! Since then, unmarked,
In that rude cave those dark memorials lay,
And told no tale!
Spirit of other times,
Sad shadow of the ancient world, come forth!
Thou who has slept four thousand years, awake!
Rise from the cavern's last recess, and say,
What giant cleft in twain the neighbouring rocks,[5]
Then slept for ages in vast Ogo's Cave,[6]
And left them rent and frowning from that hour;
Say, rather, when the stern Archangel stood,
Above the tossing of the flood, what arm
Shattered this mountain, and its hollow chasm
Heaped with the mute memorials of that doom!
Spirit of other times, thou speakest not!
Yet who could gaze a moment on that wreck
Of desolation, but must pause to think
Of the mutations of the globe – of time,
Hurrying to onward spoil – of his own life,
Swift passing, as the summer light, away —
Of Him who spoke, and the dread storm went forth.
The surge came, and the surge went back, and there —

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[4] The reader is referred to Dr Buckland's most interesting illustrations of these remains of a former world. The Bishop of Bath and Wells has built a picturesque and appropriate cottage near the cave, on the hill commanding this fine view.

[5] The stupendous Cheddar Cliffs, in the neighbourhood.

[6] Wookey, *Antrum Ogonis*.

There – when the black abyss had ceased to roar,
And waters, shrinking from the rocks and hills,
Slept in the solitary sunshine – there
The bones that strew the inmost cavern lay:
And when forgotten centuries had passed,
And the gray smoke went up from villages,
And cities, with their towers and temples, shone,
And kingdoms rose and perished – there they lay!
The crow sailed o'er the spot; the villager
Plodded to morning toil, yet undisturbed
They lay: – when, lo! as if but yesterday
The Archangel's trump had thundered o'er the deep
The mighty shade of ages that are passed
Towers into light! Say, Christian, is it true,
That dim recess, that cavern, heaped with bones,
Will echo to thy Bible!
But a while
Here let me stand, and gaze upon the scene;
That headland, and those winding sands, and mark
The morning sunshine, on that very shore
Where once a child I wandered. Oh! return,
(I sigh) return a moment, days of youth,
Of childhood, – oh, return! How vain the thought,
Vain as unmanly! yet the pensive Muse,
Unblamed, may dally with imaginings;
For this wide view is like the scene of life,
Once traversed o'er with carelessness and glee,
And we look back upon the vale of years,
And hear remembered voices, and behold,

In blended colours, images and shades
Long passed, now rising, as at Memory's call,
Again in softer light.
I see thee not,
Home of my infancy – I see thee not,
Thou fane that standest on the hill alone,[7]
The homeward sailor's sea-mark; but I view
Brean Down beyond; and there thy winding sands,
Weston; and, far away, one wandering ship,
Where stretches into mist the Severn sea.
There, mingled with the clouds, old Cambria draws
Its stealing line of mountains, lost in haze;
There, in mid-channel, sit the sister holms,[8]
Secure and tranquil, though the tide's vast sweep,
As it rides by, might almost seem to rive
The deep foundations of the earth again,
Threatening, as once, resistless, to ascend
In tempest to this height, to bury here
Fresh-weltering carcases!
But, lo, the Cave!
Descend the steps, cut rudely in the rock,
Cautious. The yawning vault is at our feet!
Long caverns, winding within caverns, spread
On either side their labyrinths; all dark,
Save where the light falls glimmering on huge bones,
In mingled multitudes. Ere yet we ask
Whose bones, and of what animals they formed

[7] Uphill church.

[8] Flat and Steep Holms.

The structure, when no human voice was heard
In all this isle; look upward to the roof
That silent drips, and has for ages dripped,
From which, like icicles, the stalactites
Depend: then ask of the geologist,
How nature, vaulting the rude chamber, scooped
Its vast recesses; he with learning vast
Will talk of limestone rock, of stalactites,
And oolites, and hornblende, and graywacke —
With sounds almost as craggy as the rock
Of which he speaks – feldspar, and gneis, and schorl!
But let us learn of this same troglodyte,[9]
Who guides us through the winding labyrinth,
The erudite "Professor" of the cave,
Not of the college; stagyrite of bones.
He leads, with flickering candle, through the heaps
Himself has piled, and placed in various forms,
Grotesque arrangement, while the cave itself
Seems but his element of breathing! Look!
This humereus is that of the wild ox.
The very candle, as with sympathy,
Flares while he speaks, in glimmering wonderment!
But who can mark these visible remains,
Nor pause to think how awful, and how true,
The dread event they speak! What monuments
Hath man, since then, the lord, the emmet, raised
On earth! He hath built pyramids, and said,
Stand there! and in their solitude they stood,

[9] Mr Beard, of Banwell, called familiarly "the Professor," but in reality the guide.

Whilst, like the camel's shadow on the sands
Beneath them years and ages passed. He said,
My name shall never die! and like the God
Of silence,[10] with his finger on his lip,
Oblivion mocked, then pointed to a tomb,
'Mid vast and winding vaults, without a name.
Where art thou, Thebes? The chambers of the dead
Echo, Behold! and twice ten thousand men,
Even in their march of rapine and of blood,
Involuntary halted,[11] at the sight
Of thy majestic wreck, for many, a league —
Sphynxes, colossal fanes, and obelisks —
Pale in the morning sun! Ambition sighed
A moment, and passed on. In this rude isle,
The Druid altars frowned; and still they stand,
As silent as the barrows at their feet,
Yet tell the same stern tale. Soldier of Rome,
Art thou come hither to this land remote
Hid in the ocean-waste? Thy chariot wheels
Rung on that road below![12]– Cohorts, and turms,
With their centurions, in long file appear,
Their golden eagles glittering to the sun,
O'er the last line of spears; and standard-flags
Wave, and the trumpets sounding to advance,
And shields, and helms, and crests, and chariots, mark

[10] Egyptian god of silence.

[11] Halt of the French army at the sight of the ruins.

[12] The Roman way passes immediately under Banwell.

The glorious march of Cæsar's soldiery,
Firing the gray horizon! They are passed!
And, like a gleam of glory, perishing,
Leave but a name behind! So passes man,
An armed spectre o'er a field of blood,
And vanishes; and other armed shades
Pass by, red battle hurtling as they pass.
The Saxon kings have strewed their palaces
From Thames to Tyne. But, lo! the sceptre shakes;
The Dane, remorseless as the hurricane
That sweeps his native cliffs, harries the land!
What terror strode before his track of blood!
What hamlets mourned his desultory march,
When on the circling hills, along the sea,
The beacon-flame shone nightly! He has passed!
Now frowns the Norman victor on his throne,
And every cottage shrouds its lonely fire,
As the sad curfew sounds. Yet Piety,
With new-inspiring energies, awoke,
And ampler polity: in woody vales,
In unfrequented wilds, and forest-glens,
The towers of the sequestered abbey shone,
As when the pinnacles of Glaston-Fane
First met the morning light. The parish church,
Then too, exulting o'er the ruder cross,
Upsprung, till soon the distant village peal
Flings out its music, where the tapering spire
Adds a new picture to the sheltered vale.
Uphill, thy rock, where sits the lonely church,

Above the sands, seems like the chronicler
Of other times, there left to tell the tale!
But issuing from the cave, look round, behold
How proudly the majestic Severn rides
On to the sea; how gloriously in light
It rides! Along this solitary ridge,
Where smiles, but rare, the blue campanula,
Among the thistles and gray stones that peep
Through the thin herbage, to the highest point
Of elevation, o'er the vale below,
Slow let us climb. First look upon that flower,
The lowly heath-bell, smiling at our feet.
How beautiful it smiles alone! The Power
That bade the great sea roar, that spread the heavens,
That called the sun from darkness, decked that flower,
And bade it grace this bleak and barren hill.
Imagination, in her playful mood,
Might liken it to a poor village maid,
Lowly, but smiling in her lowliness,
And dressed so neatly as if every day
Were Sunday. And some melancholy bard
Might, idly musing, thus discourse to it: —
Daughter of Summer, who dost linger here,
Decking the thistly turf, and arid hill,
Unseen, let the majestic dahlia
Glitter, an empress, in her blazonry
Of beauty; let the stately lily shine,
As snow-white as the breast of the proud swan
Sailing upon the blue lake silently,

That lifts her tall neck higher as she views
Her shadow in the stream! Such ladies bright
May reign unrivalled in their proud parterres!
Thou wouldst not live with them; but if a voice,
Fancy, in shaping mood, might give to thee,
To the forsaken primrose thou wouldst say —
Come, live with me, and we two will rejoice:
Nor want I company; for when the sea
Shines in the silent moonlight, elves and fays,
Gentle and delicate as Ariel,
That do their spiritings on these wild holts,
Circle me in their dance, and sing such songs
As human ear ne'er heard! But cease the strain,
Lest wisdom and severer truth should chide.
Behind that windmill, sailing round and round,
Like days on days revolving, Bleadon lies,
Where first I pondered on the grammar-lore,
Sad as the spelling-book, beneath the roof
Of its secluded parsonage; Brean Down
Emerges o'er the edge of Hutton Hill,
Just seen in paler light! And Weston there,
Where I remember a few cottages
Sprinkling the sand, uplifts its tower, and shines,
As if in conscious beauty, o'er the scene.
And I have seen a far more welcome sight,
The living line of population stream —
Children, and village maids, and gray old men —
Stream o'er the sands to church: such change has been
In the brief compass of one hastening life!

