Classic Poetry Series

John Clare

- 170 poems -

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John Clare (13 July 1793 – 20 May 1864)

John Clare was an English poet, the son of a farm labourer, who came to be known for his celebratory representations of the English countryside and his lamentation of its disruption. His poetry underwent a major re-evaluation in the late 20th century and he is often now considered to be among the most important 19th-century poets. His biographer Jonathan Bate states that Clare was "the greatest labouring-class poet that England has ever produced. No one has ever written more powerfully of nature, of a rural childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self".

Life

Early Life

Clare was born in Helpston, six miles to the north of the city of Peterborough. In his life time, the village was in the Soke of Peterborough in Northamptonshire and his memorial calls him "The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet". Helpston now lies in the Peterborough unitary authority of Cambridgeshire.

He became an agricultural labourer while still a child; however, he attended school in Glinton church until he was twelve. In his early adult years, Clare became a pot-boy in the Blue Bell public house and fell in love with Mary Joyce; but her father, a prosperous farmer, forbade her to meet him. Subsequently he was a gardener at Burghley House. He enlisted in the militia, tried camp life with Gypsies, and worked in Pickworth as a lime burner in 1817. In the following year he was obliged to accept parish relief. Malnutrition stemming from childhood may be the main culprit behind his 5-foot stature and may have contributed to his poor physical health in later life.

Early poems

Clare had bought a copy of Thomson's Seasons and began to write poems and sonnets. In an attempt to hold off his parents' eviction from their home, Clare offered his poems to a local bookseller named Edward Drury. Drury sent Clare's poetry to his cousin John Taylor of the publishing firm of Taylor & Hessey, who had published the work of John Keats. Taylor published Clare's Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery in 1820. This book was highly praised, and in the next year his Village Minstrel and other Poems were published.

Midlife

He had married Martha ("Patty") Turner in 1820. An annuity of 15 guineas from the Marquess of Exeter, in whose service he had been, was supplemented by subscription, so that Clare became possessed of £45 annually, a sum far beyond what he had ever earned. Soon, however, his income became insufficient, and in 1823 he was nearly penniless. The Shepherd's Calendar (1827) met with little success, which was not increased by his hawking it himself. As he worked again in the fields his health temporarily improved; but he soon became seriously ill. Earl FitzWilliam presented him with a new cottage and a piece of ground, but Clare could not settle in his new home.

Clare was constantly torn between the two worlds of literary London and his often illiterate neighbours; between the need to write poetry and the need for money to feed and clothe his children. His health began to suffer, and he had bouts of severe depression, which became worse after his sixth child was born in 1830 and as his poetry sold less well. In 1832, his friends and his London patrons clubbed together to move the family to a larger cottage with a smallholding in the village of Northborough, not far from Helpston. However, he felt only more alienated.

His last work, the Rural Muse (1835), was noticed favourably by Christopher North and other reviewers, but this was not enough to support his wife and seven children. Clare's mental health began to worsen. As his alcohol consumption steadily increased along with his dissatisfaction with his own identity, Clare's behaviour became more erratic. A notable instance of this behaviour was demonstrated in his interruption of a performance of The Merchant of Venice, in which Clare verbally assaulted Shylock. He was becoming a burden to Patty and his family, and in July 1837, on the recommendation of his publishing friend, John Taylor, Clare went of his own volition (accompanied by a friend of Taylor's) to Dr Matthew Allen's private asylum High Beach near Loughton, in Epping Forest. Taylor had assured Clare that he would receive the best medical care.

Later life and death

During his first few asylum years in Essex (1837–1841), Clare re-wrote famous poems and sonnets by Lord Byron. His own version of Child Harold became a lament for past lost love, and Don Juan, A Poem became an acerbic, misogynistic, sexualised rant redolent of an aging Regency dandy. Clare also took credit for Shakespeare's plays, claiming to be the Renaissance genius himself. "I'm John Clare now," the poet claimed to a newspaper editor, "I was Byron and Shakespeare formerly."

In 1841, Clare left the asylum in Essex, to walk home, believing that he was to meet his first love Mary Joyce; Clare was convinced that he was married with children to her and Martha as well. He did not believe her family when they told him she had died accidentally three years earlier in a house fire. He remained free, mostly at home in Northborough, for the five months following, but eventually Patty called the doctors in. Between Christmas and New Year in 1841, Clare was committed to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum (now St Andrew's Hospital). Upon Clare's arrival at the asylum, the accompanying doctor, Fenwick Skrimshire, who had treated Clare since 1820, completed the admission papers. To the enquiry "Was the insanity preceded by any severe or long-continued mental emotion or exertion?", Dr Skrimshire entered: "After years of poetical prosing." He remained here for the rest of his life under the humane regime of Dr Thomas Octavius Prichard, encouraged and helped to write. Here he wrote possibly his most famous poem, I Am.

He died on 20 May 1864, in his 71st year. His remains were returned to Helpston for burial in St Botolph’s churchyard. Today, children at the John Clare School, Helpston's primary, parade through the village and place their 'midsummer cushions' around Clare's gravestone (which has the inscriptions "To the Memory of John Clare The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet" and "A Poet is Born not Made") on his birthday, in honour of their most famous

resident. The thatched cottage where he was born was bought by the John Clare Education & Environment Trust in 2005 and is restoring the cottage to its 18th century state.

Poetry

In his time, Clare was commonly known as "the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet". Since his formal education was brief, Clare resisted the use of the increasingly standardised English grammar and orthography in his poetry and prose. Many of his poems would come to incorporate terms used locally in his Northamptonshire dialect, such as 'pooty' (snail), 'lady-cow' (ladybird), 'crizzle' (to crisp) and 'throstle' (song thrush).

In his early life he struggled to find a place for his poetry in the changing literary fashions of the day. He also felt that he did not belong with other peasants. Clare once wrote;

"I live here among the ignorant like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seemes careless of having anything to do with—they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I should mention them in my writings and I find more pleasure in wandering the fields than in musing among my silent neighbours who are insensible to everything but toiling and talking of it and that to no purpose."

It is common to see an absence of punctuation in many of Clare's original writings, although many publishers felt the need to remedy this practice in the majority of his work. Clare argued with his editors about how it should be presented to the public.

Clare grew up during a period of massive changes in both town and countryside as the Industrial Revolution swept Europe. Many former agricultural workers, including children, moved away from the countryside to over-crowded cities, following factory work. The Agricultural Revolution saw pastures ploughed up, trees and hedges uprooted, the fens drained and the common land enclosed. This destruction of a centuries-old way of life distressed Clare deeply. His political and social views were predominantly conservative ("I am as far as my politics reaches 'King and Country'—no Innovations in Religion and Government say I."). He refused even to complain about the subordinate position to which English society relegated him, swearing that "with the old dish that was served to my forefathers I am content."

His early work delights both in nature and the cycle of the rural year. Poems such as Winter Evening, Haymaking and Wood Pictures in Summer celebrate the beauty of the world and the certainties of rural life, where animals must be fed and crops harvested. Poems such as Little Trotty Wagtail show his sharp observation of wildlife, though The Badger shows his lack of sentiment about the place of animals in the countryside. At this time, he often used poetic forms such as the sonnet and the rhyming couplet. His later poetry tends to be more meditative and use forms similar to the folks songs and ballads of his youth. An example of this is Evening.

His knowledge of the natural world went far beyond that of the major Romantic poets. However, poems such as I Am show a metaphysical depth on a par with his contemporary poets and many of his pre-asylum poems deal with intricate play on the nature of linguistics. His 'bird's nest poems', it can be argued, illustrate the self-awareness, and obsession with the creative process that captivated the romantics. Clare was the most influential poet, aside from Wordsworth to practice in an older style.

Revival of interest in the twentieth century

Clare was relatively forgotten during the later nineteenth century, but interest in his work was revived by Arthur Symons in

1908, Edmund Blunden in 1920 and John and Anne Tibble in their ground-breaking 1935 2-volume edition. Benjamin Britten set some of 'May' from A Shepherd's Calendar in his Spring Symphony of 1948, and included a setting of The Evening Primrose in his Five Flower Songs

Copyright to much of his work has been claimed since 1965 by the editor of the Complete Poetry (OUP, 9 vols., 1984–2003), Professor Eric Robinson though these claims were contested. Recent publishers have refused to acknowledge the claim (especially in recent editions from Faber and Carcanet) and it seems the copyright is now defunct.

The John Clare Trust purchased Clare Cottage in Helpston in 2005, preserving it for future generations. In May 2007 the Trust gained £1.27m of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and commissioned Jefferson Sheard Architects to create the new landscape design and Visitor Centre, including a cafe, shop and exhibition space. The Cottage has been restored using traditional building methods and opened to the public. The largest collection of original Clare manuscripts are housed at Peterborough Museum, where they are available to view by appointment.

Since 1993, the John Clare Society of North America has organised an annual session of scholarly papers concerning John Clare at the annual Convention of the Modern Language Association of America.

Works:

Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery. London, 1820.
The Village Minstrel, and Other Poems. London, 1821.
The Shepherd's Calendar with Village Stories and Other Poems. London, 1827
The Rural Muse. London, 1835.
Sonnet. London 1841
First Love
Snow Storm.
The Firetail.
The Badger – Time unknown

A vision

I lost the love of heaven above,
I spurned the lust of earth below,
I felt the sweets of fancied love
And hell itself my only foe.

I lost earth's joys but felt the glow
Of heaven's flame abound in me
Till loveliness and I did grow
The bard of immortality.

I loved but woman fell away
I hid me from her faded fame,
I snatched the sun's eternal ray
And wrote till earth was but a name

In every language upon earth,
On every shore, o'er every sea,
I give my name immortal birth
And kept my spirit with the free.

John Clare

A World For Love

Oh, the world is all too rude for thee, with much ado and care;
Oh, this world is but a rude world, and hurts a thing so fair;
Was there a nook in which the world had never been to sear,
That place would prove a paradise when thou and Love were near.

And there to pluck the blackberry, and there to reach the sloe,
How joyously and happily would Love thy partner go;
Then rest when weary on a bank, where not a grassy blade
Had eer been bent by Trouble's feet, and Love thy pillow made.

For Summer would be ever green, though sloes were in their prime,
And Winter smile his frowns to Spring, in beauty's happy clime;
And months would come, and months would go, and all in sunny mood,
And everything inspired by thee grow beautifully good.

And there to make a cot unknown to any care and pain,
And there to shut the door alone on singing wind and rain--
Far, far away from all the world, more rude than rain or wind,
Oh, who could wish a sweeter home, or better place to find?

Than thus to love and live with thee, thou beautiful delight!
Than thus to live and love with thee the summer day and night!
The Earth itself, where thou hadst rest, would surely smile to see
Herself grow Eden once again, possest of Love and thee

John Clare

All nature has a feeling

All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks
Are life eternal: and in silence they
Speak happiness beyond the reach of books;
There's nothing mortal in them; their decay
Is the green life of change; to pass away
And come again in blooms revivified.
Its birth was heaven, eternal it its stay,
And with the sun and moon shall still abide
Beneath their day and night and heaven wide.

John Clare

An Invite, to Eternity

Wilt thou go with me, sweet maid,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through the valley-depths of shade,
Of night and dark obscurity;
Where the path has lost its way,
Where the sun forgets the day,
Where there's nor life nor light to see,
Sweet maiden, wilt thou go with me!

Where stones will turn to flooding streams,
Where plains will rise like ocean waves,
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And mountains darken into caves,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity,
Where parents live and are forgot,
And sisters live and know us not!

Say, maiden; wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be,
To live in death and be the same,
Without this life or home or name,
At once to be and not to be -
That was and is not -yet to see
Things pass like shadows, and the sky
Above, below, around us lie?

John Clare

Approaching Night

O take this world away from me;
Its strife I cannot bear to see,
Its very praises hurt me more
Than een its coldness did before,
Its hollow ways torment me now
And start a cold sweat on my brow,
Its noise I cannot bear to hear,
Its joy is trouble to my ear,
Its ways I cannot bear to see,
Its crowds are solitudes to me.
O, how I long to be agen
That poor and independent man,
With labour's lot from morn to night
And books to read at candle light;
That followed labour in the field
From light to dark when toil could yield
Real happiness with little gain,
Rich thoughtless health unknown to pain:
Though, leaning on my spade to rest,
I've thought how richer folks were blest
And knew not quiet was the best.

Go with your tauntings, go;
Neer think to hurt me so;
I'll scoff at your disdain.
Cold though the winter blow,
When hills are free from snow
It will be spring again.

So go, and fare thee well,
Nor think ye'll have to tell
Of wounded hearts from me,
Locked up in your hearts cell.
Mine still at home doth dwell
In its first liberty.

Bees sip not at one flower,
Spring comes not with one shower,
Nor shines the sun alone
Upon one favoured hour,
But with unstinted power
Makes every day his own.

And for my freedom's sake
With such I'll pattern take,
And rove and revel on.
Your gall shall never make
Me honied paths forsake;
So prythee get thee gone.

And when my toil is blest
And I find a maid possest

Of truth that's not in thee,
Like bird that finds its nest
I'll stop and take my rest;
And love as she loves me.

John Clare

Autumn

The thistledown's flying, though the winds are all still,
On the green grass now lying, now mounting the hill,
The spring from the fountain now boils like a pot;
Through stones past the counting it bubbles red-hot.

The ground parched and cracked is like overbaked bread,
The greensward all wracked is, bents dried up and dead.
The fallow fields glitter like water indeed,
And gossamers twitter, flung from weed unto weed.

Hill-tops like hot iron glitter bright in the sun,
And the rivers we're eying burn to gold as they run;
Burning hot is the ground, liquid gold is the air;
Whoever looks round sees Eternity there.

John Clare

Autumn Birds

The wild duck startles like a sudden thought,
And heron slow as if it might be caught.
The flopping crows on weary wings go by
And grey beard jackdaws noising as they fly.
The crowds of starnels whizz and hurry by,
And darken like a clod the evening sky.
The larks like thunder rise and suthy round,
Then drop and nestle in the stubble ground.
The wild swan hurries hight and noises loud
With white neck peering to the evening clowd.
The weary rooks to distant woods are gone.
With lengths of tail the magpie winnows on
To neighbouring tree, and leaves the distant crow
While small birds nestle in the edge below.

John Clare

Badger

The badger grunting on his woodland track
With shaggy hide and sharp nose scrowed with black
Roots in the bushes and the woods, and makes
A great high burrow in the ferns and brakes.
With nose on ground he runs an awkward pace,
And anything will beat him in the race.
The shepherd's dog will run him to his den
Followed and hooted by the dogs and men.
The woodman when the hunting comes about
Goes round at night to stop the foxes out
And hurrying through the bushes to the chin
Breaks the old holes, and tumbles headlong in.
When midnight comes a host of dogs and men
Go out and track the badger to his den,
And put a sack within the hole, and lie
Till the old grunting badger passes bye.
He comes and hears—they let the strongest loose.
The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose.
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry,
And the old hare half wounded buzzes bye.
They get a forked stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town,
And bait him all the day with many dogs,
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs.
He runs along and bites at all he meets:
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets.
He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door.
The frequent stone is hurled where e'er they go;
When badgers fight, then every one's a foe.
The dogs are clapt and urged to join the fray;
The badger turns and drives them all away.
Though scarcely half as big, demure and small,
He fights with dogs for bones and beats them all.
The heavy mastiff, savage in the fray,
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away.
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold,
The badger grins and never leaves his hold.
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels
And bites them through—the drunkard swears and reels.
The frighted women take the boys away,
The blackguard laughs and hurries on the fray.
He tries to reach the woods, an awkward race,
But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chase.
He turns again and drives the noisy crowd
And beats the many dogs in noises loud.
He drives away and beats them every one,
And then they loose them all and set them on.
He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men,
Then starts and grins and drives the crowd again;
Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
And leaves his hold and cackles, groans, and dies.

Some keep a baited badger tame as hog
And tame him till he follows like the dog.
They urge him on like dogs and show fair play.
He beats and scarcely wounded goes away.
Lapt up as if asleep, he scorns to fly
And seizes any dog that ventures nigh.
Clapt like a dog, he never bites the men
But worries dogs and hurries to his den.
They let him out and turn a harrow down
And there he fights the host of all the town.
He licks the patting hand, and tries to play
And never tries to bite or run away,
And runs away from the noise in hollow trees
Burnt by the boys to get a swarm of bees.

John Clare

Ballad

A faithless shepherd courted me,
He stole away my liberty.
When my poor heart was strange to men,
He came and smiled and stole it then.

When my apron would hang low,
Me he sought through frost and snow.
When it puckered up with shame,
And I sought him, he never came.

When summer brought no fears to fright,
He came to guard me every night.
When winter nights did darkly prove,
None came to guard me or to love.

I wish, I wish, but all in vain,
I wish I was a maid again.
A maid again I cannot be,
O when will green grass cover me?

John Clare

Bantry Bay

On the eighteenth of October we lay in Bantry Bay,
All ready to set sail, with a fresh and steady gale:
A fortnight and nine days we in the harbour lay,
And no breeze ever reached us or strained a single sail.
Three ships of war had we, and the great guns loaded all;
But our ships were dead and beaten that had never feared a foe.
The winds becalmed around us cared for no cannon ball;
They locked us in the harbour and would not let us go.

On the nineteenth of October, by eleven of the clock,
The sky turned black as midnight and a sudden storm came on--
Awful and sudden--and the cables felt the shock;
Our anchors they all broke away and every sheet was gone.
The guns fired off amid the strife, but little hope had we;
The billows broke above the ship and left us all below.
The crew with one consent cried 'Bear further out to sea,'
But the waves obeyed no sailor's call, and we knew not where to go.

She foundered on a rock, while we clambered up the shrouds,
And staggered like a mountain drunk, wedged in the waves almost.
The red hot boiling billows foamed in the stooping clouds,
And in that fatal tempest the whole ship's crew were lost.
Have pity for poor mariners, ye landsmen, in a storm.
O think what they endure at sea while safe at home you stay.
All ye that sleep on beds at night in houses dry and warm,
O think upon the whole ship's crew, all lost at Bantry Bay.

John Clare

Birds In Alarm

The firetail tells the boys when nests are nigh
And tweets and flies from every passer-bye.
The yellowhammer never makes a noise
But flies in silence from the noisy boys;
The boys will come and take them every day,
And still she lays as none were ta'en away.

The nightingale keeps tweeting-churring round
But leaves in silence when the nest is found.
The pewit hollos 'chewrit' as she flies
And flops about the shepherd where he lies;
But when her nest is found she stops her song
And cocks [her] coppled crown and runs along.
Wrens cock their tails and chitter loud and play,
And robins hollo 'tut' and fly away.

John Clare

Bonny Lassie O!

O the evening's for the fair, bonny lassie O!
To meet the cooler air and walk an angel there,
With the dark dishevelled hair,
Bonny lassie O!

The bloom's on the brere, bonny lassie O!
Oak apples on the tree; and wilt thou gang to see
The shed I've made for thee,
Bonny lassie O!

Tis agen the running brook, bonny lassie O!
In a grassy nook hard by, with a little patch of sky,
And a bush to keep us dry,
Bonny lassie O!

There's the daisy all the year, bonny lassie O!
There's the king-cup bright as gold, and the speedwell never cold,
And the arum leaves unrolled,
Bonny lassie O!

O meet me at the shed, bonny lassie O!
With a woodbine peeping in, and the roses like thy skin
Blushing, thy praise to win,
Bonny lassie O!

I will meet thee there at e'en, bonny lassie O!
When the bee sips in the bean, and grey willow branches lean,
And the moonbeam looks between,
Bonny lassie O!

John Clare

Bonny Mary O!

The morning opens fine, bonny Mary O!
The robin sings his song by the dairy O!
Where the little Jenny wrens cock their tails among the hens,
Singing morning's happy songs with Mary O!

The swallow's on the wing, bonny Mary O!
Where the rushes fringe the spring, bonny Mary O!
Where the cowslips do unfold, shaking tassels all of gold,
Which make the milk so sweet, bonny Mary O!

There's the yellowhammer's nest, bonny Mary O!
Where she hides her golden breast, bonny Mary O!
On her mystic eggs she dwells, with strange writing on their shells,
Hid in the mossy grass, bonny Mary O!

There the spotted cow gets food, bonny Mary O!
And chews her peaceful cud, bonny Mary O!
In the mole-hills and the bushes, and the clear brook fringed with rushes
To fill the evening pail, bonny Mary O!

The cowpond once agen, bonny Mary O!
Lies dimpled like thy sen, bonny Mary O!
Where the gnat swarms fall and rise under evening's mellow skies,
And on flags sleep dragon flies, bonny Mary O!

And I will meet thee there, bonny Mary O!
When a-milking you repair, bonny Mary O!
And I'll kiss thee on the grass, my buxom, bonny lass,
And be thine own for aye, bonny Mary O!

John Clare

Braggart

With careful step to keep his balance up
He reels on warily along the street,
Slabbering at mouth and with a staggering stoop
Mutters an angry look at all he meets.
Bumptious and vain and proud he shoulders up
And would be something if he knew but how;
To any man on earth he will not stoop
But cracks of work, of horses and of plough.
Proud of the foolish talk, the ale he quaffs,
He never heeds the insult loud that laughs:
With rosy maid he tries to joke and play,--
Who shrugs and nettles deep his pomp and pride.
And calls him 'drunken beast' and runs away--
King to himself and fool to all beside.

John Clare

Christmas

Christmas is come and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now
E'en want will dry its tears in mirth
And crown him wi' a holly bough
Tho tramping 'neath a winters sky
O'er snow track paths and rhymey stiles
The huswife sets her spining bye
And bids him welcome wi' her smiles
Each house is swept the day before
And windows stuck wi' evergreens
The snow is beesom'd from the door
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes
Gilt holly wi' its thorny pricks
And yew and box wi' berrys small
These deck the unus'd candlesticks
And pictures hanging by the wall

Neighbours resume their anual cheer
Wishing wi smiles and spirits high
Clad christmass and a happy year
To every morning passer bye
Milk maids their christmass journeys go
Accompanyd wi favourd swain
And childern pace the crumping snow
To taste their grannys cake again

Hung wi the ivys veining bough
The ash trees round the cottage farm
Are often stript of branches now
The cotters christmass hearth to warm
He swings and twists his hazel band
And lops them off wi sharpend hook
And oft brings ivy in his hand
To decorate the chimney nook

Old winter whipes his ides bye
And warms his fingers till he smiles
Where cottage hearths are blazing high
And labour resteth from his toils
Wi merry mirth beguiling care
Old customs keeping wi the day
Friends meet their christmass cheer to share
And pass it in a harmless way

Old customs O I love the sound
However simple they may be
What ere wi time has sanction found
Is welcome and is dear to me
Pride grows above simplicity
And spurns it from her haughty mind
And soon the poets song will be
The only refuge they can find

The shepherd now no more afraid
Since custom doth the chance bestow
Starts up to kiss the giggling maid
Beneath the branch of mizzletoe
That neath each cottage beam is seen
Wi pearl-like-berrys shining gay
The shadow still of what hath been
Which fashion yearly fades away

And singers too a merry throng
At early morn wi simple skill
Yet imitate the angels song
And chant their christmass ditty still
And mid the storm that dies and swells
By fits-in humings softly steals
The music of the village bells
Ringing round their merry peals

And when its past a merry crew
Bedeckt in masks and ribbons gay
The 'Morrice danse' their sports renew
And act their winter evening play
The clown-turnd-kings for penny praise
Storm wi the actors strut and swell
And harlequin a laugh to raise
Wears his hump back and tinkling bell

And oft for pence and spicy ale
Wi winter nosgays pind before
The wassail singer tells her tale
And drawls her christmass carrols oer
The prentice boy wi ruddy face
And ryhme bepowderd dancing locks
From door to door wi happy pace
Runs round to claim his 'christmass box'

The block behind the fire is put
To sanction customs old desires
And many a faggots bands are cut
For the old farmers christmass fires
Where loud tongd gladness joins the throng
And winter meets the warmth of may
Feeling by times the heat too strong
And rubs his shins and draws away

While snows the window panes bedim
The fire curls up a sunny charm
Where creaming oer the pitchers rim
The flowering ale is set to warm
Mirth full of joy as summer bees
Sits there its pleasures to impart

While childern tween their parents knees
Sing scraps of carrols oer by heart

And some to view the winter weathers
Climb up the window seat wi glee
Likening the snow to falling feathers
In fancys infant extacy
Laughing wi superstitious love
Oer visions wild that youth supplyes
Of people pulling geese above
And keeping christmass in the skyes

As tho the homstead trees were drest
In lieu of snow wi dancing leaves
As. tho the sundryd martins nest
Instead of ides hung the eaves
The childern hail the happy day
As if the snow was april grass
And pleasd as neath the warmth of may
Sport oer the water froze to glass

Thou day of happy sound and mirth
That long wi childish memory stays
How blest around the cottage hearth
I met thee in my boyish days
Harping wi raptures dreaming joys
On presents that thy coming found
The welcome sight of little toys
The christmass gifts of comers round

'The wooden horse wi arching head
Drawn upon wheels around the room
The gilded coach of ginger bread
And many colord sugar plumb
Gilt coverd books for pictures sought
Or storys childhood loves to tell
Wi many a urgent promise bought
To get tomorrows lesson well

And many a thing a minutes sport
Left broken on the sanded floor
When we woud leave our play and court
Our parents promises for more
Tho manhood bids such raptures dye
And throws such toys away as vain
Yet memory loves to turn her eye
And talk such pleasures oer again

Around the glowing hearth at night
The harmless laugh and winter tale
Goes round-while parting friends delight
To toast each other oer their ale

The cotter oft wi quiet zeal
Will musing oer his bible lean
While in the dark the lovers steal
To kiss and toy behind the screen

The yule cake dotted thick wi plumbs
Is on each supper table found
And cats look up for falling crumbs
Which greedy childern litter round
And huswifes sage stuffd seasond chine
Long hung in chimney nook to drye
And boiling eldern berry wine
To drink the christmas eves 'good bye'

John Clare

Christmass

Christmass is come and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now
Een want will dry its tears in mirth
And crown him wi a holly bough
Tho tramping neath a winters sky
Oer snow track paths and ryhmey stiles
The huswife sets her spining bye
And bids him welcome wi her smiles
Each house is swept the day before
And windows stuck wi evergreens
The snow is beesomd from the door
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes
Gilt holly wi its thorny pricks
And yew and box wi berrys small
These deck the unusd candlesticks
And pictures hanging by the wall

Neighbours resume their anual cheer
Wishing wi smiles and spirits high
Clad christmass and a happy year
To every morning passer bye
Milk maids their christmass journeys go
Accompanyd wi favourd swain
And childern pace the crumping snow
To taste their grannys cake again

Hung wi the ivys veining bough
The ash trees round the cottage farm
Are often stript of branches now
The cotters christmass hearth to warm
He swings and twists his hazel band
And lops them off wi sharpend hook
And oft brings ivy in his hand
To decorate the chimney nook

Old winter whipes his ides bye
And warms his fingers till he smiles
Where cottage hearths are blazing high
And labour resteth from his toils
Wi merry mirth beguiling care
Old customs keeping wi the day
Friends meet their christmass cheer to share
And pass it in a harmless way

Old customs O I love the sound
However simple they may be
What ere wi time has sanction found
Is welcome and is dear to me
Pride grows above simplicity
And spurns it from her haughty mind
And soon the poets song will be
The only refuge they can find

The shepherd now no more afraid
Since custom doth the chance bestow
Starts up to kiss the giggling maid
Beneath the branch of mizzletoe
That neath each cottage beam is seen
Wi pearl-like-berrys shining gay
The shadow still of what hath been
Which fashion yearly fades away

And singers too a merry throng
At early morn wi simple skill
Yet imitate the angels song
And chant their christmass ditty still
And mid the storm that dies and swells
By fits-in humings softly steals
The music of the village bells
Ringing round their merry peals

And when its past a merry crew
Bedeckt in masks and ribbons gay
The 'Morrice danse' their sports renew
And act their winter evening play
The clown-turnd-kings for penny praise
Storm wi the actors strut and swell
And harlequin a laugh to raise
Wears his hump back and tinkling bell

And oft for pence and spicy ale
Wi winter nosgays pind before
The wassail singer tells her tale
And drawls her christmass carrols oer
The prentice boy wi ruddy face
And ryhme bepowderd dancing locks
From door to door wi happy pace
Runs round to claim his 'christmass box'

The block behind the fire is put
To sanction customs old desires
And many a faggots bands are cut
For the old farmers christmass fires
Where loud tongd gladness joins the throng
And winter meets the warmth of may
Feeling by times the heat too strong
And rubs his shins and draws away

While snows the window panes bedim
The fire curls up a sunny charm
Where creaming oer the pitchers rim
The flowering ale is set to warm
Mirth full of joy as summer bees
Sits there its pleasures to impart

While childern tween their parents knees
Sing scraps of carrols oer by heart

And some to view the winter weathers
Climb up the window seat wi glee
Likening the snow to falling feathers
In fancys infant extacy
Laughing wi superstitious love
Oer visions wild that youth supplyes
Of people pulling geese above
And keeping christmass in the skyes

As tho the homstead trees were drest
In lieu of snow wi dancing leaves
As. tho the sundryd martins nest
Instead of ides hung the eaves
The childern hail the happy day
As if the snow was april grass
And pleasd as neath the warmth of may
Sport oer the water froze to glass

Thou day of happy sound and mirth
That long wi childish memory stays
How blest around the cottage hearth
I met thee in my boyish days
Harping wi raptures dreaming joys
On presents that thy coming found
The welcome sight of little toys
The christmass gifts of comers round

'The wooden horse wi arching head
Drawn upon wheels around the room
The gilded coach of ginger bread
And many colord sugar plumb
Gilt coverd books for pictures sought
Or storys childhood loves to tell
Wi many a urgent promise bought
To get tomorrows lesson well

And many a thing a minutes sport
Left broken on the sanded floor
When we woud leave our play and court
Our parents promises for more
Tho manhood bids such raptures dye
And throws such toys away as vain
Yet memory loves to turn her eye
And talk such pleasures oer again

Around the glowing hearth at night
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To drink the christmass eves 'good bye'

John Clare

Clock-O'-Clay

In the cowslip pips I lie,
Hidden from the buzzing fly,
While green grass beneath me lies,
Pearled with dew like fishes' eyes,
Here I lie, a clock-o'-clay,
Waiting for the time o' day.

While the forest quakes surprise,
And the wild wind sobs and sighs,
My home rocks as like to fall,
On its pillar green and tall;
When the pattering rain drives by
Clock-o'-clay keeps warm and dry.

Day by day and night by night,
All the week I hide from sight;
In the cowslip pips I lie,
In the rain still warm and dry;
Day and night and night and day,
Red, black-spotted clock-o'-clay.

My home shakes in wind and showers,
Pale green pillar topped with flowers,
Bending at the wild wind's breath,
Till I touch the grass beneath;
Here I live, lone clock-o'-clay,
Watching for the time of day.

John Clare

Country Letter

Dear brother robin this comes from us all
With our kind love and could Gip write and all
Though but a dog he'd have his love to spare
For still he knows and by your corner chair
The moment he comes in he lyes him down
and seems to fancy you are in the town.
This leaves us well in health thank God for that
For old acquaintance Sue has kept your hat
Which mother brushes ere she lays it bye
and every sunday goes upstairs to cry
Jane still is yours till you come back agen
and neer so much as dances with the men
and ned the woodman every week comes in
and asks about you kindly as our kin
and he with this and goody Thompson sends
Remembrances with those of all our friends
Father with us sends love untill he hears
and mother she has nothing but her tears
Yet wishes you like us in health the same
and longs to see a letter with your name
So loving brother don't forget to write
Old Gip lies on the hearth stone every night
Mother can't bear to turn him out of doors
and never noises now of dirty floors
Father will laugh but lets her have her way
and Gip for kindness get a double pay
So Robin write and let us quickly see
You don't forget old friends no more than we
Nor let my mother have so much to blame
To go three journeys ere your letter came.

John Clare

Death

Why should man's high aspiring mind
Burn in him with so proud a breath,
When all his haughty views can find
In this world yields to death?
The fair, the brave, the vain, the wise,
The rich, the poor, the great, and small,
Are each but worm's anatomies
To strew his quiet hall.

Power may make many earthly gods,
Where gold and bribery's guilt prevails,
But death's unwelcome, honest odds
Kick o'er the unequal scales.
The flattered great may clamours raise
Of power, and their own weakness hide,
But death shall find unlooked-for ways
To end the farce of pride,

An arrow hurtled eer so high,
From een a giant's sinewy strength,
In Time's untraced eternity
Goes but a pigmy length;
Nay, whirring from the tortured string,
With all its pomp of hurried flight,
Tis by the skylark's little wing
Outmeasured in its height.

Just so man's boasted strength and power
Shall fade before death's lightest stroke,
Laid lower than the meanest flower,
Whose pride oer-topt the oak;
And he who, like a blighting blast,
Dispeopled worlds with war's alarms
Shall be himself destroyed at last
By poor despised worms.

Tyrants in vain their powers secure,
And awe slaves' murmurs with a frown,
For unawed death at last is sure
To sap the babels down.
A stone thrown upward to the sky
Will quickly meet the ground agen;
So men-gods of earth's vanity
Shall drop at last to men;

And Power and Pomp their all resign,
Blood-purchased thrones and banquet halls.
Fate waits to sack Ambition's shrine
As bare as prison walls,
Where the poor suffering wretch bows down
To laws a lawless power hath passed;
And pride, and power, and king, and clown

Shall be Death's slaves at last.

Time, the prime minister of Death!
There's nought can bribe his honest will.
He stops the richest tyrant's breath
And lays his mischief still.
Each wicked scheme for power all stops,
With grandeurs false and mock display,
As eve's shades from high mountain tops
Fade with the rest away.

Death levels all things in his march;
Nought can resist his mighty strength;
The palace proud, triumphal arch,
Shall mete its shadow's length.
The rich, the poor, one common bed
Shall find in the unhonoured grave,
Where weeds shall crown alike the head
Of tyrant and of slave.

John Clare

Decay

O Poesy is on the wane,
For Fancy's visions all unfitting;
I hardly know her face again,
Nature herself seems on the flitting.
The fields grow old and common things,
The grass, the sky, the winds a-blowing;
And spots, where still a beauty clings,
Are sighing 'going! all a-going!'
O Poesy is on the wane,
I hardly know her face again.

The bank with brambles overspread,
And little molehills round about it,
Was more to me than laurel shades,
With paths of gravel finely clouted;
And streaking here and streaking there,
Through shaven grass and many a border,
With rutty lanes had no compare,
And heaths were in a richer order.
But Poesy is on the wane,
I hardly know her face again.

