

## SONNET XXXVI

Should the lone wanderer, fainting on his way,  
 Rest for a moment of the sultry hours,  
 And though his path through thorns and roughness lay,  
 Pluck the wild rose, or woodbine's gadding flowers;  
 Weaving gay wreaths beneath some sheltering tree,  
 The sense of sorrow he awhile may lose;  
 So have I sought thy flowers, fair poesy,  
 So charmed my way with friendship and the muse!  
 But darker now grows life's unhappy day,  
 Dark with new clouds of evil yet to come,  
 Her pencil sickening fancy throws away,  
 And weary hope reclines upon the tomb;  
 And points my wishes to that tranquil shore  
 Where the pale spectre care pursues no more.

## The Emigrants, A Poem, in Two Books (1793)

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

Dear Sir,

There is, I hope, some propriety in my addressing a composition to you, which would never perhaps have existed had I not, amid the heavy pressure of many sorrows, derived infinite consolation from your poetry, and some degree of animation and of confidence from your esteem.<sup>1</sup>

The following performance is far from aspiring to be considered as an imitation of your inimitable poem, *The Task*; I am perfectly sensible that it belongs not to a feeble and feminine hand to draw the bow of Ulysses.<sup>2</sup>

The force, clearness, and sublimity of your admirable poem; the felicity, almost peculiar to your genius, of giving to the most familiar objects dignity and effect, I could never hope to reach - yet, having read *The Task* almost incessantly from its first publication<sup>3</sup> to the present time, I felt that kind of enchantment described by Milton when he says

The angel ended, and in Adam's ear

So charming left his voice, that he awhile

Thought him still speaking.

*(Paradise Lost viii 1-3)*

And from the force of this impression, I was gradually led to attempt, in blank verse, a delineation of those interesting objects which happened to excite my attention, and which even pressed upon an heart that has learned, perhaps from its own sufferings, to feel with acute though unavailing compassion the calamity of others.

A dedication usually consists of praises and of apologies; *my* praise can add nothing to the unanimous and loud applause of your country. She regards you with pride as

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper praised Smith's abilities when introduced to her by William Hayley in early August 1792.<sup>2</sup> Ulysses acquired, when young, a bow which he never used, valuing it so highly that he left it at

home. The contest to draw its string and win the

hand of Penelope forms the culmination of the home-

coming which ends *The Odyssey*.<sup>3</sup> *The Task* was first published in 1784.

one of the few who, at the present period, rescue her from the imputation of having degenerated in poetical talents; but in the form of apology I should have much to say, if I again dared to plead the pressure of evils, aggravated by their long continuance, as an excuse for the defects of this attempt.

Whatever may be the faults of its execution, let me vindicate myself from those that may be imputed to the design. In speaking of the emigrant clergy,<sup>4</sup> I beg to be understood as feeling the utmost respect for the integrity of their principles, and it is with pleasure I add my suffrage to that of those who have had a similar opportunity of witnessing the conduct of the emigrants of all descriptions during their exile in England - which has been such as does honour to *their* nation, and ought to secure to them in ours the esteem of every liberal mind.

Your philanthropy, dear sir, will induce you, I am persuaded, to join with me in hoping that this painful exile may finally lead to the extirpation of that reciprocal hatred so unworthy of great and enlightened nations; that it may tend to humanize both countries, by convincing each that good qualities exist in the other; and at length annihilate the prejudices that have so long existed to the injury of both.

Yet it is unfortunately but too true that with the body of the English, this national aversion has acquired new force by the dreadful scenes which have been acted in France during the last summer<sup>5</sup> - even those who are the victims of the Revolution have not escaped the odium which the undistinguishing multitude annex to all the natives of a country where such horrors have been acted. Nor is this the worst effect those events have had on the minds of the English: by confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed its ill management, the attempts of public virtue with the outrages that guilt and folly have committed in its disguise - the very name of liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many who have written or spoken in its defence have been stigmatized as promoters of anarchy, and enemies to the prosperity of their country. Perhaps even the author of *The Task*, with all his goodness and tenderness of heart, is in the catalogue of those who are reckoned to have been too warm in a cause which it was once the glory of Englishmen to avow and defend. The exquisite poem, indeed, in which you have honoured liberty by a tribute highly gratifying to her sincerest friends, was published some years before the demolition of regal despotism in France - which, in the fifth Book, it seems to foretell.<sup>6</sup> All the truth and energy of the passage to which I allude must have been strongly felt when, in the Parliament of England, the greatest orator of our time quoted the sublimest of our poets - when the eloquence of Fox did justice to the genius of Cowper.

I am, dear sir,

With the most perfect esteem,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

CHARLOTTE SMITH

Brighthelmstone, 10 May 1793

<sup>4</sup> *the emigrant clergy* On 26 May 1792 the French gov-

ernment decided that priests who refused to join the Constitutional Church were effectively traitors, and should be deported. With the end of the monarchy

on 10 August that decree became immediately effective, and led to the exile of many clergyman to Eng-

land. The presence of three bishops and 220 priests among the victims of the September massacres under-

lined the dangers to the clergy at this moment.

<sup>5</sup> The storming of the Tuileries (10 August 1792)

was followed by the imprisonment of the king and his family, and the September massacres of royalist and other prisoners in Paris (5-7 September).

<sup>6</sup> *Task* Book V includes a passage in praise of liberty (ll. 446 ff), and one contrasting the monarchy in England and France (to the detriment of the latter)

(ll. 331-62).



## BOOK I

*Scene: on the cliffs to the eastward of the town of Brightelmstone in Sussex<sup>7</sup>*

*Time: a morning in November 1792*

Slow in the wintry morn, the struggling light  
 Throws a faint gleam upon the troubled waves;  
 Their foaming tops, as they approach the shore,  
 And the broad surf that, never ceasing, breaks  
 On the innumerable<sup>8</sup> pebbles, catch the beams  
 Of the pale sun, that with reluctance gives  
 To this cold northern isle its shortened day.  
 Alas, how few the morning wakes to joy!  
 How many murmur at oblivious night  
 For leaving them so soon; for bearing thus  
 Their fancied bliss (the only bliss they taste!)  
 On her black wings away; changing the dreams  
 That soothed their sorrows, for calamities  
 (And every day brings its own sad proportion);  
 For doubts, diseases, abject dread of death,  
 And faithless friends, and fame and fortune lost,  
 Fancied or real wants, and wounded pride  
 That views the daystar but to curse his beams.  
 Yet He whose Spirit into being called  
 This wondrous world of waters; He who bids  
 The wild wind lift them till they dash the clouds,  
 And speaks to them in thunder; or whose breath,  
 Low murmuring o'er the gently heaving tides,  
 When the fair moon, in summer night serene,  
 Irradiates with long trembling lines of light  
 Their undulating surface; that great Power,  
 Who, governing the planets, also knows  
 If but a sea-mew falls,<sup>9</sup> whose nest is hid  
 In these incumbent cliffs; He surely means  
 To us, his reasoning creatures, whom He bids  
 Acknowledge and revere his awful hand,  
 Nothing but good. Yet man, misguided man,  
 Mars the fair work that he was bid enjoy,  
 And makes himself the evil he deploras.  
 How often, when my weary soul recoils  
 From proud oppression, and from legal crimes

<sup>7</sup> Smith lived in Brighton 1788-93.