And yet that hill, the light, is to my eyes
Familiar as those sister isles that sit
In the mid channel! Look, how calm they sit,
As listening each to the tide's rocking roar!
Of different aspects – this, abrupt and high,
And desolate, and cold, and bleak, uplifts
Its barren brow – barren, but on its steep
One native flower is seen, the peony;
One flower, which smiles in sunshine or in storm,
There sits companionless, but yet not sad:
She has no sister of the summer-field,
None to rejoice with her when spring returns,
None that, in sympathy, may bend its head,
When evening winds blow hollow o'er the rock,
In autumn's gloom! So Virtue, a fair flower,
Blooms on the rock of Care, and, though unseen,
So smiles in cold seclusion; while, remote
From the world's flaunting fellowship, it wears,
Like hermit Piety, one smile of peace,
In sickness or in health, in joy or tears,
In summer days or cold adversity;
And still it feels Heaven's breath, reviving, steal
On its lone breast; feels the warm blessedness
Of Heaven's own light about it, though its leaves
Are wet with evening tears!
Yonder island
Seems not so desolate, nor frowns aloof,
As if from human kind. The lighthouse there,
Through the long winter night, shows its pale fire;

And three forgotten mounds mark the rude graves,
None knows of whom; but those of men who breathed,
And bore their part in life, and looked to Heaven,
As man looks now! – they died and left no name!
Fancy might think, amid the wilderness
Of waves, they sought to hide from human eyes
All memory of their fortunes. Till the trump
Of doom, they rest unknown. But mark that hill —
Where Kewstoke seems to creep into the sea,
Thy abbey, Woodspring, rose.[13] Wild is the spot;
And there three mailed murderers retired,
To the last point of land. There they retired,
And there they knelt upon the ground, and cried,
Bury us 'mid the waves, where none may know
The whispered secret of a deed of blood!
No stone is o'er those graves: – the sullen tide,
As it flows by and sounds along the shore,
Seems moaningly to say, Pray for our souls!
Nor other "Miserere" have they had
At eve, nor other orison at morn.
Thou hast put on thy mildest look to-day,
Thou mighty element! Solemn, and still,
And motionless, and touched with softer light,

[13] The abbey was built by the descendants of Becket's murderers. Almost at the brink of the channel, being secured from it only by a narrow shelf of rocks called Swallow-clift, William de Courteneye, about 1210, founded a friary of Augustine monks at Worsprynge, or Woodspring, to the honour of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and St Thomas à Becket. William de Courteneye was a descendant of William de Traci, and was nearly related to the three other murderers of à Becket, to whom this monastery was dedicated.

And without noise, lies all thy long expanse.
Thou seemest now as calm, as if a child
Might dally with thy playfulness, and stand,
The weak winds lifting gently its light hair;
Upon thy margin, watching one by one
The long waves, breaking slow, with such a sound
As Silence, in her dreamy mood, might love,
When she more softly breathed, fearing a breath
Might mar thy placidness!
Oh, treachery!
So still, and like a giant in his strength
Reposing, didst thou lie, when the fond sire
One moment looked, and saw his blithsome boys
Gay on the sands, one moment, and the next,
Heart-stricken and bereft, by the same surge,
Stood in his desolation;[14]– for he looked,
And thought how he had blessed them in their sleep,
And the next moment they were borne away,
Snatched by the circling surge, and seen no more;
While morning shone, and not a ripple told
How terrible and dark a deed was done!
And so the seas were hushed, and not a cloud
Marred the pale moonlight, save that, here and there,
Wandering far off, some feathery shreds were seen,
As the sole orb, above the lighthouse, held
Its course in loveliness; and not a sound
Came from the distant deep, save that, at times,

[14] See the late Sir Charles Elton's pathetic description of the deaths of his two sons at Weston, whilst bathing in his sight; one lost in his endeavour to save his brother.

Amid the noise of human merriment,
The ear might seem to catch a low faint moan,
A boding sound, as of a dying dirge,
From the sunk rocks;[15] while all was still beside,
And every star seemed listening in its watch;
When the gay packet-bark, to Erin bound,
Resounding with the laugh and song, went on!
Look! she is gone! O God! she is gone down,
With her light-hearted company; gone down,
And all at once is still, save, on the mast,
Just peering o'er the waters, the wild shrieks
Of three, at times, are heard! They, when the dead
Were round them, floating on the moonlight wave,
Kept there their dismal watch till morning dawned,
And to the living world were then restored!

PART SECOND

REFLECTIONS ON THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS STATE OF PARISHES, PAST AND PRESENT

A shower, even while we gaze, steals o'er the scene,

[15] Called "The Wolves," from their peculiar sound.

Shrouding it, and the sea-view is shout out,
Save where, beyond the holms, one thread of light
Hangs, and a pale and sunny stream shoots on,
O'er the dim vapours, faint and far away,
Like Hope's still light beyond the storms of Time.
Come, let us rest a while in this rude seat!
I was a child when first I heard the sound
Of the great sea. 'Twas night, and journeying far,
We were belated on our road, 'mid scenes
New and unknown, – a mother and her child,
Now first in this wide world a wanderer: —
My father came, the pastor of the church[16]
That crowns the high hill crest, above the sea;
When, as the wheels went slow, and the still night
Seemed listening, a low murmur met the ear,
Not of the winds: – my mother softly said,
Listen! it is the sea! With breathless awe,
I heard the sound, and closer pressed her hand.
Much of the sea, in infant wonderment,
I oft had heard, and of the shipwrecked man,
Who sees, on some lone isle, day after day,
The sun sink o'er the solitude of waves,
Like Crusoe; and the tears would start afresh,
Whene'er my mother kissed my cheek, and told
The story of that desolate wild man,
And how the speaking bird, when he returned
After long absence to his cave forlorn,
Said, as in tones of human sympathy,

[16] Uphill.

Poor Robin Crusoe!
Thoughts like these arose,
When first I heard, at night, the distant sound,
Great Ocean, "of thy everlasting voice!"[17]
Where the white parsonage, among the trees,
Peeped out, that night I restless passed. The sea
Filled all my thoughts; and when slow morning came,
And the first sunbeam streaked the window-pane,
I rose unnoticed, and with stealthy pace,
Straggling along the village green, explored
Alone my fearful but adventurous way;
When, having turned the hedgerow, I beheld,
For the first time, thy glorious element,
Old Ocean, glittering in the beams of morn,
Stretching far off, and, westward, without bound,
Amid thy sole dominion, rocking loud!
Shivering I stood, and tearful; and even now,
When gathering years have marked my look, – even now
I feel the deep impression of that hour,
As but of yesterday!
Spirit of Time,
A moment pause, and I will speak to thee!
Dark clouds are round thee; but, lo! Memory waves
Her wand, – the clouds disperse, as the gray rack
Disperses while we gaze, and light steals out,
While the gaunt phantom almost seems to drop
His scythe! Now shadows of the past, distinct,
Are thronging round; the voices of the dead

[17] Southey.

Are heard; and, lo! the very smoke goes up —
For so it seems – from yonder tenement,
Where leads the slender pathway to the door.
Enter that small blue parlour: there sits one,
A female, and a child is in her arms;
A child leans at her side, intent to show
A pictured book, and looks upon her face;
One, from the green, comes with a cowslip ball;[18]
And one,[19] a hero, sits sublime and horsed,
Upon a rocking-steed, from Banwell-fair;
This,[20] drives his tiny wheel-barrow, without,
On the green garden-sward; whilst one,[21] apart,
Sighs o'er his solemn task – the spelling-book —
Half moody, half in tears. Some lines of thought
Are on that matron's brow; yet placidness,
Such as resigned religion gives, is there,
Mingled with sadness; for who e'er beheld,
Without one stealing sigh, a progeny
Of infants clustering round maternal knees,
Nor felt some boding fears, how they might fare
In the wide world, when they who loved them most
Were silent in their graves!
Nay! pass not on,
Till thou hast marked a book – the leaf turned down —

[18] Three sisters.

[19] Dr Henry Bowles, physician on the staff, buried at sea.

[20] Charles Bowles, Esq. of Shaftesbury.

[21] The author.

