

MINOR POEMS BY MILTON

JOHN MILTON

Freeeditorial 

ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

I

This is the month, and this the happy morn,

Wherein the Son of Heaven's eternal King,

Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,

Our great redemption from above did bring;

For so the holy sages once did sing,

That he our deadly forfeit should release,

And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

II

That glorious form, that light unsufferable,

And that far-beaming blaze of majesty,

Wherewith he wont at Heaven's high council-table

To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,

He laid aside, and, here with us to be,

Forsook the courts of everlasting day,

And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

III

Say, Heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein

Afford a present to the Infant God?

Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,

To welcome him to this his new abode,

Now while the heaven, by the Sun's team untrod,

Hath took no print of the approaching light,

And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

IV

See how from far upon the eastern road

The star-led wizards haste with odors sweet!

Oh! run; prevent them with thy humble ode,

And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;

Have thou the honor first thy Lord to greet,

And join thy voice unto the Angel Quire,

From out his secret altar touched with hallowed fire.

THE HYMN

I

It was the winter wild,

While the heaven-born child

All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;

Nature, in awe to him,

Had doffed her gaudy trim,

With her great Master so to sympathize:

It was no season then for her

To wanton with the Sun, her lusty paramour.

II

Only with speeches fair

She woos the gentle air

To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,

And on her naked shame,

Pollute with sinful blame,

The saintly veil of maiden white to throw;

Confounded, that her Maker's eyes

Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

III

But he, her fears to cease,

Sent down the meek-eyed Peace:

She, crowned with olive green, came softly sliding

Down through the turning sphere,

His ready harbinger,

With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing;

And, waving wide her myrtle wand,

She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

IV

No war, or battle's sound,

Was heard the world around;

The idle spear and shield were high uphung;

The hooked chariot stood,

Unstained with hostile blood;

The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;

And kings sat still with awful eye,

As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

V

But peaceful was the night

Wherein the Prince of Light

His reign of peace upon the earth began.

The winds, with wonder whist,

Smoothly the waters kissed,

Whispering new joys to the mild Ocean,

Who now hath quite forgot to rave,

While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

VI

The stars, with deep amaze,

Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,

Bending one way their precious influence,

And will not take their flight,

For all the morning light,

Or Lucifer that often warned them thence;

But in their glimmering orbs did glow,

Until their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

VII

And, though the shady gloom

Had given day her room,

The Sun himself withheld his wonted speed,

And hid his head for shame,

As his inferior flame

The new-enlightened world no more should need:

He saw a greater Sun appear

Than his bright throne or burning axletree could bear.

VIII

The shepherds on the lawn,

Or ere the point of dawn,

Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;

Full little thought they than

That the mighty Pan

Was kindly come to live with them below:

Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,

Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

IX

When such music sweet

Their hearts and ears did greet

As never was by mortal finger strook,

Divinely-warbled voice

Answering the stringed noise,

As all their souls in blissful rapture took:

The air, such pleasure loth to lose,

With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

X

Nature, that heard such sound

Beneath the hollow round

Of Cynthia's seat the Airy region thrilling,

Now was almost won

To think her part was done,

And that her reign had here its last fulfilling:

She knew such harmony alone

Could hold all Heaven and Earth in happier union.

XI

At last surrounds their sight

A globe of circular light,

That with long beams the shamefaced Night arrayed;

The helmed cherubim

And sworded seraphim

Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,

Harping in loud and solemn quire,

With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's new-born Heir.

XII

Such music (as 'tis said)

Before was never made,

But when of old the Sons of Morning sung,

While the Creator great

His constellations set,

And the well-balanced World on hinges hung,

And cast the dark foundations deep,

And bid the weltering waves their oozy channel keep.

XIII

Ring out, ye crystal spheres!

Once bless our human ears,

If ye have power to touch our senses so;

And let your silver chime

Move in melodious time;

And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;

And with your ninefold harmony

Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

XIV

For, if such holy song

Enwrap our fancy long,

Time will run back and fetch the Age of Gold;

And speckled Vanity

Will sicken soon and die,

And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;

And Hell itself will pass away,

And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

XV

Yea, Truth and Justice then

Will down return to men,

Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,

Mercy will sit between,

Throned in celestial sheen,

With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;

And Heaven, as at some festival,

Will open wide the gates of her high palace-hall.

XVI

But wisest Fate says No,

This must not yet be so;

The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy

That on the bitter cross

Must redeem our loss,

So both himself and us to glorify:

Yet first, to those ychained in sleep,

The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through the deep.

XVII

With such a horrid clang

As on Mount Sinai rang,

While the red fire and smouldering clouds outbrake:

The aged Earth, aghast

With terror of that blast,

Shall from the surface to the centre shake,

When, at the world's last session,

The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread his throne.

XVIII

And then at last our bliss

Full and perfect is,

But now begins; for from this happy day

The Old Dragon under ground,

In straiter limits bound,

Not half so far casts his usurped sway,

And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,

Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

XIX

The Oracles are dumb;

No voice or hideous hum

Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.

Apollo from his shrine

Can no more divine,

With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.

No nightly trance, or breathed spell,

Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

XX

The lonely mountains o'er,

And the resounding shore,

A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;

From haunted spring, and dale

Edged with poplar pale,

The parting Genius is with sighing sent;

With flower-inwoven tresses torn

The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

XXI

In consecrated earth,

And on the holy hearth,

The Lars and Lemures moan with midnight plaint;

In urns, and altars round,

A drear and dying sound

Affrights the flamens at their service quaint;

And the chill marble seems to sweat,

While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.

XXII

Peor and Baälim

Forsake their temples dim,

With that twice-battered god of Palestine;

And mooned Ashtaroth,

Heaven's queen and mother both,

Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine:

The Lybic Hammon shrinks his horn;

In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

XXIII

And sullen Moloch, fled,

Hath left in shadows dread

His burning idol all of blackest hue;

In vain with cymbals' ring

They call the grisly king,

In dismal dance about the furnace blue;

The brutish gods of Nile as fast,

Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste.

XXIV

Nor is Osiris seen

In Memphian grove or green,

Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud;

Nor can he be at rest

Within his sacred chest;

Nought but profoundest Hell can be his shroud;

In vain, with timbrelled anthems dark,

The sable-stoled sorcerers bear his worshipped ark.

XXV

He feels from Juda's land

The dreaded Infant's hand;

The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn;

Nor all the gods beside

Longer dare abide,

Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine:

Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,

Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew.

XXVI

So, when the sun in bed,

Curtained with cloudy red,

Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,

The flocking shadows pale

Troop to the infernal jail,

Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave,

And the yellow-skirted fays

Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.

XXVII

But see! the Virgin blest

Hath laid her Babe to rest.

Time is our tedious song should here have ending:

Heaven's youngest-teemed star

Hath fixed her polished car,

Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending;

And all about the courtly stable

Bright-harnessed Angels sit in order serviceable.

ON SHAKESPEARE

What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones

The labor of an age in piled stones?

Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid

Under a star-y-pointing pyramid?

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,

What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?

Thou in our wonder and astonishment

Hast built thyself a livelong monument.

For whilst, to the shame of slow-endavoring art

Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart

Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book

Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,

Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,

Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,

And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie

That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

L'ALLEGRO

Hence, loathed Melancholy,

Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born

In Stygian cave forlorn

'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!