I sat beside the pasture stream,
When Beauty's self was sitting by,
The fields did more than Eden seem
Nor could I tell the reason why.
I often drank when not adry
To pledge her health in draughts divine;
Smiles made it nectar from the sky,
Love turned een water into wine.
O Poesy is on the wane,
I cannot find her face again.

The sun those mornings used to find,
Its clouds were other-country mountains,
And heaven looked downward on the mind,
Like groves, and rocks, and mottled fountains.
Those heavens are gone, the mountains grey
Turned mist--the sun, a homeless ranger,
Pursues alone his naked way,
Unnoticed like a very stranger.
O Poesy is on the wane,
Nor love nor joy is mine again.

Love's sun went down without a frown,
For very joy it used to grieve us;
I often think the West is gone,
Ah, cruel Time, to undeceive us.
The stream it is a common stream,
Where we on Sundays used to ramble,
The sky hangs oer a broken dream,
The bramble's dwindled to a bramble!

O Poesy is on the wane,
I cannot find her haunts again.

Mere withered stalks and fading trees,
And pastures spread with hills and rushes,
Are all my fading vision sees;
Gone, gone are rapture's flooding gushes!
When mushrooms they were fairy bowers,
Their marble pillars overswelling,
And Danger paused to pluck the flowers
That in their swarthy rings were dwelling.
Yes, Poesy is on the wane,
Nor joy nor fear is mine again.

Aye, Poesy hath passed away,
And Fancy's visions undeceive us;
The night hath ta'en the place of day,
And why should passing shadows grieve us?
I thought the flowers upon the hills
Were flowers from Adam's open gardens;
But I have had my summer thrills,
And I have had my heart's rewardings.
So Poesy is on the wane,
I hardly know her face again.

And Friendship it hath burned away,
Like to a very ember cooling,
A make-believe on April day
That sent the simple heart a-fooling;
Mere jesting in an earnest way,
Deceiving on and still deceiving;
And Hope is but a fancy-play,
And Joy the art of true believing;
For Poesy is on the wane,
O could I feel her faith again!

John Clare

December

While snow the window-panes bedim,
The fire curls up a sunny charm,
Where, creaming o'er the pitcher's rim,
The flowering ale is set to warm;
Mirth, full of joy as summer bees,
Sits there, its pleasures to impart,
And children, 'tween their parent's knees,
Sing scraps of carols o'er by heart.

And some, to view the winter weathers,
Climb up the window-seat with glee,
Likening the snow to falling feathers,
In fancy infant ecstasy;
Laughing, with superstitious love,
O'er visions wild that youth supplies,
Of people pulling geese above,
And keeping Christmas in the skies.

As tho' the homestead trees were drest,
In lieu of snow, with dancing leaves,
As tho' the sun-dried martin's nest,
Instead of ickles, hung the eaves,
The children hail the happy day -
As if the snow were April's grass,
And pleas'd, as 'neath the warmth of May,
Sport o'er the water froze as glass.

John Clare

Dewdrops

The dewdrops on every blade of grass are so much like silver drops that I am obliged to stoop down as I walk to see if they are pearls, and those sprinkled on the ivy-woven beds of primroses underneath the hazels, whitethorns and maples are so like gold beads that I stooped down to feel if they were hard, but they melted from my finger. And where the dew lies on the primrose, the violet and whitethorn leaves they are emerald and beryl, yet nothing more than the dews of the morning on the budding leaves; nay, the road grasses are covered with gold and silver beads, and the further we go the brighter they seem to shine, like solid gold and silver. It is nothing more than the sun's light and shade upon them in the dewy morning; every thorn-point and every bramble-spear has its trembling ornament: till the wind gets a little brisker, and then all is shaken off, and all the shining jewelry passes away into a common spring morning full of budding leaves, primroses, violets, vernal speedwell, bluebell and orchis, and commonplace objects.

John Clare

Distant Hills

What is there in those distant hills
My fancy longs to see,
That many a mood of joy instils?
Say what can fancy be?

Do old oaks thicken all the woods,
With weeds and brakes as here?
Does common water make the floods,
That's common everywhere?

Is grass the green that clothes the ground?
Are springs the common springs?
Daisies and cowslips dropping round,
Are such the flowers she brings?

* * * * *

Are cottages of mud and stone,
By valley wood and glen,
And their calm dwellers little known
Men, and but common men,

That drive afield with carts and ploughs?
Such men are common here,
And pastoral maidens milking cows
Are dwelling everywhere.

If so my fancy idly clings
To notions far away,
And longs to roam for common things
All round her every day,

Right idle would the journey be
To leave one's home so far,
And see the moon I now can see
And every little star.

And have they there a night and day,
And common counted hours?
And do they see so far away
This very moon of ours?

* * * * *

I mark him climb above the trees
With one small [comrade] star,
And think me in my reveries--
He cannot shine so far.

* * * * *

The poets in the tales they tell

And with their happy powers
Have made lands where their fancies dwell
Seem better lands than ours.

Why need I sigh far hills to see
If grass is their array,
While here the little paths go through
The greenest every day?

Such fancies fill the restless mind,
At once to cheat and cheer
With thought and semblance undefined,
Nowhere and everywhere.

John Clare

Dyke Side

The frog croaks loud, and maidens dare not pass
But fear the noisome toad and shun the grass;
And on the sunny banks they dare not go
Where hissing snakes run to the flood below.
The nuthatch noises loud in wood and wild,
Like women turning skreeking to a child.
The schoolboy hears and brushes through the trees
And runs about till drabbled to the knees.
The old hawk winnows round the old crow's nest;
The schoolboy hears and wonder fills his breast.
He throws his basket down to climb the tree
And wonders what the red blotched eggs can be:
The green woodpecker bounces from the view
And hollos as he buzzes bye 'kew kew.'

John Clare

Early Nightingale

When first we hear the shy-come nightingales,
They seem to mutter o’er their songs in fear,
And, climb we e’er so soft the spinney rails,
All stops as if no bird was anywhere.
The kindled bushes with the young leaves thin
Let curious eyes to search a long way in,
Until impatience cannot see or hear
The hidden music; gets but little way
Upon the path - when up the songs begin,
Full loud a moment and then low again.
But when a day or two confirms her stay
Boldly she sings and loud for half the day;
And soon the village brings the woodman’s tale
Of having heard the new-come nightingale.

John Clare

Early Spring

The Spring is come, and Spring flowers coming too,
The crocus, patty kay, the rich hearts' ease;
The polyanthus peeps with blebs of dew,
And daisy flowers; the buds swell on the trees;
While oer the odd flowers swim grandfather bees
In the old homestead rests the cottage cow;
The dogs sit on their haunches near the pail,
The least one to the stranger growls 'bow wow,'
Then hurries to the door and cocks his tail,
To knaw the unfinished bone; the placid cow
Looks oer the gate; the thresher's lumping flail
Is all the noise the spring encounters now.

John Clare

Earth's Eternity

Man, Earth's poor shadow! talks of Earth's decay:
But hath it nothing of eternal kin?
No majesty that shall not pass away?
No soul of greatness springing up within?
Thought marks without hoar shadows of sublime,
Pictures of power, which if not doomed to win
Eternity, stand laughing at old Time
For ages: in the grand ancestral line
Of things eternal, mounting to divine,
I read Magnificence where ages pay
Worship like conquered foes to the Apennine,
Because they could not conquer. There sits Day
Too high for Night to come at--mountains shine,
Outpeering Time, too lofty for decay.

John Clare

Emmonsail's Heath in Winter

I love to see the old heath's withered brake
Mingle its crimpled leaves with furze and ling,
While the old heron from the lonely lake
Starts slow and flaps its melancholy wing,
An oddling crow in idle motion swing
On the half-rotten ash-tree's topmost twig,
Beside whose trunk the gypsy makes his bed.
Up flies the bouncing woodcock from the brig
Where a black quagmire quakes beneath the tread;
The fieldfares chatter in the whistling thorn
And for the haw round fields and closen rove,
And coy bumbarrels, twenty in a drove,
Flit down the hedgerows in the frozen plain
And hang on little twigs and start again.

John Clare

Evening

'Tis evening; the black snail has got on his track,
And gone to its nest is the wren,
And the packman snail, too, with his home on his back,
Clings to the bowed bents like a wen.

The shepherd has made a rude mark with his foot
Where his shadow reached when he first came,
And it just touched the tree where his secret love cut
Two letters that stand for love's name.

The evening comes in with the wishes of love,
And the shepherd he looks on the flowers,
And thinks who would praise the soft song of the dove,
And meet joy in these dew-falling hours.

For Nature is love, and finds haunts for true love,
Where nothing can hear or intrude;
It hides from the eagle and joins with the dove,
In beautiful green solitude.

John Clare

Evening Primrose

When once the sun sinks in the west,
And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
Or its companionable star,
The evening primrose opes anew
Its delicate blossoms to the dew;
And, hermit-like, shunning the light,
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
Knows not the beauty it possesses;
Thus it blooms on while night is by;
When day looks out with open eye,
Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,
It faints and withers and is gone.

John Clare

Farewell

Farewell to the bushy clump close to the river
And the flags where the butter-bump hides in forever;
Farewell to the weedy nook, hemmed in by waters;
Farewell to the miller's brook and his three bonny daughters;
Farewell to them all while in prison I lie--
In the prison a thrall sees naught but the sky.

Shut out are the green fields and birds in the bushes;
In the prison yard nothing builds, blackbirds or thrushes.
Farewell to the old mill and dash of waters,
To the miller and, dearer still, to his three bonny daughters.

In the nook, the larger burdock grows near the green willow;
In the flood, round the moor-cock dashes under the billow;
To the old mill farewell, to the lock, pens, and waters,
To the miller himsel', and his three bonny daughters.

John Clare

Farewell And Defiance To Love

Love and thy vain employs, away
From this too oft deluded breast!
No longer will I court thy stay,
To be my bosom's teazing guest.
Thou treacherous medicine, reckoned pure,
Thou quackery of the harassed heart,
That kills what it pretends to cure,
Life's mountebank thou art.

With nostrums vain of boasted powers,
That, ta'en, a worse disorder leave;
An asp hid in a group of flowers,
That bites and stings when few perceive;
Thou mock-truce to the troubled mind,
Leading it more in sorrow's way,
Freedom, that leaves us more confined,
I bid thee hence away.

Dost taunt, and deem thy power beyond
The resolution reason gave?
Tut! Falsity hath snapt each bond,
That kept me once thy quiet slave,
And made thy snare a spider's thread,
Which een my breath can break in twain;
Nor will I be, like Sampson, led
To trust thy wiles again.

I took thee as my staff to guide
Me on the road I did pursue,
And when my weakness most relied
Upon its strength it broke in two.
I took thee as my friendly host
That counsel might in dangers show,
But when I needed thee the most
I found thou wert my foe.

Tempt me no more with rosy cheeks,
Nor daze my reason with bright eyes;
I'm wearied with thy painted freaks,
And sicken at such vanities:
Be roses fine as eer they will,
They, with the meanest, fade and die,
And eyes, though thronged with darts to kill,
Share like mortality.
Feed the young bard, that madly sips
His nectar-draughts from folly's flowers,
Bright eyes, fair cheeks, and ruby lips,
Till muses melt to honey showers;
Lure him to thrum thy empty lays,
While flattery listens to the chimes,
Till words themselves grow sick with praise
And stop for want of rhymes.

Let such be still thy paramours,
And chaunt love's old and idle tune,
Robbing the spring of all its flowers,
And heaven of all her stars and moon,
To gild with dazzling similes
Blind folly's vain and empty lay:
I'm sobered from such phantasies,
So get thee hence away.

Nor bid me sigh for mine own cost,
Nor count its loss, for mine annoy,
Nor say my stubbornness hath lost
A paradise of dainty joy:
I'll not believe thee, till I know
That sober reason turns an ape,
And acts the harlequin, to show
That cares in every shape,

Heart-achings, sighs, and grief-wrung tears,
Shame-blushes at betrayed distress,
Dissembled smiles, and jealous fears,
Are nought but real happiness:
Then will I mourn what now I brave,
And suffer Celia's quirks to be
(Like a poor fate-bewilder'd slave,)
The rulers of my destiny.

I'll weep and sigh wheneer she wills
To frown, and when she deigns to smile
It shall be cure for all my ills,
And, foolish still, I'll laugh the while;
But till that comes, I'll bless the rules
Experience taught, and deem it wise
To hold thee as the game of fools,
And all thy tricks despise.

John Clare

Farm Breakfast

Maids shout to breakfast in a merry strife,
And the cat runs to hear the whetted knife,
And dogs are ever in the way to watch
The mouldy crust and falling bone to catch.
The wooden dishes round in haste are set,
And round the table all the boys are met;
All know their own save Hodge who would be first,
But every one his master leaves the worst.
On every wooden dish, a humble claim,
Two rude cut letters mark the owner's name;
From every nook the smile of plenty calls,
And rusty flitches decorate the walls,
Moore's Almanack where wonders never cease--
All smeared with candle snuff and bacon grease.

John Clare

Farmer's Boy

He waits all day beside his little flock
And asks the passing stranger what's o'clock,
But those who often pass his daily tasks
Look at their watch and tell before he asks.
He mutters stories to himself and lies
Where the thick hedge the warmest house supplies,
And when he hears the hunters far and wide
He climbs the highest tree to see them ride--
He climbs till all the fields are blea and bare
And makes the old crow's nest an easy chair.
And soon his sheep are got in other grounds--
He hastens down and fears his master come,
He stops the gap and keeps them all in bounds
And tends them closely till it's time for home.

John Clare

Field Path

The beams in blossom with their spots of jet
Smelt sweet as gardens wheresoever met;
The level meadow grass was in the swath;
The hedge briar rose hung right across the path,
White over with its flowers--the grass that lay
Bleaching beneath the twittering heat to hay
Smelt so deliciously, the puzzled bee
Went wondering where the honey sweets could be;
And passer-bye along the level rows
Stoopt down and whipt a bit beneath his nose.

John Clare

First Love

I ne'er was struck before that hour
With love so sudden and so sweet,
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower
And stole my heart away complete.
My face turned pale as deadly pale.
My legs refused to walk away,
And when she looked, what could I ail?
My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face
And took my eyesight quite away,
The trees and bushes round the place
Seemed midnight at noonday.
I could not see a single thing,
Words from my eyes did start --
They spoke as chords do from the string,
And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?
Is love's bed always snow?
She seemed to hear my silent voice,
Not love's appeals to know.
I never saw so sweet a face
As that I stood before.
My heart has left its dwelling-place
And can return no more

John Clare

Firwood

The fir trees taper into twigs and wear
The rich blue green of summer all the year,
Softening the roughest tempest almost calm
And offering shelter ever still and warm
To the small path that towels underneath,
Where loudest winds--almost as summer's breath--
Scarce fan the weed that lingers green below
When others out of doors are lost in frost and snow.
And sweet the music trembles on the ear
As the wind suthers through each tiny spear,
Makeshifts for leaves; and yet, so rich they show,
Winter is almost summer where they grow.

John Clare

Fragment

The cataract, whirling down the precipice,
Elbows down rocks and, shouldering, thunders through.
Roars, howls, and stifled murmurs never cease;
Hell and its agonies seem hid below.
Thick rolls the mist, that smokes and falls in dew;
The trees and greenwood wear the deepest green.
Horrible mysteries in the gulph stare through,
Roars of a million tongues, and none knows what they mean.

John Clare

From

Sweet solitude, what joy to be alone--
In wild, wood-shady dell to stay for hours.
Twould soften hearts if they were hard as stone
To see glad butterflies and smiling flowers.
Tis pleasant in these quiet lonely places,
Where not the voice of man our pleasure mars,
To see the little bees with coal black faces
Gathering sweets from little flowers like stars.

The wind seems calling, though not understood.
A voice is speaking; hark, it louder calls.
It echoes in the far-outstretching wood.
First twas a hum, but now it loudly squalls;
And then the pattering rain begins to fall,
And it is hushed--the fern leaves scarcely shake,
The tottergrass it scarcely stirs at all.
And then the rolling thunder gets awake,
And from black clouds the lightning flashes break.

The sunshine's gone, and now an April evening
Commences with a dim and mackerel sky.
Gold light and woolpacks in the west are leaving,
And leaden streaks their splendid place supply.
Sheep ointment seems to daub the dead-hued sky,
And night shuts up the lightsomeness of day,
All dark and absent as a corpse's eye.
Flower, tree, and bush, like all the shadows grey,
In leaden hues of desolation fade away.

Tis May; and yet the March flower Dandelion
Is still in bloom among the emerald grass,
Shining like guineas with the sun's warm eye on--
We almost think they are gold as we pass,
Or fallen stars in a green sea of grass.
They shine in fields, or waste grounds near the town.
They closed like painter's brush when even was.
At length they turn to nothing else but down,
While the rude winds blow off each shadowy crown.

John Clare

From The Parish: A Satire

I

In politics and politicians' lies
The modern farmer waxes wondrous wise;
Opinionates with wisdom all compact,
And een could tell a nation how to act;
Throws light on darkness with excessive skill,
Knows who acts well and whose designs are ill,
Proves half the members nought but bribery's tools,
And calls the past a dull dark age of fools.

As wise as Solomon they read the news,
Not with their blind forefathers' simple views,
Who read of wars, and wished that wars would cease,
And blessed the King, and wished his country peace;
Who marked the weight of each fat sheep and ox,
The price of grain and rise and fall of stocks;
Who thought it learning how to buy and sell,
And him a wise man who could manage well.
No, not with such old-fashioned, idle views
Do these newsmongers traffic with the news.
They read of politics and not of grain,
And speechify and comment and explain,
And know so much of Parliament and state
You'd think they're members when you heard them prate;
And know so little of their farms the while
They can but urge a wiser man to smile.

II

A thing all consequence here takes the lead,
Reigning knight-errant oer this dirty breed--
A bailiff he, and who so great to brag
Of law and all its terrors as Bumtagg;
Fawning a puppy at his master's side
And frowning like a wolf on all beside;
Who fattens best where sorrow worst appears
And feeds on sad misfortune's bitterest tears?
Such is Bumtagg the bailiff to a hair,
The worshipper and demon of despair,
Who waits and hopes and wishes for success
At every nod and signal of distress,
Happy at heart, when storms begin to boil,
To seek the shipwreck and to share the spoil.
Brave is this Bumtagg, match him if you can;
For there's none like him living--save his man.

As every animal assists his kind
Just so are these in blood and business joined;
Yet both in different colours hide their art,
And each as suits his ends transacts his part.
One keeps the heart-bred villain full in sight,

The other cants and acts the hypocrite,
Smoothing the deed where law sharks set their gin
Like a coy dog to draw misfortune in.
But both will chuckle oer their prisoners' sighs
And are as blest as spiders over flies.
Such is Bumtagg, whose history I resign,
As other knaves wait room to stink and shine;
And, as the meanest knave a dog can brag,
Such is the lurcher that assists Bumtagg.

John Clare

Gipsies

The snow falls deep; the forest lies alone;
The boy goes hasty for his load of brakes,
Then thinks upon the fire and hurries back;
The gipsy knocks his hands and tucks them up,
And seeks his squalid camp, half hid in snow,
Beneath the oak which breaks away the wind,
And bushes close in snow-like hovel warm;
There tainted mutton wastes upon the coals,
And the half-wasted dog squats close and rubs,
Then feels the heat too strong, and goes aloof;
He watches well, but none a bit can spare,
And vainly waits the morsel thrown away.
Tis thus they live--a picture to the place,
A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race.

John Clare

Grasshoppers

Grasshoppers go in many a thumming spring
And now to stalks of tasseled sow-grass cling,
That shakes and swees awhile, but still keeps straight;
While arching oxeye doubles with his weight.
Next on the cat-tail-grass with farther bound
He springs, that bends until they touch the ground.

John Clare

Graves Of Infants

Infant' graves are steps of angels, where
Earth's brightest gems of innocence repose.
God is their parent, and they need no tear;
He takes them to His bosom from earth's woes,
A bud their lifetime and a flower their close.
Their spirits are an Iris of the skies,
Needing no prayers; a sunset's happy close.
Gone are the bright rays of their soft blue eyes;
Flowers weep in dew-drops oer them, and the gale gently sighs

Their lives were nothing but a sunny shower,
Melting on flowers as tears melt from the eye.
Their deaths were dew-drops on Heaven's amaranth bower,
And tolled on flowers as Summer gales went by.
They bowed and trembled, and they left no sigh,
And the sun smiled to show their end was well.
Infants have nought to weep for ere they die;
All prayers are needless, beads they need not tell,
White flowers their mourners are, Nature their passing bell.

John Clare

Hen's Nest

Among the orchard weeds, from every search,
Snugly and sure, the old hen’s nest is made,
Who cackles every morning from her perch
To tell the servant girl new eggs are laid;
Who lays her washing by, and far and near
Goes seeking all about from day to day,
And stung with nettles tramples everywhere;
But still the cackling pullet lays away.
The boy on Sundays goes the stack to pull
In hopes to find her there, but naught is seen,
And takes his hat and thinks to find it full,
She’s laid so long so many might have been.
But naught is found and all is given o’er
Till the young brood come chirping to the door.

John Clare

Hodge

He plays with other boys when work is done,
But feels too clumsy and too stiff to run,
Yet where there's mischief he can find a way
The first to join and last [to run] away.
What's said or done he never hears or minds
But gets his pence for all the eggs he finds.
He thinks his master's horses far the best,
And always labours longer than the rest.
In frost and cold though lame he's forced to go--
The call's more urgent when he journeys slow.
In surly speed he helps the maids by force
And feeds the cows and hallos till he's hoarse;
And when he's lame they only jest and play
And bid him throw his kiby heels away.

John Clare

House Or Window Flies

These little window dwellers, in cottages and halls, were always entertaining to me; after dancing in the window all day from sunrise to sunset they would sip of the tea, drink of the beer, and eat of the sugar, and be welcome all summer long. They look like things of mind or fairies, and seem pleased or dull as the weather permits. In many clean cottages and genteel houses, they are allowed every liberty to creep, fly, or do as they like; and seldom or ever do wrong. In fact they are the small or dwarfish portion of our own family, and so many fairy familiars that we know and treat as one of ourselves.

John Clare

I Am

I am: yet what I am none cares or knows,
My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes,
They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
Like shades in love and death's oblivion lost;
And yet I am! and live with shadows tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life nor joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
And e'en the dearest--that I loved the best--
Are strange--nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod;
A place where woman never smil'd or wept;
There to abide with my creator, God,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept:
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie;
The grass below--above the vaulted sky.

John Clare

I Dreamt Of Robin

I opened the casement this morn at starlight,
And, the moment I got out of bed,
The daisies were quaking about in their white
And the cowslip was nodding its head.
The grass was all shivers, the stars were all bright,
And Robin that should come at e'en--
I thought that I saw him, a ghost by moonlight,
Like a stalking horse stand on the green.

I went bed agen and did nothing but dream
Of Robin and moonlight and flowers.
He stood like a shadow transfixed by a stream,
And I couldn't forget him for hours.
I'd just dropt asleep when I dreamed Robin spoke,
And the casement it gave such a shake,
As if every pane in the window was broke;
Such a patter the gravel did make.

So I up in the morning before the cock crew
And to strike me a light I sat down.
I saw from the door all his track in the dew
And, I guess, called 'Come in and sit down.'
And one, sure enough, tramples up to the door,
And who but young Robin his sen?
And ere the old folks were half willing to stir
We met, kissed, and parted agen.

John Clare

I Hid My Love

I hid my love when young till I
Couldn't bear the buzzing of a fly;
I hid my love to my despite
Till I could not bear to look at light;
I dare not gaze upon her face
But left her memory in each place;
Where'er I saw a wild flower lie
I kissed and bade my love goodbye.

I met her in the greenest dells,
Where dewdrops pearl the wood bluebells;
The lost breeze kissed her bright blue eye,
The bee kissed and went singing by,
A sunbeam found a passage there,
A gold chain round her neck so fair;
As secret as the wild bee's song
She lay there all the summer long.

I hid my love in field and town
Till e'en the breeze would knock me down;
The bees seemed singing ballads o'er,
The fly's bass turned to lion's roar;
And even the silence found a tongue,
To haunt me all the summer long;
The riddle nature could not prove
Was nothing else but secret love.

John Clare

Idle Fame

I would not wish the burning blaze
Of fame around a restless world,
The thunder and the storm of praise
In crowded tumults heard and hurled.
I would not be a flower to stand
The stare of every passer-bye;
But in some nook of fairyland,
Seen in the praise of beauty's eye.

John Clare

Impromptu

'Where art thou wandering, little child?'
I said to one I met to-day.--
She pushed her bonnet up and smiled,
'I'm going upon the green to play:
Folks tell me that the May's in flower,
That cowslip-peeps are fit to pull,
And I've got leave to spend an hour
To get this little basket full.'

--And thou'st got leave to spend an hour!
My heart repeated.--She was gone;
--And thou hast heard the thorn's in flower,
And childhood's bliss is urging on:
Ah, happy child! thou mak'st me sigh,
This once as happy heart of mine,
Would nature with the boon comply,
How gladly would I change for thine.

John Clare

In Hilly-Wood

How sweet to be thus nestling deep in boughs,
Upon an ashen stoven pillowing me;
Faintly are heard the ploughmen at their ploughs,
But not an eye can find its way to see.
The sunbeams scarce molest me with a smile,
So thick the leafy armies gather round;
And where they do, the breeze blows cool the while,
Their leafy shadows dancing on the ground.
Full many a flower, too, wishing to be seen,
Perks up its head the hiding grass between.-
In mid-wood silence, thus, how sweet to be;
Where all the noises, that on peace intrude,
Come from the chittering cricket, bird, and bee,
Whose songs have charms to sweeten solitude.

John Clare

Insects

These tiny loiterers on the barley's beard,
And happy units of a numerous herd
Of playfellows, the laughing Summer brings,
Mocking the sunshine on their glittering wings,
How merrily they creep, and run, and fly!
No kin they bear to labour's drudgery,
Smoothing the velvet of the pale hedge-rose;
And where they fly for dinner no one knows -
The dew-drops feed them not - they love the shine
Of noon, whose suns may bring them golden wine
All day they're playing in their Sunday dress -
When night reposes, for they can do no less;
Then, to the heath-bell's purple hood they fly,
And like to princes in their slumbers lie,
Secure from rain, and dropping dews, and all,
In silken beds and roomy painted hall.
So merrily they spend their summer-day,
Now in the corn-fields, now in the new-mown hay.
One almost fancies that such happy things,
With coloured hoods and richly burnished wings,
Are fairy folk, in splendid masquerade
Disguised, as if of mortal folk afraid,
Keeping their joyous pranks a mystery still,
Lest glaring day should do their secrets ill.

John Clare

Invitation To Eternity

Say, wilt thou go with me, sweet maid,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through the valley-depths of shade,
Of bright and dark obscurity;
Where the path has lost its way,
Where the sun forgets the day,
Where there's nor light nor life to see,
Sweet maiden, wilt thou go with me?

Where stones will turn to flooding streams,
Where plains will rise like ocean's waves,
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And darkness darken into caves,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity
Where parents live and are forgot,
And sisters live and know us not?

Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be,
To live in death and be the same,
Without this life or home or name,
At once to be and not to be--
That was and is not--yet to see
Things pass like shadows, and the sky
Above, below, around us lie?

The land of shadows wilt thou trace,
Nor look nor know each other's face;
The present marred with reason gone,
And past and present both as one?
Say, maiden, can thy life be led
To join the living and the dead?
Then trace thy footsteps on with me:
We are wed to one eternity.

John Clare

Letter In Verse

Like boys that run behind the loaded wain
For the mere joy of riding back again,
When summer from the meadow carts the hay
And school hours leave them half a day to play;
So I with leisure on three sides a sheet
Of foolscap dance with poesy's measured feet,
Just to ride post upon the wings of time
And kill a care, to friendship turned in rhyme.
The muse's gallop hurries me in sport
With much to read and little to divert,
And I, amused, with less of wit than will,
Run till I tire.--And so to cheat her still.
Like children running races who shall be
First in to touch the orchard wall or tree,
The last half way behind, by distance vext,
Turns short, determined to be first the next;
So now the muse has run me hard and long--
I'll leave at once her races and her song;
And, turning round, laugh at the letter's close
And beat her out by ending it in prose.

John Clare

Little Trotty Wagtail

Little trotty wagtail he went in the rain,
And tittering, tottering sideways he neer got straight again,
He stooped to get a worm, and looked up to get a fly,
And then he flew away ere his feathers they were dry.

Little trotty wagtail, he waddled in the mud,
And left his little footmarks, trample where he would.
He waddled in the water-pudge, and waggle went his tail,
And chirrupt up his wings to dry upon the garden rail.

Little trotty wagtail, you nimble all about,
And in the dimpling water-pudge you waddle in and out;
Your home is nigh at hand, and in the warm pig-stye,
So, little Master Wagtail, I'll bid you a good-bye.

John Clare

Love

Love, though it is not chill and cold,
But burning like eternal fire,
Is yet not of approaches bold,
Which gay dramatic tastes admire.
Oh timid love, more fond than free,
In daring song is ill pourtrayed,
Where, as in war, the devotee
By valour wins each captive maid;--

Where hearts are prest to hearts in glee,
As they could tell each other's mind;
Where ruby lips are kissed as free,
As flowers are by the summer wind.
No! gentle love, that timid dream,
With hopes and fears at foil and play,
Works like a skiff against the stream,
And thinking most finds least to say.

It lives in blushes and in sighs,
In hopes for which no words are found;
Thoughts dare not speak but in the eyes,
The tongue is left without a sound.
The pert and forward things that dare
Their talk in every maiden's ear,
Feel no more than their shadows there--
Mere things of form, with nought of fear.

True passion, that so burns to plead,
Is timid as the dove's disguise;
Tis for the murder-aiming gleed
To dart at every thing that flies.
True love, it is no daring bird,
But like the little timid wren,
That in the new-leaved thorns of spring
Shrinks farther from the sight of men.

The idol of his musing mind,
The worship of his lonely hour,
Love woos her in the summer wind,
And tells her name to every flower;
But in her sight, no open word
Escapes, his fondness to declare;
The sighs by beauty's magic stirred
Are all that speak his passion there.

John Clare

Love Cannot Die

In crime and enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die,
Who say to us in slander's breath
That love belongs to sin and death.
From heaven it came on angel's wing
To bloom on earth, eternal spring;
In falsehood's enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die.

Twas born upon an angel's breast.
The softest dreams, the sweetest rest,
The brightest sun, the bluest sky,
Are love's own home and canopy.
The thought that cheers this heart of mine
Is that of love; love so divine
They sin who say in slander's breath
That love belongs to sin and death.

The sweetest voice that lips contain,
The sweetest thought that leaves the brain,
The sweetest feeling of the heart--
There's pleasure in its very smart.
The scent of rose and cinnamon
Is not like love remembered on;
In falsehood's enmity they lie
Who sin and tell us love can die.

John Clare

Love Lives Beyond The Tomb

Love lives beyond
The tomb, the earth, which fades like dew-
I love the fond,
The faithful, and the true.
Love lies in sleep,
The happiness of healthy dreams,
Eve's dews may weep,
But love delightful seems.
'Tis seen in flowers,
And in the even's pearly dew
On earth's green hours,
And in the heaven's eternal blue.

'Tis heard in spring
When light and sunbeams, warm and kind,
On angels wing
Bring love and music to the wind.
And where is voice
So young, so beautiful, so sweet
As nature's choice,
Where spring and lovers meet?
Love lies beyond
The tomb, the earth, the flowers, and dew.
I love the fond,
The faithful, young, and true.

John Clare

Market Day

With arms and legs at work and gentle stroke
That urges switching tail nor mends his pace,
On an old ribbed and weather beaten horse,
The farmer goes jogtrotting to the fair.
Both keep their pace that nothing can provoke
Followed by brindled dog that snuffs the ground
With urging bark and hurries at his heels.
His hat slouched down, and great coat buttoned close
Bellied like hooped keg, and chuffy face
Red as the morning sun, he takes his round
And talks of stock: and when his jobs are done
And Dobbin's hay is eaten from the rack,
He drinks success to corn in language hoarse,
And claps old Dobbin's hide, and potters back.

John Clare

Mary Bateman

My love she wears a cotton plaid,
A bonnet of the straw;
Her cheeks are leaves of roses spread,
Her lips are like the haw.
In truth she is as sweet a maid
As true love ever saw.

Her curls are ever in my eyes,
As nets by Cupid flung;
Her voice will oft my sleep surprise,
More sweet then ballad sung.
O Mary Bateman's curling hair!
I wake, and there is nothing there.

I wake, and fall asleep again,
The same delights in visions rise;
There's nothing can appear more plain
Than those rose cheeks and those bright eyes.
I wake again, and all alone
Sits Darkness on his ebon throne.

All silent runs the silver Trent,
The cobweb veils are all wet through,
A silver bead's on every bent,
On every leaf a bleb of dew.
I sighed, the moon it shone so clear;
Was Mary Bateman walking here?