Night Thoughts on Death and Immortality!
This book, my mother! in the weary hours
Of life, in every care, in every joy,
Was thy companion: next to God's own Word,
The book that bears this name,[22] thou didst revere,
Leaving a stain of tears upon the page,
Whose lessons, with a more emphatic truth,
Touched thine own heart!
That heart has long been still!
But who is he, of aspect more severe,
Yet with a manly kindness in his mien,
He, who o'erlooks yon sturdy labourer
Delving the glebe! My father as he lived!
That father, and that mother, "earth to earth,
And dust to dust," the inevitable doom
Hath long consigned! And where is he, the son,
Whose future fate they pondered with a sigh?
Long, nor unprosperous, has been his way
Through life's tumultuous scenes, who, when a child,
Played in that garden platform in the sun;
Or loitered o'er the common, and pursued
The colts among the sand-hills; or, intent
On hardier enterprise, his pumpkin-ship,
New-rigged, and buoyant, with its tiny sail,
Launched on the garden pond; or stretched his hand,
At once forgetting all this glorious toil,
When the bright butterfly came wandering by.
But never will that day pass from his mind,

[22] Young's "Night Thoughts."

When, scarcely breathing for delight, at Wells,
He saw the horsemen of the clock[23] ride round,
As if for life; and ancient Blandifer,[24]
Seated aloft, like Hermes, in his chair
Complacent as when first he took his seat,
Some hundred years ago; saw him lift up,
As if old Time was cowering at his feet,
Solemn lift up his mace, and strike the bell,
Himself for ever silent in his seat.
How little thought I then, the hour would come,
When the loved prelate of that beauteous fane,
At whose command I write, might placidly
Smile on this picture, in my future verse,
When Blandifer had struck so many hours
For me, his poet, in this vale of years,
Himself unchanged and solemn as of yore!
My father was the pastor, and the friend
Of all who, living then – the scene is closed —
Now silent in that rocky churchyard sleep,
The aged and the young! A village then
Was not as villages are now. The hind,
Who delved, or "jocund drove his team a-field,"
Had then an independence in his look
And heart; and, plodding on his lowly path,
Disdained a parish dole, content, though poor.
He was the village monitor: he taught
His children to be good, and read their book,

[23] Clock in the Cathedral.

[24] Traditional name of the clock-image, seated in a chair, and striking the hours.

And in the gallery took his Sunday place, —
To-morrow, with the bee, to work.
So passed
His days of cheerful, independent toil;
And when the pastor came that way, at eve,
He had a ready present for the child
Who read his book the best; and that poor child
Remembered it, when, treading the same path
In which his father trod, he so grew up
Contented, till old Time had blanched his locks,
And he was borne – whilst the bell tolled – to sleep
In the same churchyard where his father slept!
His daughter walked content, and innocent
As lovely, in her lowly path. She turned
The hour-glass, while the humming wheel went round,
Or went "a-Maying" o'er the fields in spring,
Leading her little brother by the hand,
Along the village lane, and o'er the stile,
To gather cowslips; and then home again,
To turn her wheel, contented, through the day.
Or, singing low, bend where her brother slept,
Rocking the cradle, to "sweet William's grave!"[25]
No lure could tempt her from the woodbine shed,
Where she grew up, and folded first her hands
In infant prayer: yet oft a tear would steal
Down her young cheek, to think how desolate
That home would be when her poor mother died;
Still praying that she ne'er might cause a pain,

[25] *Vide* the old ballad.

Undutiful, to "bring down her gray hairs
With sorrow to the grave!"
Now mark this scene!
The fuming factory's polluted air
Has stained the country! See that rural nymph,
An infant in her arms! She claims the dole
From the cold parish, which her faithless swain
Denies: he stands aloof, with clownish leer;
The constable behind – and mark his brow —
Beckons the nimble clerk; the justice, grave,
Turns from his book a moment, with a look
Of pity, signs the warrant for her pay,
A weekly eighteen pence; she, unabashed,
Slides from the room, and not a transient blush,
Far less the accusing tear, is on her cheek!
A different scene comes next: That village maid
Approaches timidly, yet beautiful;
A tear is on her lids, when she looks down
Upon her sleeping child. Her heart was won,
The wedding-day was fixed, the ring was bought!
'Tis the same story – Colin was untrue!
He ruined, and then left her to her fate.
Pity her, she has not a friend on earth,
And that still tear speaks to all human hearts
But his, whose cruelty and treachery
Caused it to flow! So crime still follows crime.
Ask we the cause? See, where those engines heave,
That spread their giant arms o'er all the land!
The wheel is silent in the vale! Old age

And youth are levelled by one parish law!
Ask why that maid, all day, toils in the field,
Associate with the rude and ribald clown,
Even in the shrinking April of her youth?
To earn her loaf, and eat it by herself.
Parental love is smitten to the dust;
Over a little smoke the aged sire
Holds his pale hands – and the deserted hearth
Is cheerless as his heart: but Piety
Points to the Bible! Shut the book again:
The ranter is the roving gospel now,
And each his own apostle! Shut the book:
A locust-swarm of tracts darken its light,
And choke its utterance; while a Babel-rout
Of mock-religionists, turn where we will,
Have drowned the small still voice, till Piety,
Sick of the din, retires to pray alone.
But though abused Religion, and the dole
Of pauper-pay, and vomitories huge
Of smoke, are each a steam-engine of crime,
Polluting, far and wide, the wholesome air,
And withering life's green verdure underneath,
Full many a poor and lowly flower of want
Has Education nursed, like a pure rill,
Winding through desert glens, and bade it live
To grace the cottage with its mantling sweets.
There was a village girl, I knew her well,
From five years old and upwards; all her friends
Were dead, and she was to the workhouse left,

And there a witness to such sounds profane
As might turn virtue pale! When Sunday came,
Assembled with the children of the poor,
Upon the lawn of my own parsonage,
She stood among them: they were taught to read
In companies and groups, upon the green,
Each with its little book; her lighted eyes
Shone beautiful where'er they turned; her form
Was graceful; but her book her sole delight![26]
Instructed thus she went a serving-maid
Into the neighbouring town, – ah! who shall guide
A friendless maid, so beautiful and young,
From life's contagions! But she had been taught
The duties of her humble lot, to pray
To God, and that one heavenly Father's eye
Was over rich and poor! On Sunday night,
She read her Bible, turning still away
From those who flocked, inflaming and inflamed,
To nightly meetings; but she never closed
Her eyes, or raised them to the light of morn,
Without a prayer to Him who "bade the sun
Go forth," a giant, from his eastern gate!
No art, no bribe, could lure her steps astray
From the plain path, and lessons she had learned,
A village child. She is a mother now,
And lives to prove the blessings and the fruits
Of moral duty, on the poorest child,

[26] A book, called the "Villager's Verse Book," to excite the first feelings of religion, from common rural imagery, was written on purpose for these children.

When duty, and when sober piety,
Impressing the young heart, go hand in hand.
No villager was then a disputant
In Calvinistic and contentious creeds;
No pale mechanic, from a neighbouring sink
Of steam and rank debauchery and smoke,
Crawled forth upon a Sunday morn, with looks
Saddening the very sunshine, to instruct
The parish poor in evangelic lore;
To teach them to cast off, "as filthy rags,"
Good works! and listen to such ministers,
Who all (be sure) "are worthy of their hire;"
Who only preach for good of their poor souls,
That they may turn "from darkness unto light,"
And, above all, fly, as the gates of hell,
Morality![27] and Baal's steeple house,
Where, without "heart-work," Doctor Littlegrace
Drones his dull requiem to the snoring clerk!"[28]
True; he who drawls his heartless homily
For one day's work, and plods, on wading stilts,
Through prosing paragraphs, with inference,
Methodically dull, as orthodox,
Enforcing sagely that we all must die
When God shall call – oh, what a pulpit drone
Is he! The blue fly might as well preach "Hum,"
And "so conclude!"
But save me from the sight

[27] See "Pilgrim's Progress."

[28] See Rowland Hill's caricatures, entitled "Village Dialogues."

Of curate fop, half jockey and half clerk,
The tandem-driving Tommy of a town,
Disdaining books, omniscient of a horse,
Impatient till September comes again,
Eloquent only of "the pretty girl
With whom he danced last night!" Oh! such a thing
Is worse than the dull doctor, who performs
Duly his stinted task, and then to sleep,
Till Sunday asks another homily
Against all innovations of the age,
Mad missionary zeal, and Bible clubs,
And Calvinists and Evangelicals!
Yes! Evangelicals! Oh, glorious word!
But who deserves that awful name? Not he
Who spits his puny Puritanic spite
On harmless recreation; who reviles
All who, majestic in their distant scorn,
Bear on in silence their calm Christian course.
He only is the Evangelical
Who holds in equal scorn dogmas and dreams,
The Shibboleth of saintly magazines,
Decked with most grim and godly visages;
The cobweb sophistry, or the dark code
Of commentators, who, with loathsome track,
Crawl o'er a text, or on the lucid page,
Beaming with heavenly love and God's own light,
Sit like a nightmare![29] Soon a deadly mist

[29] The text, which no Christian can misunderstand, "God is *not* willing," is turned, by elaborate Jesuitical sophistry, to "God is willing," by one "master in Israel." So

Creeps o'er our eyes and heart, till angel forms
Turn into hideous phantoms, mocking us,
Even when we look for comfort at the spring
And well of life, while dismal voices cry,
Death! Reprobation! Woe! Eternal woe!
He only is the Evangelical
Who from the human commentary turns
With tranquil scorn, and nearer to his heart
Presses the Bible, till repentant tears,
In silence, wet his cheek, and new-born faith,
And hope, and charity, with radiant smile,
Visit his heart, – all pointing to the cross!
He only is the Evangelical,
Who, with eyes fixed upon that spectacle,
Christ and him crucified, with ardent hope,
And holier feelings, lifts his thoughts from earth,
And cries, My Father! Meantime, his whole heart
Is on God's Word: he preaches Faith, and Hope,
And Charity, – these three, and not that one!
And Charity, the greatest of these three![30]
Give me an Evangelical like this! But now
The blackest crimes in tract-religion's code
Are moral virtues! Spare the prodigal, —
He may awake when God shall "call;" but, hell,

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that, in fact, the Almighty, saying No when he should have said Yes, did not know what he meant, till such a sophistical blasphemer set him right! To such length does an adherence to preconceived Calvinism lead the mind.