<sup>8</sup> *innumeros*: innumerable. A poetized form, which at least one reviewer found objectionable; see headnote, *Essay on Man*.

<sup>9</sup> *Matthew* 10:29: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground

without your Father.' The passage was recalled often by eighteenth-century writers, thanks perhaps to Pope's *Essay on Man*:

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,  
 A hero perish, or a sparrow fall . . .  
 (l. 87-8)

(For such are in this land, where the vain boast  
 Of equal law is mockery, while the cost  
 Of seeking for redress is sure to plunge  
 Th' already injured to more certain ruin,  
 And the wretch starves before his counsel pleads) -  
 How often do I half abjure society  
 And sigh for some lone cottage, deep embowered  
 In the green woods that these steep chalky hills  
 Guard from the strong south-west;<sup>10</sup> where round their base  
 The beech wide flourishes, and the light ash  
 With slender leaf half hides the thymy turf!  
 There do I wish to hide me, well content  
 If on the short grass, strewn with fairy flowers,  
 I might repose thus sheltered;<sup>11</sup> or, when eve  
 In orient crimson lingers in the west,  
 Gain the high mound, and mark these waves remote  
 (Lucid though distant), blushing with the rays  
 Of the far-flaming orb that sinks beneath them.  
 For I have thought that I should then behold  
 The beauteous works of God unspoiled by man  
 And less affected then by human woes  
 I witnessed not; might better learn to bear  
 Those that injustice and duplicity  
 And faithlessness and folly fix on me:  
 For never yet could I derive relief,  
 When my swoln heart was bursting with its sorrows,  
 From the sad thought that others like myself  
 Live but to swell affliction's countless tribes!  
 Tranquil seclusion I have vainly sought;  
 Peace, who delights in solitary shade,  
 No more will spread for me her downy wings,  
 But, like the fabled Danaïds or the wretch  
 Who ceaseless up the steep acclivity  
 Was doomed to heave the still rebounding rock,<sup>12</sup>  
 Onward I labour - as the baffled wave  
 Which yon rough beach repulses, that returns  
 With the next breath of wind, to fail again.  
 Ah, mourner, cease these wallings! Cease and learn  
 That not the cot sequestered where the briar  
 And woodbine wild embrace the mossy thatch  
 (Scarce seen amid the forest gloom obscure),

<sup>10</sup> *the strong south-west wind.*

<sup>11</sup> *I might repose thus sheltered* a reworking of Virgil's famous topos: 'o quis me gelidis in vallibus Haemi / Sisat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrat!' (*Georgics* ii 488-9).

<sup>12</sup> Lines 68-70 refer to the fifty daughters of Danaeus, King of Argos, who ordered them to kill their fifty

husbands, who he suspected of plotting against him. The daughters were punished by having eternally to draw water into leaking pots in Hades. Sisyphus was condemned in hell to roll uphill a huge stone which perpetually rolled down again.

Or more substantial farm, well-fenced and warm,  
Where the full barn and cattle foddered round  
Speak rustic plenty; nor the stielier dome  
By dark firs shaded, or the aspiring pine  
Close by the village church (with care concealed  
By verdant foliage, lest the poor man's grave  
Should mar the smiling prospect of his lord);  
Where offices well-ranged, or dovecote stocked,  
Declare manorial residence - not these  
Or any of the buildings new and trim,  
With windows circling towards the restless sea,  
Which, ranged in rows,<sup>13</sup> now terminate my walk,  
Can shut out for an hour the spectre care  
That, from the dawn of reason, follows still  
Unhappy mortals, till the friendly grave

(Our sole secure asylum) 'ends the chase'.<sup>14</sup>

Behold, in witness of this mournful truth  
A group approach me, whose dejected looks  
(Sad heralds of distress!) proclaim them men  
Banished for ever and for conscience sake  
From their distracted country, whence the name  
Of freedom misapplied, and much abused  
By lawless anarchy, has driven them far  
To wander - with the prejudice they learned  
From bigotry (the tur'ess of the blind)

Through the wide world unsheltered; their sole hope  
That German spoilers through that pleasant land  
May carry wide the desolating scourge

Of war and vengeance.<sup>15</sup> Yet unhappy men,

Whate'er your errors, I lament your fate;

And, as disconsolate and sad ye hang

Upon the barrier of the rock, and seem

To murmur your despondence, waiting long

Some fortunate reverse that never comes,

Methinks in each expressive face I see

Discriminated anguish. There droops<sup>16</sup> one

Who in a moping cloister long consumed

This life inactive, to obtain a better,<sup>17</sup>

And thought that meagre abstinence, to wake

From his hard pallet with the midnight bell,

To live on eleemosynary bread,<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *ranged in rows* recently-built Georgian terraces, erected during Brighton's heyday as a social centre.

<sup>14</sup> *ends the chase* 'I have a confused notion that this expression, with nearly the same application, is to be found in Young, but I cannot refer to it' (Smith's note). Curran notes that the phrase is from Samuel

Pratt's 'Pro and Con' in Dodsley's *Miscellanies* (1785).

<sup>15</sup> *war and vengeance* many French emigrants had joined the Prussian army on the borders, which had been attempting to invade France since May 1792.

<sup>16</sup> *droops* the diction is Miltonic; cf. *Samson Agonistes* 194: 'So much I feel my genial spirits droop.'

<sup>17</sup> *a better* i.e. a better life.

<sup>18</sup> *eleemosynary bread* alms.

And to renounce God's works, would please that God.

And now the poor pale wretch receives, amazed,

The pity strangers give to his distress

(Because these strangers are, by his dark creed,  
Condemned as heretics), and with sick heart

Regrets his pious prison and his beads.<sup>19</sup>

Another, of more haughty port, declines

The aid he needs not, while in mute despair

His high indignant thoughts go back to France,  
Dwelling on all he lost - the Gothic<sup>20</sup> dome

That vied with splendid palaces,<sup>21</sup> the beds  
Of silk and down, the silver chalices,  
Vestments with gold enwrought for blazing altars,  
Where, amid clouds of incense, he held forth  
To kneeling crowds the imaginary bones<sup>22</sup>  
Of saints supposed, in pearl and gold enchased,<sup>23</sup>  
And still with more than living monarchs' pomp  
Surrounded; was believed by mumbling bigots  
To hold the keys of heaven, and to admit  
Whom he thought good to share it. Now, alas,  
He to whose daring soul and high ambition  
The world seemed circumscribed - who, wont to dream  
Of Fleuri, Richelieu, Alberoni,<sup>24</sup> men  
Who trod on empire, and whose politics  
Were not beyond the grasp of his vast mind -  
Is, in a land once hostile, still profaned  
By disbelief and rites unorthodox,  
The object of compassion. At his side,  
Lighter of heart than these, but heavier far<sup>25</sup>  
Than he was wont, another victim comes -  
An Abbé who with less contracted brow  
Still smiles and flatters, and still talks of hope,  
Which, sanguine as he is, he does not feel,  
And so he cheats the sad and weighty pressure

<sup>19</sup> 'Lest the same attempts at misrepresentation should now be made, as have been made on former occasions, it is necessary to repeat that nothing is farther from my thoughts than to reflect invidiously on the emigrant clergy, whose steadiness of principle excites veneration, as much as their sufferings, compassion. Adversity has now taught them the charity and humility they perhaps wanted when they made it a part of their faith that salvation could be obtained in no other religion than their own' (Smith's note).

