

Classic Poetry Series

Charlotte Smith

- poems -

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Huge Vapours Brood Above the Clifted Shore

Huge vapours brood above the clifted shore,
Night o'er the ocean settles, dark and mute,
Save where is heard the repercussive roar
Of drowsy billows, on the rugged foot
Of rocks remote; or still more distant tone
Of seamen, in the anchored bark, that tell
The watch relieved; or one deep voice alone,
Singing the hour, and bidding "strike the bell."
All is black shadow, but the lucid line
Marked by the light surf on the level sand,
Or where afar, the ship-lights faintly shine
Like wandering fairy fires, that oft on land
Mislead the pilgrim; such the dubious ray
That wavering reason lends, in life's long darkling way.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet I

o

THE partial Muse, has from my earliest hours,
Smil'd on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread,
And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,
To weave fantastic garlands for my head:
But far, far happier is the lot of those
Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;
Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,
Reserves the thorn, to fester in the heart.
For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye
Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,
Points every pang, and deepens every sigh
Of mourning friendship or unhappy love.
Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost,
If those paint sorrow best--who feel it most!

o

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet II

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet III: To a Nightingale

Poor melancholy bird---that all night long
Tell'st to the Moon, thy tale of tender woe;
From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow,
And whence this mournful melody of song?

Thy poet's musing fancy would translate
What mean the sounds that swell thy little breast,
When still at dewy eve thou leav'st thy nest,
Thus to the listening night to sing thy fate!

Pale Sorrow's victims wert thou once among,
Tho' now releas'd in woodlands wild to rove?
Say---hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong,
Or diedst thou---martyr of disastrous love?
Ah! songstress sad! that such my lot might be,
To sigh and sing at liberty---like thee!

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet LXIII: The Gossamer

O'er faded heath-flowers spun, or thorny furze,
The filmy Gossamer is lightly spread;
Waving in every sighing air that stirs,
As Fairy fingers had entwined the thread:
A thousand trembling orbs of lucid dew
Spangle the texture of the fairy loom,
As if soft Sylphs, lamenting as they flew,
Had wept departed Summer's transient bloom:
But the wind rises, and the turf receives
The glittering web: -- So, evanescent, fade
Bright views that Youth with sanguine heart believes:
So vanish schemes of bliss, by Fancy made;
Which, fragile as the fleeting dews of morn,
Leave but the wither'd heath, and barren thorn!

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet LXVI: The Night-Flood Rakes

The night-flood rakes upon the stony shore;
Along the rugged cliffs and chalky caves
Mourns the hoarse Ocean, seeming to deplore
All that are buried in his restless waves—
Mined by corrosive tides, the hollow rock
Falls prone, and rushing from its turfy height,
Shakes the broad beach with long-resounding shock,
Loud thundering on the ear of sullen Night;
Above the desolate and stormy deep,
Gleams the wan Moon, by floating mist opprest;
Yet here while youth, and health, and labour sleep,
Alone I wander—Calm untroubled rest,
"Nature's soft nurse," deserts the sigh-swoln breast,
And shuns the eyes, that only wake to weep!

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet LXVII: On Passing over a Dreary Tract

Swift fleet the billowy clouds along the sky,
Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast;
While only beings as forlorn as I,
Court the chill horrors of the howling blast.
Even round yon crumbling walls, in search of food,
The ravenous Owl foregoes his evening flight,
And in his cave, within the deepest wood,
The Fox eludes the tempest of the night.
But to my heart congenial is the gloom
Which hides me from a World I wish to shun;
That scene where Ruin saps the mouldering tomb,
Suits with the sadness of a wretch undone.
Nor is the deepest shade, the keenest air,
Black as my fate, or cold as my despair.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet LXX: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Fr

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-utter'd lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no nice felicities that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet LXX: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-utter'd lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no nice felicities that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet VII: Sweet Poet of the Woods

Sweet poet of the woods---a long adieu!
Farewel, soft minstrel of the early year!
Ah! 'twill be long ere thou shalt sing anew,
And pour thy music on the 'night's dull ear,'
Whether on spring thy wandering flights await,
Or whether silent in our groves ye dwell,
The pensive muse shall own thee for her mate,
And still protect the song, she loves so well.
With cautious step, the love-lorn youth shall glide
Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest;
And shepherd girls, from eyes profane shall hide
The gentle bird, who sings of pity best.
For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
And still be dear to sorrow, and to love!