[30] "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." —*St Paul*.

Roll thy avenging flames, to swallow up
The son who never left his father's home
Lest he should trust to morals when he dies!
Let him not lay the unction to his soul,
That his upbraiding conscience tells no tale
At that dread hour; bid him confess his sin,
The greater that, with humble hope, he looks
Back on a well-spent life! Bid him confess
That he hath broken all God's holy laws, —
In vain hath he done justly, – loved, in vain,
Mercy, and hath walked humbly with his God!
These are mere works; but faith is everything,
And all in all! The Christian code contains
No "if" or "but!"[31] Let tabernacles ring,
And churches too,[32] with sanctimonious strains
Baneful as these; and let such strains be heard
Through half the land; and can we shut our eyes,
And, sadly wondering, ask the cause of crimes,
When infidelity stands lowering here,
With open scorn, and such a code as this,
So baneful, withers half the charities
Of human hearts! Oh! dear is Mercy's voice
To man, a mourner in the vale of sin
And death: how dear the still small voice of Faith,
That bids him raise his look beyond the clouds

[31] Literally the expression of Hawker, the apostle of thousands and thousands. I speak of the obvious inference drawn from such expressions, and this daring denial of the very words of his Master: "Happy are ye, *if* ye do them!" —*Christ*. "*But* in vain," *etc.*

[32] I fear many churches have more to answer for than tabernacles.

That hang o'er this dim earth; but he who tears
Faith from her heavenly sisterhood, denies
The gospel, and turns traitor to the cause
He has engaged to plead. Come, Faith, and Hope,
And Charity! how dear to the sad heart,
The consolations and the glorious views
That animate the Christian in his course!
But save, oh! save me from the tract-led Miss,
Who trots to every Bethel club, and broods
O'er some black missionary's monstrous tale,
Reckless of want around her!
But the priest,
Who deems the Almighty frowns upon his throne,
Because two pair of harmless dowagers,
Whose life has passed without a stain, beguile
An evening hour with cards; who deems that hell
Burns fiercer for a saraband; that thou —
Thou, my sweet Shakspeare – thou, whose touch awakes
The inmost heart of virtuous sympathy, —
Thou, O divinest poet! at whose voice
Sad Pity weeps, or guilty Terror drops
The blood-stained dagger from his palsied hand, —
That thou art pander to the criminal!
He who thus edifies his Christian flock,
Moves, more than even the Bethel-trotting Miss,
My pity, my aversion, and my scorn.
Cry aloud! – Oh, speak in thunder to the soul
That sleeps in sin! Harrow the inmost heart
Of murderous intent, till dew-drops stand

Upon his haggard brow! Call conscience up,
Like a stern spectre, whose dim finger points
To dark misdeeds of yore! Wither the arm
Of the oppressor, at whose feet the slave
Crouches, and pleading lifts his fettered hands!
Thou violator of the innocent
Hide thee! Hence! hide thee in the deepest cave,
From man's indignant sight! Thou hypocrite!
Trample in dust thy mask, nor cry faith, faith,
Making it but a hollow tinkling sound,
That stirs not the foul heart! Horrible wretch!
Look not upon the face of that sweet child,
With thoughts which hell would tremble to conceive!
Oh, shallow, and oh, senseless! In a world
Where rank offences turn the good man pale,
Who leave the Christian's sternest code, to vent
Their petty ire on petty trespasses,
If trespasses they are; – when the wide world
Groans with the burthen of offence; when crimes
Stalk on, with front defying, o'er the land,
Whilst, her own cause betraying, Christian zeal
Thus swallows camels, straining at a gnat!
Therefore, without a comment, or a note,
We love the Bible; and we prize the more
The spirit of its pure unspotted page,
As pure from the infectious breath that stains,
Like a foul fume, its hallowed light, we hail
The radiant car of heaven, amidst the clouds
Of mortal darkness, and of human mist,

Sole, as the sun in heaven![33]
Oh! whilst the car
Of God's own glory rolls along in light,
We join the loud song of the Christian host,
(All puny systems shrinking from the blaze),
Hosannah to the car of light! Roll on!
Saldanna's[34] rocks have echoed to the hymns
Of Faith, and Hope, and Charity! Roll on!
Till the wild wastes of inmost Africa,
Where the long Niger's track is lost, respond,
Hosannah to the car of light! Roll on!
From realm to realm, from shore to farthest shore,
O'er dark pagodas, and huge idol-fanes,
That frown along the Ganges' utmost stream,
Till the poor widow, from the burning pile
Starting, shall lift her hands to heaven, and weep
That she has found a Saviour, and has heard
The sounds of Christian love! Oh, horrible!
The pile is smoking! – the bamboos lie there,
That held her down when the last struggle shook
The blazing pile![35] Hasten, O car of light!
Alas for suffering nature! Juggernaut,
Armed, in his giant car goes also forth,

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[33] The long controversial note appended to this poem has been purposely suppressed.

[34] I forget in what book of travels I read an account of a poor Hottentot, who being brought here, clothed, and taught our language, after a year or two was seen, every day till he died, on some bridge, muttering to himself, "Home go, Saldanna."

[35] See Bishop Heber's Journal. Yet the Shaster, or the holy book of the Hindoos, says, "No one shall be burned, unless willingly!"

Goes forth amid his red and reeling priests,
While thousands gasp and die beneath the wheels,
As they go groaning on, 'mid cries, and drums,
And flashing cymbals, and delirious songs
Of tinkling dancing girls, and all the rout
Of frantic superstition! Turn away!
And is not Juggernaut himself with us?
Not only cold insidious sophistry
Comes, blinking with its taper-fume, to light,
If so he may, the sun in the mid heaven!
Not only blind and hideous blasphemy
Scowls in his cloak, and mocks the glorious orb,
Ascending, in its silence, o'er a world
Of sin and sorrow; but a hellish brood
Of imps, and fiends, and phantoms, ape the form
Of godliness, till godliness itself
Seems but a painted monster, and a name
For darker crimes, at which the shuddering heart
Shrinks; while the ranting rout, as they march on,
Mock Heaven with hymns, till, see! pale Belial
Sighs o'er a filthy tract, and Moloch marks,
With gouts of blood, his brandished magazine!
Start, monster, from the dismal dream! Look up!
Oh! listen to the apostolic voice,
That, like a voice from heaven, proclaims, To faith
Add virtue! There is no mistaking here;
Whilst moral education by the hand
Shall lead the children to the house of God,
Nor sever Christian faith from Christian love.

If we would see the fruits of charity,
Look at that village group, and paint the scene!
Surrounded by a clear and silent stream,
Where the swift trout shoots from the sudden ray,
A rural mansion on the level lawn
Uplifts its ancient gables, whose slant shade
Is drawn, as with a line, from roof to porch,
Whilst all the rest is sunshine. O'er the trees
In front, the village church, with pinnacles
And light gray tower, appears; whilst to the right,
An amphitheatre of oaks extends
Its sweep, till, more abrupt, a wooded knoll,
Where once a castle frowned, closes the scene.
And see! an infant troop, with flags and drum,
Are marching o'er that bridge, beneath the woods,
On to the table spread upon the lawn,
Raising their little hands when grace is said;
Whilst she who taught them to lift up their hearts
In prayer, and to "remember, in their youth,"
God, "their Creator," mistress of the scene
(Whom I remember once as young), looks on,
Blessing them in the silence of her heart.
And we too bless them. Oh! away, away!
Cant, heartless cant, and that economy,
Cold, and miscalled "political," away!
Let the bells ring – a Puritan turns pale
To hear the festive sound: let the bells ring —
A ***Christian*** loves them; and this holiday
Remembers him, while sighs unbidden steal,