<sup>20</sup> *Gothic* used here in the architectural sense, referring to a manner common in Western Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.

<sup>21</sup> 'Let it not be considered as an insult to men in fallen fortune, if these luxuries (undoubtedly inconsistent

with their profession) be here enumerated. France is not the only country where the splendour and indulgences of the higher, and the poverty and depression of the inferior clergy, have alike proved injurious to the cause of religion' (Smith's note).

<sup>22</sup> *imaginary bones* the reviewer in the *European Magazine* notes that this phrase 'is not only affected, but vicious; for the bones are certainly *real*, to whatever body they may have belonged' (24 (1793) 42).

<sup>23</sup> *enchased* set.

<sup>24</sup> *Fleuri, Richelieu, Alberoni* powerful cardinals.

<sup>25</sup> *heavier* for an echo of Michael's words to Adam and Eve, who are told that they shall 'possess / A paradise within thee, happier far' (*Paradise Lost* xii

186-7).

80

85

90

95

100

105

110

115

120

125

130

135

140

145

150



Of evils present. Still, as men misled  
 By early prejudice (so hard to break),  
 I mourn your sorrows, for I too have known  
 Involuntary exile<sup>26</sup> and, while yet  
 England had charms for me,<sup>27</sup> have felt how sad  
 It is to look across the dim cold sea  
 That melancholy rolls its reflux<sup>28</sup> tides  
 Between us and the dear regretted land  
 We call our own – as now ye pensive wait  
 On this bleak morning, gazing on the waves  
 That seem to leave your shore, from whence the wind  
 Is loaded to your ears with the deep groans  
 Of martyred saints and suffering royalty,<sup>29</sup>  
 While to your eyes the avenging power of Heaven  
 Appears in awful anger to prepare  
 The storm of vengeance, fraught with plagues and death.  
 Even he of milder heart, who was indeed  
 The simple shepherd in a rustic scene,  
 And mid the vine-clad hills of Languedoc  
 Taught to the barefoot peasant, whose hard hands  
 Produced the nectar he could seldom taste,<sup>30</sup>  
 Submission to the Lord for whom he toiled –  
 He, or his brethren, who to Neustria's sons<sup>31</sup>  
 Enforced religious patience, when, at times,  
 On their indignant hearts Power's iron hand  
 Too strongly struck, eliciting some sparks  
 Of the bold spirit of their native north –  
 Even these parochial priests, these humbled men  
 Whose lowly undistinguished cottages  
 Witnessed a life of purest piety,  
 While the meek tenants were, perhaps, unknown  
 Each to the haughty lord of his domain,  
 Who marked them not (the noble scorning still  
 The poor and pious priest, as with slow pace  
 He glided through the dim-arched avenue  
 Which to the castle led, hoping to cheer

<sup>26</sup> *Involuntary exile* Smith and her family were compelled to live near Dieppe, 1784-5, as a means of eluding her husband's creditors.

<sup>27</sup> *had charms for me* Smith echoes herself; cf. *Sonnet XII. Written on the Sea Shore* 7: 'But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me'. Cf. also Wordsworth, *Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree* 21: 'Stranger! these gloomy boughs / Had charms for him'.

<sup>28</sup> *refluent* flowing back.  
<sup>29</sup> *suffering royalty* After the storming of the Tuileries by the Paris mob on 10 August 1792 the royal family sought refuge at the Legislative Assembly; they were imprisoned at the Temple on 12 August.

<sup>30</sup> See the finely descriptive verses written at Montauban in France in 1750 by Dr Joseph Warton, printed in Dodsley's *Miscellanies* iv. 203 (Smith's note).  
 Warton's *Verses written at Montauban in France, 1750* was published in Robert Dodsley's *Collection of Poems* vol. 4 (1755), pp. 207-8, and reprinted in the *London Magazine* 24 (1755) 183-4. The poem laments that the French peasants pick grapes without being able to afford to taste the wine they produce: 'No cups nectarous shall their toils repay' (l. 5).

<sup>31</sup> *Neustria's sons* inhabitants of Normandy.

The last sad hour of some laborious life  
 That hastened to its close) – even such a man  
 Becomes an exile, staying not to try  
 By temperate zeal to check his madd'ning flock,  
 Who at the novel sound of liberty  
 (Ah, most intoxicating sound to slaves!)  
 Start into licence. Lo! dejected now,  
 The wandering pastor mourns, with bleeding heart,  
 His erring people, weeps and prays for them,  
 And trembles for the account that he must give  
 To Heaven for souls entrusted to his care.  
 Where the cliff, hollowed by the wintry storm,  
 Affords a seat with matted seaweed strewn,  
 A softer form reclines; around her run,  
 On the rough shingles or the chalky bourn,  
 Her gay unconscious children, soon amused,  
 Who pick the fretted stone or glossy shell  
 Or crimson plant marine, or they contrive  
 The fairy vessel with its ribband sail  
 And gilded paper pennant; in the pool  
 Left by the salt wave on the yielding sands,  
 They launch the mimic navy. Happy age,  
 Unmindful of the miseries of man!  
 Alas, too long a victim to distress,  
 Their mother, lost in melancholy thought,  
 Lulled for a moment by the murmurs low  
 Of sullen billows, wearied by the task  
 Of fixing here, with swoln and aching eyes,  
 Fixed on the grey horizon, since the dawn  
 Solicitously watched the weekly sail  
 From her dear native land – now yields awhile  
 To kind forgetfulness, while fancy brings,  
 In waking dreams, that native land again!  
 Versailles appears, its painted galleries  
 And rooms of regal splendour, rich with gold,  
 Where, by long mirrors multiplied,<sup>32</sup> the crowd  
 Paid willing homage – and, united there,  
 Beauty gave charms to empire. Ah! too soon  
 From the gay visionary pageant roused,  
 See the sad mourner start, and, drooping, look  
 With tearful eyes and heaving bosom round  
 On drear reality, where dark'ning waves,  
 Urged by the rising wind, unheeded foam  
 Near her cold rugged seat. To call her thence  
 A fellow-sufferer comes: dejection deep

<sup>32</sup> *by long mirrors multiplied* the Palace of Versailles has a long chamber lined with mirrors.

Checks, but conceals not quite, the martial air  
 And that high consciousness of noble blood  
 Which he has learned from infancy to think  
 Exalts him o'er the race of common men.  
 Nursed in the velvet lap of luxury  
 And fed by adulation, could *he* learn  
 That worth alone is true nobility,  
 And that *the peasant* who, 'amid the sons  
 Of Reason, Valour, Liberty, and Virtue,  
 Displays distinguished merit, is a noble  
 Of Nature's own creation?'<sup>33</sup> If even here,  
 If in this land of highly-vaunted freedom  
 Even Britons controvert the unwelcome truth,  
 Can it be relished by the sons of France —  
 Men who derive their boasted ancestry  
 From the fierce leaders of religious wars,  
 The first in chivalry's emblazoned page,  
 Who reckon Gueslin, Bayard or De Foix<sup>34</sup>  
 Among their brave progenitors? *Their* eyes,  
 Accustomed to regard the splendid trophies  
 Of heraldry (that with fantastic hand  
 Mingles, like images in feverish dreams,  
 'Gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire'<sup>35</sup>  
 With painted puns, and visionary shapes),  
 See not the simple dignity of virtue,  
 But hold all base, whom honours such as these  
 Exalt not from the crowd<sup>36</sup> — as one who long  
 Has dwelt amid the artificial scenes  
 Of populous city<sup>37</sup> deems that splendid shows,  
 The theatre, and pageant pomp of courts,  
 Are only worth regard; forgets all taste  
 For nature's genuine beauty; in the lapse  
 Of gushing waters hears no soothing sound,  
 Nor listens with delight to sighing winds  
 That on their fragrant pinions waft the notes  
 Of birds rejoicing in the tangled copse;  
 Nor gazes pleased on ocean's silver breast,

<sup>33</sup> These lines are Thomson's, and are among those sentiments which are now called (when used by living writers) not commonplace declamation but sentiments of dangerous tendency' (Smith's note). I am unable to trace a source in Thomson for these lines.