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet XLII: Composed During a Walk

The dark and pillowy cloud, the fallow trees,
Seem o'er the ruins of the year to mourn;
And, cold and hollow, the inconstant breeze
Sobs thro' the falling leaves and wither'd fern.
O'er the tall brow of yonder chalky bourn,
The evening shades their gather'd darkness fling,
While, by the lingering light, I scarce discern
The shrieking night-jar sail on heavy wing.
Ah! yet a little—and propitious Spring
Crown'd with fresh flowers shall wake the woodland strain;
But no gay change revolving seasons bring
To call forth pleasure from the soul of pain;
Bid Syren Hope resume her long-lost part,
And chase the vulture Care—that feeds upon the heart.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet XLIII: The Unhappy Exile

The unhappy exile, whom his fates confine
To the bleak coast of some unfriendly isle,
Cold, barren, desart, where no harvests smile,
But thirst and hunger on the rocks repine;
When, from some promontory's fearful brow,
Sun after sun he hopeless sees decline
In the broad shipless sea—perhaps may know
Such heartless pain, such blank despair as mine;
And, if a flattering cloud appears to show
The fancied semblance of a distant sail,
Then melts away—anew his spirits fail,
While the lost hope but aggravates his woe!
Ah! so for me delusive Fancy toils,
Then, from contrasted truth—my feeble soul recoils.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet XLIV: Press'd by the Moon

Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its power combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
While I am doom'd—by life's long storm oppress,
To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet XLVII: To Fancy

Thee, Queen of Shadows! -- shall I still invoke,
Still love the scenes thy sportive pencil drew,
When on mine eyes the early radiance broke
Which shew'd the beauteous rather than the true!
Alas! long since those glowing tints are dead,
And now 'tis thine in darkest hues to dress
The spot where pale Experience hangs her head
O'er the sad grave of murder'd Happiness!
Thro' thy false medium, then, no longer view'd,
May fancied pain and fancied pleasure fly,
And I, as from me all thy dreams depart,
Be to my wayward destiny subdued:
Nor seek perfection with a poet's eye,
Nor suffer anguish with a poet's heart!

Charlotte Smith

Sonnet XXXIV: Charm'd by Thy Suffrage

Charm'd by thy suffrage, shall I yet aspire
(All inauspicious as my fate appears,
By troubles darken'd, that encrease with years,
To guide the crayon, or to touch the lyre?
Ah me!---the sister Muses still require
A spirit free from all intrusive fears,
Nor will they deign to wipe away the tears
Of vain regret, that dim their sacred fire.
But when thy envied sanction crowns my lays,
A ray of pleasure lights my languid mind,
For well I know the value of thy praise;
And to how few, the flattering meed confin'd,
That thou,---their highly favour'd brows to bind,
Wilt weave green myrtle, and unfading bays!