Find out some uncouth cell,

Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,

And the night-raven sings;

There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,

As ragged as thy locks,

In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,

In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,

And by men heart-easing Mirth;

Whom lovely Venus, at a birth,

With two sister Graces more,

To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:

Or whether (as some sager sing)

The frolic wind that breathes the spring,

Zephyr, with Aurora playing,

As he met her once a-Maying,

There, on beds of violets blue,

And fresh-blown roses washed in dew,

Filled her with thee, a daughter fair,

So buxom, blithe, and debonair.

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee

Jest, and youthful Jollity,

Quips and Cranks and wanton Wiles,

Nods and Becks and wreathed Smiles,

Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,

And love to live in dimple sleek;

Sport that wrinkled Care derides,

And Laughter holding both his sides.

Come, and trip it, as you go,

On the light fantastic toe;

And in thy right hand lead with thee

The mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty;

And, if I give thee honor due,

Mirth, admit me of thy crew,

To live with her, and live with thee,

In unreprieved pleasures free;

To hear the lark begin his flight,

And, singing, startle the dull night,

From his watch-tower in the skies,

Till the dappled dawn doth rise;

Then to come, in spite of sorrow,

And at my window bid good-morrow,

Through the sweet-briar or the vine,

Or the twisted eglantine;

While the cock, with lively din,

Scatters the rear of darkness thin;

And to the stack, or the barn-door,

Stoutly struts his dames before:

Oft listening how the hounds and horn

Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,

From the side of some hoar hill,

Through the high wood echoing shrill:

Sometime walking, not unseen,

By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,

Right against the eastern gate

Where the great Sun begins his state,

Robed in flames and amber light,

The clouds in thousand liveries dight;

While the ploughman, near at hand,

Whistles o'er the furrowed land,

And the milkmaid singeth blithe,

And the mower whets his scythe,

And every shepherd tells his tale

Under the hawthorn in the dale.

Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,

Whilst the landskip round it measures:

Russet lawns, and fallows gray,

Where the nibbling flocks do stray;

Mountains on whose barren breast

The laboring clouds do often rest;

Meadows trim, with daisies pied;

Shallow brooks, and rivers wide;

Towers and battlements it sees

Bosomed high in tufted trees,

Where perhaps some beauty lies,

The cynosure of neighboring eyes.

Hard by a cottage chimney smokes

From betwixt two aged oaks,

Where Corydon and Thyrsis met

Are at their savory dinner set

Of herbs and other country messes,

Which the neat-handed Phyllis dresses;

And then in haste her bower she leaves,

With Thestylis to bind the sheaves;

Or, if the earlier season lead,

To the tanned haycock in the mead.

Sometimes, with secure delight,

The upland hamlets will invite,

When the merry bells ring round,

And the jocund rebecks sound

To many a youth and many a maid

Dancing in the chequered shade,

And young and old come forth to play

On a sunshine holiday,

Till the livelong daylight fail:

Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,

With stories told of many a feat,

How Faery Mab the junkets eat.

She was pinched and pulled, she said;

And he, by Friar's lantern led,

Tells how the drudging goblin sweat

To earn his cream-bowl duly set,

When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,

His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn

That ten day-laborers could not end;

Then lies him down, the lubber fiend,

And, stretched out all the chimney's length,

Basks at the fire his hairy strength,

And crop-full out of doors he flings,

Ere the first cock his matin rings.

Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,

By whispering winds soon lulled asleep.

Towered cities please us then,

And the busy hum of men,

Where throngs of knights and barons bold,

In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold,

With store of ladies, whose bright eyes

Rain influence, and judge the prize

Of wit or arms, while both contend

To win her grace whom all commend.

There let Hymen oft appear

In saffron robe, with taper clear,

And pomp, and feast, and revelry,

With mask and antique pageantry;

Such sights as youthful poets dream,

On summer eves by haunted stream.

Then to the well-trod stage anon,

If Jonson's learned sock be on,

Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,

Warble his native wood-notes wild,

And ever, against eating cares,

Lap me in soft Lydian airs,

Married to immortal verse,

Such as the meeting soul may pierce,

In notes with many a winding bout

Of linked sweetness long drawn out

With wanton heed and giddy cunning,

The melting voice through mazes running,

Untwisting all the chains that tie

The hidden soul of harmony;

That Orpheus' self may heave his head

From golden slumber on a bed

Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear

Such strains as would have won the ear

Of Pluto to have quite set free

His half-regained Eurydice.

These delights if thou canst give,

Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

IL PENSEROSO

Hence, vain deluding Joys,

The brood of Folly without father bred!

How little you bested,

Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys!

Dwell in some idle brain,

And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,

As thick and numberless

As the gay motes that people the sun-beams,

Or likest hovering dreams,

The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.

But, hail! thou Goddess sage and holy!

Hail, divinest Melancholy!

Whose saintly visage is too bright

To hit the sense of human sight,

And therefore to our weaker view,

O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue;

Black, but such as in esteem

Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,

Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove

To set her beauty's praise above

The Sea-Nymphs, and their powers offended.

Yet thou art higher far descended:

Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore

To solitary Saturn bore;

His daughter she; in Saturn's reign

Such mixture was not held a stain.

Oft in glimmering bowers and glades

He met her, and in secret shades

Of woody Ida's inmost grove,

Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove.

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,

Sober, steadfast, and demure,

All in a robe of darkest grain,

Flowing with majestic train,

And sable stole of cypress lawn

Over thy decent shoulders drawn.

Come; but keep thy wonted state,

With even step, and musing gait,

And looks commercing with the skies

Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:

There, held in holy passion still,

Forget thyself to marble, till

With a sad leaden downward cast

Thou fix them on the earth as fast.

And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,

Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,

And hears the Muses in a ring

Aye round about Jove's altar sing;

And add to these retired Leisure,

That in trim gardens takes his pleasure;

But, first and chiefest, with thee bring

Him that yon soars on golden wing,

Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,

The Cherub Contemplation;

And the mute Silence hist along,

'Less Philomel will deign a song,

In her sweetest, saddest plight,

Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,

While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke

Gently o'er the accustomed oak.

Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,

Most musical, most melancholy!

Thee, chauntress, oft the woods among

I woo, to hear thy even-song;

And, missing thee, I walk unseen

On the dry smooth-shaven green,

To behold the wandering moon,

Riding near her highest noon,

Like one that had been led astray

Through the heaven's wide pathless way,

And oft, as if her head she bowed,

Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

Oft, on a plat of rising ground,

I hear the far-off curfew sound,

Over some wide-watered shore,

Swinging slow with sullen roar;

Or, if the air will not permit,

Some still removed place will fit,

Where glowing embers through the room

Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,

Far from all resort of mirth,

Save the cricket on the hearth,

Or the bellman's drowsy charm

To bless the doors from nightly harm.

Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,

Be seen in some high lonely tower,

Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,

With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere

The spirit of Plato, to unfold

What worlds or what vast regions hold

The immortal mind that hath forsook

Her mansion in this fleshly nook;

And of those demons that are found

In fire, air, flood, or underground,

Whose power hath a true consent.

With planet or with element.

Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy

In sceptred pall come sweeping by,

Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,

Or the tale of Troy divine,

Or what (though rare) of later age

Ennobled hath the buskined stage.

But, O sad Virgin! that thy power

Might raise Musæus from his bower;

Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing

Such notes as, warbled to the string,

Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,

And made Hell grant what love did seek;

Or call up him that left half-told

The story of Cambuscan bold,

Of Camball, and of Algarsife,

And who had Canace to wife,

That owned the virtuous ring and glass,

And of the wondrous horse of brass

On which the Tartar king did ride;

And if aught else great bards beside

In sage and solemn tunes have sung,

Of turneys, and of trophies hung,

Of forests, and enchantments drear,

Where more is meant than meets the ear.

Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,

Till civil-suited Morn appear,

Not tricked and frowned, as she was wont

With the Attic boy to hunt,

But kerchieft in a comely cloud,

While rocking winds are piping loud

Or ushered with a shower still,

When the gust hath blown his fill,

Ending on the rustling leaves,

With minute-drops from off the eaves.

And, when the sun begins to fling

His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring

To arched walks of twilight groves,

And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves,

Of pine, or monumental oak,

Where the rude axe with heaved stroke

Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,

Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.

There, in close covert, by some brook,

Where no profaner eye may look,

Hide me from day's garish eye,

While the bee with honeyed thigh,

That at her flowery work doth sing,

And the waters murmuring,

With such consort as they keep,

Entice the dewy-feathered Sleep.

And let some strange mysterious dream

Wave at his wings, in airy stream

Of lively portraiture displayed,

Softly on my eyelids laid;

And, as I wake, sweet music breathe

Above, about, or underneath,

Sent by some Spirit to mortals good,

Or the unseen Genius of the wood.

But let my due feet never fail

To walk the studious cloister's pale,

And love the high embowed roof,

With antique pillars massy-proof,

And storied windows richly dight,

Casting a dim religious light.

There let the pealing organ blow,

To the full-voiced quire below,

In service high and anthems clear,

As may with sweetness, through mine ear,

Dissolve me into ecstasies,

And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.

And may at last my weary age

Find out the peaceful hermitage,

The hairy gown and mossy cell,

Where I may sit and rightly spell

Of every star that heaven doth shew,

And every herb that sips the dew,

Till old experience do attain

To something like prophetic strain.

These pleasures, Melancholy, give;

And I with thee will choose to live.

ARCADES

Part of an Entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield by some Noble Persons of her Family; who appear on the Scene in pastoral habit, moving toward the seat of state, with this song:—

I. SONG

Look, Nymphs and Shepherds, look!

What sudden blaze of majesty

Is that which we from hence descry,

Too divine to be mistook?

This, this is she

To whom our vows and wishes bend:

Here our solemn search hath end.

Fame, that her high worth to raise

Seemed erst so lavish and profuse,

We may justly now accuse

Of detraction from her praise:

Less than half we find expressed;

Envy bid conceal the rest.

Mark what radiant state she spreads,

In circle round her shining throne

Shooting her beams like silver threads:

This, this is she alone,

Sitting like a goddess bright

In the centre of her light.

Might she the wise Latona be,

Or the towered Cybele,

Mother of a hundred gods?

Juno dares not give her odds:

Who had thought this clime had held

A deity so unparalleled?

As they come forward, the Genius of the Wood appears, and, turning toward them, speaks.

Gen. Stay, gentle Swains, for, though in this disguise,

I see bright honor sparkle through your eyes;

Of famous Arcady ye are, and sprung

Of that renowned flood, so often sung,

Divine Alpheus, who, by secret sluice,

Stole under seas to meet his Arethuse;

And ye, the breathing roses of the wood,

Fair silver-buskined Nymphs, as great and good.

I know this quest of yours and free intent

Was all in honor and devotion meant

To the great mistress of yon princely shrine,

Whom with low reverence I adore as mine,

And with all helpful service will comply

To further this night's glad solemnity,

And lead ye where ye may more near behold

What shallow-searching Fame hath left untold;

Which I full oft, amidst those shades alone,

Have sat to wonder at, and gaze upon.

For know, by lot from Jove, I am the Power

Of this fair wood, and live in oaken bower,

To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove

With ringlets quaint and wanton windings wove;

And all my plants I save from nightly ill

Of noisome winds and blasting vapors chill;

And from the boughs brush off the evil dew,

And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,

Or what the cross dire-looking planet smites,

Or hurtful worm with cankered venom bites.

When evening gray doth rise, I fetch my round

Over the mount, and all this hallowed ground;

And early, ere the odorous breath of morn

Awakes the slumbering leaves, or tasselled horn

Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,

Number my ranks, and visit every sprout

With puissant words and murmurs made to bless.

But else, in deep of night, when drowsiness

Hath locked up mortal sense, then listen

To the celestial Sirens' harmony,

That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,

And sing to those that hold the vital shears,

And turn the adamantine spindle round

On which the fate of gods and men is wound.

Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,

To lull the daughters of Necessity,

And keep unsteady Nature to her law,

And the low world in measured motion draw

After the heavenly tune, which none can hear

Of human mould with gross unpurged ear.

And yet such music worthiest were to blaze

The peerless height of her immortal praise

Whose lustre leads us, and for her most fit,

If my inferior hand or voice could hit

Inimitable sounds. Yet, as we go,

Whate'er the skill of lesser gods can show

I will assay, her worth to celebrate,

And so attend ye toward her glittering state;

Where ye may all, that are of noble stem,

Approach, and kiss her sacred vesture's hem.

II. SONG

O'er the smooth enamelled green,

Where no print of step hath been,

Follow me, as I sing

And touch the warbled string:

Under the shady roof

Of branching elm star-proof

Follow me.

I will bring you where she sits,

Clad in splendor as befits

Her deity.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hath not seen.

III. SONG

Nymphs and Shepherds, dance no more

By sandy Ladon's liliated banks;

On old Lycæus, or Cyllene hoar,

Trip no more in twilight ranks;

Though Erymanth your loss deplore,

A better soil shall give ye thanks.

From the stony Mænalus

Bring your flocks, and live with us;

Here ye shall have greater grace,

To serve the Lady of this place.

Though Syrinx your Pan's mistress were,

Yet Syrinx well might wait on her.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hath not seen.

AT A SOLEMN MUSIC

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heaven's joy,

Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,

Wed your divine sounds, and mixed power employ,

Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce;

And to our high-raised phantasy present

That undisturbed song of pure concert,

Aye sung before the sapphire-colored throne

To Him that sits thereon,

With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;

Where the bright Seraphim in burning row

Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,

And the Cherubic host in thousand quires

Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,

With those just Spirits that wear victorious palms,

Hymns devout and holy psalms

Singing everlastingly:

That we on Earth, with undiscording voice,

May rightly answer that melodious noise;

As once we did, till disproportioned sin

Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din

Broke the fair music that all creatures made

To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed

In perfect diapason, whilst they stood

In first obedience, and their state of good.

O, may we soon again renew that song,

And keep in tune with Heaven, till God ere long

To his celestial consort us unite,

To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light!

COMUS

A MASQUE PRESENTED AT LUDLOW CASTLE, 1634.

THE PERSONS.

The Attendant Spirit, afterwards in the habit of Thyrsis.

Comus, with his Crew.

The Lady.

First Brother.

Second Brother.

Sabrina, the Nymph.

The first Scene discovers a wild wood.

The Attendant Spirit descends or enters.

Spirit. Before the starry threshold of Jove's court

My mansion is, where those immortal shapes

Of bright aerial spirits live insphered

In regions mild of calm and serene air,

Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot

Which men call Earth, and, with low-thoughted care,

Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,

Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,

Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,

After this mortal change, to her true servants

Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats.

Yet some there be that by due steps aspire

To lay their just hands on that golden key

That opes the palace of eternity.

To such my errand is; and, but for such,

I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds

With the rank vapors of this sin-worn mould.

But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway

Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream

Took in, by lot 'twixt high and nether Jove.

Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles

That, like to rich and various gems, inlay

The unadorned bosom of the deep;

Which he, to grace his tributary gods,

By course commits to several government,

And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns

And wield their little tridents. But this Isle,

The greatest and the best of all the main,

He quarters to his blue-haired deities;

And all this tract that fronts the falling sun

A noble Peer of mickle trust and power

Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide

An old and haughty nation, proud in arms:

Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,

Are coming to attend their father's state,

And new-intrusted sceptre. But their way

Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,

The nodding horror of those shady brows

Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger;

And here their tender age might suffer peril,

But that, by quick command from sovran Jove,

I was despatched for their defence and guard!

And listen why; for I will tell you now

What never yet was heard in tale or song,

From old or modern bard, in hall or bower.

Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape

Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine,

After the Tuscan mariners transformed,

Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,

On Circe's island fell. (Who knows not Circe,

The daughter of the Sun, whose charmed cup

Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,

And downward fell into a grovelling swine?)

This Nymph, that gazed upon his clustering locks,

With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth,

Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son

Much like his father, but his mother more,

Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named:

Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,

Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields,

At last betakes him to this ominous wood,

And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered,

Excels his mother at her mighty art;

Offering to every weary traveller

His orient liquor in a crystal glass,

To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste

(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst),

Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,

The express resemblance of the gods, is changed

Into some brutish form of wolf or bear,

Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,

All other parts remaining as they were.

And they, so perfect in their misery,

Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,

But boast themselves more comely than before,

And all their friends and native home forget,

To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.

Therefore, when any favored of high Jove

Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,

Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star

I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy,

As now I do. But first I must put off

These my sky-robcs, spun out of Iris' woof,

And take the weeds and likeness of a swain

That to the service of this house belongs,

Who, with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,

Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,

And hush the waving woods; nor of less faith,

And in this office of his mountain watch

Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid

Of this occasion. But I hear the tread

Of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.

Comus enters, with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistening. They come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold

Now the top of heaven doth hold;

And the gilded car of day

His glowing axle doth allay

In the steep Atlantic stream:

And the slope sun his upward beam

Shoots against the dusky pole,

Pacing toward the other goal

Of his chamber in the east.

Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast,

Midnight shout and revelry,

Tipsy dance and jollity.

Braid your locks with rosy twine,

Dropping odors, dropping wine.

Rigor now is gone to bed;

And Advice with scrupulous head,

Strict Age, and sour Severity,

With their grave saws, in slumber lie.

We, that are of purer fire,

Imitate the starry quire,

Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,

Lead in swift round the months and years.

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,

Now to the moon in wavering morrice move;

And on the tawny sands and shelves

Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.

By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,

The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim,

Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:

What hath night to do with sleep?

Night hath better sweets to prove;

Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.

Come, let us our rites begin;

'Tis only daylight that makes sin,

Which these dun shades will ne'er report.

Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,

Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame

Of midnight torches burns! mysterious dame,

That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb

Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,

And makes one blot of all the air!

Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,

Wherein thou ridest with Hecat', and befriend

Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end

Of all thy dues be done, and none left out

Ere the blabbing eastern scout,

The nice Morn on the Indian steep,

From her cabined loop-hole peep,

And to the tell-tale Sun descry

Our concealed solemnity.

Come, knit hands, and beat the ground

In a light fantastic round.

The Measure.

Break off, break off! I feel the different pace

Of some chaste footing near about this ground.

Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees;

Our number may affright. Some virgin sure

(For so I can distinguish by mine art)

Benighted in these woods! Now to my charms,

And to my wily trains: I shall ere long

Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed

About my mother Circe. Thus I hurl

My dazzling spells into the spongy air,

Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,

And give it false presentments, lest the place

And my quaint habits breed astonishment,

And put the damsel to suspicious flight;

Which must not be, for that's against my course.

I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,

And well-placed words of glozing courtesy,

Baited with reasons not unplausible,

Wind me into the easy-hearted man,

And hug him into snares. When once her eye

Hath met the virtue of this magic dust

I shall appear some harmless villager,

Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.

But here she comes; I fairly step aside,

And hearken, if I may her business hear.

The Lady enters.

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,

My best guide now. Methought it was the sound

Of riot and ill-managed merriment,

Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe

Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,

When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,

In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,

And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth

To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence

Of such late wassailers; yet, oh! where else

Shall I inform my unacquainted feet

In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?

My brothers, when they saw me wearied out

With this long way, resolving here to lodge

Under the spreading favor of these pines,

Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side

To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit

As the kind hospitable woods provide.

They left me then when the gray-hooded Even,

Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,

Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain.

But where they are, and why they came not back,

Is now the labor of my thoughts. 'Tis likeliest

They had engaged their wandering steps too far;

And envious darkness, ere they could return,

Had stole them from me. Else, O thievish Night,

Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,

In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars

That Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps

With everlasting oil, to give due light

To the misled and lonely traveller?

This is the place, as well as I may guess,

Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth

Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear;

Yet nought but single darkness do I find.

What might this be? A thousand fantasies

Begin to throng into my memory,

Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,

And airy tongues that syllable men's names

On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound

The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended

By a strong siding champion, Conscience.

O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,

Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,

And thou unblemished form of Chastity!

I see thee visibly, and now believe

That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill

Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,

Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,

To keep my life and honor unassailed....

Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud

Turn forth her silver lining on the night?

I did not err: there does a sable cloud

Turn forth her silver lining on the night,

And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.

I cannot hallo to my brothers, but

Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest

I'll venture; for my new-enlivened spirits

Prompt me, and they perhaps are not far off.

SONG

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen

Within thy airy shell

By slow Meander's margent green,

And in the violet-embroidered vale

Where the love-lorn nightingale

Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:

Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair

That liketh thy Narcissus are?

O, if thou have

Hid them in some flowery cave,

Tell me but where,

Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere!

So may'st thou be translated to the skies,

And give resounding grace to all Heaven's harmonies!

Comus. Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould

Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?

Sure something holy lodges in that breast,

And with these raptures moves the vocal air

To testify his hidden residence.

How sweetly did they float upon the wings

Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,

At every fall smoothing the raven down

Of darkness till it smiled! I have oft heard

My mother Circe with the Sirens three,

Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,

Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs,

Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul,

And lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept,

And chid her barking waves into attention,

And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause.

Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,

And in sweet madness robbed it of itself;

But such a sacred and home-felt delight,

Such sober certainty of waking bliss,

I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,

And she shall be my queen.—Hail, foreign wonder!

Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,

Unless the goddess that in rural shrine

Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song

Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog

To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.

Lady. Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise

That is addressed to unattending ears.

Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift

How to regain my severed company,

Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo

To give me answer from her mossy couch.

Comus. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?

Lady. Dim darkness and this leavy labyrinth.

Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?

Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.

Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?

Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.

Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady?

Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

Comus. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.

Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit!

Comus. Imports their loss, beside the present need?

Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.

Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?

Lady. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips.

Comus. Two such I saw, what time the labored ox

In his loose traces from the furrow came,

And the swinked hedger at his supper sat.

I saw them under a green mantling vine,

That crawls along the side of yon small hill,

Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;

Their port was more than human, as they stood.

I took it for a faery vision

Of some gay creatures of the element,

That in the colors of the rainbow live,

And play i' the plighted clouds. I was awe-strook,

And, as I passed, I worshiped. If those you seek,

It were a journey like the path to Heaven

To help you find them.

Lady. Gentle villager,

What readiest way would bring me to that place?

Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

Lady. To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,

In such a scant allowance of star-light,

Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,

Without the sure guess of well-practised feet.

Comus. I know each lane, and every alley green,

Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,

And every bosky bourn from side to side,

My daily walks and ancient neighborhood;

And, if your stray attendance be yet lodged,

Or shroud within these limits, I shall know

Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark

From her thatched pallet rouse. If otherwise,

I can conduct you, Lady, to a low

But loyal cottage, where you may be safe

Till further quest.

Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,

And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,

Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,

With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls

And courts of princes, where it first was named,

And yet is most pretended. In a place

Less warranted than this, or less secure,

I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.

Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial

To my proportioned strength! Shepherd, lead on...

THE TWO BROTHERS

Eld. Bro. Unmuffle, ye faint stars; and thou, fair moon,

That wont'st to love the traveller's benison,

Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,

And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here

In double night of darkness and of shades;

Or, if your influence be quite dammed up

With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,

Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole

Of some clay habitation, visit us

With thy long levelled rule of streaming light,

And thou shalt be our star of Arcady,

Or Tyrian Cynosure.

Sec. Bro. Or, if our eyes

Be barred that happiness, might we but hear

The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes,

Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,

Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock

Count the night-watches to his feathery dames,

'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering,

In this close dungeon of innumerable boughs.

But, Oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister !

Where may she wander now, whither betake her

From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles?

Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,

Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm

Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.

What if in wild amazement and affright,

Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp

Of savage hunger, or of savage heat!

Eld. Bro. Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite

To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;

For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown,

What need a man forestall his date of grief,

And run to meet what he would most avoid?

Or, if they be but false alarms of fear,

How bitter is such self-delusion!

I do not think my sister so to seek,

Or so unprincipled in virtue's book,

And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,

As that the single want of light and noise

(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)

Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,

And put them into misbecoming plight.

Virtue could see to do what Virtue would

By her own radiant light, though sun and moon

Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self

Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,

Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,

She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,

That, in the various bustle of resort,

Were all to-ruffled, and sometimes impaired.

He that has light within his own clear breast

May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day:

But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts

Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;

Himself is his own dungeon.

Sec. Bro. 'Tis most true

That musing Meditation most affects

The pensive secrecy of desert cell,

Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,

And sits as safe as in a senate-house;

For who would rob a hermit of his weeds,

His few books, or his beads, or maple dish,

Or do his gray hairs any violence?

But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree

Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard

Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye

To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit,

From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.

You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps

Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den,

And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope

Danger will wink on Opportunity,

And let a single helpless maiden pass

Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.

Of night or loneliness it recks me not;

I fear the dread events that dog them both,

Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person

Of our unowned sister.

Eld. Bro. I do not, brother,

Infer as if I thought my sister's state

Secure without all doubt or controversy;

Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear

Does arbitrate the event, my nature is

That I incline to hope rather than fear,

And gladly banish squint suspicion.

My sister is not so defenceless left

As you imagine; she has a hidden strength,

Which you remember not.

Sec. Bro. What hidden strength,

Unless the strength of Heaven, if you mean that?

Eld. Bro. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength,

Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own.

'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:

She that has that is clad in complete steel,

And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,

May trace huge forests, and unharbored heaths,

Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds;

Where, through the sacred rays of chastity,

No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaineer,

Will dare to soil her virgin purity.

Yea, there where very desolation dwells,

By grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades,

She may pass on with unblenched majesty,

Be it not done in pride, or in presumption.

Some say no evil thing that walks by night,

In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,

Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,

That breaks his magic chains at curfew time,

No goblin or swart faery of the mine,

Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.

Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call

Antiquity from the old schools of Greece

To testify the arms of chastity?

Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,

Fair silver-shafted queen forever chaste,

Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness

And spotted mountain-pard, but set at nought

The frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men

Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods.

What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield

That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,

Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,

But rigid looks of chaste austerity,

And noble grace that dashed brute violence

With sudden adoration and blank awe?

So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity

That, when a soul is found sincerely so,

A thousand liveried angels lackey her,

Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,

And in clear dream and solemn vision

Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;

Till oft converse with heavenly habitants

Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,

The unpolluted temple of the mind,

And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,

Till all be made immortal. But, when lust,

By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,

But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,

Lets in defilement to the inward parts,

The soul grows clotted by contagion,

Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose

The divine property of her first being.

Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp

Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres,

Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave,

As loth to leave the body that it loved,

And linked itself by carnal sensuality

To a degenerate and degraded state.

Sec. Bro. How charming is divine Philosophy!

Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,

But musical as is Apollo's lute,

And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,

Where no crude surfeit reigns.

Eld. Bro. List! list! I hear

Some far-off hallo break the silent air.

Sec. Bro. Methought so too; what should it be?

Eld. Bro. For certain,

Either some one, like us, night-founded here,

Or else some neighbor woodman, or, at worst,

Some roving robber calling to his fellows.

Sec. Bro. Heaven help my sister! Again, again, and near!

Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

Eld. Bro. I'll hallo.

If he be friendly, he comes well: if not,

Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us!

The Attendant Spirit, habited like a shepherd.

That hallo I should know. What are you? speak.

Come not too near; you fall on iron stakes else.

Spir. What voice is that? my young lord? speak again.

Sec. Bro. O brother, 'tis my father's Shepherd, sure.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed

The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,

And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale.

How camest thou here, good swain? Hath any ram

Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,

Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?

How could'st thou find this dark sequestered nook?

Spir. O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,

I came not here on such a trivial toy

As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth

Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth

That doth enrich these downs is worth a thought

To this my errand, and the care it brought.

But, oh! my virgin Lady, where is she?

How chance she is not in your company?

Eld. Bro. To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame

Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.

Spir. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.

Eld. Bro. What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly shew.

Spir. I'll tell ye. 'Tis not vain or fabulous

(Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)

What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse,

Storied of old in high immortal verse

Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles,

And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell;

For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood,

Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,

Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,

Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries,

And here to every thirsty wanderer

By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,

With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison

The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,

And the inglorious likeness of a beast

Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage

Charactered in the face. This have I learnt

Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts

That brow this bottom glade; whence night by night

He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl

Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,

Doing abhorred rites to Hecate

In their obscurèd haunts of inmost bowers.

Yet have they many baits and guileful spells

To inveigle and invite the unwary sense

Of them that pass unweeting by the way.

This evening late, by then the chewing flocks

Had ta'en their supper on the savory herb

Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold,

I sat me down to watch upon a bank

With ivy canopied, and interwove

With flaunting honeysuckle, and began,

Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,

To meditate my rural minstrelsy,

Till fancy had her fill. But ere a close

The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,

And filled the air with barbarous dissonance;

At which I ceased, and listened them a while,

Till an unusual stop of sudden silence

Gave respite to the drowsy-flighted steeds

That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep.

At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound

Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,

And stole upon the air, that even Silence

Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might

Deny her nature, and be never more,

Still to be so displaced. I was all ear,

And took in strains that might create a soul

Under the ribs of Death. But, oh! ere long

Too well I did perceive it was the voice

Of my most honored Lady, your dear sister.

Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear;

And 'O poor hapless nightingale,' thought I,

'How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!'

Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,

Through paths and turnings often trod by day,

Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place

Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise

(For so by certain signs I knew), had met

Already, ere my best speed could prevent,

The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey;

Who gently asked if he had seen such two,

Supposing him some neighbor villager.

Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed

Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung

Into swift flight, till I had found you here;

But further know I not.

Sec. Bro. O night and shades,

How are ye joined with hell in triple knot

Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,

Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence

You gave me, brother?