<sup>34</sup> *Gueslin, Bayard or De Foix*: famous French warriors.

<sup>35</sup> *Gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire* *Paradise Lost* 1.628.

<sup>36</sup> 'It has been said, and with great appearance of truth, that the contempt in which the nobility of France held the common people was remembered, and with

all that vindictive asperity which long endurance of oppression naturally excites, when, by a wonderful concurrence of circumstances, the people acquired the power of retaliation. Yet let me here add what seems to be in some degree inconsistent with the former charge — that the French are good masters to their servants, and that in their treatment of their negro slaves they are allowed to be more mild and merciful than other Europeans' (Smith's note).

<sup>37</sup> *populous city* cf. Satan in *Paradise Lost*, 'As one who long in populous city pent' (ix. 445).

While lightly o'er it sail the summer clouds  
 Reflected in the wave that, hardly heard,  
 Flows on the yellow sands: so to *his* mind  
 That long has lived where Despotism hides  
 His features harsh, beneath the diadem  
 Of worldly grandeur, abject slavery seems,  
 If by that power imposed, slavery no more.  
 For luxury wreathes with silk the iron bonds,  
 And hides the ugly rivets with her flowers,  
 Till the degenerate triflers, while they love  
 The glitter of the chains, forget their weight.<sup>38</sup>  
 But more, the men whose ill-acquired wealth  
 Was wrung from plundered myriads by the means  
 Too often legalised by power abused,  
 Feel all the horrors of the fatal change,  
 When their ephemeral greatness, marred at once  
 (As a vain toy that Fortune's childish hand  
 Equally joyed to fashion or to crush),  
 Leaves them exposed to universal scorn  
 For having nothing else, not even the claim  
 To honour, which respect for heroes past  
 Allows to ancient titles — men like these  
 Sink even beneath the level whence base arts  
 Alone had raised them, unlamented sink,  
 And know that they deserve the woes they feel.  
 Poor wand'ring wretches, whose'er ye are  
 That hopeless, houseless, friendless, travel wide  
 O'er these bleak russet downs, where, dimly seen,  
 The solitary shepherd shiv'ring tends  
 His dun discoloured flock (shepherd unlike  
 Him whom in song the poet's fancy crowns  
 With garlands, and his crook with v'lets binds) —  
 Poor vagrant wretches! Outcasts of the world  
 Whom no abode receives, no parish owns,  
 Roving, like nature's commoners, the land  
 That boasts such general plenty — if the sight  
 Of wide-extended misery softens yours  
 Awhile, suspend your murmurs, here behold  
 The strange vicissitudes of fate, while thus  
 The exiled nobles from their country driven,  
 Whose richest luxuries were theirs, must feel

<sup>38</sup> The financiers and *fermiers généraux* are here intended. In the present moment of clamour against all those who have spoken or written in favour of the first Revolution of France, the declaimers seem to have forgotten that under the reign of a mild and easy-tempered monarch, in the most voluptuous court in the world, the abuses by which men of this descrip-

tion were enriched had arisen to such height that their prodigality exhausted the immense resources of France, and, unable to supply the exigencies of government, the ministry were compelled to call *le tiers* — a meeting that gave birth to the Revolution which has since been so ruinously conducted' (Smith's note).



More poignant anguish than the lowest poor,  
 Who, born to indigence, have learned to brave  
 Rigid Adversity's depressing breath!  
 Ah, rather Fortune's worthless favourites  
 Who feed on England's vitals - pensioners  
 Of base corruption, who, in quick ascent  
 To opulence unmerited, become  
 Giddy with pride, and as ye rise, forgetting  
 The dust ye lately left, with scorn look down  
 On those beneath ye (though you equals once  
 In fortune, and in worth superior still,  
 They view the eminence on which ye stand  
 With wonder, not with envy, for they know  
 The means by which ye reached it, have been such  
 As in all honest eyes degrade ye far  
 Beneath the poor dependent, whose sad heart  
 Reluctant pleads for what your pride denies) -  
 Ye venal, worthless hirelings of a court!  
 Ye pampered parasites whom Britons pay  
 For forging fetters for them! - rather here  
 Study a lesson that concerns ye much,  
 And, trembling, learn that if oppressed too long  
 The raging multitude, to madness stung,  
 Will turn on their oppressors and no more  
 By sounding titles and parading forms  
 Bound like tame victims, will redress themselves!  
 Then swept away by the resistless torrent  
 Not only all your pomp may disappear,  
 But in the tempest lost, fair Order sink  
 Her decent head, and lawless Anarchy  
 O'erturn celestial Freedom's radiant throne -  
 As now in Gallia, where Confusion, born  
 Of party rage and selfish love of rule,  
 Sully the noblest cause that ever warmed  
 The heart of patriot virtue.<sup>39</sup> There arise  
 The infernal passions: Vengeance, seeking blood,  
 And Avarice, and Envy's harpy fangs  
 Pollute the immortal shrine of Liberty,  
 Dismay her votaries, and disgrace her name.  
 Respect is due to principle, and they  
 Who suffer for their conscience have a claim,  
 Whate'er that principle may be, to praise.  
 These ill-starred exiles then who bound by ties  
 To them the bonds of honour, who resigned

<sup>39</sup> 'This sentiment will probably *renew* against me the indignation of those who have an interest in asserting that no such virtue anywhere exists' (Smith's note).

Their country to preserve them, and now seek  
 In England an asylum, well deserve  
 To find that (every prejudice forgot  
 Which pride and ignorance teaches) we for them  
 Feel as our brethren, and that English hearts  
 Of just compassion ever own the sway  
 As truly as our element, the deep,  
 Obeys the mild dominion of the moon.  
 This they *have* found, and may they find it still!  
 Thus mayst thou, Britain, triumph! May thy foes,  
 By Reason's gen'rous potency subdued,  
 Learn that the God thou worshipp'st delights  
 In acts of pure humanity! May thine  
 Be still such bloodless laurels, nobler far  
 Than those acquired at Cressy or Poitiers<sup>40</sup> -  
 Or of more recent growth, those well bestowed  
 On him<sup>41</sup> who stood on Calpe's blazing height  
 Amid the thunder of a warring world,  
 Illustrious rather from the crowds he saved  
 From flood and fire, than from the ranks who fell  
 Beneath his valour! Actions such as these,  
 Like incense rising to the throne of Heaven,  
 Far better justify the pride that swells  
 In British bosoms, than the deafening roar  
 Of victory from a thousand brazen throats,  
 That tell with what success wide-wasting war  
 Has by our brave compatriots thinned the world.