Of life's departing and departed days,
When he himself was young, and heard the bells,
In unison with feelings of his heart —
His first pure ***Christian*** feelings, hallowing
The harmonious sound!
And, children, now rejoice, —
Now, for the holidays of life are few;
Nor let the rustic minstrel tune, in vain,
The cracked church-viol, resonant to-day
Of mirth, though humble! Let the fiddle scrape
Its merriment, and let the joyous group
Dance in a round, for soon the ills of life
Will come! Enough, if one day in the year,
If one brief day, of this brief life, be given
To mirth as innocent as yours! But, lo!
That ancient woman, leaning on her staff!
Pale, on her crutch she rests one withered hand;
One withered hand, which Gerard Dow might paint,
Even its blue veins! And who is she? The nurse
Of the fair mistress of the scene: she led
Her tottering steps in infancy – she spelt
Her earliest lesson to her; and she now
Leans from that open window, while she thinks —
When summer comes again, the turf will lie
On my cold breast; but I rejoice to see
My child thus leading on the progeny
Of her poor neighbours in the peaceful path
Of humble virtue! I shall be at rest,
Perhaps, when next they meet; but my last prayer

Is with them, and the mistress of this home.
"The innocent are gay,"[36] gay as the lark
That sings in morn's first sunshine; and why not?
But may they ne'er forget, as life steals on,
In age, the lessons they have learned in youth!
How false the charge, how foul the calumny
On England's generous aristocracy,
That, wrapped in sordid, selfish apathy,
They feel not for the poor!
Ask, is it true?
Lord of the whirling wheels, the charge is false![37]
Ten thousand charities adorn the land,
Beyond thy cold conception, from this source.
What cottage child but has been neatly clad,
And taught its earliest lesson, from their care?
Witness that schoolhouse, mantled with festoon
Of various plants, which fancifully wreath
Its window-mullions, and that rustic porch,
Whence the low hum of infant voices blend
With airs of spring, without. Now, all alive,
The green sward rings with play, among the shrubs —
Hushed the long murmur of the morning task,
Before the pensive matron's desk!
But turn,

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[36] Cowper.

[37] The English landlord has been held up to obloquy, as endeavouring to keep up the price of corn, for his own sordid interest; but rent never leads, it only follows, and the utmost a landlord can get for his capital is three per cent., whereas the lord of whirling wheels gains thirty per cent.

And mark that aged widow! By her side
Is God's own Word; and, lo! the spectacles
Are yet upon the page. Her daughter kneels
And prays beside her! Many years have shed
Their snow so silently and softly down
Upon her head, that Time, as if to gaze,
Seems for a moment to suspend his flight
Onward, in reverence to those few gray hairs,
That steal beneath her cap, white as its snow.
Whilst the expiring lamp is kept alive,
Thus feebly, by a duteous daughter's love,
Her last faint prayer, ere all is dark on earth,
Will to the God of heaven ascend, for those
Whose comforts smoothed her silent bed.
And thou,
Witness Elysian Tempe of Stourhead!
Oh, not because, with bland and gentle smile,
Adding a radiance to the look of age,
Like eve's still light, thy liberal master spreads
His lettered treasures; – not because his search
Has dived the Druid mound, illustrating
His country's annals, and the monuments
Of darkest ages; – not because his woods
Wave o'er the dripping cavern of Old Stour,
Where classic temples gleam along the edge
Of the clear waters, winding beautiful; —
Oh! not because the works of breathing art,
Of Poussin, Rubens, Rembrandt, Gainsborough,
Start, like creations, from the silent walls;

To thee, this tribute of respect and love,
Beloved, benevolent, and generous Hoare,
Grateful I pay; – but that, when thou art dead
(Late may it be!) the poor man's tear will fall,
And his voice falter, when he speaks of thee.[38]
And witness thou, magnificent abode,
Where virtuous Ken,[39] with his gray hairs and shroud,
Came, for a shelter from the world's rude storm,
In his old age, leaving his palace-throne,
Having no spot where he might lay his head,
In all the earth! Oh, witness thou, the seat
Of his first friend, his friend from schoolboy days!
Oh! witness thou, if one who wanted bread
Has not found shelter there; if one poor man
Has been deserted in his hour of need;
Or one poor child been left without a guide,
A father, an instructor, and a friend;
In him, the pastor, and distributor[40]
Of bounties large, yet falling silently
As dews on the cold turf! And witness thou,

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[38] These lines were written at Stourhead.

[39] The Bishop of Bath and Wells. Ken was one of the seven bishops sent to the Tower by James. He had character, patronage, wealth, station, eminence: he resigned all, at the accession of King William, for the sake of that conscience which, in a former reign, sent him a prisoner to the Tower. He had no home in the world; but he found an asylum with the generous nobleman who had been his old schoolfellow at Winchester. Here, it is said, he brought with him his shroud, in which he was buried at Frome; and here he chiefly composed his four volumes of poems.

[40] The Rev. Mr Skurray.

Marston,[41] the seat of my kind, honoured friend —
My kind and honoured friend, from youthful days.
Then wandering on the banks of Rhine, we saw
Cities and spires, beneath the mountains blue,
Gleaming; or vineyards creep from rock to rock;
Or unknown castles hang, as if in clouds:
Or heard the roaring of the cataract,
Far off, beneath the dark defile or gloom
Of ancient forests; till behold, in light,
Foaming and flashing, with enormous sweep,
Through the rent rocks – where, o'er the mist of spray
The rainbow, like a fairy in her bower,
Is sleeping, while it roars – that volume vast,
White, and with thunder's deafening roar, comes down.
Live long, live happy, till thy journey close,
Calm as the light of day! Yet witness thou,
The seat of noble ancestry, the seat
Of science, honoured by the name of Boyle,
Though many sorrows, since we met in youth,
Have pressed thy generous master's manly heart,
Witness, the partner of his joys and griefs;
Witness the grateful tenantry, the home
Of the poor man, the children of that school —
Still warm benevolence sits smiling there.
And witness, the fair mansion, on the edge
Of those chalk hills, which, from my garden walk,
Daily I see, whose gentle mistress droops[42]

[41] The seat of the Earl of Cork and Orrery.

[42] Mrs Heneage, Compton House.

With her own griefs, yet never turns her look
From others' sorrows; on whose lids the tear
Shines yet more lovely than the light of youth.
And many a cottage-garden smiles, whose flowers
Invite the music of the morning bee.
And many a fireside has shot out, at eve,
Its light upon the old man's withered hand
And pallid cheek from their benevolence —
Sad as is still the parish-pauper's home —
Who shed around their patrimonial seats
The light of heaven-descending Charity.
And every feeling of the Christian heart
Would rise accusing, could I pass unsung,
Thee,[43] fair as Charity's own form, who late
Didst stand beneath the porch of that gray fane,
Soliciting[44] a mite from all who passed,
With such a smile, as to refuse would seem
To do a wrong to Charity herself.
How many blessings, silent and unheard,
The mistress of the lonely parsonage
Dispenses, when she takes her daily round
Among the aged and the sick, whose prayers
And blessings are her only recompense!
How many pastors, by cold obloquy
And senseless hate reviled, tread the same path
Of charity in silence, taught by Him

[43] Mrs Methuen, of Corsham House.

[44] For the "Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," on which occasion a sermon was preached by the author.

Who was reviled not to revile again;
And leaving to a righteous God their cause!
Come, let us, with the pencil in our hand,
Portray a character. What book is this?
Rector of Overton![45] I know him not;
But well I know the Vicar, and a man
More worthy of that name, and worthier still
To grace a higher station of our Church,
None knows; – a friend and father to the poor,
A scholar, unobtrusive, yet profound,
"As e'er my conversation coped withal;"
His piety unvarnished, but sincere.[46]
Killarney's lake,[47] and Scotia's hills,[48] have heard
His summer-wandering reed; nor on the themes
Of hallowed inspiration[49] has his harp
Been silent, though ten thousand jangling strings —
When all are poets in this land of song,
And every field chinks with its grasshopper —
Have well-nigh drowned the tones; but poesy
Mingles, at eventide, with many a mood
Of stirring fancy, on his silent heart
When o'er those bleak and barren downs, in rain
Or sunshine, where the giant Wansdeck sweeps,

[45] A book, just published, with this title, "The Duke of Marlborough is rector of Overton, near Marlborough."

[46] Rev. Charles Hoyle, Vicar of Overton, near Marlborough.

[47] "Killarney," a poem.

[48] Sonnets.

[49] "Exodus," a poem.

Homewards he bends his solitary way.
Live long; and late may the old villager
Look on thy stone, amid the churchyard grass,
Remembering years of kindness, and the tongue,
Eloquent of his Maker, when he sat
At church, and heard the undivided code
Of apostolic truth – of hope, of faith,
Of charity – the end and test of all.
Live long; and though I proudly might recall
The names of many friends – like thee, sincere
And pious, and in solitude adorned
With rare accomplishments – this grateful praise
Accept, congenial to the poet's theme;
For well I know, haply when I am dead,
And in my shroud, whene'er thy homeward path
Lies o'er those hills, and thou shalt cast a look
Back on our garden-slope, and Bremhill tower,
Thou wilt remember me, and many a day
There passed in converse and sweet harmony.
A truce to satire, and to harsh reproof,
Severer arguments, that have detained
The unwilling Muse too long: – come, while the clouds
Work heavy and the winds at intervals,
Pipe, and at intervals sink in a sigh,
As breathed o'er sounds and shadows of the past —
Change we our style and measure, to relate
A village tale of a poor Cornish maid,
And of her prayer-book. It is sad, but true;
And simply told, though not in lady phrase

Of modish song, may touch some gentle heart,
And wake an interest, when description fails.