Eld. Bro. Yes, and keep it still;

Lean on it safely; not a period

Shall be unsaid for me. Against the threats

Of malice or of sorcery, or that power

Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm:

Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,

Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled;

Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm

Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.

But evil on itself shall back recoil,

And mix no more with goodness, when at last,

Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,

It shall be in eternal restless change

Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail,

The pillared firmament is rottenness,

And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on!

Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven

May never this just sword be lifted up;

But for that damned magician, let him be girt

With all the griesly legions that troop

Under the sooty flag of Acheron,

Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms

'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,

And force him to return his purchase back,

Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,

Cursed as his life.

Spir. Alas! good venturous youth,

I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise;

But here thy sword can do thee little stead.

Far other arms and other weapons must

Be those that quell the might of hellish charms.

He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,

And crumble all thy sinews.

Eld. Bro. Why, prithee, Shepherd,

How durst thou then thyself approach so near

As to make this relation?

Spir. Care and utmost shifts

How to secure the Lady from surprisal

Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,

Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled

In every virtuous plant and healing herb

That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray.

He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing;

Which when I did, he on the tender grass

Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,

And in requital ope his leathern scrip,

And show me simples of a thousand names,

Telling their strange and vigorous faculties.

Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,

But of divine effect, he culled me out.

The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,

But in another country, as he said,

Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil:

Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain

Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon;

And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly

That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave.

He called it Hæmony, and gave it me,

And bade me keep it as of sovran use

'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,

Or ghastly Furies' apparition.

I pursed it up, but little reckoning made,

Till now that this extremity compelled.

But now I find it true; for by this means

I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,

Entered the very lime-twigs of his spells,

And yet came off. If you have this about you

(As I will give you when we go) you may

Boldly assault the necromancer's hall;

Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood

And brandished blade rush on him: break his glass,

And shed the luscious liquor on the ground;

But seize his wand. Though he and his curst crew

Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,

Or, like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,

Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

Eld. Bro. Thyrasis, lead on apace; I'll follow thee;

And some good angel bear a shield before us!

The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties. Comus appears with his rabble, and the Lady set in an enchanted chair: to whom he offers his glass; which she puts by, and goes about to rise.

Comus. Nay, Lady, sit. If I but wave this wand,

Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,

And you a statue, or as Daphne was,

Root-bound, that fled Apollo.

Lady. Fool, do not boast.

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind

With all thy charms, although this corporal rind

Thou hast immanacled while Heaven sees good.

Comus. Why are you vexed, Lady? why do you frown?

Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates

Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures

That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,

When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns

Brisk as the April buds in primrose season.

And first behold this cordial julep here,

That flames and dances in his crystal bounds,

With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.

Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone

In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena

Is of such power to stir up joy as this,

To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.

Why should you be so cruel to yourself,

And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent

For gentle usage and soft delicacy?

But you invert the covenants of her trust,

And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,

With that which you received on other terms,

Scorning the unexempt condition

By which all mortal frailty must subsist,

Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,

That have been tired all day without repast,

And timely rest have wanted. But, fair virgin,

This will restore all soon.

Lady. 'Twill not, false traitor!

'Twill not restore the truth and honesty

That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies.

Was this the cottage and the safe abode

Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,

These oughly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!

Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!

Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence

With vized falsehood and base forgery?

And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here

With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute?

Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,

I would not taste thy treasonous offer. None

But such as are good men can give good things;

And that which is not good is not delicious

To a well-governed and wise appetite.

Comus. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears

To those budge doctors of the stoic fur,

And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,

Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence!

Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth

With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,

Covering the earth with odors, fruits, and flocks,

Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,

But all to please and sate the curious taste?

And set to work millions of spinning worms,

That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk,

To deck her sons; and, that no corner might

Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins

She hatched the all-worshipped ore and precious gems,

To store her children with. If all the world

Should, in a fit of temperance, feed on pulse,

Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,

The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,

Not half his riches known, and yet despised;

And we should serve him as a grudging master,

As a penurious niggard of his wealth,

And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,

Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,

And strangled with her waste fertility:

The earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with plumes,

The herds would over-multitude their lords;

The sea o'erfraught would swell, and the unsought diamonds

Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,

And so bestud with stars, that they below

Would grow inured to light, and come at last

To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.

List, Lady; be not coy, and be not cozened

With that same vaunted name, Virginity.

Beauty is Nature's coin; must not be hoarded,

But must be current; and the good thereof

Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,

Unsavory in the enjoyment of itself.

If you let slip time, like a neglected rose

It withers on the stalk with languished head.

Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown

In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,

Where most may wonder at the workmanship.

It is for homely features to keep home;

They had their name thence: coarse complexions

And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply

The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.

What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,

Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn?

There was another meaning in these gifts;

Think what, and be advised; you are but young yet.

Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips

In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler

Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,

Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.

I hate when vice can bolt her arguments

And virtue has no tongue to check her pride.

Impostor! do not charge most innocent Nature,

As if she would her children should be riotous

With her abundance. She, good cateress,

Means her provision only to the good,

That live according to her sober laws,

And holy dictate of spare Temperance.

If every just man that now pines with want

Had but a moderate and beseeming share

Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury

Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,

Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed

In unsuperfluous even proportion,

And she no whit encumbered with her store;

And then the Giver would be better thanked,

His praise due paid: for swinish gluttony

Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,

But with besotted base ingratitude

Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. Shall I go on?

Or have I said enow? To him that dares

Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words

Against the sun-clad power of chastity

Fain would I something say;—yet to what end?

Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend

The sublime notion and high mystery

That must be uttered to unfold the sage

And serious doctrine of Virginitie;

And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know

More happiness than this thy present lot.

Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric,

That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence;

Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.

Yet, should I try, the uncontrolled worth

Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits

To such a flame of sacred vehemence

That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,

And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,

Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,

Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.

Comus. She fables not. I feel that I do fear

Her words set off by some superior power;

And, though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew

Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove

Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus

To some of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble,

And try her yet more strongly,—Come, no more!

This is mere moral babble, and direct

Against the canon laws of our foundation.

I must not suffer this; yet 'tis but the lees

And settlings of a melancholy blood.

But this will cure all straight; one sip of this

Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight

Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste....

The Brothers rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground: his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in. The Attendant Spirit comes in.

Spir. What! have you let the false enchanter scape?

O ye mistook; ye should have snatched his wand,

And bound him fast. Without his rod reversed,

And backward mutters of dissevering power,

We cannot free the Lady that sits here

In stony fetters fixed and motionless.

Yet stay: be not disturbed; now I bethink me,

Some other means I have which may be used,

Which once of Melibœus old I learnt,

The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.

There is a gentle Nymph not far from hence,

That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream:

Sabrina is her name: a virgin pure;

Whilom she was the daughter of Lochrine,

That had the sceptre from his father Brute.

She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit

Of her enraged stepdame, Guendolen,

Commended her fair innocence to the flood

That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.

The water-nymphs, that in the bottom played,

Held up their pearled wrists, and took her in,

Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall;

Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,

And gave her to his daughters to imbathe

In nectared lavers strewed with asphodel,

And through the porch and inlet of each sense

Dropt in ambrosial oils, till she revived,

And underwent a quick immortal change,

Made Goddess of the river. Still she retains

Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve

Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,

Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs

That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,

Which she with precious vial'd liquors heals:

For which the shepherds, at their festivals,

Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,

And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream

Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.