## BOOK II

*Quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem  
 Tam multae scelerum fauces; non ullus anatro  
 Dignus honos: squalent abductis arva colonis,  
 Et curvae rigidum falkes conflantur in ense.  
 Hinc movet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum;  
 Vicinae ruptis inter se legibus urbes  
 Arma ferunt: saevit toto Mars impius orbe.*

Virgil, *Georgics* i 505-11<sup>1</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Cressy* or *Poitiers* two important battles fought by Edward III in his attempt to win the French throne.  
<sup>41</sup> *him* George Augustus Eliott, 1st Baron Heathfield (1717-90), who maintained British rule of Gibraltar throughout a four-year siege, by sea and land, from the Spanish (1779-83).

## BOOK II

<sup>1</sup> 'For here right and wrong are confounded: there are so many wars throughout the world: so many

315

320

325

330

335

340

345

350

355

360

365

370

375

380

Scene: on an eminence on one of those downs, which afford to the south a view of the sea;  
to the north of the weald of Sussex

Time: an afternoon in April 1793<sup>2</sup>

Long wintry months are past; the moon that now  
Lights her pale crescent even at noon has made  
Four times her revolution, since with step  
Mournful and slow,<sup>3</sup> along the wave-worn cliff,  
Pensive I took my solitary way  
Lost in despondence, while contemplating  
Not my own wayward destiny alone  
(Hard as it is, and difficult to bear!),  
But in beholding the unhappy lot  
Of the lorn exiles who amid the storms  
Of wild disastrous anarchy are thrown,  
Like shipwrecked sufferers, on England's coast,  
To see, perhaps, no more their native land  
Where Desolation riots.<sup>4</sup> They, like me,  
From fairer hopes and happier prospects driven,  
Shrink from the future, and regret the past.  
But on this upland scene, while April comes  
With fragrant airs to fan my throbbing breast,  
Fain would I snatch an interval from care  
That weighs my wearied spirit down to earth,  
Courting, once more, the influence of hope  
(For 'Hope' still waits upon the flowery prime)<sup>5</sup>  
As here I mark Spring's humid hand unfold  
The early leaves that fear capricious winds,  
While, even on sheltered banks, the timid flowers  
Give, half-reluctantly, their warmer hues  
To mingle with the primroses' pale stars.  
No shade the leafless copses yet afford,  
Nor hide the mossy labours of the thrush  
That, startled, darts across the narrow path;  
But quickly reassured, resumes his task,  
Or adds his louder notes to those that rise  
From yonder tufted brake, where the white buds  
Of the first thorn are mingled with the leaves

<sup>2</sup> After the execution of Louis XVI, 21 January 1793, violence in Paris began to intensify. Robespierre was to come to power in July. Britain declared war on France in February.

<sup>3</sup> *step / Mournful and slow*

With how sad steps and slow, ô Moore,  
thou climb'st the skies,  
How silently, and with how wan a  
face . . .  
(Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 31, 1-2)

<sup>4</sup> *When Desolation riots* counter-revolutionary disturbances had been going on in France for a long time; the Vendée was particularly badly affected in March 1793.

<sup>5</sup> 'Shakespeare' (Smith's note). As Curran points out, the allusion is not to Shakespeare but to Edmund Waller, *To my young Lady Lucy Sidney* 13: 'Hope waits upon the flowery prime'.

Of that which blossoms on the brow of May,<sup>6</sup>  
Ah, 'twill not be! so many years have passed  
Since, on my native hills, I learned to gaze  
On those delightful landscapes, and those years  
Have taught me so much sorrow that my soul  
Feels not the joy reviving nature brings,  
But, in dark retrospect, dejected dwells  
On human follies, and on human woes.  
What is the promise of the infant year,  
The lively verdure, or the bursting blooms,  
To those who shrink from horrors such as war  
Spreads o'er the affrighted world? With swimming eye,  
Back on the past they throw their mournful looks,  
And see the temple which they fondly hoped  
Reason would raise to Liberty, destroyed  
By ruffian hands; while, on the ruined mass,  
Flushed with hot blood, the fiend of discord sits  
In savage triumph, mocking every plea  
Of policy and justice, as she shows  
The headless corpse of one whose only crime  
Was being born a monarch.<sup>7</sup> Mercy turns  
From spectacle so dire her swollen eyes,  
And Liberty, with calm unruffled brow  
Magnanimous, as conscious of her strength  
In reason's panoply, scorns to disdain<sup>8</sup>  
Her righteous cause with carnage, and resigns  
To fraud and anarchy the infuriate crowd.  
What is the promise of the infant year  
To those who (while the poor but peaceful hind  
Pens, unmolested, the increasing flock  
Of his rich master in this sea-fenced isle)  
Survey, in neighbouring countries, scenes that make  
The sick heart shudder, and the man who thinks  
Blush for his species? *There* the trumpet's voice  
Drowns the soft warbling of the woodland choir;  
And violets, lurking in their turfy beds  
Beneath the flow'ring thorn, are stained with blood.  
There fall, at once, the spoiler and the spoiled,  
While war, wide-ravaging, annihilates  
The hope of cultivation, gives to fiends,  
The meagre, ghastly fiends of Want and Woe,  
The blasted land. There, taunting in the van  
Of vengeance-breathing armies, Insult stalks,

<sup>6</sup> Smith refers firstly to blackthorn, the buds of which appear before the leaves, and secondly to hawthorn (or may-tree), the leaves of which come first, in mid to late May.

<sup>7</sup> Louis XVI, executed 21 January 1793.

<sup>8</sup> *distant* stain, sully.



And, in the ranks, 'Famine, and Sword, and Fire,  
Crouch for employment.<sup>9</sup> Lo! the suffering world,  
Torn by the fearful conflict, shrinks amazed  
From Freedom's name, usurped and misapplied,  
And, cowering to the purple tyrant's rod,  
Deems *that* the lesser ill. Deluded men!  
Ere ye profane her ever-glorious name,  
Or catalogue the thousands that have bled  
Resisting her, or those who greatly died  
Martyrs to liberty, revert awhile  
To the black scroll that tells of regal crimes  
Committed to destroy her; rather count  
The hecatombs of victims who have fallen  
Beneath a single despot, or who gave  
Their wasted lives for some disputed claim  
Between anointed robbers - monsters both!<sup>10</sup>  
'Oh polished perturbation - golden care!'<sup>11</sup> -  
So strangely coveted by feeble man  
To lift him o'er his fellows - toy for which  
Such showers of blood have drenched th' affrighted earth.  
Unfortunate *his* lot, whose luckless head  
Thy jewelled circlet, lined with thorns, has bound;  
And who, by custom's laws, obtains from thee  
Hereditary right to rule, unchecked,  
Submissive myriads: for untempered power,  
Like steel ill-formed, injures the hand  
It promised to protect. Unhappy France!  
If e'er thy lilies, trampled now in dust  
And blood-bespotted, shall again revive  
In silver splendour, may the wreath be wov'n  
By voluntary hands,<sup>12</sup> and freemen, such  
As England's self might boast, unite to place  
The guarded diadem on *his* fair brow,  
Where Loyalty may join with Liberty  
To fix it firmly. In the rugged school  
Of stern adversity so early trained,  
His future life, perchance, may emulate  
That of the brave Bernois,<sup>13</sup> so justly called  
The darling of his people, who revered

<sup>9</sup> 'Shakespeare' (Smith's note). *Henry I*, Prologue 7-8. Wordsworth makes the same allusion in a similar passage of *Descriptive Sketches*, also published in 1793: 'Like lightning's eager for th' almighty word, / Look up for sign of havoc, Fire and Sword' (ll. 802-3).  
<sup>10</sup> 'Such was the cause of quarrel between the Houses of York and Lancaster, and of too many others with which the page of history reproaches the reason of man' (Smith's note).  
<sup>11</sup> 'Shakespeare' (Smith's note). 2 *Henry II* IV v 23.  
<sup>12</sup> *If e'er thy lilies... voluntary hands*. If France ever again revives the monarchy, let it be voluntary.  
<sup>13</sup> 'Henry the Fourth of France. It may be said of this monarch that, had all the French sovereigns resembled him, despotism would have lost its horrors; yet he had considerable failings, and his greatest virtues may be chiefly imputed to his education in the school of adversity' (Smith's note).