Charlotte Smith

The Emigrants: Book I

*Scene, on the Cliffs to the Eastward of the Town of
Brightelmstone in Sussex. 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 pebbles, catch the beams
Of the pale Sun, that with reluctance gives
To this cold northern Isle, its shorten'd 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 sooth'd 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 day star, but to curse his beams.
Yet He, whose Spirit into being call'd
This wond'rous 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, 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 deplores.
How often, when my weary soul recoils
From proud oppression, and from legal crimes
(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 injur'd 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 embower'd
In the green woods, that these steep chalky Hills
Guard from the strong South West; where round their base
The Beach 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 shelter'd; or when Eve
 In Orient crimson lingers in the west,
 Gain the high mound, and mark these waves remote
 (Lucid tho' 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, unspoil'd by Man
 And less affected then, by human woes
 I witness'd 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 swol'n 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 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 doom'd to heave the still rebounding rock,
 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 wailings: cease and learn,
 That not the Cot sequester'd, where the briar
 And wood-bine wild, embrace the mossy thatch,
 (Scarce seen amid the forest gloom obscure!)
 Or more substantial farm, well fenced and warm,
 Where the full barn, and cattle fodder'd round
 Speak rustic plenty; nor the statelier dome
 By dark firs shaded, or the aspiring pine,
 Close by the village Church (with care conceal'd
 By verdant foliage, lest the poor man's grave
 Should mar the smiling prospect of his Lord),
 Where offices well rang'd, or dove-cote stock'd,
 Declare manorial residence; not these
 Or any of the buildings, new and trim
 With windows circling towards the restless Sea,
 Which ranged in rows, 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 chace 1 ."
 Behold, in witness of this mournful truth,
 A group approach me, whose dejected looks,
 Sad Heralds of distress! proclaim them Men
 Banish'd for ever and for conscience sake
 From their distracted Country, whence the name
 Of Freedom misapplied, and much abus'd
 By lawless Anarchy, has driven them far

To wander; with the prejudice they learn'd
 From Bigotry (the Tut'ress of the blind),
 Thro' the wide World unshelter'd; their sole hope,
 That German spoilers, thro' that pleasant land
 May carry wide the desolating scourge
 Of War and Vengeance; 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 one,
 Who in a moping cloister long consum'd
 This life inactive, to obtain a better,
 And thought that meagre abstinence, to wake
 From his hard pallet with the midnight bell,
 To live on eleemosynary bread,
 And to renounce God's works, would please that God.
 And now the poor pale wretch receives, amaz'd,
 The pity, strangers give to his distress,
 Because these Strangers are, by his dark creed,
 Condemn'd as Heretics--and with sick heart
 Regrets 2 his pious prison, and his beads.--
 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 dome,
 That vied with splendid palaces 3 ; 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
 Of Saints suppos'd, in pearl and gold enchas'd,
 And still with more than living Monarchs' pomp
 Surrounded; was believ'd 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 seem'd circumscrib'd; who, wont to dream,
 Of Fleuri, Richelieu, Alberoni, men
 Who trod on Empire, and whose politics
 Were not beyond the grasp of his vast mind,
 Is, in a Land once hostile, still prophan'd
 By disbelief, and rites un-orthodox,
 The object of compassion--At his side,
 Lighter of heart than these, but heavier far
 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

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; and while yet
 England had charms for me, have felt how sad
 It is to look across the dim cold sea,
 That melancholy rolls its refluent 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 martyr'd Saints and suffering Royalty,
 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 bare-foot peasant, whose hard hands
 Produc'd the nectar he could seldom taste,
 Submission to the Lord for whom he toil'd;
 He, or his brethren, who to Neustria's sons
 Enforc'd 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 undistinguish'd cottages
 Witness'd a life of purest piety,
 While the meek tenants were, perhaps, unknown
 Each to the haughty Lord of his domain,
 Who mark'd them not; the Noble scorning still
 The poor and pious Priest, as with slow pace
 He glided thro' the dim arch'd avenue
 Which to the Castle led; hoping to cheer
 The last sad hour of some laborious life
 That hasten'd 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, hollow'd by the wintry storm,
 Affords a seat with matted sea-weed strewn,
 A softer form reclines; around her run,
 On the rough shingles, or the chalky bourn,
 Her gay unconscious children, soon amus'd;