And, as the old swain said, she can unlock

The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,

If she be right invoked in warbled song;

For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift

To aid a virgin, such as was herself,

In hard-besetting need. This will I try,

And add the power of some adjuring verse.

Song.

Sabrina fair,

Listen where thou art sitting

Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,

In twisted braids of lilies knitting

The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;

Listen for dear honor's sake,

Goddess of the silver lake,

Listen and save!

Listen, and appear to us,

In name of great Oceanus,

By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,

And Tethys' grave majestic pace;

By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,

And the Carpathian wizard's hook;

By scaly Triton's winding shell,

And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell;

By Leucothea's lovely hands,

And her son that rules the strands;

By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,

And the songs of Sirens sweet;

By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,

And fair Ligea's golden comb,

Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks

Sleeking her soft alluring locks;

By all the nymphs that nightly dance

Upon thy streams with wily glance;

Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head

From thy coral-paven bed,

And bridle in thy headlong wave,

Till thou our summons answered have.

Listen and save!

Sabrina rises, attended by Water-nymphs, and sings.

By the rushy-fringed bank,

Where grow the willow and the osier dank,

My sliding chariot stays,

Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen

Of turkis blue, and emerald green,

That in the channel strays:

Whilst from off the waters fleet

Thus I set my printless feet

O'er the cowslip's velvet head,

That bends not as I tread.

Gentle swain, at thy request

I am here!

Spir. Goddess dear,

We implore thy powerful hand

To undo the charmed band

Of true virgin here distressed

Through the force and through the wile

Of unblessed enchanter vile.

Sabr. Shepherd, 'tis my office best

To help ensnared chastity.

Brightest Lady, look on me.

Thus I sprinkle on thy breast

Drops that from my fountain pure

I have kept of precious cure;

Thrice upon thy finger's tip,

Thrice upon thy rubied lip:

Next this marble venom'd seat,

Smear'd with gums of glutinous heat,

I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.

Now the spell hath lost his hold,

And I must haste ere morning hour

To wait in Amphitrite's bower.

Sabrina descends, and the Lady rises out of her seat.

Spir. Virgin, daughter of Lochrine,

Sprung of old Anchises' line,

May thy brimmed waves for this

Their full tribute never miss

From a thousand petty rills,

That tumble down the snowy hills:

Summer drouth or singed air

Never scorch thy tresses fair,

Nor wet October's torrent flood

Thy molten crystal fill with mud;

May thy billows roll ashore

The beryl and the golden ore;

May thy lofty head be crowned

With many a tower and terrace round,

And here and there thy banks upon

With groves of myrrh and cinnamon.

Come, Lady; while Heaven lends us grace,

Let us fly this cursed place,

Lest the sorcerer us entice

With some other new device.

Not a waste or needless sound

Till we come to holier ground.

I shall be your faithful guide

Through this gloomy covert wide;

And not many furlongs thence

Is your Father's residence,

Where this night are met in state

Many a friend to gratulate

His wished presence, and beside

All the swains that there abide

With jigs and rural dance resort.

We shall catch them at their sport,

And our sudden coming there

Will double all their mirth and cheer.

Come, let us haste; the stars grow high,

But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow Town, and the President's Castle: then come the Country Dancers; after them the Attendant Spirit, with the Two Brothers and the Lady.

Song.

Spir. Back, shepherds, back! Enough your play

Till next sun-shine holiday.

Here be, without duck or nod,

Other trippings to be trod

Of lighter toes, and such court guise

As Mercury did first devise

With the mincing Dryades

On the lawns and on the leas.

This second Song presents them to their Father and Mother.

Noble Lord and Lady bright,

I have brought ye new delight.

Here behold so goodly grown

Three fair branches of your own.

Heaven hath timely tried their youth,

Their faith, their patience, and their truth,

And sent them here through hard assays

With a crown of deathless praise,

To triumph in victorious dance

O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The dances ended, the Spirit epiloguizes.

Spir. To the ocean now I fly,

And those happy climes that lie

Where day never shuts his eye,

Up in the broad fields of the sky.

There I suck the liquid air,

All amidst the gardens fair

Of Hesperus, and his daughters three

That sing about the golden tree.

Along the crisped shades and bowers

Revels the spruce and jocund Spring;

The Graces and the rosy-bosomed Hours

Thither all their bounties bring.

There eternal Summer dwells,

And west winds with musky wing

About the cedarn alleys fling

Nard and cassia's balmy smells.

Iris there with humid bow

Waters the odorous banks, that blow

Flowers of more mingled hue

Than her purpled scarf can shew,

And drenches with Elysian dew

(List, mortals, if your ears be true)

Beds of hyacinth and roses,

Where young Adonis oft reposes,

Waxing well of his deep wound,

In slumbers soft, and on the ground

Sadly sits the Assyrian queen.

But far above, in spangled sheen,

Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced

Holds his dear Psyche, sweet entranced

After her wandering labors long,

Till free consent the gods among

Make her his eternal bride,

And from her fair unspotted side

Two blissful twins are to be born,

Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn.

But now my task is smoothly done:

I can fly, or I can run

Quickly to the green earth's end,

Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,

And from thence can soar as soon

To the corners of the moon.

Mortals, that would follow me,

Love Virtue; she alone is free.

She can teach ye how to climb

Higher than the sphery chime;

Or, if Virtue feeble were,

Heaven itself would stoop to her.

LYCIDAS

In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637; and, by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy, then in their height.

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,

Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,

I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,

And with forced fingers rude

Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear

Compels me to disturb your season due;

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,

Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew

Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.

He must not float upon his watery bier

Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,

Without the meed of some melodious tear.

Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well

That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;

Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.

Hence with denial vain and coy excuse:

So may some gentle Muse

With lucky words favor my destined urn,

And as he passes turn,

And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,

Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;

Together both, ere the high lawns appeared

Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,

We drove a-field, and both together heard

What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,

Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,

Oft till the star that rose at evening bright

Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.

Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute;

Tempered to the oaten flute

Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel

From the glad sound would not be absent long;

And old Damocetas loved to hear our song.

But, oh! the heavy change, now thou art gone,

Now thou art gone and never must return!

Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,

With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,

And all their echoes, mourn.

The willows, and the hazel copses green,

Shall now no more be seen

Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.

As killing as the canker to the rose,

Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,

Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,

When first the white-thorn blows;

Such Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep

Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?

For neither were ye playing on the steep

Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,

Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,

Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.

Ay me! I fondly dream

"Had ye been there," ... for what could that have done?

What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,

The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,

Whom universal nature did lament,

When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,

His gory visage down the stream was sent,

Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?

Alas! what boots it with uncessant care

To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,

And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?

Were it not better done, as others use,

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,

Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise

(That last infirmity of noble mind)

To scorn delights and live laborious days;

But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,

And think to burst out into sudden blaze,

Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,

And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"

Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears:

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,

Nor in the glistening foil

Set off to the world, nor in broad rumor lies,

But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes

And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;

As he pronounces lastly on each deed,

Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed."

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honored flood,

Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,

That strain I heard was of a higher mood.

But now my oat proceeds,

And listens to the Herald of the Sea,

That came in Neptune's plea.

He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,

What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain?

And questioned every gust of rugged wings

That blows from off each beaked promontory.

They knew not of his story;

And sage Hippotades their answer brings,

That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed:

The air was calm, and on the level brine

Sleek Panope with all her sisters played.

It was that fatal and perfidious bark,

Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,

That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

Next, Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,

His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,

Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge

Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.

“Ah! who hath reft,” quoth he, “my dearest pledge?”