John Clare

May

Come queen of months in company
Wi all thy merry minstrelsy
The restless cuckoo absent long
And twittering swallows chimney song
And hedge row crickets notes that run
From every bank that fronts the sun
And swathy bees about the grass
That stops wi every bloom they pass
And every minute every hour
Keep teazing weeds that wear a flower
And toil and childhoods humming joys
For there is music in the noise
The village childern mad for sport
In school times leisure ever short
That crick and catch the bouncing ball
And run along the church yard wall
Capt wi rude figured slabs whose claims
In times bad memory hath no names
Oft racing round the nookey church
Or calling ecchos in the porch
And jilting oer the weather cock
Viewing wi jealous eyes the clock
Oft leaping grave stones leaning hights
Uncheckt wi mellancholy sights
The green grass swelld in many a heap
Where kin and friends and parents sleep
Unthinking in their jovial cry
That time shall come when they shall lye
As lowly and as still as they
While other boys above them play
Heedless as they do now to know
The unconcious dust that lies below
The shepherd goes wi happy stride
Wi moms long shadow by his side
Down the dryd lanes neath blooming may
That once was over shoes in clay
While martins twitter neath his eves
Which he at early morning leaves
The driving boy beside his team
Will oer the may month beauty dream
And cock his hat and turn his eye
On flower and tree and deepning skye
And oft bursts loud in fits of song
And whistles as he reels along
Crack[ing] his whip in starts of joy
A happy dirty driving boy
The youth who leaves his corner stool
Betimes for neighbouring village school
While as a mark to urge him right
The church spires all the way in sight
Wi cheerings from his parents given
Starts neath the joyous smiles of heaven

And sawns wi many an idle stand
Wi bookbag swinging in his hand
And gazes as he passes bye
On every thing that meets his eye
Young lambs seem tempting him to play
Dancing and bleating in his way
Wi trembling tails and pointed ears
They follow him and loose their fears
He smiles upon their sunny faces
And feign woud join their happy races
The birds that sing on bush and tree
Seem chirping for his company
And all in fancys idle whim
Seem keeping holiday but him
He lolls upon each resting stile
To see the fields so sweetly smile
To see the wheat grow green and long
And list the weeders toiling song
Or short not[e] of the changing thrush
Above him in the white thorn bush
That oer the leaning stile bends low
Loaded wi mockery of snow
Mozzld wi many a lushing thread
Of crab tree blossoms delicate red
He often bends wi many a wish
Oer the brig rail to view the fish
Go sturting by in sunny gleams
And chucks in the eye dazzld streams
Crumbs from his pocket oft to watch
The swarming struttle come to catch
Them where they to the bottom sile
Sighing in fancys joy the while
Hes cautiond not to stand so nigh
By rosey milkmaid tripping bye
Where he admires wi fond delight
And longs to be there mute till night
He often ventures thro the day
At truant now and then to play
Rambling about the field and plain
Seeking larks nests in the grain
And picking flowers and boughs of may
To hurd awhile and throw away
Lurking neath bushes from the sight
Of tell tale eyes till schools noon night
Listing each hour for church clocks hum
To know the hour to wander home
That parents may not think him long
Nor dream of his rude doing wrong
Dreading thro the night wi dreaming pain
To meet his masters wand again
Each hedge is loaded thick wi green
And where the hedger late hath been

Tender shoots begin to grow
From the mossy stumps below
While sheep and cow that teaze the grain
will nip them to the root again
They lay their bill and mittens bye
And on to other labours hie
While wood men still on spring intrudes
And thins the shadow solitudes
Wi sharpend axes felling down
The oak trees budding into brown
Where as they crash upon the ground
A crowd of labourers gather round
And mix among the shadows dark
To rip the crackling staining bark
From off the tree and lay when done
The rolls in lares to meet the sun
Depriving yearly where they come
The green wood pecker of its home
That early in the spring began
Far from the sight of troubling man
And bord their round holes in each tree
In fancys sweet security
Till startld wi the woodmans noise
It wakes from all its dreaming joys
The blue bells too that thickly bloom
Where man was never feared to come
And smell smocks that from view retires
Mong rustling leaves and bowing briars
And stooping lilys of the valley
That comes wi shades and dews to dally
White beady drops on slender threads
Wi broad hood leaves above their heads
Like white robd maids in summer hours
Neath umberellas shunning showers
These neath the barkmens crushing treads
Oft perish in their blooming beds
Thus stript of boughs and bark in white
Their trunks shine in the mellow light
Beneath the green surviving trees
That wave above them in the breeze
And waking whispers slowly bends
As if they mournd their fallen friends
Each morning now the weeders meet
To cut the thistle from the wheat
And ruin in the sunny hours
Full many wild weeds of their flowers
Corn poppys that in crimson dwell
Calld 'head achs' from their sickly smell
And carlock yellow as the sun
That oer the may fields thickly run
And 'iron weed' content to share
The meanest spot that spring can spare

Een roads where danger hourly comes
Is not wi out its purple blooms
And leaves wi points like thistles round
Thickset that have no strength to wound
That shrink to childhoods eager hold
Like hair-and with its eye of gold
And scarlet starry points of flowers
Pimpernel dreading nights and showers
Oft calld 'the shepherds weather glass'
That sleep till suns have dyd the grass
Then wakes and spreads its creeping bloom
Till clouds or threatning shadows come
Then close it shuts to sleep again
Which weeders see and talk of rain
And boys that mark them shut so soon
will call them 'John go bed at noon
And fumitory too a name
That superstition holds to fame
Whose red and purple mottled flowers
Are cropt by maids in weeding hours
To boil in water milk and way1
For washes on an holiday
To make their beauty fair and sleak
And scour the tan from summers cheek
And simple small forget me not
Eyd wi a pinshead yellow spot
I'th'2 middle of its tender blue
That gains from poets notice due
These flowers the toil by crowds destroys
And robs them of their lowly joys
That met the may wi hopes as sweet
As those her suns in gardens meet
And oft the dame will feel inclind
As childhoods memory comes to mind
To turn her hook away and spare
The blooms it lovd to gather there
My wild field catalogue of flowers
Grows in my ryhmes as thick as showers
Tedious and long as they may be
To some, they never weary me
The wood and mead and field of grain
I coud hunt oer and oer again
And talk to every blossom wild
Fond as a parent to a child
And cull them in my childish joy
By swarms and swarms and never cloy
When their lank shades oer morning pearls
Shrink from their lengths to little girls
And like the clock hand pointing one
Is turnd and tells the morning gone
They leave their toils for dinners hour
Beneath some hedges bramble bower

And season sweet their savory meals
Wi joke and tale and merry peals
Of ancient tunes from happy tongues
While linnets join their fitful songs
Perchd oer their heads in frolic play
Among the tufts of motling may
The young girls whisper things of love
And from the old dames hearing move
Oft making 'love knotts' in the shade
Of blue green oat or wheaten blade
And trying simple charms and spells
That rural superstition tells
They pull the little blossom threads
From out the knapweeds button heads
And put the husk wi many a smile
In their white bosoms for awhile
Who if they guess aright the swain
That loves sweet fancys trys to gain
Tis said that ere its lain an hour
Twill blossom wi a second flower
And from her white breasts hankerchief
Bloom as they ne'er had lost a leaf
When signs appear that token wet
As they are neath the bushes met
The girls are glad wi hopes of play
And harping of the holiday
A hugh blue bird will often swim
Along the wheat when skys grow dim
Wi clouds-slow as the gales of spring
In motion wi dark shadowd wing
Beneath the coming storm it sails
And lonly chirps the wheat hid quails
That came to live wi spring again
And start when summer browns the grain
They start the young girls joys afloat
Wi 'wet my foot' its yearly note
So fancy doth the sound explain
And proves it oft a sign of rain
About the moor 'mong sheep and cow
The boy or old man wanders now
Hunting all day wi hopful pace
Each thick sown rushy thistly place
For plover eggs while oer them flye
The fearful birds wi teazing cry
Trying to lead their steps astray
And coying him another way
And be the weather chill or warm
Wi brown hats truckd beneath his arm
Holding each prize their search has won
They plod bare headed to the sun
Now dames oft bustle from their wheels
Wi childern scampering at their heels

To watch the bees that hang and swive
In clumps about each thronging hive
And flit and thicken in the light
While the old dame enjoys the sight
And raps the while their warming pans
A spell that superstition plans
To coax them in the garden bounds
As if they lovd the tinkling sounds
And oft one hears the dinning noise
Which dames believe each swarm decoys
Around each village day by day
Mingling in the warmth of may
Sweet scented herbs her skill contrives
To rub the bramble platted hives
Fennels thread leaves and crimpld balm
To scent the new house of the swarm
The thresher dull as winter days
And lost to all that spring displays
Still mid his barn dust forcd to stand
Swings his frail round wi weary hand
While oer his head shades thickly creep
And hides the blinking owl asleep
And bats in cobweb corners bred
Sharing till night their murky bed
The sunshine trickles on the floor
Thro every crevice of the door
And makes his barn where shadows dwell
As irksome as a prisoners cell
And as he seeks his daily meal
As schoolboys from their tasks will steal
ile often stands in fond delay
To see the daisy in his way
And wild weeds flowering on the wall
That will his childish sports recall
Of all the joys that came wi spring
The twirling top the marble ring
The gingling halfpence hussld up
At pitch and toss the eager stoop
To pick up heads, the smuggeld plays
Neath hovels upon sabbath days
When parson he is safe from view
And clerk sings amen in his pew
The sitting down when school was oer
Upon the threshold by his door
Picking from mallows sport to please
Each crumpld seed he calld a cheese
And hunting from the stackyard sod
The stinking hen banes belted pod
By youths vain fancys sweetly fed
Christning them his loaves of bread
He sees while rocking down the street
Wi weary hands and crimpling feet

Young childern at the self same games
And hears the self same simple names
Still floating on each happy tongue
Touchd wi the simple scene so strong
Tears almost start and many a sigh
Regrets the happiness gone bye
And in sweet natures holiday
His heart is sad while all is gay
How lovly now are lanes and balks
For toils and lovers sunday walks
The daisey and the buttercup
For which the laughing childern stoop
A hundred times throughout the day
In their rude ramping summer play
So thickly now the pasture crowds
In gold and silver sheeted clouds
As if the drops in april showers
Had woo'd the sun and swoond to flowers
The brook resumes its summer dresses
Purling neath grass and water cresses
And mint and flag leaf swording high
Their blooms to the unheeding eye
And taper bowbent hanging rushes
And horse tail childerns bottle brushes
And summer tracks about its brink
Is fresh again where cattle drink
And on its sunny bank the swain
Stretches his idle length again
Soon as the sun forgets the day
The moon looks down on the lovly may
And the little star his friend and guide
Travelling together side by side
And the seven stars and charleses wain1
Hangs smiling oer green woods agen
The heaven rekindles all alive
Wi light the may bees round the hive
Swarm not so thick in mornings eye
As stars do in the evening skye
All all are nestling in their joys
The flowers and birds and pasture boys
The firetail, long a stranger, comes
To his last summer haunts and homes
To hollow tree and crevisd wall
And in the grass the rails odd call
That featherd spirit stops the swain
To listen to his note again
And school boy still in vain retraces
The secrets of his hiding places
In the black thorns crowded cops~e1
Thro its varied turns and stops
The nightingale its ditty weaves
Hid in a multitude of leaves

The boy stops short to hear the strain
And 'sweet jug jug' he mocks again
The yellow hammer builds its nest
By banks where sun beams earliest rest
That drys the dews from off the grass
Shading it from all that pass
Save the rude boy wi ferret gaze
That hunts thro evry secret maze
He finds its pencild eggs agen
All streakd wi lines as if a pen
By natures freakish hand was took
To scrawl them over like a book
And from these many mozzling marks
The school boy names them 'writing larks'
Bum barrels twit on bush and tree
Scarse bigger then a bumble bee
And in a white thorns leafy rest
It builds its curious pudding-nest
Wi hole beside as if a mouse
Had built the little barrel house
Toiling full many a lining feather
And bits of grey tree moss together
Amid the noisey rooky park
Beneath the firdales branches dark
The little golden crested wren
Hangs up his glowing nest agen
And sticks it to the furry leaves
As martins theirs beneath the eaves
The old hens leave the roost betimes
And oer the garden pailing climbs
To scrat the gardens fresh turnd soil
And if unwatchd his crops to spoil
Oft cackling from the prison yard
To peck about the houseclose sward
Catching at butterflys and things
Ere they have time to try their wings
The cattle feels the breath of may
And kick and toss their heads in play
The ass beneath his bags of sand
Oft jerks the string from leaders hand
And on the road will eager stoop
To pick the sprouting thistle up
Oft answering on his weary way
Some distant neighbours sobbing bray
Dining the ears of driving boy
As if he felt a fit of joy
Wi in its pinfold circle left
Of all its company bereft
Starvd stock no longer noising round
Lone in the nooks of foddering ground
Each skeleton of lingering stack
By winters tempests beaten black

Nodds upon props or bolt upright
Stands swarthy in the summer light
And oer the green grass seems to lower
Like stump of old time wasted tower
All that in winter lookd for hay
Spread from their batterd haunts away
To pick the grass or lye at lare
Beneath the mild hedge shadows there
Sweet month that gives a welcome call
To toil and nature and to all
Yet one day mid thy many joys
Is dead to all its sport and noise
Old may day where's thy glorys gone
All fled and left thee every one
Thou comst to thy old haunts and homes
Unnoticd as a stranger comes
No flowers are pluckt to hail the now
Nor cotter seeks a single bough
The maids no more on thy sweet morn
Awake their thresholds to adorn
Wi dewey flowers-May locks new come
And princifeathers cluttering bloom
And blue bells from the woodland moss
And cowslip cucking balls to toss
Above the garlands swinging hight
Hang in the soft eves sober light
These maid and child did yearly pull
By many a folded apron full
But all is past the merry song
Of maidens hurrying along
To crown at eve the earliest cow
Is gone and dead and silent now
The laugh raisd at the mocking thorn
Tyd to the cows tail last that morn
The kerchief at arms length displayd
Held up by pairs of swain and maid
While others bolted underneath
Bawling loud wi panting breath
'Duck under water' as they ran
Alls ended as they ne'er began
While the new thing that took thy place
Wears faded smiles upon its face
And where enclosure has its birth
It spreads a mildew oer her mirth
The herd no longer one by one
Goes plodding on her morning way
And garlands lost and sports nigh gone
Leaves her like thee a common day
Yet summer smiles upon thee still
Wi natures sweet unalterd will
And at thy births unworshipd hours
Fills her green lap wi swarms of flowers

To crown thee still as thou hast been
Of spring and summer months the queen.

John Clare

Meet Me in the Green Glen

Love, meet me in the green glen,
Beside the tall elm-tree,
Where the sweetbriar smells so sweet agen;
There come with me.
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me at the sunset
Down in the green glen,
Where we've often met
By hawthorn-tree and foxes' den,
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me in the green glen,
By sweetbriar bushes there;
Meet me by your own sen,
Where the wild thyme blossoms fair.
Meet me in the green glen.

Meet me by the sweetbriar,
By the mole-hill swelling there;
When the west glows like a fire
God's crimson bed is there.
Meet me in the green glen.

John Clare

Merry Maid

Bonny and stout and brown, without a hat,
She frowns offended when they call her fat--
Yet fat she is, the merriest in the place,
And all can know she wears a pretty face.
But still she never heeds what praise can say,
But does the work, and oft runs out to play,
To run about the yard and ramp and noise
And spring the mop upon the servant boys.
When old hens noise and cackle every where
She hurries eager if the eggs are dear,
And runs to seek them when they lay away
To get them ready for the market day.
She gambols with the men and laughs aloud
And only quarrels when they call her proud.

John Clare

Nature's Hymn to the Deity

All nature owns with one accord
The great and universal Lord:
The sun proclaims him through the day,
The moon when daylight drops away,
The very darkness smiles to wear
The stars that show us God is there,
On moonlight seas soft gleams the sky
And 'God is with us' waves reply.

Winds breathe from God's abode 'we come,'
Storms louder own God is their home,
And thunder yet with louder call,
Sounds 'God is mightiest over all';
Till earth right loath the proof to miss
Echoes triumphantly 'He is,'
And air and ocean makes reply,
God reigns on earth, in air and sky.

All nature owns with one accord
The great and universal Lord:
Insect and bird and tree and flower--
The witnesses of every hour--
Are pregnant with his prophesy
And 'God is with us' all reply.
The first link in the mighty plan
Is still--and all upbraideth man.

John Clare

Night Wind

Darkness like midnight from the sobbing woods
Clamours with dismal tidings of the rain
Roaring as rivers breaking loose in floods
To spread and foam and deluge all the plain
The cotter listens at his door again
Half doubting whether it be floods or wind
And through the thickening darkness looks affraid
Thinking of roads that travel has to find
Through night's black depths in danger's garb arrayed
And the loud glabber round the flaze soon stops
When hushed to silence by a lifted hand
Of fearing dame who hears the noise in dread
And thinks a deluge comes to drown the land
Nor dares she go to bed untill the tempest drops

John Clare

Nobody Cometh To Woo

On Martinmas eve the dogs did bark,
And I opened the window to see,
When every maiden went by with her spark
But neer a one came to me.
And O dear what will become of me?
And O dear what shall I do,
When nobody whispers to marry me--
Nobody cometh to woo?

None's born for such troubles as I be:
If the sun wakens first in the morn
'Lazy hussy' my parents both call me,
And I must abide by their scorn,
For nobody cometh to marry me,
Nobody cometh to woo,
So here in distress must I tarry me--
What can a poor maiden do?

If I sigh through the window when Jerry
The ploughman goes by, I grow bold;
And if I'm disposed to be merry,
My parents do nothing but scold;
And Jerry the clown, and no other,
Eer cometh to marry or woo;
They think me the moral of mother
And judge me a terrible shrew.

For mother she hateth all fellows,
And spinning's my father's desire,
While the old cat growls bass with the bellows
If eer I hitch up to the fire.
I make the whole house out of humour,
I wish nothing else but to please,
Would fortune but bring a new comer
To marry, and make me at ease!

When I've nothing my leisure to hinder
I scarce get as far as the eaves;
Her head's instant out of the window
Calling out like a press after thieves.
The young men all fall to remarking,
And laugh till they're weary to see't,
While the dogs at the noise begin barking,
And I slink in with shame from the street.

My mother's aye jealous of loving,
My father's aye jealous of play,
So what with them both there's no moving,
I'm in durance for life and a day.
O who shall I get for to marry me?
Who will have pity to woo?
Tis death any longer to tarry me,

And what shall a poor maiden do?

John Clare

November

The landscape sleeps in mist from morn till noon;
And, if the sun looks through, 'tis with a face
Beamless and pale and round, as if the moon,
When done the journey of her nightly race,
Had found him sleeping, and supplied his place.
For days the shepherds in the fields may be,
Nor mark a patch of sky - blindfold they trace,
The plains, that seem without a bush or tree,
Whistling aloud by guess, to flocks they cannot see.

The timid hare seems half its fears to lose,
Crouching and sleeping 'neath its grassy lair,
And scarcely startles, tho' the shepherd goes
Close by its home, and dogs are barking there;
The wild colt only turns around to stare
At passer by, then knaps his hide again;
And moody crows beside the road forbear
To fly, tho' pelted by the passing swain;
Thus day seems turn'd to night, and tries to wake in vain.

The owlet leaves her hiding-place at noon,
And flaps her grey wings in the doubling light;
The hoarse jay screams to see her out so soon,
And small birds chirp and startle with affright;
Much doth it scare the superstitious wight,
Who dreams of sorry luck, and sore dismay;
While cow-boys think the day a dream of night,
And oft grow fearful on their lonely way,
Fancying that ghosts may wake, and leave their graves by day.

Yet but awhile the slumbering weather flings
Its murky prison round - then winds wake loud;
With sudden stir the startled forest sings
Winter's returning song - cloud races cloud,
And the horizon throws away its shroud,
Sweeping a stretching circle from the eye;
Storms upon storms in quick succession crowd,
And o'er the sameness of the purple sky
Heaven paints, with hurried hand, wild hues of every dye.

At length it comes along the forest oaks,
With sobbing ebbs, and uproar gathering high;
The scared, hoarse raven on its cradle croaks,
And stockdove-flocks in hurried terrors fly,
While the blue hawk hangs o'er them in the sky.-
The hedger hastens from the storm begun,
To seek a shelter that may keep him dry;
And foresters low bent, the wind to shun,
Scarce hear amid the strife the poacher's muttering gun.

The ploughman hears its humming rage begin,
And hies for shelter from his naked toil;

Buttoning his doublet closer to his chin,
He bends and scampers o'er the elting soil,
While clouds above him in wild fury boil,
And winds drive heavily the beating rain;
He turns his back to catch his breath awhile,
Then ekes his speed and faces it again,
To seek the shepherd's hut beside the rushy plain.

The boy, that scareth from the spiry wheat
The melancholy crow - in hurry weaves,
Beneath an ivied tree, his sheltering seat,
Of rushy flags and sedges tied in sheaves,
Or from the field a shock of stubble thieves.
There he doth dithering sit, and entertain
His eyes with marking the storm-driven leaves;
Oft spying nests where he spring eggs had ta'en,
And wishing in his heart 'twas summer-time again.

Thus wears the month along, in checker'd moods,
Sunshine and shadows, tempests loud, and calms;
One hour dies silent o'er the sleepy woods,
The next wakes loud with unexpected storms;
A dreary nakedness the field deforms -
Yet many a rural sound, and rural sight,
Lives in the village still about the farms,
Where toil's rude uproar hums from morn till night
Noises, in which the ears of Industry delight.

At length the stir of rural labour's still,
And Industry her care awhile forgoes;
When Winter comes in earnest to fulfil
His yearly task, at bleak November's close,
And stops the plough, and hides the field in snows;
When frost locks up the stream in chill delay,
And mellows on the hedge the jetty sloes,
For little birds - then Toil hath time for play,
And nought but threshers' flails awake the dreary day.

John Clare

Now Is Past

Now is past--the happy _now_
When we together roved
Beneath the wildwood's oak-tree bough
And Nature said we loved.
Winter's blast
The _now_ since then has crept between,
And left us both apart.
Winters that withered all the green
Have froze the beating heart.
Now is past.

Now is past since last we met
Beneath the hazel bough;
Before the evening sun was set
Her shadow stretched below.
Autumn's blast
Has stained and blighted every bough;
Wild strawberries like her lips
Have left the mosses green below,
Her bloom's upon the hips.
Now is past.

Now is past, is changed agen,
The woods and fields are painted new.
Wild strawberries which both gathered then,
None know now where they grew.
The skys oercast.
Wood strawberries faded from wood sides,
Green leaves have all turned yellow;
No Adelaide walks the wood rides,
True love has no bed-fellow.
Now is past.

John Clare

Patty of the Vale

'A weedling child on lonely lea
My evening rambles chanced to see;
And much the weedling tempted me
To crop its tender flower;

Exposed to wind and heavy rain,
It's head bow'd lowly on the plain;
Hand silently it seem'd in pain
Of life's endanger'd hour.

And and wilt thou bid my bloom decay,
And crop my flower, and me betray,
And cast my injured sweets away?-
Its silence seemly sigh'd

'A moment's idol of thy mind!
And is a stranger so unkind
to leave the shameful root behind,
Bereft of all its pride?'

And so it seemly did complain;
And beating fell the heavy rain;
And low it droop'd upon the plain,
To fate resign'd to fall:

My heart did melt at its decline,
And ' Come,' said I, ' thou gem divine,
My fate shall stand the storm with thine;'
So took the root and all.'

John Clare

Peggy

Peggy said good morning and I said good bye,
When farmers dib the corn and laddies sow the rye.
Young Peggy's face was common sense and I was rather shy
When I met her in the morning when the farmers sow the rye.

Her half laced boots fit tightly as she tripped along the grass,
And she set her foot so lightly where the early bee doth pass.
Oh Peggy was a young thing, her face was common sense,
I courted her about the spring and loved her ever thence.

Oh Peggy was the young thing and bonny as to size;
Her lips were cherries of the spring and hazel were her eyes.
Oh Peggy she was straight and tall as is the poplar tree,
Smooth as the freestone of the wall, and very dear to me.

Oh Peggy's gown was chocolate and full of cherries white;
I keep a bit on't for her sake and love her day and night.
I drest myself just like a prince and Peggy went to woo,
But she's been gone some ten years since, and I know not what to do.

John Clare

Peggy's The Lady Of The Hall

And will she leave the lowly clowns
For silk and satins gay,
Her woollen aprons and drab gowns
For lady's cold array?
And will she leave the wild hedge rose,
The redbreast and the wren,
And will she leave her Sunday beaus
And milk shed in the glen?
And will she leave her kind friends all
To be the Lady of the Hall?

The cowslips bowed their golden drops,
The white thorn white as sheets;
The lamb agen the old ewe stops,
The wren and robin tweets.
And Peggy took her milk pails still,
And sang her evening song,
To milk her cows on Cowslip Hill
For half the summer long.
But silk and satins rich and rare
Are doomed for Peggy still to wear.

But when the May had turned to haws,
The hedge rose swelled to hips,
Peggy was missed without a cause,
And left us in eclipse.
The shepherd in the hovel milks,
Where builds the little wren,
And Peggy's gone, all clad in silks--
Far from the happy glen,
From dog-rose, woodbine, clover, all
To be the Lady of the Hall.

John Clare

Pleasures Of Fancy

A path, old tree, goes by thee crooking on,
And through this little gate that claps and bangs
Against thy rifted trunk, what steps hath gone?
Though but a lonely way, yet mystery hangs
Oer crowds of pastoral scenes recordless here.
The boy might climb the nest in thy young boughs
That's slept half an eternity; in fear
The herdsman may have left his startled cows
For shelter when heaven's thunder voice was near;
Here too the woodman on his wallet laid
For pillow may have slept an hour away;
And poet pastoral, lover of the shade,
Here sat and mused half some long summer day
While some old shepherd listened to the lay.

John Clare

Ploughman Singing

Here morning in the ploughman's songs is met
Ere yet one footstep shows in all the sky,
And twilight in the east, a doubt as yet,
Shows not her sleeve of grey to know her bye.
Woke early, I arose and thought that first
In winter time of all the world was I.
The old owls might have hallooed if they durst,
But joy just then was up and whistled bye
A merry tune which I had known full long,
But could not to my memory wake it back,
Until the ploughman changed it to the song.
O happiness, how simple is thy track.
--Tinged like the willow shoots, the east's young brow
Glows red and finds thee singing at the plough.

John Clare

Quail's Nest

I wandered out one rainy day
And heard a bird with merry joys
Cry 'wet my foot' for half the way;
I stood and wondered at the noise,

When from my foot a bird did flee--
The rain flew bouncing from her breast
I wondered what the bird could be,
And almost trampled on her nest.

The nest was full of eggs and round--
I met a shepherd in the vales,
And stood to tell him what I found.
He knew and said it was a quail's,

For he himself the nest had found,
Among the wheat and on the green,
When going on his daily round,
With eggs as many as fifteen.

Among the stranger birds they feed,
Their summer flight is short and low;
There's very few know where they breed,
And scarcely any where they go.

John Clare

Remembrances

Summer pleasures they are gone like to visions every one
And the cloudy days of autumn and of winter cometh on
I tried to call them back but unbidden they are gone
Far away from heart and eye and for ever far away
Dear heart and can it be that such raptures meet decay
I thought them all eternal when by Langley Bush I lay
I thought them joys eternal when I used to shout and play
On its bank at 'clink and bandy' 'chock' and 'taw' and ducking stone
Where silence sitteth now on the wild heath as her own
Like a ruin of the past all alone

When I used to lie and sing by old eastwells boiling spring
When I used to tie the willow boughs together for a 'swing'
And fish with crooked pins and thread and never catch a thing
With heart just like a feather- now as heavy as a stone
When beneath old lea close oak I the bottom branches broke
To make our harvest cart like so many working folk
And then to cut a straw at the brook to have a soak
O I never dreamed of parting or that trouble had a sting
Or that pleasures like a flock of birds would ever take to wing
Leaving nothing but a little naked spring

When jumping time away on old cross berry way
And eating awes like sugar plumbs ere they had lost the may
And skipping like a leveret before the peep of day
On the rolly polly up and downs of pleasant swordy well
When in round oaks narrow lane as the south got black again
We sought the hollow ash that was shelter from the rain
With our pockets full of peas we had stolen from the grain
How delicious was the dinner time on such a showry day
O words are poor receipts for what time hath stole away
The ancient pulpit trees and the play

When for school oer 'little field' with its brook and wooden brig
Where I swaggered like a man though I was not half so big
While I held my little plough though twas but a willow twig
And drove my team along made of nothing but a name
'Gee hep' and 'hoit' and 'woi'- O I never call to mind
These pleasant names of places but I leave a sigh behind
While I see the little mouldywharps hang sweeing to the wind
On the only aged willow that in all the field remains
And nature hides her face where theyre sweeing in their chains
And in a silent murmuring complains

Here was commons for the hills where they seek for
freedom still
Though every commons gone and though traps are set to kill
The little homeless miners- O it turns my bosom chill
When I think of old 'sneap green' puddocks nook and hilly
snow
Where bramble bushes grew and the daisy gemmed in dew
And the hills of silken grass like to cushions to the view
When we threw the pissmire crumbs when we's nothing
else to do
All leveled like a desert by the never weary plough
All vanished like the sun where that cloud is passing now
All settled here for ever on its brow

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

By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill
On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange and chill
And spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will
To the axe of the spoiler and self interest fell a prey
And cross berry way and old round oaks narrow lane
With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again
Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
And hung the moles for traitors - though the brook is
running still
It runs a naked brook cold and chill

O had I known as then joy had left the paths of men
I had watched her night and day besure and never slept agen
And when she turned to go O I'd caught her mantle then
And wooed her like a lover by my lonely side to stay
Aye knelt and worshipped on as love in beautys bower
And clung upon her smiles as a bee upon her flower
And gave her heart my poesys all cropt in a sunny hour
As keepsakes and pledges to fade away

But love never heeded to treasure up the may
So it went the comon road with decay.

John Clare

Rural Morning

Soon as the twilight through the distant mist
In silver hemmings skirts the purple east,
Ere yet the sun unveils his smiles to view
And dries the morning's chilly robes of dew,
Young Hodge the horse-boy, with a soodly gait,
Slow climbs the stile, or opes the creaky gate,
With willow switch and halter by his side
Prepared for Dobbin, whom he means to ride;
The only tune he knows still whistling oer,
And humming scraps his father sung before,
As 'Wantley Dragon,' and the 'Magic Rose,'
The whole of music that his village knows,
Which wild remembrance, in each little town,
From mouth to mouth through ages handles down.
Onward he jolls, nor can the minstrel-throngs
Entice him once to listen to their songs;
Nor marks he once a blossom on his way;
A senseless lump of animated clay--
With weather-beaten hat of rusty brown,
Stranger to brinks, and often to a crown;
With slop-frock suiting to the ploughman's taste,
Its greasy skirtings twisted round his waist;
And hardened high-lows clenched with nails around,
Clamping defiance oer the stoney ground,
The deadly foes to many a blossomed sprout
That luckless meets him in his morning's rout.
In hobbling speed he roams the pasture round,
Till hunted Dobbin and the rest are found;
Where some, from frequent meddlings of his whip,
Well know their foe, and often try to slip;
While Dobbin, tamed by age and labour, stands
To meet all trouble from his brutish hands,
And patient goes to gate or knowly brake,
The teasing burden of his foe to take;
Who, soon as mounted, with his switching weals,
Puts Dob's best swiftness in his heavy heels,
The toltering bustle of a blundering trot
Which whips and cudgels neer increased a jot,
Though better speed was urged by the clown--
And thus he snorts and jostles to the town.

And now, when toil and summer's in its prime,
In every vill, at morning's earliest time,
To early-risers many a Hodge is seen,
And many a Dob's heard clattering oer the green.

Now straying beams from day's unclosing eye
In copper-coloured patches flush the sky,
And from night's prison strugglingly encroach,
To bring the summons of warm day's approach,
Till, slowly mounting oer the ridge of clouds
That yet half shows his face, and half enshrouds,

The unfettered sun takes his unbounded reign
And wakes all life to noise and toil again:
And while his opening mellows oer the scenes
Of wood and field their many mingling greens,
Industry's bustling din once more devours
The soothing peace of morning's early hours:
The grunt of hogs freed from their nightly dens
And constant cacklings of new-laying hens,
And ducks and geese that clamorous joys repeat
The splashing comforts of the pond to meet,
And chirping sparrows dropping from the eaves
For offal kernels that the poultry leaves,
Oft signal-calls of danger chittering high
At skulking cats and dogs approaching nigh.
And lowing steers that hollow echoes wake
Around the yard, their nightly fast to break,
As from each barn the lumping flail rebounds
In mingling concert with the rural sounds;
While oer the distant fields more faintly creep
The murmuring bleatings of unfolding sheep,
And ploughman's callings that more hoarse proceed
Where industry still urges labour's speed,
The bellowing of cows with udders full
That wait the welcome halloo of 'come mull,'
And rumbling waggons deafening again,
Rousing the dust along the narrow lane,
And cracking whips, and shepherd's hooting cries,
From woodland echoes urging sharp replies.
Hodge, in his waggon, marks the wondrous tongue,
And talks with echo as he drives along;
Still cracks his whip, bawls every horse's name,
And echo still as ready bawls the same:
The puzzling mystery he would gladly cheat,
And fain would utter what it can't repeat,
Till speedless trials prove the doubted elf
As skilled in noise and sounds as Hodge himself;
And, quite convinced with the proofs it gives,
The boy drives on and fancies echo lives,
Like some wood-fiend that frights benighted men,
The troubling spirit of a robber's den.

And now the blossom of the village view,
With airy hat of straw, and apron blue,
And short-sleeved gown, that half to guess reveals
By fine-turned arms what beauty it conceals;
Whose cheeks health flushes with as sweet a red
As that which stripes the woodbine oer her head;
Deeply she blushes on her morn's employ,
To prove the fondness of some passing boy,
Who, with a smile that thrills her soul to view,
Holds the gate open till she passes through,
While turning nods beck thanks for kindness done,

And looks--if looks could speak-proclaim her won.
With well-scoured buckets on proceeds the maid,
And drives her cows to milk beneath the shade,
Where scarce a sunbeam to molest her steals--
Sweet as the thyme that blossoms where she kneels;
And there oft scares the cooing amorous dove
With her own favoured melodies of love.
Snugly retired in yet dew-laden bowers,
This sweetest specimen of rural flowers
Displays, red glowing in the morning wind,
The powers of health and nature when combined.

Last on the road the cowboy careless swings,
Leading tamed cattle in their tending strings,
With shining tin to keep his dinner warm
Swung at his back, or tucked beneath his arm;
Whose sun-burnt skin, and cheeks chuffed out with fat,
Are dyed as rusty as his napless hat.
And others, driving loose their herds at will,
Are now heard whooping up the pasture-hill;
Peeled sticks they bear of hazel or of ash,
The rib-marked hides of restless cows to thrash.
In sloven garb appears each bawling boy,
As fit and suiting to his rude employ;
His shoes, worn down by many blundering treads,
Oft show the tenants needing safer sheds:
The pithy bunch of unripe nuts to seek,
And crabs sun-reddened with a tempting cheek,
From pasture hedges, daily puts to rack
His tattered clothes, that scarcely screen the back,--
Daubed all about as if besmeared with blood,
Stained with the berries of the brambly wood
That stud the straggling briars as black as jet,
Which, when his cattle lair, he runs to get;
Or smaller kinds, as if beglossed with dew
Shining dim-powdered with a downy blue,
That on weak tendrils lowly creeping grow
Where, choaked in flags and sedges, wandering slow,
The brook purls simmering its declining tide
Down the crooked boundings of the pasture-side.
There they to hunt the luscious fruit delight,
And dabbling keep within their charges' sight;
Oft catching prickly struttles on their rout,
And miller-thumbs and gudgeons driving out,
Hid near the arched brig under many a stone
That from its wall rude passing clowns have thrown.
And while in peace cows eat, and chew their cuds,
Moozing cool sheltered neath the skirting woods,
To double uses they the hours convert,
Turning the toils of labour into sport;
Till morn's long streaking shadows lose their tails,
And cooling winds swoon into faultering gales;

And searching sunbeams warm and sultry creep,
Waking the teazing insects from their sleep;
And dreaded gadflies with their drowsy hum
On the burnt wings of mid-day zephyrs come,--
Urging each lown to leave his sports in fear,
To stop his starting cows that dread the fly;
Droning unwelcome tidings on his ear,
That the sweet peace of rural morn's gone by.