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,
 Lull'd for a moment by the murmurs low
 Of sullen billows, wearied by the task
 Of having here, with swol'n and aching eyes
 Fix'd on the grey horizon, since the dawn
 Solicitously watch'd 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 multiply'd, the crowd
 Paid willing homage--and, united there,
 Beauty gave charms to empire--Ah! too soon
 From the gay visionary pageant rous'd,
 See the sad mourner start!--and, drooping, look
 With tearful eyes and heaving bosom round
 On drear reality--where dark'ning waves,
 Urg'd by the rising wind, unheeded foam
 Near her cold rugged seat:--To call her thence
 A fellow-sufferer comes: dejection deep
 Checks, but conceals not quite, the martial air,
 And that high consciousness of noble blood,
 Which he has learn'd from infancy to think
 Exalts him o'er the race of common men:
 Nurs'd 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 5 the sons
 "Of Reason, Valour, Liberty, and Virtue,
 "Displays distinguish'd merit, is a Noble
 "Of Nature's own creation!"--If even here,
 If in this land of highly vaunted Freedom,
 Even Britons controvert the unwelcome truth,
 Can it be relish'd by the sons of France?
 Men, who derive their boasted ancestry
 From the fierce leaders of religious wars,
 The first in Chivalry's emblazon'd page;
 Who reckon Gueslin, Bayard, or De Foix,
 Among their brave Progenitors? Their eyes,
 Accustom'd to regard the splendid trophies
 Of Heraldry (that with fantastic hand
 Mingles, like images in feverish dreams,
 "Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimeras dire,"

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 --As one, who long
 Has dwelt amid the artificial scenes
 Of populous City, 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 trangled copse;
 Nor gazes pleas'd on Ocean's silver breast,
 While lightly o'er it sails the summer clouds
 Reflected in the wave, that, hardly heard,
 Flows on the yellow sands: so to his mind,
 That long has liv'd where Despotism hides
 His features harsh, beneath the diadem
 Of worldly grandeur, abject Slavery seems,
 If by that power impos'd, 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.
 But more the Men, whose ill acquir'd wealth
 Was wrung from plunder'd myriads, by the means
 Too often legaliz'd by power abus'd,
 Feel all the horrors of the fatal change,
 When their ephemeral greatness, marr'd at once
 (As a vain toy that Fortune's childish hand
 Equally joy'd to fashion or to crush),
 Leaves them expos'd 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 rais'd them;--unlamented sink,
 And know that they deserve the woes they feel.
 Poor wand'ring wretches! whosoe'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 discolour'd flock (Shepherd, unlike
 Him, whom in song the Poet's fancy crowns
 With garlands, and his crook with vi'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 exil'd Nobles, from their country driven,
 Whose richest luxuries were their's, must feel
 More poignant anguish, than the lowest poor,
 Who, born to indigence, have learn'd 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 (tho' your 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 reach'd 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 pamper'd Parasites! whom Britons pay
 For forging fetters for them; rather here
 Study a lesson that concerns ye much;
 And, trembling, learn, that if oppress'd 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 warm'd
 The heart of Patriot Virtue & --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-starr'd Exiles then, who, bound by ties,
 To them the bonds of honour; who resign'd
 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 may'st thou, Britain, triumph!--May thy foes,
By Reason's gen'rous potency subdued,
Learn, that the God thou worshippest, delights
In acts of pure humanity!--May thine
Be still such bloodless laurels! nobler far
Than those acquir'd at Cressy or Poitiers,
Or of more recent growth, those well bestow'd
On him who stood on Calpe's blazing height
Amid the thunder of a warring world,
Illustrious rather from the crowds he sav'd
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.

Charlotte Smith

The Emigrants: Book II

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.

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, 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 shipwreck'd sufferers, on England's coast,
To see, perhaps, no more their native land,
Where Desolation riots: 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)
As here I mark Spring's humid hand unfold
The early leaves that fear capricious winds,
While, even on shelter'd 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 re-assur'd, resumes his talk,
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
Of that which blossoms on the brow of May.
Ah! 'twill not be:---- So many years have pass'd,
Since, on my native hills, I learn'd to gaze
On these 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 hop'd