The warrior less than they adored the man!  
But ne'er may party rage, perverse and blind,  
And base venality, prevail to raise  
To public trust a wretch<sup>14</sup> whose private vice  
Makes even the wildest profligate recoil,  
And who, with hiring ruffians leagued, has burst  
The laws of nature and humanity,  
Wading beneath the patriot's specious mask  
And in equality's illusive name,  
To empire through a stream of kindred blood!  
Innocent prisoner, most unhappy heir  
Of fatal greatness,<sup>15</sup> who art suffering now  
For all the crimes and follies of thy race,  
Better for thee, if o'er thy baby brow  
The regal mischief never had been held -  
Then, in an humble sphere, perhaps content,  
Thou hadst been free and joyous on the heights  
Of Pyrenean mountains shagged with woods  
Of chestnut, pine and oak; as on these hills  
Is yonder little thoughtless shepherd lad  
Who, on the slope abrupt of downy turf  
Reclined in playful indolence, sends off  
The chalky ball, quick bounding far below,  
While, half-forgotten of his simple task,  
Hardly his length'ning shadow, or the bells'  
Slow tinkling of his flock, that supping tend  
To the brown fallows in the vale beneath,  
Where nightly it is folded, from his sport  
Recall the happy idler. While I gaze  
On his gay vacant countenance, my thoughts  
Compare with his obscure, laborious lot,  
Thine, most unfortunate, imperial boy -  
Who round thy sullen prison daily hear'st  
The savage howl of Murder as it seeks  
Thy unoffending life; while sad within  
Thy wretched mother,<sup>16</sup> petrified with grief,  
Views thee with stony eyes, and cannot weep!  
Ah, much I mourn thy sorrows, hapless Queen,  
And deem thy expiation made to Heaven  
For every fault to which prosperity  
Betrayed thee when it placed thee on a throne  
Where boundless power was thine, and thou wert raised

<sup>14</sup> *wretch* almost certainly Marat, editor of *L'ami du peuple*, an energetically pro-revolutionary paper, assassinated by Charlotte Corday, 13 July 1793.  
<sup>15</sup> *Innocent prisoner... greatness* the Dauphin Louis XVII, then seven years old, who is thought to have died in June 1795.  
<sup>16</sup> *The wretched mother* Marie Antoinette, with whom Louis XVII was imprisoned. She was executed on 16 October 1793.



High (as it seemed) above the envious reach  
 Of destiny! What'er thy errors were,  
 Be they no more remembered, though the rage  
 Of party swelled them to such crimes as bade  
 Compassion stifle every sigh that rose  
 For thy disastrous lot. More than enough  
 Thou hast endured, and every English heart,  
 Ev'n those that highest beat in Freedom's cause,  
 Disclaim as base, and of that cause unworthy,  
 The vengeance or the fear that makes thee still  
 A miserable prisoner! Ah, who knows,  
 From sad experience, more than I, to feel  
 For thy desponding spirit, as it sinks  
 Beneath procrustinated fears for those  
 More dear to thee than life! But eminence  
 Of misery is thine, as once of joy;  
 And as we view the strange vicissitude  
 We ask anew where happiness is found.  
 Alas, in rural life, where youthful dreams  
 See the Arcadia that romance describes,  
 Not even content resides! In yon low hut  
 Of clay and thatch, where rises the grey smoke  
 Of smould'ring turf cut from the adjoining moor,  
 The labourer, its inhabitant, who toils  
 From the first dawn of twilight till the sun  
 Sinks in the rosy waters of the west,  
 Finds that with poverty it cannot dwell -  
 For bread, and scanty bread, is all he earns  
 For him and for his household. Should disease  
 Born of chill wintry rains arrest his arm,  
 Then, through his patched and straw-stuffed casement, peeps  
 The squalid figure of extremest Want,  
 And from the parish the reluctant dole,  
 Dealt by th' unfeeling farmer, hardly saves  
 The ling'ring spark of life from cold extinction;  
 Then the bright sun of spring, that smiling bids  
 All other animals rejoice, beholds,  
 Crept from his pallet, the emaciate wretch  
 Attempt with feeble effort to resume  
 Some heavy task above his wasted strength,  
 Turning his wistful looks (how much in vain!)  
 To the deserted mansion where no more  
 The owner (gone to gayer scenes) resides,  
 Who made even luxury virtue; while he gave  
 The scattered crumbs to honest Poverty.  
 But, though the landscape be too oft deformed  
 By figures such as these, yet peace is here,  
 And o'er our vallies, clothed with springing corn,  
 No hostile hoof shall trample, nor fierce flames

160

165

170

175

180

185

190

195

200

205

Wither the wood's young verdure, ere it form  
 Gradual the laughing May's luxuriant shade;  
 For by the rude sea guarded we are safe,  
 And feel not evils such as with deep sighs  
 The emigrants deplore, as they recall  
 The summer past, when nature seemed to lose  
 Her course in wild distemperature,<sup>17</sup> and aid,  
 With seasons all reversed, destructive war.  
 Shuddering, I view the pictures they have drawn  
 Of desolated countries where the ground,  
 Stripped of its unripe produce, was thick strewn  
 With various death - the warhorse falling there  
 By famine, and his rider by the sword.  
 The moping clouds sailed heavy charged with rain,  
 And bursting o'er the mountain's misty brow  
 Deluged, as with an inland sea, the vales,<sup>18</sup>  
 Where through the sullen evening's lurid gloom,  
 Rising like columns of volcanic fire,  
 The flames of burning villages illumed  
 The waste of water; and the wind that howled  
 Along its troubled surface brought the groans  
 Of plundered peasants, and the frantic shrieks  
 Of mothers for their children; while the brave,  
 To pity still alive, listened aghast  
 To these dire echoes, hopeless to prevent  
 The evils they beheld, or check the rage  
 Which ever, as the people of one land  
 Meet in contention, fires the human heart  
 With savage thirst of kindred blood, and makes  
 Man lose his nature, rendering him more fierce  
 Than the gaunt monsters of the howling waste.  
 Oft have I heard the melancholy tale  
 Which, all their native gaiety forgot,  
 These exiles tell - how hope impelled them on,  
 Reckless of tempest, hunger or the sword,  
 Till, ordered to retreat they knew not why  
 From all their flattering prospects, they became  
 The prey of dark suspicion and regret.<sup>19</sup>  
 Then in despondence sunk the unnerved arm

215

220

225

230

235

240

245

<sup>17</sup> *distemperature* inclemency; in this case, extreme heat.