John Clare

Scandal

She hastens out and scarcely pins her clothes
To hear the news and tell the news she knows;
She talks of sluts, marks each unmended gown,
Her self the dirtiest slut in all the town.
She stands with eager haste at slander's tale,
And drinks the news as drunkards drink their ale.
Excuse is ready at the biggest lie--
She only heard it and it passes bye.
The very cat looks up and knows her face
And hastens to the chair to get the place;
When once set down she never goes away,
Till tales are done and talk has nought to say.
She goes from house to house the village oer,
Her slander bothers everybody's door.

John Clare

Schoolboys in Winter

The schoolboys still their morning ramble take
To neighboring village school with playing speed,
Loitering with passtime's leisure till they quake,
Oft looking up the wild-geese droves to heed,
Watching the letters which their journeys make;
Or plucking haws on which their fieldfares feed,
And hips and sloes; and on each shallow lake
Making glib slides, where they like shadows go
Till some fresh passtimes in their minds awake.
Then off they start anew and hasty blow
Their numbed and clumpsing fingers till they glow;
Then races with their shadows wildly run
That stride huge giants o'er the shining snow
In the pale splendour of the winter sun.

John Clare

Secret Love

I hid my love when young till I
Couldn't bear the buzzing of a fly;
I hid my love to my despite
Till I could not bear to look at light:
I dare not gaze upon her face
But left her memory in each place;
Where eer I saw a wild flower lie
I kissed and bade my love good bye.

I met her in the greenest dells
Where dewdrops pearl the wood blue bells
The lost breeze kissed her bright blue eye,
The bee kissed and went singing by,
A sunbeam found a passage there,
A gold chain round her neck so fair;
As secret as the wild bee's song
She lay there all the summer long.

I hid my love in field and town
Till een the breeze would knock me down,
The bees seemed singing ballads oer,
The fly's bass turned a lion's roar;
And even silence found a tongue,
To haunt me all the summer long;
The riddle nature could not prove
Was nothing else but secret love.

John Clare

Signs Of Winter

The cat runs races with her tail. The dog
Leaps oer the orchard hedge and knarls the grass.
The swine run round and grunt and play with straw,
Snatching out hasty mouthfuls from the stack.
Sudden upon the elmtree tops the crow
Unceremonious visit pays and croaks,
Then swops away. From mossy barn the owl
Bobs hasty out--wheels round and, scared as soon,
As hastily retires. The ducks grow wild
And from the muddy pond fly up and wheel
A circle round the village and soon, tired,
Plunge in the pond again. The maids in haste
Snatch from the orchard hedge the mizzled clothes
And laughing hurry in to keep them dry.

John Clare

Snow Storm

What a night! The wind howls, hisses, and but stops
To howl more loud, while the snow volley keeps
Incessant batter at the window pane,
Making our comfort feel as sweet again;
And in the morning, when the tempest drops,
At every cottage door mountainous heaps
Of snow lie drifted, that all entrance stops
Untill the beesom and the shovel gain
The path, and leave a wall on either side.
The shepherd rambling valleys white and wide
With new sensations his old memory fills,
When hedges left at night, no more descried,
Are turned to one white sweep of curving hills,
And trees turned bushes half their bodies hide.

The boy that goes to fodder with surprise
Walks oer the gate he opened yesternight.
The hedges all have vanished from his eyes;
Een some tree tops the sheep could reach to bite.
The novel scene emboldens new delight,
And, though with cautious steps his sports begin,
He bolder shuffles the huge hills of snow,
Till down he drops and plunges to the chin,
And struggles much and oft escape to win--
Then turns and laughs but dare not further go;
For deep the grass and bushes lie below,
Where little birds that soon at eve went in
With heads tucked in their wings now pine for day
And little feel boys oer their heads can stray.

John Clare

Song #1

Mary, leave thy lowly cot
When thy thickest jobs are done;
When thy friends will miss thee not,
Mary, to the pastures run.
Where we met the other night
Neath the bush upon the plain,
Be it dark or be it light,
Ye may guess we'll meet again.

Should ye go or should ye not,
Never shilly-shally, dear.
Leave your work and leave your cot,
Nothing need ye doubt or fear:
Fools may tell ye lies in spite,
Calling me a roving swain;
Think what passed the other night--
I'll be bound ye'll meet again.

John Clare

Song #2

One gloomy eve I roamed about
Neath Oxey's hazel bowers,
While timid hares were darting out,
To crop the dewy flowers;
And soothing was the scene to me,
Right pleased was my soul,
My breast was calm as summer's sea
When waves forget to roll.

But short was even's placid smile,
My startled soul to charm,
When Nelly lightly skipt the stile,
With milk-pail on her arm:
One careless look on me she flung,
As bright as parting day;
And like a hawk from covert sprung,
It pounced my peace away.

John Clare

Song #3

I peeled bits of straws and I got switches too
From the grey peeling willow as idlers do,
And I switched at the flies as I sat all alone
Till my flesh, blood, and marrow was turned to dry bone.
My illness was love, though I knew not the smart,
But the beauty of love was the blood of my heart.
Crowded places, I shunned them as noises too rude
And fled to the silence of sweet solitude.
Where the flower in green darkness buds, blossoms, and fades,
Unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids--
The hermit bees find them but once and away.
There I'll bury alive and in silence decay.

I looked on the eyes of fair woman too long,
Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue:
When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say,
So I turned myself round and she wandered away.
When she got too far off, why, I'd something to tell,
So I sent sighs behind her and walked to my cell.
Willow switches I broke and peeled bits of straws,
Ever lonely in crowds, in Nature's own laws--
My ball room the pasture, my music the bees,
My drink was the fountain, my church the tall trees.
Who ever would love or be tied to a wife
When it makes a man mad all the days of his life?

John Clare

Song #4

I wish I was where I would be,
With love alone to dwell,
Was I but her or she but me,
Then love would all be well.
I wish to send my thoughts to her
As quick as thoughts can fly,
But as the winds the waters stir
The mirrors change and fly.

John Clare

Song #5

I would not feign a single sigh
Nor weep a single tear for thee:
The soul within these orbs burns dry;
A desert spreads where love should be.
I would not be a worm to crawl
A writhing suppliant in thy way;
For love is life, is heaven, and all
The beams of an immortal day.

For sighs are idle things and vain,
And tears for idiots vainly fall.
I would not kiss thy face again
Nor round thy shining slippers crawl.
Love is the honey, not the bee,
Nor would I turn its sweets to gall
For all the beauty found in thee,
Thy lily neck, rose cheek, and all.

I would not feign a single tale
Thy kindness or thy love to seek;
Nor sigh for Jenny of the Vale,
Her ruby smile or rosy cheek.
I would not have a pain to own
For those dark curls and those bright eyes
A frowning lip, a heart of stone,
False love and folly I despise.

John Clare

Song's Eternity

What is song's eternity?
Come and see.
Can it noise and bustle be?
Come and see.
Praises sung or praises said
Can it be?
Wait awhile and these are dead -
Sigh, sigh;
Be they high or lowly bred
They die.

What is song's eternity?
Come and see.
Melodies of earth and sky,
Here they be.
Song once sung to Adam's ears
Can it be?
Ballads of six thousand years
Thrive, thrive;
Songs awaken with the spheres
Alive.

Mighty songs that miss decay,
What are they?
Crowds and cities pass away
Like a day.
Books are out and books are read;
What are they?
Years will lay them with the dead -
Sigh, sigh;
Trifles unto nothing wed,
They die.

Dreamers, mark the honey bee;
Mark the tree
Where the blue cap "tootle tee"
Sings a glee
Sung to Adam and to Eve -
Here they be.
When floods covered every bough,
Noah's ark
Heard that ballad singing now;
Hark, hark,

"Tootle tootle tootle tee" -
Can it be
Pride and fame must shadows be?
Come and see -
Every season owns her own;
Bird and bee
Sing creation's music on;
Nature's glee

Is in every mood and tone
Eternity.

John Clare

Spear Thistle

Where the broad sheepwalk bare and brown
[Yields] scant grass pining after showers,
And winds go fanning up and down
The little strawy bents and nodding flowers,
There the huge thistle, spurred with many thorns,
The suncrackt upland's russet swells adorns.

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

The pewit, swopping up and down
And screaming round the passer bye,
Or running oer the herbage brown
With copple crown uplifted high,
Loves in its clumps to make a home
Where danger seldom cares to come.

The yellowhammer, often prest
For spot to build and be unseen,
Will in its shelter trust her nest
When fields and meadows glow with green;
And larks, though paths go closely bye,
Will in its shade securely lie.

The partridge too, that scarce can trust
The open downs to be at rest,
Will in its clumps lie down, and dust
And prune its horseshoe-circled breast,
And oft in shining fields of green
Will lay and raise its brood unseen.

The sheep when hunger presses sore
May nip the clover round its nest;
But soon the thistle wounding sore
Relieves it from each brushing guest,
That leaves a bit of wool behind,
The yellowhammer loves to find.

The horse will set his foot and bite
Close to the ground lark's guarded nest
And snort to meet the prickly sight;
He fans the feathers of her breast--
Yet thistles prick so deep that he
Turns back and leaves her dwelling free.

Its prickly knobs the dews of morn
Doth bead with dressing rich to see,
When threads doth hang from thorn to thorn

Like the small spinner's tapestry;
And from the flowers a sultry smell
Comes that agrees with summer well.

The bee will make its bloom a bed,
The humble bee in tawny brown;
And one in jacket fringed with red
Will rest upon its velvet down
When overtaken in the rain,
And wait till sunshine comes again.

And there are times when travel goes
Along the sheep tracks' beaten ways,
Then pleasure many a praise bestows
Upon its blossoms' pointed rays,
When other things are parched beside
And hot day leaves it in its pride.

John Clare

Sport In The Meadows

Maytime is to the meadows coming in,
And cowslip peeps have gotten eer so big,
And water blobs and all their golden kin
Crowd round the shallows by the striding brig.
Daisies and buttercups and ladysmocks
Are all abouten shining here and there,
Nodding about their gold and yellow locks
Like morts of folken flocking at a fair.
The sheep and cows are crowding for a share
And snatch the blossoms in such eager haste
That basket-bearing children running there
Do think within their hearts they'll get them all
And hoot and drive them from their graceless waste
As though there wa'n't a cowslip peep to spare.
--For they want some for tea and some for wine
And some to maken up a cuckaball
To throw across the garland's silken line
That reaches oer the street from wall to wall.
--Good gracious me, how merrily they fare:
One sees a fairer cowslip than the rest,
And off they shout--the foremost bidding fair
To get the prize--and earnest half and jest
The next one pops her down--and from her hand
Her basket falls and out her cowslips all
Tumble and litter there--the merry band
In laughing friendship round about her fall
To helpen gather up the littered flowers
That she no loss may mourn. And now the wind
In frolic mood among the merry hours
Wakens with sudden start and tosses off
Some untied bonnet on its dancing wings;
Away they follow with a scream and laugh,
And aye the youngest ever lags behind,
Till on the deep lake's very bank it hings.
They shout and catch it and then off they start
And chase for cowslips merry as before,
And each one seems so anxious at the heart
As they would even get them all and more.
One climbs a molehill for a bunch of may,
One stands on tiptoe for a linnet's nest
And pricks her hand and throws her flowers away
And runs for plantin leaves to have it drest.
So do they run abouten all the day
And teaze the grass-hid larks from getting rest.
--Scarce give they time in their unruly haste
To tie a shoestring that the grass unties--
And thus they run the meadows' bloom to waste,
Till even comes and dulls their phantasies,
When one finds losses out to stifle smiles
Of silken bonnet-strings--and utters sigh
Oer garments renten clambering over stiles.
Yet in the morning fresh afield they hie,

Bidding the last day's troubles all goodbye;
When red pied cow again their coming hears,
And ere they clap the gate she tosses up
Her head and hastens from the sport she fears:
The old yoe calls her lamb nor cares to stoop
To crop a cowslip in their company.
Thus merrily the little noisy troop
Along the grass as rude marauders hie,
For ever noisy and for ever gay
While keeping in the meadows holiday.

John Clare

Spring's Messengers

Where slanting banks are always with the sun
The daisy is in blossom even now;
And where warm patches by the hedges run
The cottager when coming home from plough
Brings home a cowslip root in flower to set.
Thus ere the Christmas goes the spring is met
Setting up little tents about the fields
In sheltered spots.--Primroses when they get
Behind the wood's old roots, where ivy shields
Their crimpled, curdled leaves, will shine and hide.
Cart ruts and horses' footings scarcely yield
A slur for boys, just crizzled and that's all.
Frost shoots his needles by the small dyke side,
And snow in scarce a feather's seen to

John Clare

Stonepit

The passing traveller with wonder sees
A deep and ancient stonepit full of trees;
So deep and very deep the place has been,
The church might stand within and not be seen.
The passing stranger oft with wonder stops
And thinks he een could walk upon their tops,
And often stoops to see the busy crow,
And stands above and sees the eggs below;
And while the wild horse gives its head a toss,
The squirrel dances up and runs across.
The boy that stands and kills the black nosed bee
Dares down as soon as magpies' nests are found,
And wonders when he climbs the highest tree
To find it reaches scarce above the ground.

John Clare

Sudden Shower

Black grows the southern sky, betokening rain,
And humming hive-bees homeward hurry bye:
They feel the change; so let us shun the grain,
And take the broad road while our feet are dry.
Ay, there some dropples moistened on my face,
And pattered on my hat--tis coming nigh!
Let's look about, and find a sheltering place.
The little things around, like you and I,
Are hurrying through the grass to shun the shower.
Here stoops an ash-tree--hark! the wind gets high,
But never mind; this ivy, for an hour,
Rain as it may, will keep us dryly here:
That little wren knows well his sheltering bower,
Nor leaves his dry house though we come so near.

John Clare

Summer

Come we to the summer, to the summer we will come,
For the woods are full of bluebells and the hedges full of bloom,
And the crow is on the oak a-building of her nest,
And love is burning diamonds in my true lover's breast;
She sits beneath the whitethorn a-plaiting of her hair,
And I will to my true lover with a fond request repair;
I will look upon her face, I will in her beauty rest,
And lay my aching weariness upon her lovely breast.

The clock-a-clay is creeping on the open bloom of May,
The merry bee is trampling the pinky threads all day,
And the chaffinch it is brooding on its grey mossy nest
In the whitethorn bush where I will lean upon my lover's breast;
I'll lean upon her breast and I'll whisper in her ear
That I cannot get a wink o'sleep for thinking of my dear;
I hunger at my meat and I daily fade away
Like the hedge rose that is broken in the heat of the day.

John Clare

Summer Evening

The frog half fearful jumps across the path,
And little mouse that leaves its hole at eve
Nimbles with timid dread beneath the swath;
My rustling steps awhile their joys deceive,
Till past, and then the cricket sings more strong,
And grasshoppers in merry moods still wear
The short night weary with their fretting song.
Up from behind the molehill jumps the hare,
Cheat of his chosen bed, and from the bank
The yellowhammer flutters in short fears
From off its nest hid in the grasses rank,
And drops again when no more noise it hears.
Thus nature's human link and endless thrall,
Proud man, still seems the enemy of all.

John Clare

Summer Images

Now swarthy Summer, by rude health embrowned,
Precedence takes of rosy fingered Spring;
And laughing Joy, with wild flowers prank'd, and crown'd,
A wild and giddy thing,
And Health robust, from every care unbound,
Come on the zephyr's wing,
And cheer the toiling clown.

Happy as holiday-enjoying face,
Loud tongued, and "merry as a marriage bell,"
Thy lightsome step sheds joy in every place;
And where the troubled dwell,
Thy witching charms wean them of half their cares;
And from thy sunny spell,
They greet joy unawares.

Then with thy sultry locks all loose and rude,
And mantle laced with gems of garish light,
Come as of wont; for I would fain intrude,
And in the world's despite,
Share the rude wealth that thy own heart beguiles;
If haply so I might
Win pleasure from thy smiles.

Me not the noise of brawling pleasure cheers,
In nightly revels or in city streets;
But joys which soothe, and not distract the ears,
That one at leisure meets
In the green woods, and meadows summer-shorn,
Or fields, where bee-fly greets
The ear with mellow horn.

The green-swathed grasshopper, on treble pipe,
Sings there, and dances, in mad-hearted pranks;
There bees go courting every flower that's ripe,
On baulks and sunny banks;
And droning dragon-fly, on rude bassoon,
Attempts to give God thanks
In no discordant tune.

The speckled thrush, by self-delight embued,
There sings unto himself for joy's amends,
And drinks the honey dew of solitude.
There Happiness attends
With inbred Joy until the heart o'erflow,
Of which the world's rude friends,
Nought heeding, nothing know.

There the gay river, laughing as it goes,
Plashes with easy wave its flaggy sides,
And to the calm of heart, in calmness shows
What pleasure there abides,

To trace its sedgy banks, from trouble free:
Spots Solitude provides
To muse, and happy be.

There ruminating 'neath some pleasant bush,
On sweet silk grass I stretch me at mine ease,
Where I can pillow on the yielding rush;
And, acting as I please,
Drop into pleasant dreams; or musing lie,
Mark the wind-shaken trees,
And cloud-betravelled sky.

There think me how some barter joy for care,
And waste life's summer-health in riot rude,
Of nature, nor of nature's sweets aware.
When passions vain intrude,
These, by calm musings, softened are and still;
And the heart's better mood
Feels sick of doing ill.

There I can live, and at my leisure seek
Joys far from cold restraints--not fearing pride--
Free as the winds, that breathe upon my cheek
Rude health, so long denied.
Here poor Integrity can sit at ease,
And list self-satisfied
The song of honey-bees.

The green lane now I traverse, where it goes
Nought guessing, till some sudden turn espies
Rude batter'd finger post, that stooping shows
Where the snug mystery lies;
And then a mossy spire, with ivy crown,
Cheers up the short surprise,
And shows a peeping town.

I see the wild flowers, in their summer morn
Of beauty, feeding on joy's luscious hours;
The gay convolvulus, wreathing round the thorn,
Agape for honey showers;
And slender kingcup, burnished with the dew
Of morning's early hours,
Like gold yminted new.

And mark by rustic bridge, o'er shallow stream,
Cow-tending boy, to toil unreconciled,
Absorbed as in some vagrant summer dream;
Who now, in gestures wild,
Starts dancing to his shadow on the wall,
Feeling self-gratified,
Nor fearing human thrall.

Or thread the sunny valley laced with streams,
Or forests rude, and the o'ershadow'd brims
Of simple ponds, where idle shepherd dreams,
Stretching his listless limbs;
Or trace hay-scented meadows, smooth and long,
Where joy's wild impulse swims
In one continued song.

I love at early morn, from new mown swath,
To see the startled frog his route pursue;
To mark while, leaping o'er the dripping path,
His bright sides scatter dew,
The early lark that from its bustle flies,
To hail his matin new;
And watch him to the skies.

To note on hedgerow baulks, in moisture sprent,
The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn,
With earnest heed, and tremulous intent,
Frail brother of the morn,
That from the tiny bent's dew-misted leaves
Withdraws his timid horn,
And fearful vision weaves.

Or swallow heed on smoke-tanned chimney top,
Wont to be first unsealing Morning's eye,
Ere yet the bee hath gleaned one wayward drop
Of honey on his thigh;
To see him seek morn's airy couch to sing,
Until the golden sky
Bepaint his russet wing.

Or sauntering boy by tanning corn to spy,
With clapping noise to startle birds away,
And hear him bawl to every passer by
To know the hour of day;
While the uncradled breezes, fresh and strong,
With waking blossoms play,
And breathe Æolian song.

I love the south-west wind, or low or loud,
And not the less when sudden drops of rain
Moisten my glowing cheek from ebon cloud,
Threatening soft showers again,
That over lands new ploughed and meadow grounds,
Summer's sweet breath unchain,
And wake harmonious sounds.

Rich music breathes in Summer's every sound;
And in her harmony of varied greens,
Woods, meadows, hedge-rows, corn-fields, all around
Much beauty intervenes,

Filling with harmony the ear and eye;
While o'er the mingling scenes
Far spreads the laughing sky.

See, how the wind-enamoured aspen leaves
Turn up their silver lining to the sun!
And hark! the rustling noise, that oft deceives,
And makes the sheep-boy run:
The sound so mimics fast-approaching showers,
He thinks the rain's begun,
And hastes to sheltering bowers.

But now the evening curdles dank and grey,
Changing her watchet hue for sombre weed;
And moping owls, to close the lids of day,
On drowsy wing proceed;
While chickering crickets, tremulous and long,
Light's farewell inly heed,
And give it parting song.

The pranking bat its flighty circlet makes;
The glow-worm burnishes its lamp anew;
O'er meadows dew-besprent, the beetle wakes
Inquiries ever new,
Teazing each passing ear with murmurs vain,
As wanting to pursue
His homeward path again.

Hark! 'tis the melody of distant bells
That on the wind with pleasing hum rebounds
By fitful starts, then musically swells
O'er the dim stilly grounds;
While on the meadow-bridge the pausing boy
Listens the mellow sounds,
And hums in vacant joy.

Now homeward-bound, the hedger bundles round
His evening faggot, and with every stride
His leathern doublet leaves a rustling sound,
Till silly sheep beside
His path start tremulous, and once again
Look back dissatisfied,
And scour the dewy plain.

How sweet the soothing calmness that distills
O'er the heart's every sense its opiate dews,
In meek-eyed moods and ever balmy trills!
That softens and subdues,
With gentle Quiet's bland and sober train,
Which dreamy eve renews
In many a mellow strain!

I love to walk the fields, they are to me
A legacy no evil can destroy;
They, like a spell, set every rapture free
That cheer'd me when a boy.
Play--pastime--all Time's blotting pen conceal'd,
Comes like a new-born joy,
To greet me in the field.

For Nature's objects ever harmonize
With emulous Taste, that vulgar deed annoys;
Which loves in pensive moods to sympathize,
And meet vibrating joys
O'er Nature's pleasing things; nor slighting, deems
Pastimes, the Muse employs,
Vain and obtrusive themes.

John Clare

Sunday Dip

The morning road is thronged with merry boys
Who seek the water for their Sunday joys;
They run to seek the shallow pit, and wade
And dance about the water in the shade.
The boldest ventures first and dashes in,
And others go and follow to the chin,
And duck about, and try to lose their fears,
And laugh to hear the thunder in their ears.
They bundle up the rushes for a boat
And try across the deepest place to float:
Beneath the willow trees they ride and stoop--
The awkward load will scarcely bear them up.
Without their aid the others float away,
And play about the water half the day.

John Clare

The Ants

What wonder strikes the curious, while he views
The black ant's city, by a rotten tree,
Or woodland bank! In ignorance we muse:
Pausing, annoyed,--we know not what we see,
Such government and thought there seem to be;
Some looking on, and urging some to toil,
Dragging their loads of bent-stalks slavishly:
And what's more wonderful, when big loads foil
One ant or two to carry, quickly then
A swarm flock round to help their fellow-men.
Surely they speak a language whisperingly,
Too fine for us to hear; and sure their ways
Prove they have kings and laws, and that they be
Deformed remnants of the Fairy-days.

John Clare

The Beautiful Stranger

I cannot know what country owns thee now,
With France's forest lilies on thy brow.
When England knew thee thou wert passing fair;
I never knew a foreign face so rare.
The world of waters rolls and rushes bye,
Nor lets me wander where thy vallies lie.
But surely France must be a pleasant place
That greets the stranger with so fair a face;
The English maiden blushes down the dance,
But few can equal the fair maid of France.
I saw thee lovely and I wished thee mine,
And the last song I ever wrote is thine.

Thy country's honour on thy face attends;
Men may be foes but beauty makes us friends.

John Clare

The Cellar Door

By the old tavern door on the causey there lay
A hogshead of stingo just rolled from a dray,
And there stood the blacksmith awaiting a drop
As dry as the cinders that lay in his shop;
And there stood the cobbler as dry as a bun,
Almost crackt like a bucket when left in the sun.
He'd whetted his knife upon pendil and hone
Till he'd not got a spittle to moisten the stone;
So ere he could work--though he'd lost the whole day--
He must wait the new broach and bemoisten his clay.

The cellar was empty, each barrel was drained
To its dregs--and Sir John like a rebel remained
In the street--for removal too powerful and large
For two or three topers to take into charge.
Odd zooks, said a gipsey, with bellows to mend,
Had I strength I would just be for helping a friend
To walk on his legs: but a child in the street
Had as much power as he to put John on his feet.
Then up came the blacksmith: Sir Barley, said he,
I should just like to storm your old tower for a spree;

And my strength for your strength and bar your renown
I'd soon try your spirit by cracking your crown.
And the cobbler he tuckt up his apron and spit
In his hands for a burster--but devil a bit
Would he move--so as yet they made nothing of land;
For there lay the knight like a whale in the sand.
Said the tinker: If I could but drink of his vein
I should just be as strong and as stubborn again.
Push along, said the toper, the cellar's adry:
There's nothing to moisten the mouth of a fly.

Says the host, We shall burn out with thirst, he's so big.
There's a cag of small swipes half as sour as a wig.
In such like extremes, why, extremes will come pat;
So let's go and wet all our whistles with that.
Says the gipsey, May I never bottom a chair
If I drink of small swipes while Sir John's lying there.
And the blacksmith he threw off his apron and swore
Small swipes should bemoisten his gullet no more:
Let it out on the floor for the dry cock-a-roach--
And he held up his hammer with threatens to broach

Sir John in his castle without leave or law
And suck out his blood with a reed or a straw
Ere he'd soak at the swipes--and he turned him to start,
Till the host for high treason came down a full quart.
Just then passed the dandy and turned up his nose:
They'd fain have him shove, but he looked at his clothes
And nipt his nose closer and twirled his stick round
And simpered, Tis nuisance to lie on the ground.

But Bacchus, he laughed from the old tavern sign,
Saying, Go on, thou shadow, and let the sun shine.

Then again they all tried, and the tinker he swore
That the hogshead had grown twice as heavy or more.
Nay nay, said the toper, and reeled as he spoke,
We're all getting weak, that's the end of the joke.
The ploughman came up and cut short his old tune,
Hallooed 'woi' to his horses and though it was June
Said he'd help them an hour ere he'd keep them adry;
Well done, said the blacksmith with hopes running high;
He moves, and, by jingo, success to the plough!
Aye aye, said the cobbler, we'll conquer him now.

The hogshead rolled forward, the toper fell back,
And the host laughed aloud as his sides they would crack
To see the old tinker's toil make such a gap
In his coat as to rend it from collar to flap.
But the tinker he grumbled and cried Fiddle-dee!
This garment hath been an old tenant with me;
And a needle and thread with a little good skill
When I've leisure will make it stand more weathers still.
Then crack went his breeks from the hip to the knee
With his thrusting--no matter; for nothing cared he.

So long as Sir John rolled along to the door,
He's a chip of our block, said the blacksmith, and swore;
And as sure as I live to drive nails in a shoe
He shall have at my cost a full pitcher or two.
And the toper he hiccuped--which hindered an oath--
So long as he'd credit, he'd pitcher them both.
But the host stopt to hint when he'd ordered the dray
Sir Barleycorn's order was purchase and pay.
And now the old knight is imprisoned and ta'en
To waste in the tavern man's cellar again.

And now, said the blacksmith, let forfeits come first
For the insult swipes offered, or his hoops I will burst.
Here it is, my old hearties--Then drink your thirst full,
Said the host, for the stingo is worth a strong pull.
Never fear for your legs if they're broken to-day;
Winds only blow straws, dust, and feathers away.
But the cask that is full, like a giant he lies,
And giants alone can his spirits capsize.
If he lies in the path, though a king's coming bye,
John Barleycorn's mighty and there he will lie.

Then the toper sat down with a hiccup and felt
If he'd still an odd coin in his pocket to melt,
And he made a wry face, for his pocket was bare.
--But he laughed and danced up, What, old boy, are you there?
When he felt that a stiver had got to his knee

Through a hole in his fob, and right happy was he.
Says the tinker, I've brawled till no breath I have got
And not met with twopence to purchase a pot.
Says the toper, I've powder to charge a long gun,
And a stiver I've found when I thought I'd got none;

So helping a thirsty old friend in his need
Is my duty--take heart, thou art welcome indeed.
Then the smith with his tools in Sir John made a breach,
And the toper he hiccuped and ended his speech;
And pulled at the quart, till the snob he declared
When he went to drink next that the bottom was bared.
No matter for that, said the toper, and grinned;
I had but a soak and neer rested for wind.
That's the law, said the smith, with a look rather vexed,
But the quart was a forfeit; so pay for the next.

Thus they talked of their skill and their labour till noon
When the sober man's toil was exactly half done,
And there the plough lay--people hardly could pass
And the horses let loose polished up the short grass
And browsed on the bottle of flags lying there,
By the gipsey's old budget, for mending a chair.
The miller's horse tied to the old smithy door
Stood stamping his feet, by the flies bitten sore,
Awaiting the smith as he wanted a shoe;
And he stampt till another fell off and made two:

Till the miller, expecting that all would get loose,
Went to seek him and cursed him outright for a goose;
But he dipt his dry beak in the mug once or twice
And forgot all his passion and toil in a trice.
And the flybitten horse at the old smithy post
Might stamp till his shoes and his legs they were lost.
He sung his old songs and forgot his old mill--
Blow winds high or low, she might rest her at will.
And the cobbler, in spite of his bustle for pelf,
Left the shop all the day to take care of itself.

And the toper who carried his house on his head,
No wife to be teazing, no bairns to be fed,
Would sit out the week or the month or the year
Or a life-time so long as he'd credit for beer.
The ploughman he talked of his skill as divine,
How he could plough thurrows as straight as a line;
And the blacksmith he swore, had he but the command,
He could shoe the king's hunter the best in the land;
And the cobbler declared, was his skill but once seen,
He should soon get an order for shoes from the queen.

But the tinker he swore he could beat them all three,
For gi' me a pair of old bellows, says he,

And I'll make them roar out like the wind in a storm
And make them blow fire out of coal hardly warm.
The toper said nothing but wished the quart full
And swore he could toss it all off at a pull.
Have one, said the tinker; but wit was away,
When the bet was to bind him he'd nothing to pay.
And thus in the face of life's sun-and-shower weather
They drank, bragged, and sung, and got merry together.

The sun he went down--the last gleam from his brow
Flung a smile of repose on the holiday plough;
The glooms they approached, and the dews like a rain
Fell thick and hung pearls on the old sorrel mane
Of the horse that the miller had brought to be shod,
And the morning awoke, saw a sight rather odd--
For a bit of the halter still hung at the door,
Bit through by the horse now at feed on the moor;
And the old tinker's budget lay still in the weather,
While all kept on singing and drinking together.

John Clare

The Cottager

True as the church clock hand the hour pursues
He plods about his toils and reads the news,
And at the blacksmith's shop his hour will stand
To talk of 'Lunun' as a foreign land.
For from his cottage door in peace or strife
He neer went fifty miles in all his life.
His knowledge with old notions still combined
Is twenty years behind the march of mind.
He views new knowledge with suspicious eyes
And thinks it blasphemy to be so wise.
On steam's almighty tales he wondering looks
As witchcraft gleaned from old blackletter books.
Life gave him comfort but denied him wealth,
He toils in quiet and enjoys his health,
He smokes a pipe at night and drinks his beer
And runs no scores on tavern screens to clear.
He goes to market all the year about
And keeps one hour and never stays it out.
Een at St. Thomas tide old Rover's bark
Hails Dapple's trot an hour before it's dark.
He is a simple-worded plain old man
Whose good intents take errors in their plan.
Oft sentimental and with saddened vein
He looks on trifles and bemoans their pain,
And thinks the angler mad, and loudly storms
With emphasis of speech oer murdered worms.
And hunters cruel--pleading with sad care
Pity's petition for the fox and hare,
Yet feels self-satisfaction in his woes
For war's crushed myriads of his slaughtered foes.
He is right scrupulous in one pretext
And wholesale errors swallows in the next.
He deems it sin to sing, yet not to say
A song--a mighty difference in his way.
And many a moving tale in antique rhymes
He has for Christmas and such merry times,
When 'Chevy Chase,' his masterpiece of song,
Is said so earnest none can think it long.
Twas the old vicar's way who should be right,
For the late vicar was his heart's delight,
And while at church he often shakes his head
To think what sermons the old vicar made,
Downright and orthodox that all the land
Who had their ears to hear might understand,
But now such mighty learning meets his ears
He thinks it Greek or Latin which he hears,
Yet church receives him every sabbath day
And rain or snow he never keeps away.
All words of reverence still his heart reveres,
Low bows his head when Jesus meets his ears,
And still he thinks it blasphemy as well
Such names without a capital to spell.

In an old corner cupboard by the wall
His books are laid, though good, in number small,
His Bible first in place; from worth and age
Whose grandsire's name adorns the title page,
And blank leaves once, now filled with kindred claims,
Display a world's epitome of names.
Parents and children and grandchildren all
Memory's affections in the lists recall.
And prayer-book next, much worn though strongly bound,
Proves him a churchman orthodox and sound.
The 'Pilgrim's Progress' and the 'Death of Abel'
Are seldom missing from his Sunday table,
And prime old Tusser in his homely trim,
The first of bards in all the world with him,
And only poet which his leisure knows;
Verse deals in fancy, so he sticks to prose.
These are the books he reads and reads again
And weekly hunts the almanacks for rain.
Here and no further learning's channels ran;
Still, neighbours prize him as the learned man.
His cottage is a humble place of rest
With one spare room to welcome every guest,
And that tall poplar pointing to the sky
His own hand planted when an idle boy,
It shades his chimney while the singing wind
Hums songs of shelter to his happy mind.
Within his cot the largest ears of corn
He ever found his picture frames adorn:
Brave Granby's head, De Grosse's grand defeat;
He rubs his hands and shows how Rodney beat.
And from the rafters upon strings depend
Beanstalks beset with pods from end to end,
Whose numbers without counting may be seen
Wrote on the almanack behind the screen.
Around the corner up on worsted strung
Pooties in wreaths above the cupboard hung.
Memory at trifling incidents awakes
And there he keeps them for his children's sakes,
Who when as boys searched every sedgy lane,
Traced every wood and shattered clothes again,
Roaming about on rapture's easy wing
To hunt those very pooty shells in spring.
And thus he lives too happy to be poor
While strife neer pauses at so mean a door.
Low in the sheltered valley stands his cot,
He hears the mountain storm and feels it not;
Winter and spring, toil ceasing ere tis dark,
Rests with the lamb and rises with the lark,
Content his helpmate to the day's employ
And care neer comes to steal a single joy.
Time, scarcely noticed, turns his hair to grey,
Yet leaves him happy as a child at play.