Reason would raise to Liberty, destroy'd
By ruffian hands; while, on the ruin'd mass,
Flush'd with hot blood, the Fiend of Discord sits
In savage triumph; mocking every plea
Of policy and justice, as she shews
The headless corse of one, whose only crime
Was being born a Monarch--Mercy turns,
From spectacle so dire, her swol'n eyes;
And Liberty, with calm, unruffled brow
Magnanimous, as conscious of her strength
In Reason's panoply, scorns to distain
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 encreasing flock
Of his rich master in this sea-fenc'd 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 stain'd with blood.
There fall, at once, the spoiler and the spoil'd;
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;
And, in the ranks, "1 Famine, and Sword, and Fire,
"Crouch for employment."--Lo! the suffering world,
Torn by the fearful conflict, shrinks, amaz'd,
From Freedom's name, usurp'd and misapplied,
And, cowering to the purple Tyrant's rod,
Deems that the lesser ill--Deluded Men!
Ere ye prophane 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: 2 Monsters both!
"3 Oh! Polish'd perturbation--golden care!"
So strangely coveted by feeble Man
To lift him o'er his fellows;--Toy, for which
Such showers of blood have drench'd th' affrighted earth--
Unfortunate his lot, whose luckless head
Thy jewel'd circlet, lin'd with thorns, has bound;
And who, by custom's laws, obtains from thee

Hereditary right to rule, uncheck'd,
 Submissive myriads: for untemper'd power,
 Like steel ill form'd, injures the hand
 It promis'd 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; and Freeman, 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 train'd,
 His future life, perchance, may emulate
 That of the brave Bernois 4 , so justly call'd
 The darling of his people; who rever'd
 The Warrior less, than they ador'd the Man!
 But ne'er may Party Rage, perverse and blind,
 And base Venality, prevail to raise
 To public trust, a wretch, whose private vice
 Makes even the wildest profligate recoil;
 And who, with hireling ruffians leagu'd, has burst
 The laws of Nature and Humanity!
 Wading, beneath the Patriot's specious mask,
 And in Equality's illusive name,
 To empire thro' a stream of kindred blood--
 Innocent prisoner!--most unhappy heir
 Of fatal greatness, 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 Pyrennean mountains, shagg'd with woods
 Of chesnut, pine, and oak: as on these hills
 Is yonder little thoughtless shepherd lad,
 Who, on the slope abrupt of downy turf
 Reclin'd in playful indolence, sends off
 The chalky ball, quick bounding far below;
 While, half forgetful 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
 Recal 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, 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
 Betray'd thee, when it plac'd thee on a throne
 Where boundless power was thine, and thou wert rais'd
 High (as it seem'd) above the envious reach
 Of destiny! Whate'er thy errors were,
 Be they no more remember'd; tho' the rage
 Of Party swell'd them to such crimes, as bade
 Compassion stifle every sigh that rose
 For thy disastrous lot--More than enough
 Thou hast endur'd; 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 procrastinated 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 smold'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, thro' his patch'd and straw-stuff'd 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 scatter'd crumbs to honest Poverty.--
 But, tho' the landscape be too oft deform'd

By figures such as these, yet Peace is here,
 And o'er our vallies, cloath'd with springing corn,
 No hostile hoof shall trample, nor fierce flames
 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 recal
 The Summer past, when Nature seem'd to lose
 Her course in wild distemperature, and aid,
 With seasons all revers'd, destructive War.
 Shuddering, I view the pictures they have drawn
 Of desolated countries, where the ground,
 Stripp'd of its unripe produce, was thick strewn
 With various Death--the war-horse falling there
 By famine, and his rider by the sword.
 The moping clouds sail'd heavy charg'd with rain,
 And bursting o'er the mountains misty brow,
 Deluged, as with an inland sea, the vales 5 ;
 Where, thro' the sullen evening's lurid gloom,
 Rising, like columns of volcanic fire,
 The flames of burning villages illum'd
 The waste of water; and the wind, that howl'd
 Along its troubled surface, brought the groans
 Of plunder'd peasants, and the frantic shrieks
 Of mothers for their children; while the brave,
 To pity still alive, listen'd 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 impell'd them on,
 Reckless of tempest, hunger, or the sword,
 Till order'd to retreat, they knew not why,
 From all their flattering prospects, they became
 The prey of dark suspicion and regret 6 :
 Then, in despondence, sunk the unnerv'd arm
 Of gallant Loyalty--At every turn
 Shame and disgrace appear'd, and seem'd to mock
 Their scatter'd squadrons; which the warlike youth,
 Unable to endure, often implor'd,
 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 steeps
 Are dark with woods; where the receding 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 groupe
That yesterday surrounded her--Escap'd
Almost by miracle! Fear, frantic Fear,
Wing'd her weak feet: yet, half repentant now
Her headlong haste, she wishes she had staid
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 scatter'd comets, its destructive path
Is mark'd by wreaths of flame!--Then, overwhelm'd
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 ruin'd hopes
From prowling monsters, that from other hills,
More inaccessible, and wilder wastes,
Lur'd 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!--
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
Thro' the mute hall; where, by the blunted light
That the dim moon thro' 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 us'd to rush
With joy to meet him--all his family
Lie murder'd in his way!--And the day dawns