PART THIRD

THE MAIDEN'S CURSE

I subjoin the plain narrative of the singular event on which this tale is founded, from Mr Polwhele, that the reader may see how far, *poetically*, I have departed from plain facts, and what I have thought it best to add for the sake of moral, picturesque, and poetical effect. The narrative is as follows: —

"October, 1780. Thomas Thomas, aged 37. This man died of mental anguish, or what is called a broken heart. He lived in the village of Drannock, in the parish of Gwinnear, till an unhappy event occurred, which proved fatal to his peace of mind for more than eight years, and finally occasioned his death. He courted Elizabeth Thomas, of the same village, who was his first-cousin; and it was understood that they were under a matrimonial engagement. But in May 1772, some little disagreement having happened between them, he, out of resentment, or from some other motive, paid great attention to another girl; and on Sunday the 31st of that month, in the afternoon, accompanied her to the Methodist meeting at Wall. During their absence, the slighted

female, who was very beautiful in her person, but of an extremely irritable temper, took a rope and a common prayer-book, in which she had folded down the 109th Psalm, and, going into an adjacent field, hanged herself. Thomas, on his return from the preaching, inquired for Betsy; and being told she had not been seen for two or three hours, he exclaimed, 'Good God! she has destroyed herself!' which apprehension seems to show, either that she had threatened to commit suicide in consequence of his desertion, or that he dreaded it from a knowledge of the violence of her disposition. But when he saw that his fears were realised, and had read the psalm, so full of execrations, which she had pointed out to him, he cried out, 'I am ruined for ever and ever!' The very sight of this village and neighbourhood was now become insupportable, and he went to live at Marazion, hoping that a change of scene and social intercourse might expel those excruciating reflections which harrowed up his very soul, or at least render them less acute; but in this he appeared to be mistaken, for he found himself closely pursued by the evil demon

> 'Despair, whose torments no man, sure,
> But lovers and the damned endure.'

"To hear the 109th Psalm would petrify him with horror, and therefore he would not attend divine service on the 22d day of the month; he dreaded to go near a reading school, lest he should hear the dreaded lesson. Whatever misfortunes befel him (and these

were not a few, for he was several times hurt, and even maimed, in the mines in which he laboured), he still attributed them all to the malevolent agency of the deceased, and thought he could find allusions to the whole in the calamitous legacy which she had bequeathed him. When he slumbered, for he knew nothing of sound sleep, the injured girl appeared to his imagination, with such a countenance as she retained after the rash action, and the prayer-book in her hand, open at the hateful psalm; and he was frequently heard to cry out, 'Oh, my dear Betsy, shut the book, shut the book!' *etc.* With a mind so disturbed and deranged, though he could not reasonably expect much consolation from matrimony, yet imagining that the cares of a family might distract his thoughts from the miserable subject by which he was harassed both by day and night, he successively paid his addresses to many girls of Marazion; but they indignantly flew from him, and with a sneer asked him, whether he was desirous of bringing all the curses in the 109th Psalm on their heads? At length, however, he succeeded with one who had less superstition and more fortitude than the rest, and he led her to St Hilary church, to be married, January 21, 1778; but on the road thither, they were overtaken by a sudden and violent hurricane, such as those which not unfrequently happen in the vicinity of Mount's Bay; and he, suspecting that poor Betsy rode the whirlwind and directed the storm, was convulsed with terror, and was literally 'coupled with fear.' Such is the power of conscious guilt to impute accidental occurrences to the hand of vindictive justice, and so true is the

observation of the poet,

'Judicium metuit sibi mens ***mali*** conscia justum.'

"He lived long enough to have a son and a daughter; but the corrosive worm within his breast preyed upon his vitals, and at length consumed all the powers of his body, as it had long before destroyed the tranquillity of his mind, and he was released from all his pangs, both mental and corporeal, on Friday, October 20, 1780, and buried at St Hilary, the Sunday following, during evening service."

Oh! shut the book, dear Mary, shut the book!
So William cried, with wild and frantic look.
She whom he loved was in her shroud, nor pain
Nor grief can visit her sad heart again.
There is no sculptured tombstone at her head;
No rude memorial marks her lowly bed:
The village children, every holiday,
Round the green turf, in summer sunshine play;
And none, but those now bending to the tomb,
Remember Mary, lovely in her bloom!
Yet oft the hoary swain, when autumn sighs
Through the long grass, sees a dim form arise,
That hies in glimmering moonlight to the brook,
Its wan lips moving, in its hand a book.
So, like a bruised flower, and in the pride
Of youth and beauty, injured Mary died.

William some years survived, but years no trace
Of his sick heart's deep anguish could erase.
Still the dread spectre seemed to rise, and, worse,
Still in his ears rang the appalling curse!
While loud he cries, despair upon his look,
Oh! shut the book, my Mary, shut the book!
The sun is slowly westering now, and lo,
How beautiful steals out the humid bow,
A radiant arch! Listen, whilst I relate
William's dread judgment, and poor Mary's fate.
I think I see the pine, that, heavily
Swaying, yet seems as for the dead to sigh.
How many generations, since the day
Of its green pride, have passed, like leaves, away!
How many children of the hamlet played
Round its hoar trunk, who at its feet were laid,
Withered and gray old men! In life's first bloom
How many has it seen borne to the tomb!
But never one so sunk in hopeless woe
As she who lies in the cold grave below.
Her Sabbath-book, from which at church she prayed,
Was her poor father's, in that churchyard laid:
For Mary grew as beautiful in youth,
As taught at church the lore of heavenly truth.
What different passions in her bosom strove,
When first she heard the tale of village love!
The youth whose voice then won her partial ear,
A yeoman's son, had passed his twentieth year;
She scarce eighteen: her mother, with the care

Of boding age, oft whispered, Oh, beware!
For William was a thoughtless youth, and wild,
And like a colt unbroken, from a child:
At length, if not to serious thoughts awake,
He came to church, at least for Mary's sake.
Young Mary, while her father was alive,
Saw all things round the humble dwelling thrive;
Her widowed mother now was growing old,
And bit by bit their worldly goods were sold:
Mary remained, her mother's hope and pride!
How oft when she was sleeping by her side,
That mother waked, and kissed her cheek, with tears
Praying for blessings on her future years, —
When she, her mother, earthly trials o'er,
Should rest in the cold grave, to grieve no more!
But Mary to love's dream her heart resigned,
And gave to fancy all her youthful mind.
Shall I describe her! Didst thou never mark
A soft blue light, beneath eye-lashes dark?
Such was her eye's soft light; – her chestnut hair,
Light as she tripped, waved lighter to the air;
And, with her prayer-book, when on Sunday dressed,
Her looks a sweet but lowly grace expressed,
As modest as the violet at her breast.
Sometimes all day by her lone mother's side
She sat, and oft would turn, a tear to hide.
Where winds the brook, by yonder bordering wood,
Her mother's solitary cottage stood:
A few white pales in front, fenced from the road

The garden-plot, and poor but neat abode.
Before the window, 'mid the flowers of spring
A bee-hive hummed, whose bees were murmuring;
Beneath an ivied bank, abrupt and high,
A small clear well reflected bank and sky,
In whose translucent mirror, smooth and still,
From time to time, a small bird dipped its bill.
Here the first bluebell, and, of livelier hue,
The daffodil and polyanthus grew.
'Twas Mary's care a jessamine to train.
With small white blossoms, round the window-pane:
A rustic wicket opened to the meads,
Where a scant pathway to the hamlet leads:
And near, a water-wheel toiled round and round,
Dashing the o'ershot stream, with long continuous sound.
Beyond, when the brief shower had sailed away,
The tapering spire shone out in sunlight gray;
And o'er that mountain's northern point, to sight
Stretching far on, the main-sea rolled in light.
Enter: within, see everything how neat!
One book lies open on the window-seat,
The spectacles are on a leaf of Job:
There, mark, a map of the terrestrial globe;
And opposite, with its prolific stem,
The Christian's tree, and New Jerusalem;[50]
Here, see a printed paper, to record
A veritable letter from our Lord:[51]

[50] Large coloured prints, in most cottages.

[51] The letter said to be written by our Saviour to King Agbarus is seen in many

Two books are on the window-ledge beneath, —
The Book of Prayer, and Drelincourt on Death:
Some cowslips, in a cup of china placed,
A painted shelf above the chimney graced:
Grown like its mistress old, with half-shut eyes,
Save when, at times, awaked by wandering flies,
Tib[52] in the sunshine of the casement lies.
'Twas spring time now, with birds the garden rung,
And Mary's linnet at the window sung.
Whilst in the air the vernal music floats,
The cuckoo only joins his two sweet notes:[53]
But those – oh! listen, for he sings more near —
So musical, so mellow, and so clear!
Not sweeter, where thy mighty waters sweep,
Missouri, through the night of forests deep,
Resounds, from glade to glade, from rock to hill,
While fervent harmonies the wild wood fill,
The solitary note of "whip-poor-will;"[54]
Mary's old mother stops her wheel to say,
The cuckoo! hark! how sweet he sings to-day!
It is not long, not long to Whitsuntide,
And Mary then shall be a happy bride.