John Clare

The Cross Roads; Or, The Haymaker's Story

Stopt by the storm, that long in sullen black
From the south-west stained its encroaching track,
Haymakers, hustling from the rain to hide,
Sought the grey willows by the pasture-side;
And there, while big drops bow the grassy stems,
And bleb the withering hay with pearly gems,
Dimple the brook, and patter in the leaves,
The song or tale an hour's restraint relieves.
And while the old dames gossip at their ease,
And pinch the snuff-box empty by degrees,
The young ones join in love's delightful themes,
Truths told by gipsies, and expounded dreams;
And mutter things kept secrets from the rest,
As sweethearts' names, and whom they love the best;
And dazzling ribbons they delight to show,
And last new favours of some veigling beau,
Who with such treachery tries their hearts to move,
And, like the highest, bribes the maidens' love.
The old dames, jealous of their whispered praise,
Throw in their hints of man's deluding ways;
And one, to give her counsels more effect,
And by example illustrate the fact
Of innocence oercome by flattering man,
Thrice tapped her box, and pinched, and thus began.

'Now wenches listen, and let lovers lie,
Ye'll hear a story ye may profit by;
I'm your age treble, with some oddments to't,
And right from wrong can tell, if ye'll but do't:
Ye need not giggle underneath your hat,
Mine's no joke-matter, let me tell you that;
So keep ye quiet till my story's told,
And don't despise your betters cause they're old.

'That grave ye've heard of, where the four roads meet,
Where walks the spirit in a winding-sheet,
Oft seen at night, by strangers passing late,
And tarrying neighbours that at market wait,
Stalking along as white as driven snow,
And long as one's shadow when the sun is low;
The girl that's buried there I knew her well,
And her whole history, if ye'll hark, can tell.
Her name was Jane, and neighbour's children we,
And old companions once, as ye may be;
And like to you, on Sundays often strolled
To gipsies' camps to have our fortunes told;
And oft, God rest her, in the fortune-book
Which we at hay-time in our pockets took,
Our pins at blindfold on the wheel we stuck,
When hers would always prick the worst of luck;
For try, poor thing, as often as she might,
Her point would always on the blank alight;

Which plainly shows the fortune one's to have,
As such like go unwedded to the grave,--
And so it proved.--The next succeeding May,
We both to service went from sports and play,
Though in the village still; as friends and kin
Thought neighbour's service better to begin.
So out we went:--Jane's place was reckoned good,
Though she bout life but little understood,
And had a master wild as wild can be,
And far unfit for such a child as she;
And soon the whisper went about the town,
That Jane's good looks procured her many a gown
From him, whose promise was to every one,
But whose intention was to wive with none.
Twas nought to wonder, though begun by guess;
For Jane was lovely in her Sunday dress,
And all expected such a rosy face
Would be her ruin--as was just the case.
The while the change was easily perceived,
Some months went by, ere I the tales believed;
For there are people nowadays, Lord knows,
Will sooner hatch up lies than mend their clothes;
And when with such-like tattle they begin,
Don't mind whose character they spoil a pin:
But passing neighbours often marked them smile,
And watched him take her milkpail oer a stile;
And many a time, as wandering closer by,
From Jenny's bosom met a heavy sigh;
And often marked her, as discoursing deep,
When doubts might rise to give just cause to weep,
Smothering their notice, by a wished disguise
To slive her apron corner to her eyes.
Such signs were mournful and alarming things,
And far more weighty than conjecture brings;
Though foes made double what they heard of all,
Swore lies as proofs, and prophesied her fall.
Poor thoughtless wench! it seems but Sunday past
Since we went out together for the last,
And plain enough indeed it was to find
She'd something more than common on her mind;
For she was always fond and full of chat,
In passing harmless jokes bout beaus and that,
But nothing then was scarcely talked about,
And what there was, I even forced it out.
A gloomy wanness spoiled her rosy cheek,
And doubts hung there it was not mine to seek;
She neer so much as mentioned things to come,
But sighed oer pleasures ere she left her home;
And now and then a mournful smile would raise
At freaks repeated of our younger days,
Which I brought up, while passing spots of ground
Where we, when children, 'hurly-burlied' round,

Or 'blindman-buffed' some morts of hours away--
Two games, poor thing, Jane dearly loved to play.
She smiled at these, but shook her head and sighed
When eer she thought my look was turned aside;
Nor turned she round, as was her former way,
To praise the thorn, white over then with May;
Nor stooped once, though thousands round her grew,
To pull a cowslip as she used to do:
For Jane in flowers delighted from a child--
I like the garden, but she loved the wild--
And oft on Sundays young men's gifts declined,
Posies from gardens of the sweetest kind,
And eager scrambled the dog-rose to get,
And woodbine-flowers at every bush she met.
The cowslip blossom, with its ruddy streak,
Would tempt her furlongs from the path to seek;
And gay long purple, with its tufty spike,
She'd wade oer shoes to reach it in the dyke;
And oft, while scratching through the briary woods
For tempting cuckoo-flowers and violet buds,
Poor Jane, I've known her crying sneak to town,
Fearing her mother, when she'd torn her gown.
Ah, these were days her conscience viewed with pain,
Which all are loth to lose, as well as Jane.
And, what I took more odd than all the rest,
Was, that same night she neer a wish exprest
To see the gipsies, so beloved before,
That lay a stone's throw from us on the moor:
I hinted it; she just replied again--
She once believed them, but had doubts since then.
And when we sought our cows, I called, 'Come mull!'
But she stood silent, for her heart was full.
She loved dumb things: and ere she had begun
To milk, caressed them more than eer she'd done;
But though her tears stood watering in her eye,
I little took it as her last good-bye;
For she was tender, and I've often known
Her mourn when beetles have been trampled on:
So I neer dreamed from this, what soon befell,
Till the next morning rang her passing-bell.
My story's long, but time's in plenty yet,
Since the black clouds betoken nought but wet;
And I'll een snatch a minute's breath or two,
And take another pinch, to help me through.

'So, as I said, next morn I heard the bell,
And passing neighbours crossed the street, to tell
That my poor partner Jenny had been found
In the old flag-pool, on the pasture, drowned.
God knows my heart! I twittered like a leaf,
And found too late the cause of Sunday's grief;
For every tongue was loosed to gabble oer

The slanderous things that secret passed before:
With truth or lies they need not then be strict,
The one they railed at could not contradict.
Twas now no secret of her being beguiled,
For every mouth knew Jenny died with child;
And though more cautious with a living name,
Each more than guessed her master bore the blame.
That very morning, it affects me still,
Ye know the foot-path sidles down the hill,
Ignorant as babe unborn I passed the pond
To milk as usual in our close beyond,
And cows were drinking at the water's edge,
And horses browsed among the flags and sedge,
And gnats and midges danced the water oer,
Just as I've marked them scores of times before,
And birds sat singing, as in mornings gone,--
While I as unconcerned went soodling on,
But little dreaming, as the wakening wind
Flapped the broad ash-leaves oer the pond reclin'd,
And oer the water crinked the curdled wave,
That Jane was sleeping in her watery grave.
The neatherd boy that used to tend the cows,
While getting whip-sticks from the dangling boughs
Of osiers drooping by the water-side,
Her bonnet floating on the top espied;
He knew it well, and hastened fearful down
To take the terror of his fears to town,--

A melancholy story, far too true;
And soon the village to the pasture flew,
Where, from the deepest hole the pond about,
They dragged poor Jenny's lifeless body out,
And took her home, where scarce an hour gone by
She had been living like to you and I.
I went with more, and kissed her for the last,
And thought with tears on pleasures that were past;
And, the last kindness left me then to do,
I went, at milking, where the blossoms grew,
And handfuls got of rose and lambtoe sweet,
And put them with her in her winding-sheet.
A wilful murder, jury made the crime;
Nor parson 'lowed to pray, nor bell to chime;
On the cross roads, far from her friends and kin,
The usual law for their ungodly sin
Who violent hands upon themselves have laid,
Poor Jane's last bed unchristian-like was made;
And there, like all whose last thoughts turn to heaven,
She sleeps, and doubtless hoped to be forgiven.
But, though I say't, for maids thus veigled in
I think the wicked men deserve the sin;
And sure enough we all at last shall see
The treachery punished as it ought to be.

For ere his wickedness pretended love,
Jane, I'll be bound, was spotless as the dove,
And's good a servant, still old folks allow,
As ever scoured a pail or milked a cow;
And ere he led her into ruin's way,
As gay and buxom as a summer's day:
The birds that ranted in the hedge-row boughs,
As night and morning we have sought our cows,
With yokes and buckets as she bounced along,
Were often deafed to silence with her song.

But now she's gone:--girls, shun deceitful men,
The worst of stumbles ye can fall agen;
Be deaf to them, and then, as twere, ye'll see
Your pleasures safe as under lock and key.
Throw not my words away, as many do;
They're gold in value, though they're cheap to you.
And husseys hearken, and be warned from this,
If ye love mothers, never do amiss:
Jane might love hers, but she forsook the plan
To make her happy, when she thought of man.
Poor tottering dame, it was too plainly known,
Her daughter's dying hastened on her own,
For from the day the tidings reached her door
She took to bed and looked up no more,
And, ere again another year came round,
She, well as Jane, was laid within the ground;
And all were grieved poor Goody's end to see:
No better neighbour entered house than she,
A harmless soul, with no abusive tongue,
Trig as new pins, and tight's the day was long;
And go the week about, nine times in ten
Ye'd find her house as cleanly as her sen.
But, Lord protect us! time such change does bring,
We cannot dream what oer our heads may hing;
The very house she lived in, stick and stone,
Since Goody died, has tumbled down and gone:
And where the marjoram once, and sage, and rue,
And balm, and mint, with curled-leaf parsley grew,
And double marygolds, and silver thyme,
And pumpkins neath the window used to climb;
And where I often when a child for hours
Tried through the pales to get the tempting flowers,
As lady's laces, everlasting peas,
True-love-lies-bleeding, with the hearts-at-ease,
And golden rods, and tansy running high
That oer the pale-tops smiled on passers-by,
Flowers in my time that every one would praise,
Though thrown like weeds from gardens nowadays;
Where these all grew, now henbane stinks and spreads,
And docks and thistles shake their seedy heads,
And yearly keep with nettles smothering oer;--

The house, the dame, the garden known no more:
While, neighbouring nigh, one lonely elder-tree
Is all that's left of what had used to be,
Marking the place, and bringing up with tears
The recollections of one's younger years.
And now I've done, ye're each at once as free
To take your trundle as ye used to be;
To take right ways, as Jenny should have ta'en,
Or headlong run, and be a second Jane;
For by one thoughtless girl that's acted ill
A thousand may be guided if they will:
As oft mong folks to labour bustling on,
We mark the foremost kick against a stone,
Or stumble oer a stile he meant to climb,
While hind ones see and shun the fall in time.
But ye, I will be bound, like far the best
Love's tickling nick-nacks and the laughing jest,
And ten times sooner than be warned by me,
Would each be sitting on some fellow's knee,
Sooner believe the lies wild chaps will tell
Than old dames' cautions, who would wish ye well:
So have your wills.'--She pinched her box again,
And ceased her tale, and listened to the rain,
Which still as usual pattered fast around,
And bowed the bent-head loaded to the ground;
While larks, their naked nest by force forsook,
Pruned their wet wings in bushes by the brook.

The maids, impatient now old Goody ceased,
As restless children from the school released,
Right gladly proving, what she'd just foretold,
That young ones' stories were preferred to old,
Turn to the whisperings of their former joy,
That oft deceive, but very rarely cloy.

John Clare

The Crow Sat On The Willow

The crow sat on the willow tree
A-lifting up his wings,
And glossy was his coat to see,
And loud the ploughman sings,
'I love my love because I know
The milkmaid she loves me';
And hoarsely croaked the glossy crow
Upon the willow tree.
'I love my love' the ploughman sung,
And all the fields with music rung.

'I love my love, a bonny lass,
She keeps her pails so bright,
And blythe she trips the dewy grass
At morning and at night.
A cotton dress her morning gown,
Her face was rosy health:
She traced the pastures up and down
And nature was her wealth.'
He sung, and turned each furrow down,
His sweetheart's love in cotton gown.

'My love is young and handsome
As any in the town,
She's worth a ploughman's ransom
In the drab cotton gown.'
He sang and turned his furrow oer
And urged his team along,
While on the willow as before
The old crow croaked his song:
The ploughman sung his rustic lay
And sung of Phoebe all the day.

The crow he was in love no doubt
And [so were] many things:
The ploughman finished many a bout,
And lustily he sings,
'My love she is a milking maid
With red rosy cheek;
Of cotton drab her gown was made,
I loved her many a week.'
His milking maid the ploughman sung
Till all the fields around him rung.

John Clare

The Cuckoo

The cuckoo, like a hawk in flight,
With narrow pointed wings
Whews o'er our heads - soon out of sight
And as she flies she sings:
And darting down the hedgerow side
She scares the little bird
Who leaves the nest it cannot hide
While plaintive notes are heard.

I've watched it on an old oak tree
Sing half an hour away
Until its quick eye noticed me
And then it whewed away.
Its mouth when open shone as red
As hips upon the brier,
Like stock doves seemed its winged head
But striving to get higher

It heard me rustle and above leaves
Soon did its flight pursue,
Still waking summer's melodies
And singing as it flew.
So quick it flies from wood to wood
'Tis miles off 'ere you think it gone;
I've thought when I have listening stood
Full twenty sang - when only one.

When summer from the forest starts
Its melody with silence lies,
And, like a bird from foreign parts,
It cannot sing for all it tries.
'Cuck cuck' it cries and mocking boys
Crie 'Cuck' and then it stutters more
Till quick forgot its own sweet voice
It seems to know itself no more.

John Clare

The Dying Child

He could not die when trees were green,
For he loved the time too well.
His little hands, when flowers were seen,
Were held for the bluebell,
As he was carried o'er the green.

His eye glanced at the white-nosed bee;
He knew those children of the spring:
When he was well and on the lea
He held one in his hands to sing,
Which filled his heart with glee.

Infants, the children of the spring!
How can an infant die
When butterflies are on the wing,
Green grass, and such a sky?
How can they die at spring?

He held his hands for daisies white,
And then for violets blue,
And took them all to bed at night
That in the green fields grew,
As childhood's sweet delight.

And then he shut his little eyes,
And flowers would notice not;
Birds' nests and eggs caused no surprise,
He now no blossoms got;
They met with plaintive sighs.

When winter came and blasts did sigh,
And bare were plain and tree,
As he for ease in bed did lie
His soul seemed with the free,
He died so quietly.

John Clare

The Fallen Elm

Old elm that murmured in our chimney top
The sweetest anthem autumn ever made
And into mellow whispering calms would drop
When showers fell on thy many coloured shade
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made -
While darkness came as it would strangle light
With the black tempest of a winter night
That rocked thee like a cradle in thy root -
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid
Thy strength without - while all within was mute.
It seasoned comfort to our hearts' desire,
We felt that kind protection like a friend
And edged our chairs up closer to the fire,
Enjoying comfort that was never penned.
Old favourite tree, thou'st seen time's changes lower,
Though change till now did never injure thee;
For time beheld thee as her sacred dower
And nature claimed thee her domestic tree.
Storms came and shook thee many a weary hour,
Yet stedfast to thy home thy roots have been;
Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower
Till earth grew iron - still thy leaves were green.
The children sought thee in thy summer shade
And made their playhouse rings of stick and stone;
The mavis sang and felt himself alone
While in thy leaves his early nest was made,
And I did feel his happiness mine own,
Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed,
Friend not inanimate - though stocks and stones
There are, and many formed of flesh and bones.
Thou owned a language by which hearts are stirred
Deeper than by a feeling clothed in word,
And speakest now what's known of every tongue,
Language of pity and the force of wrong.
What cant assumes, what hypocrites will dare,
Speaks home to truth and shows it what they are.
I see a picture which thy fate displays
And learn a lesson from thy destiny;
Self-interest saw thee stand in freedom's ways -
So thy old shadow must a tyrant be.
Thou'st heard the knave, abusing those in power,
Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free;
Thou'st sheltered hypocrites in many a shower,
That when in power would never shelter thee.
Thou'st heard the knave supply his canting powers
With wrong's illusions when he wanted friends;
That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers
And when clouds vanished made thy shade amends -
With axe at root he felled thee to the ground
And barked of freedom - O I hate the sound
Time hears its visions speak, - and age sublime
Hath made thee a disciple unto time.

- It grows the cant term of enslaving tools
To wrong another by the name of right;
Thus came enclosure - ruin was its guide,
But freedom's cottage soon was thrust aside
And workhouse prisons raised upon the site.
Een nature's dwellings far away from men,
The common heath, became the spoiler's prey;
The rabbit had not where to make his den
And labour's only cow was drove away.
No matter - wrong was right and right was wrong,
And freedom's bawl was sanction to the song.
- Such was thy ruin, music-making elm;
The right of freedom was to injure thine:
As thou wert served, so would they overwhelm
In freedom's name the little that is mine.
And there are knaves that brawl for better laws
And cant of tyranny in stronger power
Who glut their vile unsatiated maws
And freedom's birthright from the weak devour.

John Clare

The Fear Of Flowers

The nodding oxeye bends before the wind,
The woodbine quakes lest boys their flowers should find,
And prickly dogrose spite of its array
Can't dare the blossom-seeking hand away,
While thistles wear their heavy knobs of bloom
Proud as a warhorse wears its haughty plume,
And by the roadside danger's self defy;
On commons where pined sheep and oxen lie
In ruddy pomp and ever thronging mood
It stands and spreads like danger in a wood,
And in the village street where meanest weeds
Can't stand untouched to fill their husks with seeds,
The haughty thistle oer all danger towers,
In every place the very wasp of flowers.

John Clare

The Fens

Wandering by the river's edge,
I love to rustle through the sedge
And through the woods of reed to tear
Almost as high as bushes are.
Yet, turning quick with shudder chill,
As danger ever does from ill,
Fear's moment ague quakes the blood,
While plop the snake coils in the flood
And, hissing with a forked tongue,
Across the river winds along.
In coat of orange, green, and blue
Now on a willow branch I view,
Grey waving to the sunny gleam,
Kingfishers watch the ripple stream
For little fish that nimble bye
And in the gravel shallows lie.

Eddies run before the boats,
Gurgling where the fisher floats,
Who takes advantage of the gale
And hoists his handkerchief for sail
On osier twigs that form a mast--
While idly lies, nor wanted more,
The spirit that pushed him on before.

There's not a hill in all the view,
Save that a forked cloud or two
Upon the verge of distance lies
And into mountains cheats the eyes.
And as to trees the willows wear
Lopped heads as high as bushes are;
Some taller things the distance shrouds
That may be trees or stacks or clouds
Or may be nothing; still they wear
A semblance where there's nought to spare.

Among the tawny tasselled reed
The ducks and ducklings float and feed.
With head oft dabbing in the flood
They fish all day the weedy mud,
And tumbler-like are bobbing there,
Heels topsy turvy in the air.

The geese in troops come droving up,
Nibble the weeds, and take a sup;
And, closely puzzled to agree,
Chatter like gossips over tea.
The gander with his scarlet nose
When strife's at height will interpose;
And, stretching neck to that and this,
With now a mutter, now a hiss,
A nibble at the feathers too,

A sort of 'pray be quiet do,'
And turning as the matter mends,
He stills them into mutual friends;
Then in a sort of triumph sings
And throws the water oer his wings.

Ah, could I see a spinney nigh,
A puddock riding in the sky
Above the oaks with easy sail
On stilly wings and forked tail,
Or meet a heath of furze in flower,
I might enjoy a quiet hour,
Sit down at rest, and walk at ease,
And find a many things to please.
But here my fancy's moods admire
The naked levels till they tire,
Nor een a molehill cushion meet
To rest on when I want a seat.

Here's little save the river scene
And grounds of oats in rustling green
And crowded growth of wheat and beans,
That with the hope of plenty leans
And cheers the farmer's gazing brow,
Who lives and triumphs in the plough--
One sometimes meets a pleasant sward
Of swarthy grass; and quickly marred
The plough soon turns it into brown,
And, when again one rambles down
The path, small hillocks burning lie
And smoke beneath a burning sky.
Green paddocks have but little charms
With gain the merchandise of farms;
And, muse and marvel where we may,
Gain mars the landscape every day--
The meadow grass turned up and copt,
The trees to stumpy dotterels lopt,
The hearth with fuel to supply
For rest to smoke and chatter bye;
Giving the joy of home delights,
The warmest mirth on coldest nights.
And so for gain, that joy's repay,
Change cheats the landscape every day,
Nor trees nor bush about it grows
That from the hatchet can repose,
And the horizon stooping smiles
Oer treeless fens of many miles.
Spring comes and goes and comes again
And all is nakedness and fen.

John Clare

The Firetail's Nest

'Tweet' pipes the robin as the cat creeps by
Her nestling young that in the elderns lie,
And then the bluecap tootles in its glee,
Picking the flies from orchard apple tree,
And 'pink' the chaffinch cries its well-known strain,
Urging its kind to utter 'pink' again,
While in a quiet mood hedgesparrows try
An inward stir of shadowed melody.
Around the rotten tree the firetail mourns
As the old hedger to his toil returns,
Chopping the grain to stop the gap close by
The hole where her blue eggs in safety lie.
Of everything that stirs she dreameth wrong
And pipes her 'tweet tut' fears the whole day long.

John Clare

The Flitting

I've left my own old home of homes,
Green fields and every pleasant place;
The summer like a stranger comes,
I pause and hardly know her face.
I miss the hazel's happy green,
The blue bell's quiet hanging blooms,
Where envy's sneer was never seen,
Where staring malice never comes.

I miss the heath, its yellow furze,
Molehills and rabbit tracks that lead
Through beesom, ling, and teazel burrs
That spread a wilderness indeed;
The woodland oaks and all below
That their white powdered branches shield,
The mossy paths: the very crow
Croaks music in my native field.

I sit me in my corner chair
That seems to feel itself from home,
And hear bird music here and there
From hawthorn hedge and orchard come;
I hear, but all is strange and new:
I sat on my old bench in June,
The sailing puddock's shrill 'peelew'
On Royce Wood seemed a sweeter tune.

I walk adown the narrow lane,
The nightingale is singing now,
But like to me she seems at loss
For Royce Wood and its shielding bough.
I lean upon the window sill,
The trees and summer happy seem;
Green, sunny green they shine, but still
My heart goes far away to dream.

Of happiness, and thoughts arise
With home-bred pictures many a one,
Green lanes that shut out burning skies
And old crooked stiles to rest upon;
Above them hangs the maple tree,
Below grass swells a velvet hill,
And little footpaths sweet to see
Go seeking sweeter places still,

With bye and bye a brook to cross
Oer which a little arch is thrown:
No brook is here, I feel the loss
From home and friends and all alone.
--The stone pit with its shelvy sides
Seemed hanging rocks in my esteem;
I miss the prospect far and wide

From Langley Bush, and so I seem

Alone and in a stranger scene,
Far, far from spots my heart esteems,
The closen with their ancient green,
Heaths, woods, and pastures, sunny streams.
The hawthorns here were hung with may,
But still they seem in deader green,
The sun een seems to lose its way
Nor knows the quarter it is in.

I dwell in trifles like a child,
I feel as ill becomes a man,
And still my thoughts like weedlings wild
Grow up to blossom where they can.
They turn to places known so long
I feel that joy was dwelling there,
So home-fed pleasure fills the song
That has no present joys to hear.

I read in books for happiness,
But books are like the sea to joy,
They change--as well give age the glass
To hunt its visage when a boy.
For books they follow fashions new
And throw all old esteems away,
In crowded streets flowers never grew,
But many there hath died away.

Some sing the pomps of chivalry
As legends of the ancient time,
Where gold and pearls and mystery
Are shadows painted for sublime;
But passions of sublimity
Belong to plain and simpler things,
And David underneath a tree
Sought when a shepherd Salem's springs,

Where moss did into cushions spring,
Forming a seat of velvet hue,
A small unnoticed trifling thing
To all but heaven's hailing dew.
And David's crown hath passed away,
Yet poesy breathes his shepherd-skill,
His palace lost--and to this day
The little moss is blossoming still.

Strange scenes mere shadows are to me,
Vague impersonifying things;
I love with my old haunts to be
By quiet woods and gravel springs,
Where little pebbles wear as smooth

As hermits' beads by gentle floods,
Whose noises do my spirits soothe
And warm them into singing moods.

Here every tree is strange to me,
All foreign things where eer I go,
There's none where boyhood made a swee
Or clambered up to rob a crow.
No hollow tree or woodland bower
Well known when joy was beating high,
Where beauty ran to shun a shower
And love took pains to keep her dry,

And laid the sheaf upon the ground
To keep her from the dripping grass,
And ran for stocks and set them round
Till scarce a drop of rain could pass
Through; where the maidens they reclined
And sung sweet ballads now forgot,
Which brought sweet memories to the mind,
But here no memory knows them not.

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

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

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

There little lambtoe bunches springs
In red tinged and begolden dye
For ever, and like China kings

They come but never seem to die.
There may-bloom with its little threads
Still comes upon the thorny bowers
And neer forgets those prickly heads
Like fairy pins amid the flowers.

And still they bloom as on the day
They first crowned wilderness and rock,
When Abel haply wreathed with may
The firstlings of his little flock,
And Eve might from the matted thorn
To deck her lone and lovely brow
Reach that same rose that heedless scorn
Misnames as the dog rosey now.

Give me no high-flown fangled things,
No haughty pomp in marching chime,
Where muses play on golden strings
And splendour passes for sublime,
Where cities stretch as far as fame
And fancy's straining eye can go,
And piled until the sky for shame
Is stooping far away below.

I love the verse that mild and bland
Breathes of green fields and open sky,
I love the muse that in her hand
Bears flowers of native poesy;
Who walks nor skips the pasture brook
In scorn, but by the drinking horse
Leans oer its little brig to look
How far the sallows lean across,

And feels a rapture in her breast
Upon their root-fringed grains to mark
A hermit morehen's sedgy nest
Just like a naiad's summer bark.
She counts the eggs she cannot reach
Admires the spot and loves it well,
And yearns, so nature's lessons teach,
Amid such neighbourhoods to dwell.

I love the muse who sits her down
Upon the molehill's little lap,
Who feels no fear to stain her gown
And pauses by the hedgerow gap;
Not with that affectation, praise
Of song, to sing and never see
A field flower grown in all her days
Or een a forest's aged tree.

Een here my simple feelings nurse

A love for every simple weed,
And een this little shepherd's purse
Grieves me to cut it up; indeed
I feel at times a love and joy
For every weed and every thing,
A feeling kindred from a boy,
A feeling brought with every Spring.

And why? this shepherd's purse that grows
In this strange spot, in days gone bye
Grew in the little garden rows
Of my old home now left; and I
Feel what I never felt before,
This weed an ancient neighbour here,
And though I own the spot no more
Its every trifle makes it dear.

The ivy at the parlour end,
The woodbine at the garden gate,
Are all and each affection's friend
That render parting desolate.
But times will change and friends must part
And nature still can make amends;
Their memory lingers round the heart
Like life whose essence is its friends.

Time looks on pomp with vengeful mood
Or killing apathy's disdain;
So where old marble cities stood
Poor persecuted weeds remain.
She feels a love for little things
That very few can feel beside,
And still the grass eternal springs
Where castles stood and grandeur died.

John Clare

The Flood

On Lolham Brigs in wild and lonely mood
I've seen the winter floods their gambols play
Through each old arch that trembled while I stood
Bent o'er its wall to watch the dashing spray
As their old stations would be washed away
Crash came the ice against the jambs and then
A shudder jarred the arches - yet once more
It breasted raving waves and stood agen
To wait the shock as stubborn as before
- White foam brown crested with the russet soil
As washed from new plough lands would dart beneath
Then round and round a thousand eddies boil
On tother side - then pause as if for breath
One minute - and engulphed - like life in death

Whose wrecky stains dart on the floods away
More swift than shadows in a stormy day
Straws trail and turn and steady - all in vain
The engulfing arches shoot them quickly through
The feather dances flutters and again
Darts through the deepest dangers still afloat
Seeming as faireys whisked it from the view
And danced it o'er the waves as pleasures boat
Light hearted as a thought in May -
Trays - uptorn bushes - fence demolished rails
Loaded with weeds in sluggish motions stray
Like water monsters lost each winds and trails
Till near the arches - then as in affright
It plunges - reels - and shudders out of sight

Waves trough - rebound - and fury boil again
Like plunging monsters rising underneath
Who at the top curl up a shaggy main
A moment catching at a surer breath
Then plunging headlong down and down - and on
Each following boil the shadow of the last
And other monsters rise when those are gone
Crest their fringed waves - plunge onward and are past
- The chill air comes around me ocean blea
From bank to bank the waterstrife is spread
Strange birds like snow spots o'er the huzzing sea
Hang where the wild duck hurried past and fled
On roars the flood - all restless to be free
Like trouble wandering to eternity

John Clare

The Fox

The shepherd on his journey heard when nigh
His dog among the bushes barking high;
The ploughman ran and gave a hearty shout,
He found a weary fox and beat him out.
The ploughman laughed and would have ploughed him in
But the old shepherd took him for the skin.
He lay upon the furrow stretched for dead,
The old dog lay and licked the wounds that bled,
The ploughman beat him till his ribs would crack,
And then the shepherd slung him at his back;
And when he rested, to his dog's surprise,
The old fox started from his dead disguise;
And while the dog lay panting in the sedge
He up and snapt and bolted through the hedge.

He scampered to the bushes far away;
The shepherd called the ploughman to the fray;
The ploughman wished he had a gun to shoot.
The old dog barked and followed the pursuit.
The shepherd threw his hook and tottered past;
The ploughman ran but none could go so fast;
The woodman threw his faggot from the way
And ceased to chop and wondered at the fray.
But when he saw the dog and heard the cry
He threw his hatchet--but the fox was bye.
The shepherd broke his hook and lost the skin;
He found a badger hole and bolted in.
They tried to dig, but, safe from danger's way,
He lived to chase the hounds another day.

John Clare

The Frightened Ploughman

I went in the fields with the leisure I got,
The stranger might smile but I heeded him not,
The hovel was ready to screen from a shower,
And the book in my pocket was read in an hour.

The bird came for shelter, but soon flew away;
The horse came to look, and seemed happy to stay;
He stood up in quiet, and hung down his head,
And seemed to be hearing the poem I read.

The ploughman would turn from his plough in the day
And wonder what being had come in his way,
To lie on a molehill and read the day long
And laugh out aloud when he'd finished his song.

The pewit turned over and stooped oer my head
Where the raven croaked loud like the ploughman ill-bred,
But the lark high above charmed me all the day long,
So I sat down and joined in the chorus of song.

The foolhardy ploughman I well could endure,
His praise was worth nothing, his censure was poor,
Fame bade me go on and I toiled the day long
Till the fields where he lived should be known in my song.

John Clare

The Gipsy's Camp

How oft on Sundays, when I'd time to tramp,
My rambles led me to a gipsy's camp,
Where the real effigy of midnight hags,
With tawny smoked flesh and tattered rags,
Uncouth-brimmed hat, and weather-beaten cloak,
Neath the wild shelter of a knotty oak,
Along the greensward uniformly pricks
Her pliant bending hazel's arching sticks:
While round-topt bush, or briar-entangled hedge,
Where flag-leaves spring beneath, or ramping sedge,
Keeps off the bothering bustle of the wind,
And give the best retreat she hopes to find.
How oft I've bent me oer her fire and smoke,
To hear her gibberish tale so quaintly spoke,
While the old Sybil forged her boding clack,
Twin imps the meanwhile bawling at her back;
Oft on my hand her magic coin's been struck,
And hoping chink, she talked of morts of luck:
And still, as boyish hopes did first agree,
Mingled with fears to drop the fortune's fee,
I never failed to gain the honours sought,
And Squire and Lord were purchased with a groat.
But as man's unbelieving taste came round,
She furious stampt her shoeless foot aground,
Wiped bye her soot-black hair with clenching fist,
While through her yellow teeth the spittle hist,
Swearing by all her lucky powers of fate,
Which like as footboys on her actions wait,
That fortune's scale should to my sorrow turn,
And I one day the rash neglect should mourn;
That good to bad should change, and I should be
Lost to this world and all eternity;
That poor as Job I should remain unblest:--
(Alas, for fourpence how my die is cast!)
Of not a hoarded farthing be possesst,
And when all's done, be shoved to hell at last!

John Clare

The Instinct of Hope

Is there another world for this frail dust
To warm with life and be itself again?
Something about me daily speaks there must,
And why should instinct nourish hopes in vain?
'Tis nature's prophesy that such will be,
And everything seems struggling to explain
The close sealed volume of its mystery.
Time wandering onward keeps its usual pace
As seeming anxious of eternity,
To meet that calm and find a resting place.
E'en the small violet feels a future power
And waits each year renewing blooms to bring,
And surely man is no inferior flower
To die unworthy of a second spring?

John Clare

The Landrail

How sweet and pleasant grows the way
Through summer time again
While Landrails call from day to day
Amid the grass and grain

We hear it in the weeding time
When knee deep waves the corn
We hear it in the summers prime
Through meadows night and morn

And now I hear it in the grass
That grows as sweet again
And let a minutes notice pass
And now tis in the grain

Tis like a fancy everywhere
A sort of living doubt
We know tis something but it neer
Will blab the secret out

If heard in close or meadow plots
It flies if we pursue
But follows if we notice not
The close and meadow through

Boys know the note of many a bird
In their birdnesting bounds
But when the landrails noise is heard
They wonder at the sounds

They look in every tuft of grass
Thats in their rambles met
They peep in every bush they pass
And none the wiser get

And still they hear the craiking sound
And still they wonder why
It surely cant be under ground
Nor is it in the sky

And yet tis heard in every vale
An undiscovered song
And makes a pleasant wonder tale
For all the summer long

The shepherd whistles through his hands
And starts with many a whoop
His busy dog across the lands
In hopes to fright it up

Tis still a minutes length or more
Till dogs are off and gone

Then sings and louder than before
But keeps the secret on

Yet accident will often meet
The nest within its way
And weeders when they weed the wheat
Discover where they lay

And mowers on the meadow lea
Chance on their noisy guest
And wonder what the bird can be
That lays without a nest

In simple holes that birds will rake
When dusting on the ground
They drop their eggs of curious make
Deep blotched and nearly round

A mystery still to men and boys
Who know not where they lay
And guess it but a summer noise
Among the meadow hay

John Clare

The Lass With The Delicate Air

Timid and smiling, beautiful and shy,
She drops her head at every passer bye.
Afraid of praise she hurries down the streets
And turns away from every smile she meets.
The forward clown has many things to say
And holds her by the gown to make her stay,
The picture of good health she goes along,
Hale as the morn and happy as her song.
Yet there is one who never feels a fear
To whisper pleasing fancies in her ear;
Yet een from him she shuns a rude embrace,
And stooping holds her hands before her face,--
She even shuns and fears the bolder wind,
And holds her shawl, and often looks behind.