On a wild raving Maniac, whom a fate
 So sudden and calamitous has robb'd
 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 pain'd mind recoils from, all are thine--
 The purple Pestilence, that to the grave
 Sends whom the sword has spar'd, 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 prepar'd,
 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
 Spoil'd 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 thro' yonder meads,
 I play'd; unconscious then of future ill!
 There (where, from hollows fring'd 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, whose sword-like leaves conceal'd 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 turfy shrine,
 And mark the arrival of propitious May.--
 How little dream'd I then the time would come,
 When the bright Sun of that delicious month
 Should, from disturb'd 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 heap'd on me!--
 The fearful spectres of chicane and fraud
 Have, Proteus like, still chang'd 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 form'd,)
 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 7"--a calm votary of the Nymph,
 Who, from her adamant 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 little praise, that may await
 The Mother's efforts, should provoke the spleen
 Of Priest or Levite; and they then arraign
 The dust that cannot hear them; be it yours
 To vindicate my humble fame; to say,
 That, not in selfish sufferings absorb'd,
 "I gave to misery all I had, my tears 8."
 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, fill'd with crowds,
 But on these hills, where boundless, yet distinct,
 Even as a map, beneath are spread the fields
 His bounty cloaths; divided here by woods,
 And there by commons rude, or winding brooks,
 While I might breathe the air perfum'd with flowers,
 Or the fresh odours of the mountain turf;
 And gaze on clouds above me, as they sail'd
 Majestic: or remark the reddening north,
 When bickering arrows of electric fire
 Flash on the evening sky--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 design'd to all that lives
 Some taste of happiness, my soul is pain'd

By the variety of woes that Man
For Man creates--his blessings often turn'd
To plagues and curses: Saint-like Piety,
Misled by Superstition, has destroy'd
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,
O Power Omnipotent! with mercy view
This suffering globe, and cause thy creatures cease,
With savage fangs, to tear her bleeding breast:
Refrain that rage for power, that bids a Man,
Himself a worm, desire unbounded rule
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 disciplin'd destroyers to the field.----
May lovely Freedom, in her genuine charms,
Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive
From the ensanguin'd earth the hell-born fiends
Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice, and Revenge,
That ruin what thy mercy made so fair!
Then shall these ill-starr'd 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!

Charlotte Smith

Written near a Port on a Dark Evening

O

Huge vapours brood above the clifted shore,
Night on the ocean settles dark and mute,
Save where is heard the repercussive roar
Of drowsy billows on the rugged foot
Of rocks remote; or still more distant tone
Of seamen in the anchored bark that tell
The watch relieved; or one deep voice alone
Singing the hour, and bidding "Strike the bell!"

All is black shadow but the lucid line
Marked by the light surf on the level sand,
Or where afar the ship-lights faintly shine
Like wandering fairy fires, that oft on land
Mised the pilgrim--such the dubious ray
That wavering reason lends in life's long darkling way.

O

Charlotte Smith