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cottages.

[52] Tib, the cat.

[53] The notes of the cuckoo are the only notes, among birds, exactly according to musical scale. The notes are the fifth, and major third, of the diatonic scale.

[54] The "whip-poor-will" is a bird so called in America, from his uttering those distinct sounds, at intervals, among the various wild harmonies of the forest. See Bertram's Travels in America.

On Sunday morn, when a slant light was flung
Upon the tower, and the first peal was rung,
William and Mary smiling would repair,
Arm linked in arm, to the same house of prayer.
The bells will sound more merrily, he cried,
And gently pressed her hand, at Whitsuntide:
She checked the rising thoughts, and hung her head;
And Mary, ere one year had passed – was dead!
'Twas said, and many would the tale believe,
Her shrouded form was seen upon that eve,[55]
When, gliding through the churchyard, they appear —
They who shall die within the coming year.
All pale, and strangely piteous, was her look,
Her right hand was stretched out, and held a book;
O'er it her wet hair dripped, while the moon cast
A cold wan light, as in her shroud she passed!
I cannot say if this were so, but late,
She went to Madern-stone,[56] to learn her fate,
What there she heard ne'er came to human ears —
But from that hour she oft was seen in tears.
Mild zephyr breathes, the butterfly more bright
Strays, wavering, o'er the pales, in rainbow light;
The lamb, the colt, the blackbird in the brake,

[55] In Cornwall, and in other countries remote from the metropolis, it is a popular belief, that they who are to die in the course of the year appear, on the eve of Midsummer, before the church porch. See an exquisite dramatic sketch on this subject, called "The Eve of St Mark," in Blackwood.

[56] Madern-stone, a Druidical monument in the village of Madern, to which the country people often resort, to learn their future destinies.

Seem all the vernal feeling to partake;
The lark sings high in air, itself unseen,
The hasty swallow skims the village-green;
And all things seem, to the full heart, to bring
The blissful breathings of the world's first spring.
How lovely is the sunshine of May-morn!
The garden bee has wound his earliest horn,
Busied from flower to flower, as he would say,
Up! Mary! up this merry morn of May!
Now lads and lasses of the hamlet bore
Branches of blossomed thorn or sycamore;[57]
And at her mother's porch a garland hung,
While thus their rural roundelay they sung: —

And we were up as soon as day,[58]
To fetch the summer home,
The summer and the radiant May,
For summer now is come.

In Madern vale the bell-flowers bloom,[59]
And wave to Zephyr's breath:
The cuckoo sings in Morval Coombe,
Where nods the purple heath.[60]

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[57] Such is the custom in Cornwall.

[58] Polwhele. These are the first four lines of the real song of the season, which is called "The Furry-song of Helstone." Furry is, probably, from Feriæ.

[59] *Campanula cymbalaria, foliis hederaciis.*

[60] *Erica multiflora*, common in this part of Cornwall.

Come, dance around Glen-Aston tree —
We bring a garland gay,
And Mary of Guynear shall be
Our Lady of the May.

But where is William? Did he not declare,
He would be first the blossomed bough to bear!
She will not join the train! and see! the flower
She gathered now is fading! Hour by hour
She watched the sunshine on the thatch; again
Her mother turns the hour-glass; now, the pane
The westering sun has left – the long May-day
So Mary wore in hopes and fears away.
Slow twilight steals. By the small garden gate
She stands: Oh! William never came so late!
Her mother's voice is heard: Good child, come in;
Dream not of bliss on earth – it is a sin:
Come, take the Bible down, my child, and read;
In sickness, and in sorrow, and in need,
By friends forsaken, and by fears oppressed,
There only can the weary heart find rest.
Her thin hands, marked by many a wandering vein,
Her mother turned the silent glass again;
The rushlight now is lit, the Bible read,
Yet, ere sad Mary can retire to bed,
She listens! – Hark! no voice, no step she hears, —
Oh! seek thy bed to hide those bursting tears!
When the slow morning came, the tale was told,
(Need it have been?) that William's love was cold.

But hope yet whispers, dry the accusing tear, —
When Sunday comes, he will again be here!
And Sunday came, and struggling from a cloud.
The sun shone bright – the bells were chiming loud —
And lads and lasses, in their best attire,
Were tripping past – the youth, the child, the sire;
But William came not. With a boding heart
Poor Mary saw the Sunday crowd depart:
And when her mother came, with kerchief clean,
The last who tottered homeward o'er the green,
Mary, to hear no more of peace on earth,
Retired in silence to the lonely hearth.
Next day the tidings to the cottage came,
That William's heart confessed another flame:
That, with the bailiff's daughter he was seen,
At the new tabernacle on the green;
That cold and wayward falsehood made him prove
Alike a traitor to his faith and love.

The bells are ringing, it is Whitsuntide, —
And there goes faithless William with his bride.
Turn from the sight, poor Mary! Day by day,
The dread remembrance wore her heart away:
Untimely sorrow sat upon her cheek,
And her too trusting heart was left to break.
Six melancholy months have slowly passed,
And dark is heard November's hollow blast.
Sometimes, with tearful moodiness she smiled,
Then, still and placid looked, as when a child,

Or raised her eyes disconsolate and wild.
Oft, as she strayed the brook's green marge along,
She there would sing one sad and broken song: —

Lay me where the willows wave,[61]
In the cold moonlight;
Shine upon my lowly grave,
Sadly, stars of night!

I to you would fly for rest,
But a stone, a stone,
Lies like lead upon my breast,
And every hope is flown.

Lay me where the willows wave,
In the cold moonlight;
Shine upon my lowly grave,
Sadly, stars of night!

Her mother said, Thou shalt not be confined,
Poor maid, for thou art harmless, and thy mind
The air may soothe, as fitfully it blows,
Whispering forgetfulness, if not repose.
So Mary wandered to the northern shore;[62]
There oft she heard the gaunt Tregagel roar
Among the rocks; and when the tempest blew,

[61] The ***rhythm*** of this song is taken from a ballad "most musical, most melancholy," in the Maid's Tragedy, "Lay a garland on my grave."

[62] The bay of St Ives.

And, like the shivered foam, her long hair flew,
And all the billowy space was tossing wide,
Rock on! thou melancholy main, she cried,
I love thy voice, oh, ever-sounding sea,
Nor heed this sad world while I look on thee!
Then on the surge she gazed, with vacant stare,
Or tripping with wild fennel in her hair,[63]
Sang merrily: Oh! we must dry the tear,
For Mab, the queen of fairies, will be here, —
William, she shall know all! – and then again
Her ditty died into its first sad strain: —

Lay me where the willows wave,
In the cold moonlight;
Shine upon my lowly grave,
Sadly, stars of night!

When home returned, the tears ran down apace;
She looked in silence in her mother's face;
Then, starting up, with wilder aspect cried,
How happy shall we be at Whitsuntide,
Then, mother, I shall be a bride – a bride!
Ah! some dire thought seems in her breast to rise,
Stern with terrific joy she rolls her eyes:
Her mother heeded not; nor when she took,
With more impatient haste, her Sunday book,
She heeded not – for age had dimmed her sight.
Her mother now is left alone: 'tis night.

[63] *Feniculum vulgare*, or wild fennel, common on the northern coast of Cornwall.

Mary! poor Mary! her sad mother cried,
Mary! my Mary! – but no voice replied.

Next morn, light-hearted William passed along,
And careless hummed a desultory song,
Bound to St Ives' revel.[64] Not a ray
Yet streaked the pale dawn of the dubious day;
The sun is yet below the hills: but, look!
There is the tower – the mill – the stile – the brook, —
And there is Mary's cottage! All is still!
Listen! no sound is heard but of the mill.
'Tis true, the toils of day are not begun,
But Mary always rose before the sun.
Still at the door, a leafless relic now,
Appeared a remnant of the May-day bough;
No hour-glass, in the window, tells the hours:
Where is poor Mary, where her book, her flowers?
Ah! was it fancy? – as he passed along,
He thought he heard a spirit's feeble song.[65]
Struck by the thrilling sound, he turned his look.
Upon the ground there lay an open book;
One page was folded down: – Spirit of grace!
See! there are soils, like tear-blots, on the place!
It is a prayer-book! Soon these words he read;
Let him be desolate, and beg his bread![66]

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[64] Revel is a country fair.

[65] It is a common idea in Cornwall, that when any person is drowned, the voice of his spirit may be heard by those who first pass by.