Last came, and last did go,

The Pilot of the Galilean Lake;

Two massy keys he bore of metals twain

(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).

He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake:—

“How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,

Enow of such as, for their bellies’ sake,

Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!

Of other care they little reckoning make

Than how to scramble at the shearers’ feast,

And shove away the worthy bidden guest.

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold

A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least

That to the faithful herdman’s art belongs!

What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;

And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs

Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,

But swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,

Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;

Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw

Daily devours apace, and nothing said.

But that two-handed engine at the door

Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.”

Return, Alpheus; the dread voice is past

That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,

And call the vales, and bid them hither cast

Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues.

Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use

Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,

On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,

Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,

That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,

And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.

Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,

The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,

The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,

The glowing violet,

The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,

With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,

And every flower that sad embroidery wears;

Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,

And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,

To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.

For so, to interpose a little ease,

Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.

Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas

Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled;

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,

Where thou perhaps under the welming tide

Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;

Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,

Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,

Where the great Vision of the guarded mount

Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.

Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth:

And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,

For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,

Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.

So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,

And yet anon repairs his drooping head,

And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,

Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,

Where, other groves and other streams along,

With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,

And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,

In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.

There entertain him all the Saints above,

In solemn troops, and sweet societies,

That sing, and singing in their glory move,

And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.

Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;

Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,

In thy large recompense, and shalt be good

To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,

While the still morn went out with sandals gray:

He touched the tender stops of various quills,

With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:

And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,

And now was dropt into the western bay.

At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue;

To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

SONNETS

I

TO THE NIGHTINGALE

O Nightingale that on yon bloomy spray

Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,

Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,

While the jolly Hours lead on propitious May.

Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,

First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,

Portend success in love. O, if Jove's will

Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,

Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate

Foretell my hopeless doom, in some grove nigh;

As thou from year to year hast sung too late

For my relief, yet hadst no reason why.

Whether the Muse or Love called thee his mate,

Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

II

ON HIS HAVING ARRIVED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-THREE

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,

Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!

My hasting days fly on with full career,

But my late spring no bud or blossom shew' th.

Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth

That I to manhood am arrived so near;

And inward ripeness doth much less appear,

That some more timely-happy spirits endu' th.

Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,

It shall be still in strictest measure even

To that same lot, however mean or high,

Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven.

All is, if I have grace to use it so,

As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

VIII

WHEN THE ASSAULT WAS INTENDED TO THE CITY

Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,

Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,

If deed of honor did thee ever please,

Guard them, and him within protect from harms.

He can requite thee; for he knows the charms

That call fame on such gentle acts as these,

And he can spread thy name o'er lands and seas,

Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.

Lift not thy spear against the Muses' bower:

The great Emathian conqueror bid spare

The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower

Went to the ground; and the repeated air

Of sad Electra's poet had the power

To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

IX

TO A VIRTUOUS YOUNG LADY

Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth

Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,

And with those few art eminently seen

That labor up the hill of heavenly Truth,

The better part with Mary and with Ruth

Chosen thou hast; and they that overween,

And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,

No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.

Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends

To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,

And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure

Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends

Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,

Hast gained thy entrance, Virgin wise, and pure.

X

TO THE LADY MARGARET LEY

Daughter to that good Earl, once President

Of England's Council and her Treasury,

Who lived in both unstained with gold or fee,

And left them both, more in himself content,

Till the sad breaking of that Parliament

Broke him, as that dishonest victory

At Chæronea, fatal to liberty,

Killed with report that old man eloquent,

Though later born than to have known the days

Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,

Madam, methinks I see him living yet:

So well your words his noble virtues praise

That all both judge you to relate them true

And to possess them, honored Margaret.

XIII

TO MR. H. LAWES ON HIS AIRS

Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song

First taught our English music how to span

Words with just note and accent, not to scan

With Midas' ears, committing short and long,

Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,

With praise enough for Envy to look wan;

To after age thou shalt be writ the man

That with smooth air couldst humor best our tongue.

Thou honor'st Verse, and Verse must send her wing

To honor thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire,

That tunest their happiest lines in hymn or story.

Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher

Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,

Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

XV

ON THE LORD GENERAL FAIRFAX, AT THE SIEGE OF COLCHESTER

Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings,

Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,

And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,

And rumors loud that daunt remotest kings,

Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings

Victory home, though new rebellions raise

Their Hydra heads, and the false North displays

Her broken league to imp their serpent wings.

O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand

(For what can war but endless war still breed?)

Till truth and right from violence be freed,

And public faith cleared from the shameful brand

Of public fraud. In vain doth Valor bleed,

While Avarice and Rapine share the land.

XVI

TO THE LORD GENERAL CROMWELL, MAY, 1652,

**ON THE PROPOSALS OF CERTAIN MINISTERS AT
THE COMMITTEE FOR PROPAGATION OF THE
GOSPEL**

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud

Not of war only, but detractions rude,

Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,

To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,

And on the neck of crowned Fortune proud

Hast reared God's trophies, and his work pursued,

While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,

And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,

And Worcester's laureate wreath: yet much remains

To conquer still; Peace hath her victories

No less renowned than War: new foes arise,

Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.

Help us to save free conscience from the paw

Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.

XVII

TO SIR HENRY VANE THE YOUNGER

Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old,

Than whom a better senator ne'er held

The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms, repelled

The fierce Epirot and the African bold,

Whether to settle peace, or to unfold

The drift of hollow states hard to be spelled;

Then to advise how war may best, upheld,

Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,

In all her equipage; besides, to know

Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,

What severs each, thou hast learned, which few have done.

The bounds of either sword to thee we owe:

Therefore on thy firm hand Religion leans

In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

XVIII

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones

Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;

Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,

When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones,

Forget not: in thy book record their groans

Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold

Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled

Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans

The vales redoubled to the hills, and they

To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow

O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway

The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow

A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,

Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

XIX

ON HIS BLINDNESS

When I consider how my light is spent

Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,

And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present

My true account, lest He returning chide,

“Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?”

I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need

Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best

Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state

Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,

And post o'er land and ocean without rest;

They also serve who only stand and wait."

XX

TO MR. LAWRENCE

Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,

Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,

Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire

Help waste a sullen day, what may be won

From the hard season gaining? Time will run

On smoother, till Favonius reinspire

The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire

The lily and rose, that neither sowed nor spun.

What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,

Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise

To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice

Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?

He who of those delights can judge, and spare

To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

XXI

TO CYRIACK SKINNER

Cyriack, whose grandsire on the royal bench

Of British Themis, with no mean applause,

Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our laws,

Which others at their bar so often wrench,

To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to drench

In mirth that after no repenting draws;

Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,

And what the Swede intend, and what the French.

To measure life learn thou betimes, and know

Toward solid good what leads the nearest way;

For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,

And disapproves that care, though wise in show,

That with superfluous burden loads the day,

And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

XXII

TO THE SAME

Cyriack, this three years' day these eyes, though clear,

To outward view, of blemish or of spot,

Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot;

Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear

Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,

Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not

Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot

Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer

Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?

The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied

In Liberty's defence, my noble task,

Of which all Europe rings from side to side.

This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask

Content, though blind, had I no better guide.

XXIII

ON HIS DECEASED WIFE

Methought I saw my late espoused saint

Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,

Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,

Rescued from Death by force, though pale and faint.

Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint

Purification in the Old Law did save,

And such as yet once more I trust to have

Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,

Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.

Her face was veiled; yet to my fancied sight

Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined

So clear as in no face with more delight.

But, oh! as to embrace me she inclined,

I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

Freeditorial 