<sup>18</sup> 'From the heavy and incessant rains during the last campaign, the armies were often compelled to march for many miles through marshes overflowed, suffering the extremities of cold and fatigue. The peasants frequently misled them and, after having passed these inundations at the hazard of their lives, they were sometimes under the necessity of crossing them a second and a third time. Their evening quarters after such a day of exertion were often in a wood without shelter, and their repast, instead of bread,

<sup>19</sup> 'It is remarkable that, notwithstanding the excessive hardships to which the army of the emigrants was exposed, very few in it suffered from disease till they began to retreat; then it was that despondence con-

signed to the most miserable death many brave men who deserved a better fate, and then despair impelled some to suicide, while others fell by mutual wounds, unable to survive disappointment and humiliation' (Smith's note).

Of gallant Loyalty. At every turn  
 Shame and Disgrace appeared, and seemed to mock  
 Their scattered squadrons - which the warlike youth,  
 Unable to endure, often implored,  
 As the last act of friendship, from the hand  
 Of some brave comrade, to receive the blow  
 That freed the indignant spirit from its pain.  
 To a wild mountain, whose bare summit hides  
 Its broken eminence in clouds, whose steep  
 Are dark with woods, where the retreating rocks  
 Are worn by torrents of dissolving snow,  
 A wretched woman, pale and breathless, flies,  
 And gazing round her, listens to the sound  
 Of hostile footsteps. No, it dies away!  
 Nor noise remains but of the cataract,  
 Or surly breeze of night that mutters low  
 Among the thickets where she trembling seeks  
 A temporary shelter, clasping close  
 To her hard-heaving heart her sleeping child,  
 All she could rescue of the innocent group  
 That yesterday surrounded her. Escaped  
 Almost by miracle, fear, frantic fear,  
 Winged her weak feet! Yet half-repentant now  
 Her headlong haste, she wishes she had stayed  
 To die with those affrighted Fancy paints  
 The lawless soldier's victims. Hark, again  
 The driving tempest bears the cry of Death!  
 And with deep sudden thunder, the dread sound  
 Of cannon vibrates on the tremulous earth,  
 While, bursting in the air, the murderous bomb  
 Glares o'er her mansion. Where the splinters fall  
 Like scattered comets, its destructive path  
 Is marked by wreaths of flame! Then, overwhelmed  
 Beneath accumulated horror, sinks  
 The desolate mourner, yet in death itself,  
 True to maternal tenderness, she tries  
 To save the unconscious infant from the storm  
 In which she perishes, and to protect  
 This last dear object of her ruined hopes  
 From prowling monsters, that from other hills  
 More inaccessible, and wilder wastes,  
 Lured by the scent of slaughter, follow fierce  
 Contending hosts, and to polluted fields  
 Add dire increase of horrors. But, alas,  
 The mother and the infant perish both!<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lines 254-91 rework a topos common in late eighteenth-century poetry; cf. Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) iii 351-68; Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk*

(1793) 279-300. For further discussion see Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyric Ballads* (1798) (Oxford, 1976), pp. 134-48.

The feudal chief whose Gothic battlements  
 Frown on the plain beneath, returning home  
 From distant lands, alone and in disguise,  
 Gains at the fall of night his castle walls,  
 But at the vacant gate no porter sits  
 To wait his lord's admittance. In the courts  
 All is drear silence. Guessing but too well  
 The fatal truth, he shudders as he goes  
 Through the mute hall where, by the blunted light  
 That the dim moon through painted casements lends,  
 He sees that devastation has been there.  
 Then, while each hideous image to his mind  
 Rises terrific, o'er a bleeding corse  
 Stumbling he falls; another interrupts  
 His staggering feet - all, all who used to rush  
 With joy to meet him, all his family  
 Lie murdered in his way! And the day dawns  
 On a wild raving maniac whom a fate  
 So sudden and calamitous has robbed  
 Of reason, and who round his vacant walls  
 Screams unregarded and reproaches Heaven!  
 Such are thy dreadful trophies, savage War,  
 And evils such as these, or yet more dire,  
 Which the pained mind recoils from - all are thine!  
 The purple pestilence that to the grave  
 Sends whom the sword has spared is thine, and thine  
 The widow's anguish and the orphan's tears!  
 Woes such as these does man inflict on man,  
 And by the closet murderers whom we style  
 Wise politicians are the schemes prepared  
 Which, to keep Europe's wavering balance even,  
 Depopulate her kingdoms, and consign  
 To tears and anguish half a bleeding world!  
 Oh could the time return when thoughts like these  
 Spoiled not that gay delight which vernal suns  
 Illuminating hills, and woods, and fields,  
 Gave to my infant spirits! Memory come,  
 And from distracting cares that now deprive  
 Such scenes of all their beauty, kindly bear  
 My fancy to those hours of simple joy,  
 When, on the banks of Arun, which I see  
 Make its irriguous course through yonder meads,  
 I played, unconscious then of future ill  
 There (where from hollows fringed with yellow broom,  
 The birch with silver rind, and fairy leaf,  
 Aslant the low stream trembles) I have stood  
 And meditated how to venture best  
 Into the shallow current, to procure  
 The willow-herb of glowing purple spikes



Or flags<sup>21</sup> whose sword-like leaves concealed the tide,  
 Startling the timid reed-bird from her nest,  
 As with aquatic flowers I wove the wreath,  
 Such as, collected by the shepherd girls,  
 Deck in the villages the turf's shrine,  
 And mark the arrival of propitious May.  
 How little dreamed I then the time would come  
 When the bright sun of that delicious month  
 Should, from disturbed and artificial sleep,  
 Awaken me to never-ending toil,  
 To terror and to tears - attempting still  
 With feeble hands and cold desponding heart  
 To save my children from the o'erwhelming wrongs  
 That have for ten long years been heaped on me!  
 The fearful spectres of chicane and fraud  
 Have, Proteus-like, still changed their hideous forms  
 (As the law lent its plausible disguise),  
 Pursuing my faint steps, and I have seen  
 Friendship's sweet bonds (which were so early formed,  
 And once I fondly thought of amaranth  
 Inwove with silver seven times tried) give way  
 And fail, as these green fan-like leaves of fern  
 Will wither at the touch of autumn's frost.  
 Yet there are those whose patient pity still  
 Hears my long murmurs, who unwearied try  
 With lenient hands to bind up every wound  
 My wearied spirit feels, and bid me go  
 'Right onward'<sup>22</sup> - a calm votary of the nymph  
 Who from her adamantine rock points out  
 To conscious rectitude the rugged path  
 That leads at length to peace! Ah yes, my friends,  
 Peace will at last be mine, for in the grave  
 Is peace - and pass a few short years, perchance  
 A few short months, and all the various pain  
 I now endure shall be forgotten there,  
 And no memorial shall remain of me  
 Save in your bosoms; while even *your* regret  
 Shall lose its poignancy, as ye reflect  
 What complicated woes that grave conceals!  
 But if the liltle praise that may await  
 The mother's efforts should provoke the spleen  
 Of priest or Levite,<sup>23</sup> and they then arraign  
 The dust that cannot hear them, be it yours  
 To vindicate my humble fame, to say

<sup>21</sup> flags wild iris.

<sup>22</sup> 'Milton, Sonnet 22d' (Smith's note); see *To Mr*

*Cyriack Skinner Upon his Blindness* 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Levite* contemptuous term for a clergyman.