[66] The passage folded down was the 109th Psalm, commonly called "the imprecating

Let there be none, not one, on earth to bless, —
Be his days few, – his children fatherless, —
His wife a widow! – let there be no friend
In his last moments mercy to extend!
It was a prayer-book he before had seen:
Where? when? Once more, wild terror on his mien,
He read the page: – An outcast let him lie,
And unlamented and forsaken die!
When he has children, may they pine away
Before his sight, – his wife to grief a prey.
Ah! 'tis poor Mary's book! – the very same
He read with her at church; and, lo! her name: —
The book of Mary Banks; – when this you see,
And I am dead and gone, remember me!
He trembles: mark! – the dew is on his brow:
The curse is hers! he cried – I feel it now!
I see already, even at my right hand,
Dead Mary, thy accusing spirit stand!
I feel thy deep, last curse! Then, with a cry,
He sunk upon the earth in agony.
Feebly he rose, – when, on the matted hair
Of a drowned maid, and on her bosom bare,
The sun shone out; how horrid, the first glance
Of sunlight, on that altered countenance!
The eyes were open, but though cold and dim,
Fixed with accusing ghastliness on him!

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psalm." I extract the most affecting passages: —"May his days be few.""Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.""Let there be none to extend mercy.""Let their name be blotted out,because he slayed even thebroken in heart."

Merciful God! with faltering voice he cries,
Hide me! oh, hide me from the sight! Those eyes —
They glare on me! oh, hide me with the dead!
The curse, the deep curse rests upon my head!
Alas, poor maid! 'twas frenzy fired thy breast,
Which prompted horrors not to be expressed:
Whilst ever at thy side the foul fiend stood,
And, laughing, pointed to the oblivious flood.
William, heart-stricken, to despair a prey,
Soon left the village, journeying far away.
For, as if Mary's ghost in judgment cried,
His wife, in the first pains of child-birth, died.
Who has not heard, St Cuthbert, of thy well?
Perhaps the spirit may his fortunes tell.[67]
He dropped a pebble – mark! no bubble bright
Comes from the bottom – turn away thy sight!
He looks again: O God! those eye-balls glare
How terribly! Ah, smooth that matted hair!
Mary! dear Mary! thy cold corse I see
Rise from the fountain! Look not thus at me!
I cannot bear the sight, that form, that look!
Oh! shut the book, dear Mary, shut the book!
Meantime, poor Mary in the grave was laid; —
Her lone and gray-haired mother wept and prayed:
Soon to the dust she followed; and, unknown,
There they both rest without a name or stone.

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[67] The people of the country consult the spirit of the well for their future destiny, by dropping a pebble into it, striking the ground, and other methods of divination, derived, no doubt, from the Druids. —*Polwhele.*

The village maids, who pass in summer by,
Still stop and say one prayer, for charity!
But what of William? Hide me in the mine!
He cried, the beams of day insulting shine!
Earth's very shadows are too gay, too bright, —
Hide me for ever in forgetful night!
In vain – that form, the cause of all his woes,
More sternly terrible in darkness rose!
Nearer he saw, with its pale waving hand,
The phantom in appalling stillness stand;
The letters of the book shone through the night,
More blasting! Hide, oh hide me from the sight!
Ocean, to thee and to thy storms I bring
A heart, that not the music of the spring,
Nor summer piping on the rural plain,
Shall ever wake to happiness again!
Ocean, be mine, – wild as thy wastes, to roam
From clime to clime! – Ocean, be thou my home!
Some say he died: here he was seen no more;
He went to sea; and oft, amid the roar
Of the wild waters, starting from his sleep,
He gazed upon the wild tempestuous deep;
When, slowly rising from the vessel's lee,
A shape appeared, which none besides could see;
Then would he shriek, like one whom Heaven forsook,
Oh! shut the book, dear Mary, shut the book!
In foreign lands, in darkness or in light,
The same dread spectre stood before his sight;
If slumber came his aching lids to close,

Funereal forms in long procession rose.
Sometimes he dreamed that every grief was past
Mary, long lost on earth, is found at last;
And now she smiled as when, in early life,
She lived in hope that she should be his wife;
The maids are dressed in white, and all are gay,
For this (he dreamed) is Mary's wedding-day!
Then wherefore sad? a chill comes o'er his soul, —
The sounds of mirth are hushed; and, hark! a toll! —
A slow, deep toll; and lo! a sable train
Of mourners, moving to the village fane.
A coffin now is laid in holy ground,
That, heavily, returns a hollow sound,
When the first earth upon its lid is thrown:
That hollow sound now changes to a groan:
While, rising with wan cheek, and dripping hair,
And moving lips, and eyes of ghastly glare,
The spectre comes again! It comes more near!
'Tis Mary! and that book with many a tear
Is wet, which, with dim fingers, long and cold,
He sees her to the glimmering moon unfold.
And now her hand is laid upon his heart.
Gasping, he wakes – with a convulsive start,
He gazes round! Moonlight is on the tide —
The passing keel is scarcely heard to glide, —
See where the spectre goes! with frenzied look
He shrieks again, Oh! Mary, shut the book!
Now, to the ocean's verge the phantom flies, —
And, hark! far off, the lessening laughter dies.

Years passed away, – at night, or evening close,
Faint, and more faint, the accusing spectre rose.
Restored from toil and perils of the main,
Now William treads his native place again.
Near the Land's-end, upon the rudest shore,
Where, from the west, Atlantic surges roar,
He lived, a lonely stranger, sad, but mild;
All marked his sadness, chiefly when he smiled;
Some competence he gained, by years of toil:
So, in a cottage, on his native soil,
He dwelt, remote from crowds, nor told his tale
To human ear: he saw the white clouds sail
Oft o'er the bay,[68] when suns of summer shone,
Yet still he wandered, muttering and alone.
At night, when, like the tumult of the tide,
Sinking to sad repose, all trouble died,
The book of God was on his pillow laid,
He wept upon it, and in secret prayed.
He had no friend on earth, save one blue jay,[69]
Which, from the Mississippi, far away,
O'er the Atlantic, to his native land
He brought; – and this poor bird fed from his hand.
In the great world there was not one beside
For whom he cared, since his own mother died.
Yet manly strength was his, for twenty-years
Weighed light upon his frame, though passed in tears;
His age not forty-two, and in his face

[68] Bay of St Michael's Mount.

[69] The blue jay of the Mississippi. See Chateaubriand's Indian song in "Atala."

Of care more than of age appeared the trace.
Mary was scarce remembered; by degrees,
The sights and sounds of life began to please.
Ruth was a widow, who, in youth, had known
Griefs of the heart, and losses of her own.
She, patient, mild, compassionate, and kind,
First woke to human sympathies his mind.
He looked affectionately, when her child
Caressed his bird, and then he stood and smiled.
This widow and her child, almost unknown,
Lived in a cottage that adjoined his own.
Her husband was a fisher, one whose life
Is fraught with terror to an anxious wife:
Night after night exposed upon the main;
Returning, tired with toil, or drenched with rain;
His gains, uncertain as his life; he knows
No stated hours of labour and repose.
When others to a cheerful home retire,
And his wife sits before the evening fire,
He, rocking in the dark, tempestuous night,
Haply is thinking of that social light.
Ruth's husband left the bay, the wind and rain
Came down, the tempest swept the howling main;
The boat sank in the storm, and he was found,
Below the rocks of the dark Lizard, drowned.
Seven years had passed, and after evening prayer,
To William's cottage Ruth would oft repair,
And with her little son would sometimes stay,
Listening to tales of regions far away.

The wondering boy loved of those scenes to hear —
Of battles – of the roving buccaneer —
Of the wild hunters, in the forest-glen,
And fires, and dances of the savage men.
So William spoke of perils he had passed, —
Of voices heard amid the roaring blast;
Of those who, lonely and of hope bereft,
Upon some melancholy rock are left,
Who mark, despairing, at the close of day,
Perhaps, some far-off vessel sail away.
He spoke with pity of the land of slaves —
And of the phantom-ship that rides the waves.[70]
It comes! it comes! A melancholy light
Gleams from the prow upon the storm of night.
'Tis here! 'tis there! In vain the billows roll;
It steers right on, but not a living soul
Is there to guide its voyage through the dark,
Or spread the sails of that mysterious bark!
He spoke of vast sea-serpents, how they float
For many a rood, or near some hurrying boat
Lift up their tall neck, with a hissing sound,
And questing turn their bloodshot eye-balls round.
He spoke of sea-maids, on the desert rocks,
Who in the sun comb their green dripping locks,
While, heard at distance, in the parting ray,
Beyond the furthest promontory's bay,
Aërial music swells and dies away!
One night they longer stayed the tale to hear,

[70] Called the Flying Dutchman, the phantom ship of the Cape.

And Ruth that night "beguiled him of a tear,
Whene'er he told of the distressful stroke
Which his youth suffered." Then, she pitying spoke;
And from that night a softer feeling grew,
As calmer prospects rose within his view.
And why not, ere the long night of the dead,
The slow descent of life together tread?
The day is fixed; William no more shall roam,
William and Ruth shall have one heart – one home:
The world shut out, both shall together pray:
Both wait the evening of life's changeful day:
She shall his anguish soothe, when he is wild,
And he shall be a father to her child.
Fair rose the morn – the summer air how bland!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.