John Clare

The Lout

For Sunday's play he never makes excuse,
But plays at taw, and buys his Spanish juice.
Hard as his toil, and ever slow to speak,
Yet he gives maidens many a burning cheek;
For none can pass him but his witless grace
Of bawdry brings the blushes in her face.
As vulgar as the dirt he treads upon
He calls his cows or drives his horses on;
He knows the lamest cow and strokes her side
And often tries to mount her back and ride,
And takes her tail at night in idle play,
And makes her drag him homeward all the way.
He knows of nothing but the football match,
And where hens lay, and when the duck will hatch.

John Clare

The Maid Of Jerusalem

Maid of Jerusalem, by the Dead Sea,
I wandered all sorrowing thinking of thee,--
Thy city in ruins, thy kindred deplored,
All fallen and lost by the Ottoman's sword.

I saw thee sit there in disconsolate sighs,
Where the hall of thy fathers a ruined heap lies.
Thy fair finger showed me the place where they trod,
In thy childhood where flourished the city of God.

The place where they fell and the scenes where they lie,
In the tomb of Siloa--the tear in her eye
She stifled: transfixed there it grew like a pearl,
Beneath the dark lash of the sweet Jewish Girl.

Jerusalem is fallen! still thou art in bloom,
As fresh as the ivy around the lone tomb,
And fair as the lily of morning that waves
Its sweet-scented bells over desolate graves.

When I think of Jerusalem in kingdoms yet free,
I shall think of its ruins and think upon thee;
Thou beautiful Jewess, content thou mayest roam;
A bright spot in Eden still blooms as thy home.

John Clare

The Maid Of Ocram, Or, Lord Gregory

Gay was the Maid of Ocram
As lady eer might be
Ere she did venture past a maid
To love Lord Gregory.
Fair was the Maid of Ocram
And shining like the sun
Ere her bower key was turned on two
Where bride bed lay for none.

And late at night she sought her love--
The snow slept on her skin--
Get up, she cried, thou false young man,
And let thy true love in.
And fain would he have loosed the key
All for his true love's sake,
But Lord Gregory then was fast asleep,
His mother wide awake.

And up she threw the window sash,
And out her head put she:
And who is that which knocks so late
And taunts so loud to me?
It is the Maid of Ocram,
Your own heart's next akin;
For so you've sworn, Lord Gregory,
To come and let me in.

O pause not thus, you know me well,
Haste down my way to win.
The wind disturbs my yellow locks,
The snow sleeps on my skin.--
If you be the Maid of Ocram,
As much I doubt you be,
Then tell me of three tokens
That passed with you and me.--

O talk not now of tokens
Which you do wish to break;
Chilled are those lips you've kissed so warm,
And all too numbed to speak.
You know when in my father's bower
You left your cloak for mine,
Though yours was nought but silver twist
And mine the golden twine.--

If you're the lass of Ocram,
As I take you not to be,
The second token you must tell
Which past with you and me.--
O know you not, O know you not
Twas in my father's park,
You led me out a mile too far

And courted in the dark?

When you did change your ring for mine
My yielding heart to win,
Though mine was of the beaten gold
Yours but of burnished tin,
Though mine was all true love without,
Yours but false love within?

O ask me no more tokens
For fast the snow doth fall.
Tis sad to strive and speak in vain,
You mean to break them all.--
If you are the Maid of Ocram,
As I take you not to be,
You must mention the third token
That passed with you and me.--

Twas when you stole my maidenhead;
That grieves me worst of all.--
Begone, you lying creature, then
This instant from my hall,
Or you and your vile baby
Shall in the deep sea fall;
For I have none on earth as yet
That may me father call.--

O must none close my dying feet,
And must none close my hands,
And may none bind my yellow locks
As death for all demands?
You need not use no force at all,
Your hard heart breaks the vow;
You've had your wish against my will
And you shall have it now.

And must none close my dying feet,
And must none close my hands,
And will none do the last kind deeds
That death for all demands?--
Your sister, she may close your feet,
Your brother close your hands,
Your mother, she may wrap your waist
In death's fit wedding bands;
Your father, he may tie your locks
And lay you in the sands.--

My sister, she will weep in vain,
My brother ride and run,
My mother, she will break her heart;
And ere the rising sun
My father will be looking out--

But find me they will none.
I go to lay my woes to rest,
None shall know where I'm gone.
God must be friend and father both,
Lord Gregory will be none.--

Lord Gregory started up from sleep
And thought he heard a voice
That screamed full dreadful in his ear,
And once and twice and thrice.
Lord Gregory to his mother called:
O mother dear, said he,
I've dreamt the Maid of Ocram
Was floating on the sea.

Lie still, my son, the mother said,
Tis but a little space
And half an hour has scarcely passed
Since she did pass this place.--
O cruel, cruel mother,
When she did pass so nigh
How could you let me sleep so sound
Or let her wander bye?
Now if she's lost my heart must break--
I'll seek her till I die.

He sought her east, he sought her west,
He sought through park and plain;
He sought her where she might have been
But found her not again.
I cannot curse thee, mother,
Though thine's the blame, said he
I cannot curse thee, mother,
Though thou'st done worse to me.
Yet do I curse thy pride that aye
So tauntingly aspires;
For my love was a gay knight's heir,
And my father was a squire's.

And I will sell my park and hall;
And if ye wed again
Ye shall not wed for titles twice
That made ye once so vain.
So if ye will wed, wed for love,
As I was fain to do;
Ye've gave to me a broken heart,
And I'll give nought to you.

Your pride has wronged your own heart's blood;
For she was mine by grace,
And now my lady love is gone
None else shall take her place.

I'll sell my park and sell my hall
And sink my titles too.
Your pride's done wrong enough as now
To leave it more to do.

She owneth none that owned them all
And would have graced them well;
None else shall take the right she missed
Nor in my bosom dwell.--
And then he took and burnt his will
Before his mother's face,
And tore his patents all in two,
While tears fell down apace--
But in his mother's haughty look
Ye nought but frowns might trace.

And then he sat him down to grieve,
But could not sit for pain.
And then he laid him on the bed
And ne'er got up again.

John Clare

The Maple Tree

The Maple with its tassell flowers of green
That turns to red, a stag horn shapèd seed
Just spreading out its scallopped leaves is seen,
Of yellowish hue yet beautifully green.
Bark ribb'd like corderoy in seamy screed
That farther up the stem is smoother seen,
Where the white hemlock with white umbel flowers
Up each spread stoven to the branches towers
And mossy round the stoven spread dark green
And blotched leaved orchis and the blue-bell flowers -
Thickly they grow and neath the leaves are seen.
I love to see them gemm'd with morning hours.
I love the lone green places where they be
And the sweet clothing of the Maple tree.

John Clare

The Mores

Far spread the moorey ground a level scene
Bespread with rush and one eternal green
That never felt the rage of blundering plough
Though centurys wreathed spring's blossoms on its brow
Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
In uncheckt shadows of green brown, and grey
Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky
One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree
Spread its faint shadow of immensity
And lost itself, which seemed to eke its bounds
In the blue mist the horizon's edge surrounds
Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers
Is faded all - a hope that blossomed free,
And hath been once, no more shall ever be
Inclosure came and trampled on the grave
Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave
And memory's pride ere want to wealth did bow
Is both the shadow and the substance now
The sheep and cows were free to range as then
Where change might prompt nor felt the bonds of men
Cows went and came, with evening morn and night,
To the wild pasture as their common right
And sheep, unfolded with the rising sun
Heard the swains shout and felt their freedom won
Tracked the red fallow field and heath and plain
Then met the brook and drank and roamed again
The brook that dribbled on as clear as glass
Beneath the roots they hid among the grass
While the glad shepherd traced their tracks along
Free as the lark and happy as her song
But now all's fled and flats of many a dye
That seemed to lengthen with the following eye
Moors, loosing from the sight, far, smooth, and blea
Where swopt the plover in its pleasure free
Are vanished now with commons wild and gay
As poet's visions of life's early day
Mulberry-bushes where the boy would run
To fill his hands with fruit are grubbed and done
And hedgrow-briars - flower-lovers overjoyed
Came and got flower-pots - these are all destroyed
And sky-bound mores in mangled garbs are left
Like mighty giants of their limbs bereft
Fence now meets fence in owners' little bounds
Of field and meadow large as garden grounds
In little parcels little minds to please
With men and flocks imprisoned ill at ease
Each little path that led its pleasant way
As sweet as morning leading night astray

Where little flowers bloomed round a varied host
That travel felt delighted to be lost
Nor grudged the steps that he had ta-en as vain
When right roads traced his journeys and again -
Nay, on a broken tree he'd sit awhile
To see the mores and fields and meadows smile
Sometimes with cowslaps smothered - then all white
With daiseys - then the summer's splendid sight
Of cornfields crimson o'er the headache bloomd
Like splendid armys for the battle plumed
He gazed upon them with wild fancy's eye
As fallen landscapes from an evening sky
These paths are stopt - the rude philistine's thrall
Is laid upon them and destroyed them all
Each little tyrant with his little sign
Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine
But paths to freedom and to childhood dear
A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'
And on the tree with ivy overhung
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung
As tho' the very birds should learn to know
When they go there they must no further go
Thus, with the poor, scared freedom bade goodbye
And much they feel it in the smothered sigh
And birds and trees and flowers without a name
All sighed when lawless law's enclosure came
And dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes
Have found too truly that they were but dreams.

John Clare

The Nightingale's Nest

Up this green woodland-ride let’s softly rove,
And list the nightingale - she dwells just here.
Hush ! let the wood-gate softly clap, for fear
The noise might drive her from her home of love ;
For here I’ve heard her many a merry year -
At morn, at eve, nay, all the live-long day,
As though she lived on song. This very spot,
Just where that old-man’s-beard all wildly trails
Rude arbours o’er the road, and stops the way -
And where that child its blue-bell flowers hath got,
Laughing and creeping through the mossy rails -
There have I hunted like a very boy,
Creeping on hands and knees through matted thorn
To find her nest, and see her feed her young.
And vainly did I many hours employ :
All seemed as hidden as a thought unborn.
And where those crimping fern-leaves ramp among
The hazel’s under boughs, I’ve nestled down,
And watched her while she sung ; and her renown
Hath made me marvel that so famed a bird
Should have no better dress than russet brown.
Her wings would tremble in her ecstasy,
And feathers stand on end, as ’twere with joy,
And mouth wide open to release her heart
Of its out-sobbing songs. The happiest part
Of summer’s fame she shared, for so to me
Did happy fancies shapen her employ ;
But if I touched a bush, or scarcely stirred,
All in a moment stopt. I watched in vain :
The timid bird had left the hazel bush,
And at a distance hid to sing again.
Lost in a wilderness of listening leaves,
Rich Ecstasy would pour its luscious strain,
Till envy spurred the emulating thrush
To start less wild and scarce inferior songs ;
For while of half the year Care him bereaves,
To damp the ardour of his speckled breast ;
The nightingale to summer’s life belongs,
And naked trees, and winter’s nipping wrongs,
Are strangers to her music and her rest.
Her joys are evergreen, her world is wide -
Hark! there she is as usual - let’s be hush -
For in this black-thorn clump, if rightly guest,
Her curious house is hidden. Part aside
These hazel branches in a gentle way,
And stoop right cautious ’neath the rustling boughs,
For we will have another search to day,
And hunt this fern-strewn thorn-clump round and round ;
And where this reeded wood-grass idly bows,
We’ll wade right through, it is a likely nook :
In such like spots, and often on the ground,
They’ll build, where rude boys never think to look -

Aye, as I live ! her secret nest is here,
Upon this white-thorn stump ! I've searched about
For hours in vain. There! put that bramble by -
Nay, trample on its branches and get near.
How subtle is the bird ! she started out,
And raised a plaintive note of danger nigh,
Ere we were past the brambles ; and now, near
Her nest, she sudden stops - as choking fear,
That might betray her home. So even now
We'll leave it as we found it : safety's guard
Of pathless solitudes shall keep it still.
See there! she's sitting on the old oak bough,
Mute in her fears ; our presence doth retard
Her joys, and doubt turns every rapture chill.
Sing on, sweet bird! may no worse hap befall
Thy visions, than the fear that now deceives.
We will not plunder music of its dower,
Nor turn this spot of happiness to thrall ;
For melody seems hid in every flower,
That blossoms near thy home. These harebells all
Seem bowing with the beautiful in song ;
And gaping cuckoo-flower, with spotted leaves,
Seems blushing of the singing it has heard.
How curious is the nest ; no other bird
Uses such loose materials, or weaves
Its dwelling in such spots : dead oaken leaves
Are placed without, and velvet moss within,
And little scraps of grass, and, scant and spare,
What scarcely seem materials, down and hair ;
For from men's haunts she nothing seems to win.
Yet Nature is the builder, and contrives
Homes for her children's comfort, even here ;
Where Solitude's disciples spend their lives
Unseen, save when a wanderer passes near
That loves such pleasant places. Deep adown,
The nest is made a hermit's mossy cell.
Snug lie her curious eggs in number five,
Of deadened green, or rather olive brown ;
And the old prickly thorn-bush guards them well.
So here we'll leave them, still unknown to wrong,
As the old woodland's legacy of song.

John Clare

The Old Cottagers

The little cottage stood alone, the pride
Of solitude surrounded every side.
Bean fields in blossom almost reached the wall;
A garden with its hawthorn hedge was all
The space between.--Green light did pass
Through one small window, where a looking-glass
Placed in the parlour, richly there revealed
A spacious landscape and a blooming field.
The pasture cows that herded on the moor
Printed their footsteps to the very door,
Where little summer flowers with seasons blow
And scarcely gave the eldern leave to grow.
The cuckoo that one listens far away
Sung in the orchard trees for half the day;
And where the robin lives, the village guest,
In the old weedy hedge the leafy nest
Of the coy nightingale was yearly found,
Safe from all eyes as in the loneliest ground;
And little chats that in bean stalks will lie
A nest with cobwebs there will build, and fly
Upon the kidney bean that twines and towers
Up little poles in wreaths of scarlet flowers.

There a lone couple lived, secluded there
From all the world considers joy or care,
Lived to themselves, a long lone journey trod,
And through their Bible talked aloud to God;
While one small close and cow their wants maintained,
But little needing, and but little gained.
Their neighbour's name was peace, with her they went,
With tottering age, and dignified content,
Through a rich length of years and quiet days,
And filled the neighbouring village with their praise.

John Clare

The Old Year

The Old Year's gone away
To nothingness and night:
We cannot find him all the day
Nor hear him in the night:
He left no footstep, mark or place
In either shade or sun:
The last year he'd a neighbour's face,
In this he's known by none.

All nothing everywhere:
Mists we on mornings see
Have more of substance when they're here
And more of form than he.
He was a friend by every fire,
In every cot and hall -
A guest to every heart's desire,
And now he's nought at all.

Old papers thrown away,
Old garments cast aside,
The talk of yesterday,
All things identified;
But times once torn away
No voices can recall:
The eve of New Year's Day
Left the Old Year lost to all.

John Clare

The Peasant Poet

He loved the brook's soft sound,
The swallow swimming by.
He loved the daisy-covered ground,
The cloud-bedappled sky.
To him the dismal storm appeared
The very voice of God;
And when the evening rack was reared
Stood Moses with his rod.
And everything his eyes surveyed,
The insects in the brake,
Were creatures God Almighty made,
He loved them for His sake--
A silent man in life's affairs,
A thinker from a boy,
A peasant in his daily cares,
A poet in his joy.

John Clare

The Poet's Death

The world is taking little heed
And plods from day to day:
The vulgar flourish like a weed,
The learned pass away.

We miss him on the summer path
The lonely summer day,
Where mowers cut the pleasant swath
And maidens make the hay.

The vulgar take but little heed;
The garden wants his care;
There lies the book he used to read,
There stands the empty chair.

The boat laid up, the voyage oer,
And passed the stormy wave,
The world is going as before,
The poet in his grave.

John Clare

The Sailor-Boy

Tis three years and a quarter since I left my own fireside
To go aboard a ship through love, and plough the ocean wide.
I crossed my native fields, where the scarlet poppies grew,
And the groundlark left his nest like a neighbour which I knew.

The pigeons from the dove cote cooed over the old lane,
The crow flocks from the oakwood went flopping oer the grain;
Like lots of dear old neighbours whom I shall see no more
They greeted me that morning I left the English shore.

The sun was just a-rising above the heath of furze,
And the shadows grow to giants; that bright ball never stirs:
There the shepherds lay with their dogs by their side,
And they started up and barked as my shadow they espied.

A maid of early morning twirled her mop upon the moor;
I wished her my farewell before she closed the door.
My friends I left behind me for other places new,
Crows and pigeons all were strangers as oer my head they flew.

Trees and bushes were all strangers, the hedges and the lanes,
The steeples and the houses and broad untrodden plains.
I passed the pretty milkmaid with her red and rosy face;
I knew not where I met her, I was strange to the place.

At last I saw the ocean, a pleasing sight to me:
I stood upon the shore of a mighty glorious sea.
The waves in easy motion went rolling on their way,
English colours were a-flying where the British squadron lay.

I left my honest parents, the church clock and the village;
I left the lads and lasses, the labour and the tillage;
To plough the briny ocean, which soon became my joy--
I sat and sang among the shrouds, a lonely sailor-boy.

John Clare

The Secret

I loved thee, though I told thee not,
Right earlily and long,
Thou wert my joy in every spot,
My theme in every song.
And when I saw a stranger face
Where beauty held the claim,
I gave it like a secret grace
The being of thy name.
And all the charms of face or voice
Which I in others see
Are but the recollected choice
Of what I felt for thee.

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - April

The infant april joins the spring
And views its watery skye
As youngling linnet trys its wing
And fears at first to flye
With timid step she ventures on
And hardly dares to smile
The blossoms open one by one
And sunny hours beguile

But finer days approacheth yet
With scenes more sweet to charm
And suns arrive that rise and set
Bright strangers to a storm
And as the birds with louder song
Each mornings glory cheers
With bolder step she speeds along
And looses all her fears
In wanton gambols like a child
She tends her early toils
And seeks the buds along the wild
That blossom while she smiles
And laughing on with nought to chide
She races with the hours
Or sports by natures lovley side
And fills her lap with flowers

Tho at her birth north cutting gales
Her beautys oft disguise
And hopfull blossoms turning pales
Upon her bosom dies
Yet ere she seeks another place
And ends her reign in this
She leaves us with as fair a face
As ere gave birth to bliss

And fairey month of waking mirth
From whom our joys ensue
Thou early gladder of the earth
Thrice welcom here anew
With thee the bud unfolds to leaves
The grass greens on the lea
And flowers their tender boon recieves
To bloom and smile with thee

The shepherds on thy pasture walks
The first fair cowslip finds
Whose tufted flowers on slender stalks
Keep nodding to the winds
And tho thy thorns withold the may
Their shades the violets bring
Which childern stoop for in their play
As tokens of the spring

The time when daiseys bloom divine
With thy calm hours begun
And crowflowers blazing blooms are thine
Bright childern of the sun
Along thy woodlands shaded nooks
The primrose wanly comes
And shining in thy pebley brooks
The horse bleb gaily blooms

The long lost charm of sparkling dew
Thy gentle birth recieves
And on thy wreathing locks we view
The first infolding leaves
And seeking firstling buds and flowers
The trials of thy skill
Were pastimes of my infant hours
And so they haunt me still

To see thy first broad arum leaves
I lovd them from a child
And where thy woodbines sprouting weaves
I joyd to trace the wild
And jocund as thy lambs at play
I met the wanton wind
With feelings that have passd away
Whose shadows cling behind

Those joys which childhood claims its own
Woud they were kin to men
Those treasures to the world unknown
When known-was witherd then
But hovering round our growing years
To gild cares sable shroud
Their spirit thro the gloom appears
As suns behind a cloud

As thou first met my infant eyes
When thro thy fields I flew
Whose distance where they meet the skyes
Was all the worlds I knew
That warmth of fancys wildest hours
Which made things kin to life
That heard a voice in trees and flowers
Has swoond in reasons strife

Sweet month thy pleasures bids thee be
The fairest child of spring
And every hour that comes with thee
Comes some new joy to bring
The trees still deepen in their bloom
Crass greens the meadow lands

And flowers with every morning come
As dropt by fairey hands

The field and gardens lovley hours
Begin and end with thee
For whats so sweet as peeping flowers
And bursting buds to see
What time the dews unsullied drops
In burnishd gold distills
On crocus flowers unclosing tops
And drooping daffodills

Each day with added glorys come
And as they leave the night
Put on the roseys lovley bloom
And blushes with delight
And suns that wait their welcome birth
With earlier haste pursue
Their journeys to this lower earth
To free their steps from dew

To see thee come all hearts rejoice
And warms with feelings strong
With thee all nature finds a voice
And hums a waking song
The lover views thy welcome hours
And thinks of summer come
And takes the maid thy early flowers
To tempt her steps from home

Along each hedge and sprouting bush
The singing birds are blest
And linnet green and speckld thrush
Prepare their mossy nest
On the warm bed thy plain supplys
The young lambs find repose
And mid thy green hills basking lies
Like spots of lingering snows

Young things of tender life again
Enjoys thy sunny hours
And gosslings waddle ocr the plain
As yellow as its flowers
Or swim the pond in wild delight
To catch the water flye
Where hissing geese in ceasless spite
Make childern scamper bye

Again the fairey tribes pursue
Their pleasures on the plain
And brightend with the morning dew
Black circles shine again

And on its superstitious ground
Where flowers seem loath to dwell
The toadstools fuzzy balls abound
And mushrooms yearly swell

The seasons beautys all are thine
That visit with the year
Beautys that poets think divine
And all delight to hear
Thy latter days a pleasure brings
That gladden every heart
Pleasures that come like lovley things
But like to shades depart

Thy opend leaves and ripend buds
The cuckoo makes his choice
And shepherds in thy greening woods
First hears the cheering voice
And to thy ripend blooming bowers
The nightingale belongs
And singing to thy parting hours
Keeps night awake with songs

With thee the swallow dares to come
And primes his sutty wings
And urgd to seek their yearly home
Thy suns the Martin brings
And lovley month be leisure mine
Thy yearly mate to be
Tho may day scenes may brighter shine
Their birth belongs to thee

I waked me with thy rising sun
And thy first glorys viewd
And as thy welcome hours begun
Their sunny steps pursued
And now thy sun is on the set
Like to a lovley eve
I view thy parting with regret
And linger loath to leave

Thou lovley april fare thee well
Thou early child of spring
Tho born where storms too often dwell
Thy parents news to bring
Yet what thy parting youth supplys
No other months excell
Thou first for flowers and sunny skyes
Sweet april fare thee well.

John Clare

The Shepherd's Calendar - August

Harvest approaches with its bustling day
The wheat tans brown and barley bleaches grey
In yellow garb the oat land intervenes
And tawney glooms the valley thronged with beans
Silent the village grows, wood wandering dreams
Seem not so lovely as its quiet seems
Doors are shut up as on a winters day
And not a child about them lies at play
The dust that winnows neath the breezes feet
Is all that stirs about the silent street
Fancy might think that desert spreading fear
Had whisperd terrors into quiets ear
Or plundering armys past the place had come
And drove the lost inhabitants from home
The fields now claim them where a motley crew
Of old and young their daily tasks pursue
The barleys beard is grey and wheat is brown
And wakens toil betimes to leave the town
The reapers leave their beds before the sun
And gleaners follow when home toils are done
To pick the littered ear the reaper leaves
And glean in open fields among the sheaves
The ruddy child nursed in the lap of care
In toils rude ways to do its little share
Beside its mother poddles oer the land
Sun burnt and stooping with a weary hand
Picking its tiney glean of corn or wheat
While crackling stubbles wound its legs and feet
Full glad it often is to sit awhile
Upon a smooth green baulk to ease its toil
And feign would spend an idle hour to play
With insects strangers to the moiling day
Creeping about each rush and grassy stem
And often wishes it was one of them
In weariness of heart that it might lye
Hid in the grass from the days burning eye
That raises tender blisters on his skin
Thro holes or openings that have lost a pin
Free from the crackling stubs to toil and glean
And smiles to think how happy it had been
Whilst its expecting mother stops to tye
Her handful up and waiting his supply
Misses the resting younker from her side
And shouts of rods and morts of threats beside
Pointing to the grey willows while she tells
His fears shall fetch one if he still rebells
Picturing harsh truths in its unpracticed eye
How they who idle in the harvest lye
Shall well deserving in the winter pine
Or hunt the hedges with the birds and swine
In vain he wishes that the rushes height
Were tall as trees to hide him from her sight

Leaving his pleasant seat he sighs and rubs
His legs and shows scratchd wounds from piercing stubs
To make excuse for play but she disdains
His little wounds and smiles while he complains
And as he stoops adown in troubles sore
She sees his grief and bids him sob no more
As bye and bye on the next sabbath day
She'll give him well earned pence as well as play
When he may buy almost with out a stint
Sweet candied horehound cakes and pepper mint
Or streaking sticks of lusious lolipop
What ere he chuses from the tempting shop
Wi in whose diamond winder shining lye
Things of all sorts to tempt his eager eye
Rich sugar plumbs in phials shining bright
In every hue young fancys to delight
Coaches and ladys of gilt ginger bread
And downy plumbs and apples streaked with red
Such promises all sorrows soon displace
And smiles are instant kindled in his face
Scorning all troubles which he felt before
He picks the trailing ears and mourns no more
The fields are all alive with busy noise
Of labours sounds and insects humming joys
Some oer the glittering sickle sweating stoop
Startling full oft the partridge coveys up
Some oer the rustling scythe go bending on
And shockers follow where their toils have gone
First turning swaths to wither in the sun
Where mice from terrors dangers nimbly run
Leaving their tender young in fears alarm
Lapt up in nests of chimbled grasses warm
And oft themselves for safty search in vain
From the rude boy or churlish hearted swain
Who beat their stone chinkd forks about the groun(
And spread an instant murder all around
Tho oft the anxious maidens tender prayer
Urges the clown their little lives to spare
Who sighs while trailing the long rake along
At scenes so cruel and forgets her song
And stays wi love his murder aiming hand
Some ted the puffing winnow down the land
And others following roll them up in heaps
While cleanly as a barn door beesome sweeps
The hawling drag wi gathering weeds entwind
And singing rakers end the toils behind

When the sun stoops to meet the western sky
And noons hot hours have wanderd weary bye
They seek an awthorn bush or willow tree
Or stouk or shock where coolest shadows be
Where baskets heapd and unbroachd bottles lye

Which dogs in absence watchd with wary eye
To catch their breath awhile and share the boon
Which beavering time alows their toil at noon
All gathering sit on stubbs or sheaves the hour
Where scarlet poppys linger still in flower
Stript in his shirt the hot swain drops adown
And close beside him in her unpind gown
Next to her favoured swain the maiden steals
Blushing at kindness which her love reveals
Who makes a seat for her of things around
And drops beside her on the naked ground
Wearied wi brambles catching at her gown
And pulling nutts from branches pulld adown
By friendly swain the maid Wi heaving breast
Upon her lovers shoulder leans at rest
Then from its cool retreat the beer they bring
And hand the stout hooped bottle round the ring
Each swain soaks hard-the maiden ere she sips
Shrieks at the bold whasp settling on her lips
That seems determined only hers to greet
As if it fancied they were cherrys sweet
So dog forgoes his sleep awhile or play
Springing at frogs that rustling jump away
To watch each morsel that the boon bestows
And wait the bone or crumb the shepherd throws
For shepherds are no more of ease possest
But share the harvests labours with the rest

When day declines and labour meets repose
The bawling boy his evening journey goes
At toils unwearied call the first and last
He drives his horses to their nights repast
In dewey close or meadow to sojourn
And often ventures on his still return
Oer garden pales or orchard walls to hie
When sleeps safe key hath locked up dangers eye
All but the mastiff watching in the dark
Who snufts and knows him and forbears to bark
With fearful haste he climbs each loaded tree
And picks for prizes which the ripest be
Pears plumbs or filberts covered oer in leams
While the pale moon creeps high in peaceful dreams
And oer his harvest theft in jealous light
Fills empty shadows with the power to fright
And owlet screaming as it bounces nigh
That from some barn hole pops and hurries bye
Scard at the cat upon her nightly watch
For rats that come for dew upon the thatch
He hears the noise and trembling to escape
While every object grows a dismal shape
Drops from the tree in fancys swiftest dread
By ghosts pursued and scampers home to bed

Quick tumbling oer the mossy mouldering wall
And looses half his booty in the fall
Where soon as ere the morning opes its eyes
The restless hogs will happen on the prize
And crump adown the mellow and the green
And makes all seem as nothing ne'er had been
Amid the broils of harvests weary reign
How sweet the sabbath wakes its rest again
For each weary mind what rapture dwells
To hear once more its pleasant chiming bells
That from each steeple peeping here and there
Murmur a soothing lullaby to care
The shepherd journying on his morning rounds
Pauses awhile to hear their pleasing sounds
While the glad childern free from toils employ
Mimic the ding dong sounds and laugh for joy
The fields themselves seem happy to be free
Where insects chatter with unusual glee
While solitude the stubbs and grass among
Apears to muse and listen to the song

In quiet peace awakes the welcomed morn
Men tired and childern with their gleaning worn
Weary and stiff lye round their doors the day
To rest themselves with little heart for play
No more keck horns in homestead close resounds
As in their school boy days at hare and hounds
Nor running oer the street from wall to wall
With eager shouts at 'cuck and catch the ball'
In calm delight the sabbath wears along
Yet round the cross at noon a tempted throng
Of little younkers with their pence repair
To buy the downy plumb and lucious pear
That melt i' th mouth-which gardners never fail
For gains strong impulse to expose for sale
And on the circling cross steps in the sun
Sit when the parson has his sermon done
When grandams that against his rules rebell
Come wi their baskets heapd wi fruit to sell
That thither all the season did pursue
Wi mellow goosberrys of every hue
Green ruffs and raspberry reds and drops of gold
That makes mouths water often to behold
Sold out to clowns in totts oft deemd too small
Who grudging much the price eat husks and all
Nor leaves a fragment round to cheer the eye
Of searching swine that murmurs hungry bye
And currans red and white on cabbage leaves
While childerns fingers itches to be thieves
And black red cherrys shining to the sight
As rich as brandy held before the light
Now these are past he still as sunday comes

Sits on the cross wi baskets heapd wi plumbs
And Jenitens streakd apples suggar sweet
Others spice scented ripening wi the wheat
And pears that melt ith' mouth like honey which
He oft declares to make their spirits itch
They are so juicy ripe and better still
So rich they een might suck em thro a quill
Here at their leisure gather many a clown
To talk of grain and news about the town
And here the boy wi toils earnd penny comes
In hurrying speed to purchase pears or plumbs
And oer the basket hangs wi many a smile
Wi hat in hand to hold his prize the while

Not so the boys that begs for pence in vain
Of deaf eard dames that threat while they complain
Who talk of the good dinners they have eat
And wanting more as nothing but consiet
Vowing they ne'er shall throw good pence away
So bids them off and be content wi play
Reaching her rod that hangs the chimney oer
And scaring their rude whinings to the door
Who sob aloud and hang their hats adown
To hide their tears and sawn along the town
Venturing wi sullen step his basket nigh
And often dipping a desiring eye
Stone hearted dames thrifts errors to believe
Who make their little bellys yearn to thieve
But strong temptation must to fears resign
For close beside the stocks in terror shine
So choaking substitutes for loss of pelf
He keeps his hungry fingers to himself
And mopes and sits the sabbath hours away
Wi heart too weary and too sad for play
So sundays scenes and leisure passes bye
In rests soft peace and home tranquillity
Till monday morning doth its cares pursue
And wakes the harvests busy toils anew

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - February - A Thaw

The snow is gone from cottage tops
The thatch moss glows in brighter green
And eves in quick succession drops
Where grinning ides once hath been
Pit patting Wi a pleasant noise
In tubs set by the cottage door
And ducks and geese wi happy joys
Douse in the yard pond brimming oer

The sun peeps thro the window pane
Which childern mark wi laughing eye
And in the wet street steal again
To tell each other spring is nigh
And as young hope the past recalls
In playing groups will often draw
Building beside the sunny walls
Their spring-play-huts of sticks or straw

And oft in pleasures dreams they hie
Round homsteads by the village side
Scratting the hedgrow mosses bye
Where painted pooty shells abide
Mistaking oft the ivy spray
For leaves that come wi budding spring
And wondering in their search for play
Why birds delay to build and sing

The milkmaid singing leaves her bed
As glad as happy thoughts can be
While magpies chatter oer her head
As jocund in the change as she
Her cows around the closes stray
Nor lingering wait the foddering boy
Tossing the molehills in their play
And staring round in frolic joy

Ploughmen go whistling to their toils
And yoke again the rested plough
And mingling oer the mellow soils
Boys' shouts and whips are noising now

The shepherd now is often seen
By warm banks oer his work to bend
Or oer a gate or stile to lean
Chattering to a passing friend

Odd hive bees fancying winter oer
And dreaming in their combs of spring
Creeps on the slab beside their door
And strokes its legs upon its wing
While wild ones half asleep are humming
Round snowdrop bells a feeble note

And pigions coo of summer coming
Picking their feathers on the cote

The barking dogs by lane and wood
Drive sheep afield from foddering ground
And eccho in her summer mood
Briskly mocks the cheery sound
The flocks as from a prison broke
Shake their wet fleeces in the sun
While following fast a misty smoke
Reeks from the moist grass as they run

Nor more behind his masters heels
The dog creeps oer his winter pace
But cocks his tail and oer the fields
Runs many a wild and random chase
Following in spite of chiding calls
The startld cat wi harmless glee
Scaring her up the weed green walls
Or mossy mottld apple tree

As crows from morning perches flye
He barks and follows them in vain
Een larks will catch his nimble eye
And off he starts and barks again
Wi breathless haste and blinded guess
Oft following where the hare hath gone
Forgetting in his joys excess
His frolic puppy days are done

The gossips saunter in the sun
As at the spring from door to door
Of matters in the village done
And secret newsings mutterd oer
Young girls when they each other meet
Will stand their tales of love to tell
While going on errands down the street
Or fetching water from the well