That not in selfish sufferings absorbed  
 I gave to misery all I had, my tears.<sup>24</sup>  
 And if, where regulated sanctity  
 Pours her long orisons to heaven, my voice  
 Was seldom heard, that yet my prayer was made  
 To him who hears even silence - not in domes  
 Of human architecture filled with crowds,  
 But on these hills, where boundless yet distinct,  
 Even as a map, beneath are spread the fields  
 His bounteous clothes, divided here by woods  
 And there by commons rude<sup>25</sup> or winding brooks,  
 While I might breathe the air perfumed with flowers  
 Or the fresh odours of the mountain turf,  
 And gaze on clouds above me, as they sailed  
 Majestic, or remark the reddening north  
 When bickering arrows of electric fire  
 Flash on the evening sky,<sup>26</sup> I made my prayer  
 In unison with murmuring waves that now  
 Swell with dark tempests, now are mild and blue  
 As the bright arch above, for all to me  
 Declare omniscient goodness, nor need I  
 Declamatory essays to incite  
 My wonder or my praise, when every leaf  
 That spring unfolds, and every simple bud  
 More forcibly impresses on my heart  
 His power and wisdom. Ah, while I adore  
 That goodness, which designed to all that lives  
 Some taste of happiness, my soul is pained  
 By the variety of woes that man  
 For man creates, his blessings often turned  
 To plagues and curses: saint-like Piety,  
 Misled by Superstition, has destroyed  
 More than Ambition, and the sacred flame  
 Of Liberty becomes a raging fire  
 When Licence and Confusion bid it blaze.  
 From thy high throne above yon radiant stars,  
 Oh power omnipotent, with mercy view  
 This suffering globe, and cause thy creatures cease,<sup>27</sup>  
 With savage fangs, to tear her bleeding breast,<sup>28</sup>  
 Restrain that rage for power that bids a man,  
 Himself a worm, desire unbounded rule

<sup>24</sup> 'Gray' (Smith's note), *Ellegy* 123.

<sup>25</sup> commons rude coarse common land.

<sup>26</sup> bickering arrows . . . sky the aurora borealis or northern

lights.

<sup>27</sup> cause thy creatures cease cause thy creatures [to] cease.

Smith's somewhat affected diction allows this elision,

to which the reviewer in the *European Magazine* took exception.

<sup>28</sup> *This suffering globe . . . breast* As the reviewer in the

*European Magazine* comments: 'to transmute the neutral

noun "globe" into a female, and tear "her" breast, is

a *licentia* not *sumpta pudenter*, and cannot be pardoned' (24 (1793) 44).

O'er beings like himself; teach the hard hearts  
 Of rulers that the poorest hind who dies  
 For their unrighteous quarrels in thy sight  
 Is equal to the imperious lord that leads  
 His disciplined destroyers to the field.  
 May lovely Freedom in her genuine charms,  
 Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive  
 From the ensanguined earth the hell-born fiends  
 Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice and Revenge  
 That ruin what thy mercy made so fair!  
 Then shall those ill-starred wanderers, whose sad fate  
 These desultory lines lament, regain  
 Their native country; private vengeance then  
 To public virtue yield, and the fierce feuds  
 That long have torn their desolated land  
 May (even as storms that agitate the air  
 Drive noxious vapours from the blighted earth)  
 Serve, all tremendous as they are, to fix  
 The reign of Reason, Liberty, and Peace!

From Beachy Head: with Other Poems (1807)<sup>1</sup>

BEACHY HEAD

On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime,  
 That o'er the channel reared, halfway at sea  
 The mariner at early morning hails,<sup>2</sup>  
 I would recline; while Fancy should go forth  
 And represent the strange and awful hour  
 Of vast concussion when the Omnipotent  
 Stretched forth his arm and rent the solid hills,<sup>3</sup>  
 Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between  
 The rifted shores, and from the continent  
 Eternally divided this green isle.  
 Imperial lord of the high southern coast,  
 From thy projecting headland I would mark

BEACHY HEAD

<sup>1</sup> The 'Advertisement' to this posthumous volume states: 'The poem entitled *Beachy Head* is not completed according to the original design. That the increasing debility of its author has been the cause of its being left in an imperfect state will, it is hoped, be a sufficient apology' (p. vii).

<sup>2</sup> 'In crossing the Channel from the coast of France, Beachy Head is the first land made' (Smith's note).

<sup>3</sup> 'Alluding to the idea that this island was once joined to the continent of Europe, and torn from it by some convulsion of nature. I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dieppe resemble the chalk cliffs on the southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the parts of England opposite to it' (Smith's note).

Far in the east the shades of night disperse,  
 Melting and thinned, as from the dark blue wave  
 Emerging, brilliant rays of arrowy light  
 Dart from the horizon, when the glorious sun  
 Just lifts above it his resplendent orb.  
 Advances now, with feathery silver touched,  
 The rippling tide of flood; glisten the sands,  
 While, inmates of the chalky clefts that scar  
 Thy sides precipitous, with shrill harsh cry,  
 Their white wings glancing in the level beam,  
 The terns, and gulls, and tarrocks,<sup>4</sup> seek their food,  
 And thy rough hollows echo to the voice  
 Of the gray choughs<sup>5</sup> and ever-restless daws,  
 With clamour not unlike the chiding hounds,  
 While the lone shepherd and his baying dog  
 Drive to thy turfey crest his bleating flock.  
 The high meridian<sup>6</sup> of the day is past,  
 And ocean now, reflecting the calm heaven,  
 Is of cerulean hue, and murmurs low  
 The tide of ebb upon the level sands.  
 The sloop, her angular canvas shifting still,  
 Catches the light and variable airs  
 That but a little crisp the summer sea,  
 Dimpling its tranquil surface.

Afar off,

And just emerging from the arch immense  
 Where seem to part the elements, a fleet  
 Of fishing vessels stretch their lesser sails,<sup>7</sup>  
 While more remote, and like a dubious spot  
 Just hanging in the horizon, laden deep,  
 The ship of commerce, richly freighted, makes  
 Her slower progress on her distant voyage,  
 Bound to the orient climates where the sun  
 Matures the spice within its odorous shell,  
 And, rivalling the grey worm's filmy toil,  
 Bursts from its pod the vegetable down,<sup>8</sup>  
 Which, in long turbaned wreaths, from torrid heat  
 Defends the brows of Asia's countless castes.<sup>9</sup>  
 There the earth hides within her glowing breast

<sup>4</sup> 'Terns: *Sterna hirundo*, or sea swallow; gulls: *Larus canus*; tarrocks: *Larus tridactylus*' (Smith's note).

<sup>5</sup> 'Gray choughs: *Corvus graculus*. Cornish choughs, or, as these birds are called by the Sussex people, saddle-backed crows, build in great numbers on this coast' (Smith's note).

<sup>6</sup> 'high meridian noon.'  
<sup>7</sup> 'lesser sails' as they drag their nets, the fishing vessels proceed slowly through the sea, dependent only on their smaller sails.  
<sup>8</sup> 'Cotton: *Gossypium herbaceum*' (Smith's note).  
<sup>9</sup> 'The Indian on the horizon is sailing to India to pick up cotton to take back to Europe. Lines 41-9 are inspired by *Paradise Lost* ii 636-42.'

430

435

440

10