A calm of pleasure listens round
And almost whispers winter bye
While fancy dreams of summer sounds
And quiet rapture fills the eye
The sun beams on the hedges lye
The south wind murmurs summer soft
And maids hang out white cloaths to dry
Around the eldern skirted croft

Each barns green thatch reeks in the sun
Its mate the happy sparrow calls
And as nest building spring begun
Peeps in the holes about the walls

The wren a sunny side the stack
Wi short tail ever on the strunt
Cockd gadding up above his back
Again for dancing gnats will hunt

The gladdend swine bolt from the sty
And round the yard in freedom run
Or stretching in their slumbers lye
Beside the cottage in the sun
The young horse whinneys to its mate
And sickens from the threshers door
Rubbing the straw yards banded gate
Longing for freedom on the moor

Hens leave their roosts wi cackling calls
To see the barn door free from snow
And cocks flye up the mossy walls
To clap their spangld wings and crow
About the steeples sunny top
The jackdaw flocks resemble spring
And in the stone archd windows pop
Wi summer noise and wanton wing

The small birds think their wants are oer
To see the snow hills fret again
And from the barns chaff litterd door
Betake them to the greening plain
The woodmans robin startles coy
Nor longer at his elbow comes
To peck wi hungers eager joy
Mong mossy stulps the litterd crumbs

Neath hedge and walls that screen the wind
The gnats for play will Hock together
And een poor flyes odd hopes will find
To venture in the mocking weather
From out their hiding holes again
Wi feeble pace they often creep
Along the sun warmd window pane
Like dreaming things that walk in sleep

The mavis thrush wi wild delight
Upon the orchards dripping tree
Mutters to see the day so bright
Spring scraps of young hopes poesy
And oft dame stops her burring wheel
To hear the robins note once more
That tutles while he pecks his meal
From sweet briar hips beside the door

The hedghog from its hollow root

Sees the wood moss clear of snow
And hunts each hedge for fallen fruit
Crab hip and winter bitten sloe
And oft when checkd by sudden fears
As shepherd dog his haunt espies
He rolls up in a ball of spears
And all his barking rage defies

Thus nature of the spring will dream
While south winds thaw but soon again
Frost breaths upon the stiffening stream
And numbs it into ice-the plain

Soon wears its merry garb of white
And icicles that fret at noon
Will eke their icy tails at night
Beneath the chilly stars and moon

Nature soon sickens of her joys
And all is sad and dumb again
Save merry shouts of sliding boys
About the frozen furrowd plain
The foddering boy forgets his song
And silent goes wi folded arms
And croodling shepherds bend along
Crouching to the whizzing storms

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - January- Winters Day

Withering and keen the winter comes
While comfort flyes to close shut rooms
And sees the snow in feathers pass
Winnowing by the window glass
And unfelt tempests howl and beat
Above his head in corner seat
And musing oer the changing scene
Farmers behind the tavern screen
Sit-or wi elbow idly prest
On hob reclines the corners guest
Reading the news to mark again
The bankrupt lists or price of grain
Or old moores anual prophecys
That many a theme for talk supplys
Whose almanacks thumbd pages swarm
Wi frost and snow and many a storm
And wisdom gossipd from the stars
Of polities and bloody wars
He shakes his head and still proceeds
Neer doubting once of what he reads
All wonders are wi faith supplyd
Bible at once and weather guide
Puffing the while his red tipt pipe
Dreaming oer troubles nearly ripe
Yet not quite lost in profits way
He'll turn to next years harvest day
And winters leisure to regale
Hopes better times and sips his ale
While labour still pursues his way
And braves the tempest as he may
The thresher first thro darkness deep
Awakes the mornings winter sleep
Scaring the owlet from her prey
Long before she dreams of day
That blinks above head on the snow
Watching the mice that squeaks below
And foddering boys sojourn again
By ryhme hung hedge and frozen plain
Shuffling thro the sinking snows
Blowing his fingers as he goes
To where the stock in bellowings hoarse
Call for their meals in dreary close
And print full many a hungry track
Round circling hedge that guards the stack
Wi higgling tug he cuts the hay
And bares the forkfull loads away
And morn and evening daily throws
The little heaps upon the snows
The shepherd too in great coat wrapt
And straw bands round his stockings lapt
Wi plodding dog that sheltering steals
To shun the wind behind his heels

Takes rough and smooth the winter weather
And paces thro the snow together
While in the fields the lonly plough
Enjoys its frozen sabbath now
And horses too pass time away
In leisures hungry holiday
Rubbing and lunging round the yard
Dreaming no doubt of summer sward
As near wi idle pace they draw
To brouze the upheapd cribs of straw
While whining hogs wi hungry roar
Crowd around the kitchen door
Or when their scanty meal is done
Creep in the straw the cold to shun
And old hens scratting all the day
Seeks curnels chance may throw away
Pausing to pick the seed and grain
Then dusting up the chaff again
While in the barn holes hid from view
The cats their patient watch pursue
For birds which want in flocks will draw
From woods and fields to pick the straw
The soodling boy that saunters round
The yard on homward dutys bound
Now fills the troughs for noisy hogs
Oft asking aid from barking dogs
That tuggles at each flopping ear
Of such as scramble on too near
Or circld round wi thirsty stock
That for his swinging labours flock
At clanking pump his station takes
Half hid in mist their breathing makes
Or at the pond before the door
Which every night leaves frozen oer
Wi heavy beetle1 splinters round
The glossy ice wi jarring sound
While huddling geese as half asleep
Doth round the imprisond water creep
Silent and sad to wait his aid
And soon as ere a hole is made
They din his ears wi pleasures cry
And hiss at all that ventures nigh
Splashing wi jealous joys & vain
Their fill ere it be froze again
And woodstack climbs at maids desire
Throwing down faggots for the fire
Where stealing time he often stands
To warm his half froze tingling hands
The schoolboy still in dithering joys
Pastime in leisure hours employs
And be the weather as it may
Is never at a loss for play

Rolling up giant heaps of snow
As noontide frets its little thaw
Making rude things of various names
Snow men or aught their fancy frames
Till numbd wi cold they quake away
And join at hotter sports to play
Kicking wi many a flying bound
The football oer the frozen ground
Or seeking bright glib ice to play
To sailing slide the hours away
As smooth and quick as shadows run
When clouds in autumn pass the sun
Some hurrying rambles eager take
To skait upon the meadow lake
Scaring the snipe from her retreat
From shelving banks unfrozen seat
Or running brook where icy spars
Which the pale sunlight specks wi stars
Shoots crizzling oer the restless tide
To many a likness petrified
Where fancy often stoops to pore
And turns again to wonder more
The more hen too wi fear opprest
Starts from her reedy shelterd nest
Bustling to get from foes away
And scarcly flies more fast then they
Skaiting along wi curving springs
Wi arms spread out like herons wings
They race away for pleasures sake
A hunters speed along the lake
And oft neath trees where ice is thin
Meet narrow scapes from breaking in
Again the robin waxes tame
And ventures pitys crumbs to claim
Picking the trifles off the snow
Which dames on purpose daily throw
And perching on the window sill
Where memory recolecting still
Knows the last winters broken pane
And there he hops and peeps again
The clouds of starnels dailey fly
Blackening thro the evening sky
To whittleseas1 reed wooded mere
And ozier holts by rivers near
And many a mingld swathy crowd
Rook crow and jackdaw noising loud
Fly too and fro to dreary fen
Dull winters weary flight agen
Flopping on heavy wings away
As soon as morning wakens grey
And when the sun sets round and red
Returns to naked woods to bed

Wood pigeons too in flocks appear
By hunger tamd from timid fear
They mid the sheep unstartld steal
And share wi them a scanty meal
Picking the green leaves want bestows
Of turnips sprouting thro the snows
The ickles from the cottage eaves
Which cold nights freakish labour leaves
Fret in the sun a partial thaw
Pattring on the pitted snow
But soon as ere hes out of sight
They eke afresh their tails at night
The sun soon creepeth out of sight
Behind the woods-and running night
Makes haste to shut the days dull eye
And grizzles oer the chilly sky
Dark deep and thick by day forsook
As cottage chimneys sooty nook
While maidens fresh as summer roses
Joining from the distant closes
Haste home wi yokes and swinging pail
And thresher too sets by his flail
And leaves the mice at peace agen
To fill their holes wi stolen grain
And owlets glad his toils are oer
Swoops by him as he shuts the door
The shepherd seeks his cottage warm
And tucks his hook beneath his arm
And weary in the cold to roam
Scenting the track that leadeth home
His dog wi swifter pace proceeds
And barks to urge his masters speed
Then turns and looks him in the face
And trotts before Wi mending pace
Till out of whistle from the swain
He sits him down and barks again
Anxious to greet the opend door
And meet the cottage fire once more
The robin that wi nimble eye
Glegs round a danger to espy
Now pops from out the opend door
From crumbs half left upon the floor
Nor wipes his bill on perching chair
Nor stays to clean a feather there
Scard at the cat that sliveth in
A chance from evenings glooms to win
To jump on chairs or tables nigh
Seeking what plunder may supply
The childerns litterd scraps to thieve
Or aught that negligence may leave
Creeping when huswives cease to watch
Or dairey doors are off the latch

On cheese or butter to regale
Or new milk reeking in .the pale
The hedger now in leathern coat
From woodland wilds and fields remote
After a journey far and slow
Knocks from his shoes the caking snow
And opes the welcome creaking door
Throwing his faggot on the floor
And at his listening wifes desire
To eke afresh the blazing fire
Wi sharp bill cuts the hazel bands
Then sets him down to warm his hands
And tell in labours happy way
His story of the passing day
While as the warm blaze cracks and gleams
The supper reeks in savoury steams
Or keetle simmers merrily
And tinkling cups are set for tea
Thus doth the winters dreary day
From morn to evening wear away.

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - July

Daughter of pastoral smells and sights
And sultry days and dewy nights
July resumes her yearly place
Wi her milking maiden face
Ruddy and tand yet sweet to view
When everywhere's a vale of dew
And raps it round her looks that smiles
A lovly rest to daily toils
Wi last months closing scenes and dins
Her sultry beaming birth begins

Hay makers still in grounds appear
And some are thinning nearly clear
Save oddly lingering shocks about
Which the tithman counteth out
Sticking their green boughs where they go
The parsons yearly claims to know
Which farmers view wi grudging eye
And grumbling drive their waggons bye
In hedge bound close and meadow plains
Stript groups of busy bustling swains
From all her hants wi noises rude
Drives to the wood lands solitude
That seeks a spot unmarkd wi paths
Far from the close and meadow swaths
Wi smutty song and story gay
They cart the witherd smelling hay
Boys loading on the waggon stand
And men below wi sturdy hand
Heave up the shocks on lathy prong
While horse boys lead the team along
And maidens drag the rake behind
Wi light dress shaping to the wind
And trembling locks of curly hair
And snow white bosoms nearly bare
That charms ones sight amid the hay
Like lingering blossoms of the may
From clowns rude jokes they often turn
And oft their cheeks wi blushes burn
From talk which to escape a sneer
They oft affect as not to hear
Some in the nooks about the ground
Pile up the stacks swelld bellying round
The milking cattles winter fare
That in the snow are fodderd there
Warm spots wi black thorn thickets lind
And trees to brake the northern wind
While masters oft the sultry hours
Will urge their speed and talk of showers
When boy from home trotts to the stack
Wi dinner upon dobbins back
And bottles to the saddle tyd

Or ballancd upon either side
A horse thats past his toiling day
Yet still a favorite in his way
That trotts on errands up and down
The fields and too and fro from town
Long ere his presence comes in sight
Boys listen wi heart felt delight
And know his footsteps down the road
Hastening wi the dinner load
Then they seek in close or meadows
High hedgerows wi grey willow shadows
To hide beneath from sultry noon
And rest them at their dinner boon
Where helping shepherd for the lass
Will seek a hillock on the grass
The thickset hedge or stack beside
Where teazing pismires ne'er abide
And when tis found down drops the maid
Proud wi the kind attention paid
And still the swain wi notice due
Waits on her all the dinner through
And fills her horn which she tho dry
In shoyness often pushes bye
While he will urge wi many a smile
It as a strength to help her toil
And in her hand will oft contrive
From out his pocket pulld to slive
Stole fruit when no one turns his eve
To wet her mouth when shes adry
Offerd when she refuses ale
Noons sultry labour to regale
Teazd wi the countless multitude
Of flyes that every where intrude
While boys wi boughs will often try
To beat them from them as they lye
Who find their labour all in vain
And soon as scard they swarm again
Thus while each swain and boy and lass
Sit at their dinner on the grass
The teams wi gears thrown on their backs
Stand pulling at the shocks or racks
Switching their tails and turning round
To knap the gadflys teazing wound
While dob that brought the dinners load
Too tricky to be turnd abroad
Needing the scuttle shook wi grain
To coax him to be caught again
Is to a tree at tether tyd
Ready for boy to mount and ride
Nipping the grass about his pound
And stamping battering hooves around
Soon as each ground is clear of hay

The shepherd whoops his flocks away
From fallow fields to plentys scenes
Shining as smooth as bowling greens
But scard wi clipping tides alarms
They bleat about the close in swarms
And hide neath hedges in the cool
Still panting tho wi out their whool
Markd wi the tard brands lasting dye
And make a restless hue and cry
Answering the lambs that call again
And for their old dams seek in vain
Running mid the stranger throng
And ever meeting wi the wrong
Fiegn wi some old yoe to abide
Who smells and tosses them aside
And some as if they know its face
Will meet a lamb wi mended pace
But proving hopes indulgd in vain
They turn around and blair again
Till weand from memory half forgot
They spread and feed and notice not
Save now and then to lambs shrill crys
Odd yoes in hoarser tone replys
Still may be seen the mowing swain
On balks between the fields of grain
Who often stops his thirst to ease
To pick the juicy pods of pease
And oft as chances bring to pass
Stoops oer his scythe stuck in the grass
To seek the brimming honey comb
Which bees so long were toiling home
And rifld from so many flowers
And carried thro so many hours
He tears their small hives mossy ball
Where the brown labourers hurded all
Who gather homward one by one
And see their nest and honey gone
Humming around his rushing toil
Their mellancholly wrongs awhile
Then oer the sweltering swaths they stray
And hum disconsolate away
And oft neath hedges cooler screen
Where meadow sorrel lingers green
Calld 'sour grass' by the knowing clown
The mower gladly chews it down
And slakes his thirst the best he may
When singing brooks are far away
And his hoopd bottle woeful tale
Is emptied of its cheering ale
That lulld him in unconsious sleep
At dinners hour beneath a heap
Of grass or bush or edding shock

Till startld by the country clock
That told the hours his toil had lost
Who coud but spare an hour at most
And wearing past the setting sun
He stays to get his labour done
The gipsey down the meadow brook
Wi long pole and reaping hook
Tyd at its end amid the streams
That glitters wi the hot sunbeams
Reachs and cuts the bulrush down
And hawks them round each neighboring town
Packd at his back or tyd in loads
On asses down the dusty roads
He jogs and shouts from door to door
His well known note of calling oer
Offering to huswives cheap repairs
Mending their broken bottomd chairs
Wi step half walk half dance, and eye
Ready to smile on passers bye
Wi load well suiting weather warm
Tuckd carlessly beneath his arm
Or peeping coat and side between
In woolen bag of faded green
Half conseald and half displayd
A purpose tell tale to his trade
The gipsey fiddler jogs away
To village feast and holiday
Scraping in public house to trye
What beer his music will supply
From clowns who happy wi the din
Dance their hand naild hilos thin
Along the roads in passing crowds
Followd by dust like smoaking clouds
Scotch droves of beast a little breed
In swelterd weary mood proceed
A patient race from scottish hills
To fatten by our pasture rills
Lean wi the wants of mountain soil
But short and stout for travels toil
Wi cockd up horns and curling crown
And dewlap bosom hanging down
Followd by slowly pacing swains
Wild to our rushy flats and plains
At whom the shepherds dog will rise
And shake himself and in supprise
Draw back and waffle in affright
Barking the traveller out of sight
And mowers oer their scythes will bear
Upon their uncooth dress to stare
And shepherds as they trample bye
Leaves oer their hooks a wondering eye
To witness men so oddly clad

In petticoats of banded plad
Wi blankets oer their shoulders slung
To camp at night the fields among
When they for rest on commons stop
And blue cap like a stocking top
Cockt oer their faces summer brown
Wi scarlet tazzeles on the crown
Rude patterns of the thistle flower
Untrickd and open to the shower
And honest faces fresh and free
That breath of mountain liberty
The pindar on the sabbath day
Soon as the darkness waxes grey
Before one sun beam oer the ground
Spindles its light and shadow round
Goes round the fields at early morn
To see what stock are in the corn
To see what chances sheep may win
Thro gaps the gipsey pilfers thin
Or if theyve forcd a restless way
By rubbing at a loosend tray
Or nuzling colt that trys to catch
A gate at night left off the latch
By traveller seeking home in haste
Or the clown by fareys chas'd
That listning while he makes a stand
Opens each gate wi fearful hand
And dreads a minute to remain
To put it on the latch again
And cows who often wi their horns
Toss from the gaps the stuffing thorns
These like a fox upon the watch
He in the morning trycs to catch
And drives them to the pound for pay
Carless about the sabbath day
Soon as the morning wakens red
The shepherd startles from his bed
And rocks afield his moving pace
While folded sheep will know his face
Rising as he appears in sight
To shake their coats as in delight
His shadow stalking stride for stride
Stretches a jiant by his side
Long as a tree without a top
And oft it urges him to stop
Both in his journey and his song
And wonders why it seems so long
And bye and bye as morning dies
Shrinks to an unbrichd boy in size
Then as the evening gathers blue
Grows to a jiants length anew
Puzzld the more he stops to pause

His wisdom vainly seeks the cause
Again his journey he pursues
Lengthening his track along the dews
And his dog that turnd to pick
From his sides the sucking tick
Insects that on cattle creep
And bites the labourer laid asleep
Pricks up his ears to see twas gone
Ana shakes his hide and hastens on
And the while the shepherd stayd
Trailing a track the hare had made
Bolts thro the creeping hedge again
And hurring follows wi the swain
The singing shouting herding boys
Follows again their wild employs
And ere the sun puts half his head
From out his crimson pillowd bed
And bawls behind his cows again
That one by one lobs down the lane
Wi wild weeds in his hat anew
The summer sorts of every hue
And twigs of leaves that please his eye
To his old haunts he hallows bye
Wi dog that loiters bv his side
Or trotts before wi nimble stridc
That waits till bid to bark and run
And panteth from the dreaded sun
And oft amid the sunny day
Will join a partner in his play
And in his antic tricks and glee
Will prove as fond of sport as he
And by the flag pool summer warm
He'll watch the motions of his arm
That holds a stick or stone to throw
In the sun gilded flood below
And head oer ears he danses in
Nor fears to wet his curly skin
The boys field cudgel to restore
And brings it in his mouth ashore
And eager as for crust or bone
He'll run to catch the pelted stone
Till wearied out he shakes his hide
And drops his tail and sneaks aside
Unheeding whistles shouts and calls
To take a rest where thickly falls
The rush clumps shadows there he lyes
Licking his skin and catching flyes
Or picking tween his stretching feet
The bone he had not time to eat
Before when wi the teazing boy
He was so throngd wi plays employ
Noon gathers wi its blistering breath

Around and day dyes still as death
The breeze is stopt the lazy bough
Hath not a leaf that dances now
The totter grass upon the hill
And spiders threads is hanging still
The feathers dropt from morehens wings
Upon the waters surface clings
As stedfast and as heavy seem
As stones beneath them in the stream
Hawkweed and groundsels fairey downs
Unruffld keep their seeding crowns
And in the oven heated air
Not one light thing is floating there
Save that to the earnest eye
The restless heat swims twittering bye
The swine run restless down the street
Anxious some pond or ditch to meet
From days hot swoonings to retire
Wallowing in the weeds and mire
The linnets seek the twiggs that lye
Close to the brook and brig stones drye
At top and sit and dip their bills
Till they have drunk their little fills
Then flurt their wings and wet their feathers
To cool them in the blazing weathers
Dashing the water oer their heads
Then high them to some cooling sheds
Where dark wood glooms about the plain
To pick their feathers smooth again
The young quick's branches seem as dead
And scorch from yellow into red
Ere autumn hath its pencil taen
Their shades in different hues to stain
Following behind the crawling ploughs
Whiping oft their sweating brows
The boys lead horses yokd in pairs
To jumping harrows linkd that tears
And teazes the hard clods to dust
Placing for showers in hopes their trust
The farmer follows sprinkling round
Wi turnip seed the panting ground
Providing food for beast and sheep
When winters snows are falling deep
Oft proving hopes and wishes vain
While clouds disperse that promisd rain
When soon as ere the turnip creeps
From out the crust burnt soil and peeps
Upon the farmers watching eye
Tis eaten by the jumping flye
And eager neath the midday sun
Soon as each plough teams toil is done
Scarse waiting till the gears are taen

From off their backs by boy and swain
From hayfilld racks they turn away
Nor in the stable care to stay
Hurr[y]ing to the trough to drink
Or from the yard ponds muddy brink
Rush in and wi long winded soak
Drink till theyre almost fit to choak
And from the horsbees teazing din
Thrust deep their burning noses in
Almost above their greedy eyes
To cool their mouths and shun the flyes
Deaf to the noise the geese will make
That grudge the worthy share they take
Boys now neath green lanes meeting bough
Each noons half holiday from plough
Take out their hungry teams till night
That nipp the grass wi eager bite
Wi long tails switching never still
They lounge neath trees when eat their fill
And stamp and switch till closing day
Brushing the teazing flyes away
Endless labour all in vain
That start in crowds to turn again
When the sun is sinking down
And dyes more deep the shadows brown
And gradual into slumber glooms
How sweet the village evening comes
To weary hinds from toil releasd
And panting sheep and torturd beast
The shepherd long wi heat opprest
Betakes him to his cottage rest
And his tird dog that plods along
Wi panting breath and lolling tongue
Runs eager as the brook appears
And dashes in head over ears
Startling reed sparrow broods to fiye
That in the reed woods slumberd nigh
And water rotts in haste to hide
Nibbling the sedges close beside
Lapping while he floats about
To quench his thirst then drabbles out
And shakes his coat and like the swain
Is happy night is come again

The beast that to the pond did creep
And rushd in water belly deep
The gad flyes threatning hums to shun
And horse bee darting in the sun
Lashing their tails the while they stood
And sprinkling thick their sides wi mud
Snuff the cool air now day is gone
And linger slow and idly on

To the pebbly fore to drink
And drop and rest upon its brink
Ruminating on their beds
Calm as the sky above their heads
The horse whose mouth is seldom still
Is up and cropping at his will
The moisting grass unteazd and free
In summer eves serenity
Uncheckt by flyes he grazes on
Right happy that the day is gone
Ne'er leaving off to turn around
His stooping head to knap the wound
And tail that switchd his sides all day
Is quiet now the suns away
The cowboys as their herd plod on
Before them homward one by one
Grows happy as their toil grows short
And full of fancys restless sport
Oft starts along wi sinking day
Acting proud their soldier play
Wi peeld bark sash around each waist
And rush caps oer each beaver placd
Stuck wi a headaches red cockade
And wooden swords and sticks displayd
For flags-thus march the evening troop
While soon one strikes a whistle up
And others wi their dinner tins
The evenings falling quiet dins
Patting wi hollow sounding tums
And imitating pipes and drums
Calling their cows that plod before
Their army marching from the moor
And thus they act till met the town
Carless of laughs from passing clown
Even their dogs too tird for play
Loiter on their evening way
Oft rolling on the damping grass
Or stopping wi the milking lass
Waiting a chance the ways conseal
A mouth full from her pails to steal
Dropping down to pick a bone
The hedger from his wallets thrown
Or found upon some greensward platt
Where hayfolks at their dinner sat
Sweet the cows breath down the lane
Steaming the fragrance of the plain
As home they rock and bawling wait
Till boys run to unloose the gate
And from their milksheds all adry
Turn to the pump wi anxious eye
Where shoud the maids wi boys repair
To fill the dashing bucket there

They hurry spite of threatning clown
And kick the milkers bucket down
And horses oft wi eager stoop
Will bend adown to steal a sup
Watching a moments chance to win
And dip their eager noses in
As by they pass or set it down
To rest or chatter to a clown
And knats wi their small slender noise
Bother too the troubld boys
And teaze the cows that while she chides
Will kick and turn to lick their sides
And like so many hanting sprites
Will bite and weal the maid anights
Who dreams of love and sleeps so sound
As ne'er to feel each little wound
Till waken by the morning sun
She wonders at the injury done
Thinking in fears simplicity
That faireys dreaded mistery
On her white bosom in the dark
Had been and left each blisterd mark
The fox begins his stunt odd bark
Down in its dew bed drops the lark
And on the heath amid the gorse
The night hawk stints the feeding horse
That pricks his ear wi startling eye
And snorts to hear its trembling crye
The owlet leaves his ivy tree
Into its hive slow sails the bee
The mower seeks his cloaths and hides
His scythe home bent wi weary strides
And oer his shoulder swings his bag
Bearing in hand his empty cag
Hay makers on their homward way
Into the fields will often stray
Among the grain when no one sees
Nestle and fill their laps wi peas
Sheep scard wi tweenlight doubting eye
Leap the path and canter bye
Nipping wi moment stoops the plain
And turning quick to gaze again
Till silence upon eve awaits
And milkmaids cease to clap the gates
And homward to the town are gone
Wi whispering sweethearts chatting on
And shepherds homward tracks are past
And dogs rude barks are still at last
Then down they drop as suits their wills
Or nips the thyme on pismire hills
Where nought is seen but timid hares
That nights sweet welcome gladly shares

And shadows stooping as they stoop
Beside them when the moon gets up
Reviving wi the ruddy moon
The nightingale resumes his tune
What time the horsboy drives away
His loose teams from the toils of day
To crop the closes dewy blade
Where the hay stacks fencd and made
Or on the commons bushy plain
To rest till the sun comes again
Whistling and bawling loud and long
The burthen of some drawling song
That grows more loud as eve grows late
Yet when he opes the clapping gate
He cant help turning in his joys
To look if his fear damping noise
Has raisd a mischief in the wind
And wakd a ghost to stalk behind
And when hes turnd them safe aground
And hookd the chain the gate around
Wi quicker speed he homward sings
And leaves them in the mushroom rings
Wi the dewdrunk dancing elves
To eat or rest as suits themselves
And as he hastes from labour done
An owlets whoop een makes him run
And bats shill flickerings bobbing near
Turns his heart blood cold wi fear
And when at home wi partner ralph
He hugs himself to think hes safe
And tells his tale while others smile
Of all he thought and feard the while
The black house bee hath ceasd to sing
And white nosd one wi out a sting
That boys will catch devoid of dread
Are in their little holes abed
And martins neath the mossey eves
Oft startld at the sparrow thieves
That in their house will often peep
Breaking their little weary sleep
And oft succeed when left alone
In making their clay huts their own
Where the cock sparrow on the scout
Watches and keeps the owner out
The geese have left the home close moats
And at the yard gate clean their coats
Or neath their feathers tuck their heads
Asleep till driven to their sheds
The pigeon droves in whisking flight
Hurrying to their coats ere night
In coveys round the village meet
And in the dove coat holes retreat

Nor more about the wheaten grounds
The bird boys bell and clapper sounds
Retiring wi the setting sun
His toil and shout and song is done
The shrill bat wi its flitting mate
Starts thro the church vaults iron grate
Deaths daily visitors and all
He meets save slanting suns that fall
At eve as if they lovd to shed
Their daily memory oer the dead
Hodge neath the climbing elms that drop
Their branches oer a dove coat top
Hath milkd his cows and taken in
On yokes the reeking pales or tin
And been across the straw to chain
The hen roost wicket safe again
And done his yard rounds hunting eggs
And taen his hat from off the peggs
To scamper to the circling cross
To have a game at pitch and toss
And day boy hath his supper got
Of milk before twas hardly hot
Eager from toil to get away
And join the boys at taw to play
Neath black smiths cinder litterd shed
Till the hour to go to bed
Old gossips on the greensward bench
Sit where the hombound milking wench
Will set her buckets down to rest
And be awhile their evening guest
To whom their box is held while she
Takes the smallest nips that be
That soon as snift begins to teaze
And makes her turn away to sneeze
While old dames say the sign is plain
That she will dream about her swain
And toss the cloaths from off her bed
And cautions her of roguish ned
Holding their hands agen their hips
To laugh as up she starts and trip
In quickend speed along the town
Bidding good night to passing clown

From the black smiths shop the swain
Jogs wi ploughshares laid again
And drops them by the stable shed
Where gears on pegs hang over head
Ready for driving boys to take
On fore horse when their toils awake
The kitchen wench wi face red hot
As blazing fire neath supper pot
Hath cleand her pails and pansions all

And set them leaning by the wall
And twirld her whool mop clean again
And hung it on the pales to drain

Now by the maids requesting smile
The shepherd mounts the wood stack pile
Reard high against the orchard pales
And cause of thorns she oft bewails
Prickd hands and holes in sunday gown
He throws the smoothest faggot down
And hawls it in at her desire
Ready for the kitching fire

Beneath the elderns village shade
Oer her well curb leans the maid
To draw the brimming bucket up
While passing boy to beg a sup
Will stop his roll or rocking cart
And the maidens gentle heart
Gives ready leave-the eager clown
Throws off his hat and stoops adown
Soaking his fill then hastens on
To catch his team already gone
Eager from toil to get release
And in the hay field feed at peace

The weary thresher leaves his barn
And emptys from his shoes the corn
That gatherd in them thro the day
And homward bends his weary way
The gardener he is sprinkling showers
From watering pans on drooping flowers
And set away his hoe and spade
While goody neath the cottage shade
Sits wi a baskett tween her knees
Ready for supper shelling peas
And cobler chatting in the town
Hath put his window shutter down
And the knowing parish clerk
Feign to do his jobs ere dark
ilath timd the church clock to the sun
And wound it up for night and done
And turud the hugh kev in the door
Chatting his evening story oer
Up the street the servant maid
Runs wi her errands long delayd
And ere the door she enters in
She stops to right a loosend pin
And smooth wi hasty fingers down
The crumpling creases in her gown
Which Rogers oggles rudly made
For may games forfeit never paid

And seizd a kiss against her will
While playing quoits upon the hill
Wi other shepherds laughing nigh
That made her shoy and hurry bye
The blacksmiths gangling toil is oer
And shut his hot shops branded door
Folding up his arms to start
And take at ease his evening quart
And farmer giles his business done
Wi face a very setting sun
Jogging home on dobbins back
From helping at the clover stack
The horse knows well nor trys to pass
The door where for his custom glass
He nightly from the saddle jumps
To slake his thirst or cheer the dumps
Leaving old dob his breath to catch
Wi bridle hanging at the latch
The shepherd too will often spare
A sixpence to be merry there
While the dog that trackd his feet
Adown the dusty printed street
Lies as one weary loath to roam
Agen the door to wait him home
While the taylors long day thirst
Is still unquenchd tho fit to burst
Whose been at truants merry play
From sheers and bodkin all the day
Still soaks the tankard reeling ripe
And scarce can stoop to light his pipe
The labourer sitting by his door
Happy that the day is oer
Is stooping downwards to unloose
His leathern baffles or his shoes
Making ready for his rest
Quickly to be the pillows guest
While on mothers lap wi in
The childern each their prayers begin
That taen from play are loath to go
And looking round repeating slow
Each prayer they stammer in delay
To gain from bed a longer stay
Goody hath set her spinning bye
Deafend by her chattering pye
That calls her up wi hungry rage
To put his supper in the cage
That done she sought a neighbours door
A minutes time to gossip oer
And neath her apron now tis night
Huddles for home, her candle light
Hid from the wind-to burn an hour
As clouds wi threatend thunder lower

The mastiff from his kennel free
Is now unchaind at liberty
In readiness to put to rout
The thieves that night may bring about
Thus evening deepning to a close
Leaves toil and nature to repose

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - July (2nd version)

July the month of summers prime
Again resumes her busy time
Scythes tinkle in each grassy dell
Where solitude was wont to dwell
And meadows they are mad with noise
Of laughing maids and shouting boys
Making up the withering hay
With merry hearts as light as play
The very insects on the ground
So nimbly bustle all around
Among the grass or dusty soil
They seem partakers in the toil
The very landscape reels with life
While mid the busy stir and strife
Of industry the shepherd still
Enjoys his summer dreams at will
Bent oer his hook or listless laid
Beneath the pastures willow shade
Whose foliage shines so cool and grey
Amid the sultry hues of day
As if the mornings misty veil
Yet lingered in their shadows pale
Or lolling in a musing mood
On mounds where saxon castles stood
Upon whose deeply buried walls
The ivyed oaks dark shadow falls
Oft picking up with wondering gaze
Some little thing of other days
Saved from the wreck of time-as beads
Or broken pots among the weeds
Of curious shapes-and many a stone
Of roman pavements thickly sown
Oft hoping as he searches round
That buried riches may be found
Tho search as often as he will
His hopes are dissapointed still
And marking oft upon his seat
The insect world beneath his feet
In busy motion here and there
Like visitors to feast or fair
Some climbing up the rushes stem
Hugh steeples height or more to them
With speed that sees no fear to drop
Till perched upon its spirey top
Where they awhile the view survey
Then prune their wings and flit away
Others journying too and fro
Among the grassy woods below
Musing as if they felt and knew
The pleasant scenes they wandered thro
Where each bent round them seems to be
Hugh as a jiant timber tree

While pismires from their castles come
In crowds to seek the litterd crumb
Which he on purpose drops that they
May hawl the heavy loads away
Shaping the while their dark employs
To his own visionary joys
Picturing such a life as theirs
As free from summers sweating cares
And inly wishing that his own
Coud meet with joys so thickly sown
Sport seems the all that they pursue
And play the only work they do
The cowboy still cuts short the day
In mingling mischief with his play
Oft in the pond with weeds oer grown
Hurling quick the plashing stone
To cheat his dog who watching lies
And instant plunges for the prize
And tho each effort proves as vain
He shakes his coat and dives again
Till wearied with the fruitless play
Then drops his tail and sneaks away
Nor longer heeds the bawling boy
Who seeks new sports with added joy
And on some banks oer hanging brow
Beats the whasps nest with a bough
Till armys from the hole appear
And threaten vengance in his ear
With such determined hue and cry
As makes the bold besieger flye
Elsewhere fresh mischief to renew
And still his teazing sports pursue
Pelting with excessive glee
The squirrel on the wood land tree
Who nimbles round from grain to grain
And cocks his tail and peeps again
Half pleased as if he thought the fray
Which mischief made was meant for play
Till scared and startled into flight
He instant hurries out of sight
Thus he his leisure hour employs
And feeds on busy meddling joys
While in the willow shaded pool
His cattle stand their hides to cool

Loud is the summers busy song
The smalles breeze can find a tongue
Where insects of each tiney size
Grow teazing with their melodys
Till noon burns with its blistering breath
Around and day dyes still as death
The busy noise of man and brute

Is on a sudden lost and mute
The cuckoo singing as she flies
No more to mocking boy replys
Even the brook that leaps along
Seems weary of its bubbling song
And so soft its waters creep
Tired silence sinks in sounder sleep
The cricket on its banks is dumb
The very flies forget to hum
And save the waggon rocking round
The lanscape sleeps without a sound
The breeze is stopt the lazy bough
Hath not a leaf that dances now
The totter grass upon the hill
And spiders threads are standing still
The feathers dropt from more hens wing
Which to the waters surface cling
Are stedfast and as heavy seem
As stones beneath them in the stream
Hawkweeds and Groundsells fanning downs
Unruffled keep their seedy crowns
And in the oven heated air
Not one light thing is floating there
-Save that to the earnest eye
The restless heat seems twittering bye
Noon swoons beneath the heat it made
And flowers een wither in the shade
Untill the sun slopes in the west
Like weary traveler glad to rest
On pillard clouds of many hues
Then natures voice its joy renews
And checkerd field and grassy plain
Hum with their summer songs again
A requiem to the days decline
Whose setting sun beams cooly shine
A welcome to days feeble powers
As evening dews on thirsty flowers

Now to the pleasant pasture dells
Where hay from closes sweetly smells
Adown the pathways narrow lane
The milking maiden hies again
With scraps of ballads never dumb
And rosey cheeks of happy bloom
Tanned brown by summers rude embrace
That adds new beautys to her face
And red lips never paled with sighs
And flowing hair and laughing eyes
That oer full many a heart prevailed
And swelling bosom loosly veiled
White as the love it harbours there
Unsullied with the taints of care

The mower gives his labour oer
And on his bench beside the door
Sits down to see his childern play
Or smokes his leisure hour away
While from her cage the blackbird sings
That on the wood bine arbour hings
And all with happy joys receive
The quiet of a summers eve

John Clare

The Shepherd's Calendar - June

Now summer is in flower and natures hum
Is never silent round her sultry bloom
Insects as small as dust are never done
Wi' glittering dance and reeling in the sun
And green wood fly and blossom haunting bee
Are never weary of their melody
Round field hedge now flowers in full glory twine
Large bindweed bells wild hop and streakd woodbine
That lift athirst their slender throated flowers
Agape for dew falls and for honey showers
These round each bush in sweet disorder run
And spread their wild hues to the sultry sun
Where its silk netting lace on twigs and leaves
The mottld spider at eves leisure weaves
That every morning meet the poets eye
Like faireys dew wet dresses hung to dry
The wheat swells into ear and leaves below
The may month wild flowers and their gaudy show
Bright carlock bluecap and corn poppy red
Which in such clouds of colors wid [e] ly spread
That at the sun rise might to fancys eye
Seem to reflect the many colord sky
And leverets seat and lark and partridge nest
It leaves a schoolboys height in snugger rest
And oer the weeders labour overgrows
Who now in merry groups each morning goes
To willow skirted meads wi fork and rake
The scented hay cocks in long rows to make
Where their old visitors in russet brown
The haytime butterflyes dance up and down
And gads that teaze like whasps the timid maid
And drive the herdboys cows to pond and shade
Who when his dogs assistance fails to stop
Is forcd his half made oaten pipes to drop
And start and hallo thro the dancing heat
To keep their gadding tumult from the wheat
Who in their rage will dangers overlook
And leap like hunters oer the pasture brook
Brushing thro blossomd beans in maddening haste
And 'stroying corn they scarce can stop to taste
Labour pursues its toil in weary mood
And feign woud rest wi shadows in the wood
The mowing gangs bend oer the beeded grass
Where oft the gipseys hungry journeying ass
Will turn its wishes from the meadow paths
Listning the rustle of the falling swaths
The ploughman sweats along the fallow vales
And down the suncrackt furrow slowly trails
Oft seeking when athirst the brooks supply
Where brushing eager the brinks bushes bye
For coolest water he oft brakes the rest
Of ring dove brooding oer its idle nest

And there as loath to leave the swaily place
He'll stand to breath and whipe his burning face
The shepherds idle hours are over now
Nor longer leaves him neath the hedgrow bough
On shadow pillowd banks and lolling stile
Wilds looses now their summer friends awhile
Shrill whistles barking dogs and chiding scold
Drive bleating sheep each morn from fallow fold
To wash pits where the willow shadows lean
Dashing them in their fold staind coats to clean
Then turnd on sunning sward to dry agen
They drove them homeward to the clipping pen
In hurdles pent where elm or sycamore
Shut out the sun-or in some threshing floor
There they wi scraps of songs and laugh and tale
Lighten their anual toils while merry ale
Goes round and gladdens old mens hearts to praise
The thread bare customs of old farmers days
Who while the sturting sheep wi trembling fears
Lies neath the snipping of his harmless sheers
Recalls full many a thing by bards unsung
And pride forgot-that reignd when he was young
How the hugh bowl was in the middle set
At breakfast time as clippers yearly met
Filld full of frumity where yearly swum
The streaking sugar and the spotting plumb
Which maids coud never to the table bring
Without one rising from the merry ring
To lend a hand who if twas taen amiss
Woud sell his kindness for a stolen kiss
The large stone pitcher in its homly trim
And clouded pint horn wi its copper rim
Oer which rude healths was drank in spirits high
From the best broach the cellar woud supply
While sung the ancient swains in homly ryhmes
Songs that were pictures of the good old times
When leathern bottles held the beer nut brown
That wakd the sun wi songs and sung him down
Thus will the old man ancient ways bewail
Till toiling sheers gain ground upon the tale
And brakes it off-when from the timid sheep
The fleece is shorn and wi a fearfull leap
He starts-while wi a pressing hand
His sides are printed by the tarry brand
Shaking his naked skin wi wondering joys
And fresh ones are tugd in by sturdy boys
Who when theyre thrown down neath the sheering swain
Will wipe his brow and start his tale again
Tho fashions haughtv frown hath thrown aside
Half the old forms simplicity supplyd
Yet their are some prides winter deigns to spare
Left like green ivy when the trees are bare

And now when sheering of the flocks are done
Some ancient customs mixd wi harmless fun
Crowns the swains merry toils-the timid maid
Pleasd to be praisd and yet of praise affraid
Seeks her best flowers not those of woods and fields
But such as every farmers garden yield
Fine cabbage roses painted like her face
And shining pansys trimmd in golden lace
And tall tuft larkheels featherd thick wi flowers
And woodbines climbing oer the door in bowers
And London tufts of many a mottld hue
And pale pink pea and monkshood darkly blue
And white and purple jiliflowers that stay
Lingering in blossom summer half away
And single blood walls of a lucious smell
Old fashiond flowers which huswives love so well
And columbines stone blue or deep night brown
Their honey-comb-like blossoms hanging down
Each cottage gardens fond adopted child
Tho heaths still claim them where they yet grow wild
Mong their old wild companions summer blooms
Furze brake and mozzling ling and golden broom
Snap dragons gaping like to sleeping clowns
And 'clipping pinks' (which maidens sunday gowns
Full often wear catcht at by tozing chaps)
Pink as the ribbons round their snowy caps
'Bess in her bravery' too of glowing dyes
As deep as sunsets crimson pillowd skyes
And majoram notts sweet briar and ribbon grass
And lavender the choice of every lass
And sprigs of lads love all familiar names
Which every garden thro the village claims
These the maid gathers wi a coy delight
And tyes them up in readiness for night
Giving to every swain tween love and shame
Her 'clipping poseys' as their yearly claim
And turning as he claims the custom kiss
Wi stifld smiles half ankering after bliss
She shrinks away and blushing calls it rude
But turns to smile and hopes to be pursued
While one to whom the seeming hint applied
Follows to claim it and is not denyd
No doubt a lover for within his coat
His nosegay owns each flower of better sort
And when the envious mutter oer their beer
And nodd the secret to his neighbor near
Raising the laugh to make the mutter known
She blushes silent and will not disown
And ale and songs and healths and merry ways
Keeps up a shadow of old farmers days
But the old beachen bowl that once supplyd
Its feast of frumity is thrown aside

And the old freedom that was living then
When masters made them merry wi their men
Whose coat was like his neighbors russet brown
And whose rude speech was vulgar as his clown
Who in the same horn drank the rest among
And joind the chorus while a labourer sung
All this is past-and soon may pass away
The time torn remnant of the holiday
As proud distinction makes a wider space
Between the genteel and the vulgar race
Then must they fade as pride oer custom showers
Its blighting mildew on her feeble flowers

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - March

March month of 'many weathers' wildly comes
In hail and snow and rain and threatning hums
And floods: while often at his cottage door
The shepherd stands to hear the distant roar
Loosd from the rushing mills and river locks
Wi thundering sound and over powering shocks
And headlong hurry thro the meadow brigs
Brushing the leaning sallows fingering twigs
In feathery foam and eddy hissing chase
Rolling a storm oertaken travellers pace
From bank to bank along the meadow leas
Spreading and shining like to little seas
While in the pale sunlight a watery brood
Of swopping white birds flock about the flood
Yet winter seems half weary of its toil
And round the ploughman on the elting soil
Will thread a minutes sunshine wild and warm
Thro the raggd places of the swimming storm
And oft the shepherd in his path will spye
The little daisey in the wet grass lye
That to the peeping sun enlivens gay
Like Labour smiling on an holiday
And where the stunt bank fronts the southern sky
By lanes or brooks where sunbeams love to lye
A cowslip peep will open faintly coy
Soon seen and gatherd by a wandering boy
A tale of spring around the distant haze
Seems muttering pleasures wi the lengthening days
Morn wakens mottld oft wi may day stains
And shower drops hang the grassy sprouting plains
And on the naked thorns of brassy hue
Drip glistning like a summer dream of dew
While from the hill side freshing forest drops
As one might walk upon their thickening tops
And buds wi young hopes promise seemly swells
Where woodman that in wild seclusion dwells
Wi chopping toil the coming spring decieves
Of many dancing shadows flowers and leaves
And in his pathway down the mossy wood
Crushes wi hasty feet full many a bud
Of early primrose yet if timely spied
Shelterd some old half rotten stump beside
The sight will cheer his solitery hour
And urge his feet to stride and save the flower
Muffld in baffles leathern coat and gloves
The hedger toils oft scaring rustling doves
From out the hedgrows who in hunger browze
The chockolate berrys on the ivy boughs
And flocking field fares speckld like the thrush
Picking the red awe from the sweeing bush
That come and go on winters chilling wing
And seem to share no sympathy wi spring

The stooping ditcher in the water stands
Letting the furrowd lakes from off the lands
Or splashing cleans the pasture brooks of mud
Where many a wild weed freshens into bud
And sprouting from the bottom purply green
The water cresses neath the wave is seen
Which the old woman gladly drags to land
Wi reaching long rake in her tottering hand
The ploughman mawls along the doughy sloughs
And often stop their songs to clean their ploughs
From teazing twitch that in the spongy soil
Clings round the colter terryfying toil
The sower striding oer his dirty way
Sinks anckle deep in pudgy sloughs and clay
And oer his heavy hopper stoutly leans
Strewing wi swinging arms the pattering beans
Which soon as aprils milder weather gleams
Will shoot up green between the furroed seams
The driving boy glad when his steps can trace
The swelling edding as a resting place
Slings from his clotted shoes the dirt around
And feign woud rest him on the solid ground
And sings when he can meet the parting green
Of rushy balks that bend the lands between
While close behind em struts the nauntling crow
And daws whose heads seem powderd oer wi snow
To seek the worms-and rooks a noisey guest
That on the wind rockd elms prepares her nest
On the fresh furrow often drops to pull
The twitching roots and gathering sticks and wool
Neath trees whose dead twigs litter to the wind
And gaps where stray sheep left their coats behind
While ground larks on a sweeing clump of rushes
Or on the top twigs of the oddling bushes
Chirp their 'cree creeing' note that sounds of spring
And sky larks meet the sun wi flittering wing
Soon as the morning opes its brightning eye
Large clouds of sturnels blacken thro the sky
From oizer holts about the rushy fen
And reedshaw borders by the river Nen
And wild geese regiments now agen repair
To the wet bosom of broad marshes there
In marching coloms and attention all
Listning and following their ringleaders call
The shepherd boy that hastens now and then
From hail and snow beneath his sheltering den
Of flags or file leavd sedges tyd in sheaves
Or stubble shocks oft as his eye percieves
Sun threads struck out wi momentery smiles
Wi fancy thoughts his lonliness beguiles
Thinking the struggling winter hourly bye
As down the edges of the distant sky

The hailstorm sweeps-and while he stops to strip
The stooping hedgbriar of its lingering hip
He hears the wild geese gabble oer his head
And pleasd wi fancys in his musings bred
He marks the figurd forms in which they flye
And pausing follows wi a wandering eye
Likening their curious march in curves or rows
To every letter which his memory knows
While far above the solitary crane
Swings lonly to unfrozen dykes again
Cranking a jarring mellancholy cry
Thro the wild journey of the cheerless sky
Full oft at early seasons mild and fair
March bids farewell wi garlands in her hair
Of hazzel tassles woodbines hairy sprout
And sloe and wild plumb blossoms peeping out
In thickset knotts of flowers preparing gay
For aprils reign a mockery of may
That soon will glisten on the earnest eye
Like snow white cloaths hung in the sun to drye
The old dame often stills her burring wheel
When the bright sun will thro the window steal
And gleam upon her face and dancing fall
In diamond shadows on the picturd wall
While the white butterflye as in amaze
Will settle on the glossy glass to gaze
And oddling bee oft patting passing bye
As if they care to tell her spring was nigh
And smiling glad to see such things once more
Up she will get and potter to the door
And look upon the trees beneath the eves
Sweet briar and ladslove swelling into leaves
And damsin trees thick notting into bloom
And goosberry blossoms on the bushes come
And stooping down oft views her garden beds
To see the spring flowers pricking out their heads
And from her apron strings she'll often pull
Her sissars out an early bunch to cull
For flower pots on the window board to stand
Where the old hour glass spins its thread of sand
And maids will often mark wi laughing eye
In elder where they hang their cloaths to drye
The sharp eyd robin hop from grain to grain
Singing its little summer notes again
As a sweet pledge of Spring the little lambs
Bleat in the varied weather round their dams
Or hugh molehill or roman mound behind
Like spots of snow lye shelterd from the wind
While the old yoes bold wi paternal cares
Looses their fears and every danger dares
Who if the shepherds dog but turns his eye
And stops behind a moment passing bye

Will stamp draw back and then their threats repeat
Urging defiance wi their stamping feet
And stung wi cares hopes cannot recconsile
They stamp and follow till he leaps a stile
Or skulking from their threats betakes to flight
And wi the master lessens out of sight
Clowns mark the threatning rage of march pass bye
And clouds wear thin and ragged in the sky
While wi less sudden and more lasting smiles
The growing sun their hopes of spring beguiles
Who often at its end remark wi pride
Days lengthen in their visits a 'cocks stride'
Dames clean their candlesticks and set them bye
Glad of the makeshift light that eves supply
The boy returning home at night from toil
Down lane and close oer footbrig gate and style1
Oft trembles into fear and stands to hark
The waking fox renew his short gruff bark
While badgers eccho their dread evening shrieks
And to his thrilling thoughts in terror speaks
And shepherds that wi in their hulks remain
Night after night upon the chilly plain
To watch the dropping lambs that at all hours
Come in the quaking blast like early flowers
Demanding all the shepherds care who find
Warm hedge side spots and take them from the wind
And round their necks in wary caution tyes
Long shreds of rags in red or purple dyes
Thats meant in danger as a safty spell
Like the old yoe that wears a tinkling bell
The sneaking foxes from his thefts to fright
That often seizes the young lambs at night
These when they in their nightly watchings hear
The badgers shrieks can hardly stifle fear
They list the noise from woodlands dark recess
Like helpless shrieking woman in distress
And oft as such fears fancying mystery
Believes the dismal yelling sounds to be
For superstition hath its thousand tales
To people all his midnight woods and vales
And the dread spot from whence the dismal noise
Mars the night musings of their dark employs
Owns its sad tale to realize their fear
At which their hearts in boyhood achd to hear
A maid at night by treacherous love decoyd
Was in that shrieking wood years past destroyd
She went twas said to meet the waiting swain
And home and friends ne'er saw her face again
Mid brakes and thorns that crowded round the dell
And matting weeds that had no tongues to tell
He murderd her alone at dead midnight
While the pale moon threw round her sickly light

And loud shrieks left the thickets slumbers deep
That only scard the little birds from sleep
When the pale murderers terror frowning eye
Told its dread errand that the maid shoud dye
Mid thick black thorns her secret grave was made
And there ere night the murderd girl was laid
When no one saw the deed but god and he
And moonlight sparkling thro the sleeping tree
Around-the red breast might at morning steel
There for the worm to meet his morning meal
In fresh turnd moulds that first beheld the sun
Nor knew the deed that dismal night had done
Such is the tale that superstition gives
And in her midnight memory ever lives
That makes the boy run by wi wild affright
And shepherds startle on their rounds at night

Now love teazd maidens from their droning wheel
At the red hour of sunset sliving steals
From scolding dames to meet their swains agen
Tho water checks their visits oer the plain
They slive where no one sees some wall behind
Or orchard apple trees that stops the wind
To talk about springs pleasures hoveing nigh
And happy rambles when the roads get dry
The insect world now sunbeams higher climb
Oft dream of spring and wake before their time
Blue flyes from straw stacks crawling scarce alive
And bees peep out on slabs before the hive
Stroaking their little legs across their wings
And venturing short flight where the snow drop hings
Its silver bell-and winter aconite
Wi buttercup like flowers that shut at night
And green leaf frilling round their cups of gold
Like tender maiden muffld from the cold
They sip and find their honey dreams are vain
And feebly hasten to their hives again
And butterflys by eager hopes undone
Glad as a child come out to greet the sun
Lost neath the shadow of a sudden shower
Nor left to see tomorrows april flower .

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - May

Come queen of months in company
Wi all thy merry minstrelsy
The restless cuckoo absent long
And twittering swallows chimney song
And hedge row crickets notes that run
From every bank that fronts the sun
And swathy bees about the grass
That stops wi every bloom they pass
And every minute every hour
Keep teazing weeds that wear a flower
And toil and childhoods humming joys
For there is music in the noise
The village childern mad for sport
In school times leisure ever short
That crick and catch the bouncing ball
And run along the church yard wall
Capt wi rude figured slabs whose claims
In times bad memory hath no names
Oft racing round the nookey church
Or calling ecchos in the porch
And jilting oer the weather cock
Viewing wi jealous eyes the clock
Oft leaping grave stones leaning hights
Uncheckt wi mellancholy sights
The green grass swelld in many a heap
Where kin and friends and parents sleep
Unthinking in their jovial cry
That time shall come when they shall lye
As lowly and as still as they
While other boys above them play
Heedless as they do now to know
The unconcious dust that lies below
The shepherd goes wi happy stride
Wi moms long shadow by his side
Down the dryd lanes neath blooming may
That once was over shoes in clay
While martins twitter neath his eves
Which he at early morning leaves
The driving boy beside his team
Will oer the may month beauty dream
And cock his hat and turn his eye
On flower and tree and deepning skye
And oft bursts loud in fits of song
And whistles as he reels along
Crack[ing] his whip in starts of joy
A happy dirty driving boy
The youth who leaves his corner stool
Betimes for neighbouring village school
While as a mark to urge him right
The church spires all the way in sight
Wi cheerings from his parents given
Starts neath the joyous smiles of heaven

And sawns wi many an idle stand
Wi bookbag swinging in his hand
And gazes as he passes bye
On every thing that meets his eye
Young lambs seem tempting him to play
Dancing and bleating in his way
Wi trembling tails and pointed ears
They follow him and loose their fears
He smiles upon their sunny faces
And feign woud join their happy races
The birds that sing on bush and tree
Seem chirping for his company
And all in fancys idle whim
Seem keeping holiday but him
He lolls upon each resting stile
To see the fields so sweetly smile
To see the wheat grow green and long
And list the weeders toiling song
Or short not[e] of the changing thrush
Above him in the white thorn bush
That oer the leaning stile bends low
Loaded wi mockery of snow
Mozzld wi many a lushing thread
Of crab tree blossoms delicate red
He often bends wi many a wish
Oer the brig rail to view the fish
Go sturting by in sunny gleams
And chucks in the eye dazzld streams
Crumbs from his pocket oft to watch
The swarming struttle come to catch
Them where they to the bottom sile
Sighing in fancys joy the while
Hes cautiond not to stand so nigh
By rosey milkmaid tripping bye
Where he admires wi fond delight
And longs to be there mute till night
He often ventures thro the day
At truant now and then to play
Rambling about the field and plain
Seeking larks nests in the grain
And picking flowers and boughs of may
To hurd awhile and throw away
Lurking neath bushes from the sight
Of tell tale eyes till schools noon night
Listing each hour for church clocks hum
To know the hour to wander home
That parents may not think him long
Nor dream of his rude doing wrong
Dreading thro the night wi dreaming pain
To meet his masters wand again
Each hedge is loaded thick wi green
And where the hedger late hath been

Tender shoots begin to grow
From the mossy stumps below
While sheep and cow that teaze the grain
will nip them to the root again
They lay their bill and mittens bye
And on to other labours hie
While wood men still on spring intrudes
And thins the shadow solitudes
Wi sharpend axes felling down
The oak trees budding into brown
Where as they crash upon the ground
A crowd of labourers gather round
And mix among the shadows dark
To rip the crackling staining bark
From off the tree and lay when done
The rolls in lares to meet the sun
Depriving yearly where they come
The green wood pecker of its home
That early in the spring began
Far from the sight of troubling man
And bord their round holes in each tree
In fancys sweet security
Till startld wi the woodmans noise
It wakes from all its dreaming joys
The blue bells too that thickly bloom
Where man was never feared to come
And smell smocks that from view retires
Mong rustling leaves and bowing briars
And stooping lilys of the valley
That comes wi shades and dews to dally
White beady drops on slender threads
Wi broad hood leaves above their heads
Like white robd maids in summer hours
Neath umberellas shunning showers
These neath the barkmens crushing treads
Oft perish in their blooming beds
Thus stript of boughs and bark in white
Their trunks shine in the mellow light
Beneath the green surviving trees
That wave above them in the breeze
And waking whispers slowly bends
As if they mournd their fallen friends
Each morning now the weeders meet
To cut the thistle from the wheat
And ruin in the sunny hours
Full many wild weeds of their flowers
Corn poppys that in crimson dwell
Calld 'head achs' from their sickly smell
And carlock yellow as the sun
That oer the may fields thickly run
And 'iron weed' content to share
The meanest spot that spring can spare

Een roads where danger hourly comes
Is not wi out its purple blooms
And leaves wi points like thistles round
Thickset that have no strength to wound
That shrink to childhoods eager hold
Like hair-and with its eye of gold
And scarlet starry points of flowers
Pimpernel dreading nights and showers
Oft calld 'the shepherds weather glass'
That sleep till suns have dyd the grass
Then wakes and spreads its creeping bloom
Till clouds or threatning shadows come
Then close it shuts to sleep again
Which weeders see and talk of rain
And boys that mark them shut so soon
will call them 'John go bed at noon
And fumitory too a name
That superstition holds to fame
Whose red and purple mottled flowers
Are cropt by maids in weeding hours
To boil in water milk and way1
For washes on an holiday
To make their beauty fair and sleak
And scour the tan from summers cheek
And simple small forget me not
Eyd wi a pinshead yellow spot
I'th'2 middle of its tender blue
That gains from poets notice due
These flowers the toil by crowds destroys
And robs them of their lowly joys
That met the may wi hopes as sweet
As those her suns in gardens meet
And oft the dame will feel inclind
As childhoods memory comes to mind
To turn her hook away and spare
The blooms it lovd to gather there
My wild field catalogue of flowers
Grows in my ryhmes as thick as showers
Tedious and long as they may be
To some, they never weary me
The wood and mead and field of grain
I coud hunt oer and oer again
And talk to every blossom wild
Fond as a parent to a child
And cull them in my childish joy
By swarms and swarms and never cloy
When their lank shades oer morning pearls
Shrink from their lengths to little girls
And like the clock hand pointing one
Is turnd and tells the morning gone
They leave their toils for dinners hour
Beneath some hedges bramble bower

And season sweet their savory meals
Wi joke and tale and merry peals
Of ancient tunes from happy tongues
While linnets join their fitful songs
Perchd oer their heads in frolic play
Among the tufts of motling may
The young girls whisper things of love
And from the old dames hearing move
Oft making 'love knotts' in the shade
Of blue green oat or wheaten blade
And trying simple charms and spells
That rural superstition tells
They pull the little blossom threads
From out the knapweeds button heads
And put the husk wi many a smile
In their white bosoms for awhile
Who if they guess aright the swain
That loves sweet fancys trys to gain
Tis said that ere its lain an hour
Twill blossom wi a second flower
And from her white breasts hankerchief
Bloom as they ne'er had lost a leaf
When signs appear that token wet
As they are neath the bushes met
The girls are glad wi hopes of play
And harping of the holiday
A hugh blue bird will often swim
Along the wheat when skys grow dim
Wi clouds-slow as the gales of spring
In motion wi dark shadowd wing
Beneath the coming storm it sails
And lonly chirps the wheat hid quails
That came to live wi spring again
And start when summer browns the grain
They start the young girls joys afloat
Wi 'wet my foot' its yearly note
So fancy doth the sound explain
And proves it oft a sign of rain
About the moor 'mong sheep and cow
The boy or old man wanders now
Hunting all day wi hopful pace
Each thick sown rushy thistly place
For plover eggs while oer them flye
The fearful birds wi teazing cry
Trying to lead their steps astray
And coying him another way
And be the weather chill or warm
Wi brown hats truckd beneath his arm
Holding each prize their search has won
They plod bare headed to the sun
Now dames oft bustle from their wheels
Wi childern scampering at their heels

To watch the bees that hang and swive
In clumps about each thronging hive
And flit and thicken in the light
While the old dame enjoys the sight
And raps the while their warming pans
A spell that superstition plans
To coax them in the garden bounds
As if they lovd the tinkling sounds
And oft one hears the dinning noise
Which dames believe each swarm decoys
Around each village day by day
Mingling in the warmth of may
Sweet scented herbs her skill contrives
To rub the bramble platted hives
Fennels thread leaves and crimpld balm
To scent the new house of the swarm
The thresher dull as winter days
And lost to all that spring displays
Still mid his barn dust forcd to stand
Swings his frail round wi weary hand
While oer his head shades thickly creep
And hides the blinking owl asleep
And bats in cobweb corners bred
Sharing till night their murky bed
The sunshine trickles on the floor
Thro every crevice of the door
And makes his barn where shadows dwell
As irksome as a prisoners cell
And as he seeks his daily meal
As schoolboys from their tasks will steal
ile often stands in fond delay
To see the daisy in his way
And wild weeds flowering on the wall
That will his childish sports recall
Of all the joys that came wi spring
The twirling top the marble ring
The gingling halfpence hussld up
At pitch and toss the eager stoop
To pick up heads, the smuggeld plays
Neath hovels upon sabbath days
When parson he is safe from view
And clerk sings amen in his pew
The sitting down when school was oer
Upon the threshold by his door
Picking from mallows sport to please
Each crumpld seed he calld a cheese
And hunting from the stackyard sod
The stinking hen banes belted pod
By youths vain fancys sweetly fed
Christning them his loaves of bread
He sees while rocking down the street
Wi weary hands and crimpling feet

Young childern at the self same games
And hears the self same simple names
Still floating on each happy tongue
Touchd wi the simple scene so strong
Tears almost start and many a sigh
Regrets the happiness gone bye
And in sweet natures holiday
His heart is sad while all is gay
How lovly now are lanes and balks
For toils and lovers sunday walks
The daisey and the buttercup
For which the laughing childern stoop
A hundred times throughout the day
In their rude ramping summer play
So thickly now the pasture crowds
In gold and silver sheeted clouds
As if the drops in april showers
Had woo'd the sun and swoond to flowers
The brook resumes its summer dresses
Purling neath grass and water cresses
And mint and flag leaf swording high
Their blooms to the unheeding eye
And taper bowbent hanging rushes
And horse tail childerns bottle brushes
And summer tracks about its brink
Is fresh again where cattle drink
And on its sunny bank the swain
Stretches his idle length again
Soon as the sun forgets the day
The moon looks down on the lovly may
And the little star his friend and guide
Travelling together side by side
And the seven stars and charleses wain1
Hangs smiling oer green woods agen
The heaven rekindles all alive
Wi light the may bees round the hive
Swarm not so thick in mornings eye
As stars do in the evening skye
All all are nestling in their joys
The flowers and birds and pasture boys
The firetail, long a stranger, comes
To his last summer haunts and homes
To hollow tree and crevisd wall
And in the grass the rails odd call
That featherd spirit stops the swain
To listen to his note again
And school boy still in vain retraces
The secrets of his hiding places
In the black thorns crowded cops~e1
Thro its varied turns and stops
The nightingale its ditty weaves
Hid in a multitude of leaves

The boy stops short to hear the strain
And 'sweet jug jug' he mocks again
The yellow hammer builds its nest
By banks where sun beams earliest rest
That drys the dews from off the grass
Shading it from all that pass
Save the rude boy wi ferret gaze
That hunts thro evry secret maze
He finds its pencild eggs agen
All streakd wi lines as if a pen
By natures freakish hand was took
To scrawl them over like a book
And from these many mozzling marks
The school boy names them 'writing larks'
Bum barrels twit on bush and tree
Scarse bigger then a bumble bee
And in a white thorns leafy rest
It builds its curious pudding-nest
Wi hole beside as if a mouse
Had built the little barrel house
Toiling full many a lining feather
And bits of grey tree moss together
Amid the noisey rooky park
Beneath the firdales branches dark
The little golden crested wren
Hangs up his glowing nest agen
And sticks it to the furry leaves
As martins theirs beneath the eaves
The old hens leave the roost betimes
And oer the garden pailing climbs
To scrat the gardens fresh turnd soil
And if unwatchd his crops to spoil
Oft cackling from the prison yard
To peck about the houseclose sward
Catching at butterflys and things
Ere they have time to try their wings
The cattle feels the breath of may
And kick and toss their heads in play
The ass beneath his bags of sand
Oft jerks the string from leaders hand
And on the road will eager stoop
To pick the sprouting thistle up
Oft answering on his weary way
Some distant neighbours sobbing bray
Dining the ears of driving boy
As if he felt a fit of joy
Wi in its pinfold circle left
Of all its company bereft
Starvd stock no longer noising round
Lone in the nooks of foddering ground
Each skeleton of lingering stack
By winters tempests beaten black

Nodds upon props or bolt upright
Stands swarthy in the summer light
And oer the green grass seems to lower
Like stump of old time wasted tower
All that in winter lookd for hay
Spread from their batterd haunts away
To pick the grass or lye at lare
Beneath the mild hedge shadows there
Sweet month that gives a welcome call
To toil and nature and to all
Yet one day mid thy many joys
Is dead to all its sport and noise
Old may day where's thy glorys gone
All fled and left thee every one
Thou comst to thy old haunts and homes
Unnoticd as a stranger comes
No flowers are pluckt to hail the now
Nor cotter seeks a single bough
The maids no more on thy sweet morn
Awake their thresholds to adorn
Wi dewey flowers-May locks new come
And princifeathers cluttering bloom
And blue bells from the woodland moss
And cowslip cucking balls to toss
Above the garlands swinging hight
Hang in the soft eves sober light
These maid and child did yearly pull
By many a folded apron full
But all is past the merry song
Of maidens hurrying along
To crown at eve the earliest cow
Is gone and dead and silent now
The laugh raisd at the mocking thorn
Tyd to the cows tail last that morn
The kerchief at arms length displayd
Held up by pairs of swain and maid
While others bolted underneath
Bawling loud wi panting breath
'Duck under water' as they ran
Alls ended as they ne'er began
While the new thing that took thy place
Wears faded smiles upon its face
And where enclosure has its birth
It spreads a mildew oer her mirth
The herd no longer one by one
Goes plodding on her morning way
And garlands lost and sports nigh gone
Leaves her like thee a common day
Yet summer smiles upon thee still
Wi natures sweet unalterd will
And at thy births unworshipd hours
Fills her green lap wi swarms of flowers

To crown thee still as thou hast been
Of spring and summer months the queen.

John Clare

The Shepherds Calendar - November

The landscape sleeps in mist from morn till noon;
And, if the sun looks through, 'tis with a face
Beamless and pale and round, as if the moon,
When done the journey of her nightly race,
Had found him sleeping, and supplied his place.
For days the shepherds in the fields may be,
Nor mark a patch of sky - blindfold they trace,
The plains, that seem without a bush or tree,
Whistling aloud by guess, to flocks they cannot see.

The timid hare seems half its fears to lose,
Crouching and sleeping 'neath its grassy lair,
And scarcely startles, tho' the shepherd goes
Close by its home, and dogs are barking there;
The wild colt only turns around to stare
At passer by, then knaps his hide again;
And moody crows beside the road forbear
To fly, tho' pelted by the passing swain;
Thus day seems turn'd to night, and tries to wake in vain.

The owlet leaves her hiding-place at noon,
And flaps her grey wings in the doubling light;
The hoarse jay screams to see her out so soon,
And small birds chirp and startle with affright;
Much doth it scare the superstitious wight,
Who dreams of sorry luck, and sore dismay;
While cow-boys think the day a dream of night,
And oft grow fearful on their lonely way,
Fancying that ghosts may wake, and leave their graves by day.

Yet but awhile the slumbering weather flings
Its murky prison round - then winds wake loud;
With sudden stir the startled forest sings
Winter's returning song - cloud races cloud,
And the horizon throws away its shroud,
Sweeping a stretching circle from the eye;
Storms upon storms in quick succession crowd,
And o'er the sameness of the purple sky
Heaven paints, with hurried hand, wild hues of every dye.

At length it comes along the forest oaks,
With sobbing ebbs, and uproar gathering high;
The scared, hoarse raven on its cradle croaks,
And stockdove-flocks in hurried terrors fly,
While the blue hawk hangs o'er them in the sky.-
The hedger hastens from the storm begun,
To seek a shelter that may keep him dry;
And foresters low bent, the wind to shun,
Scarce hear amid the strife the poacher's muttering gun.

The ploughman hears its humming rage begin,
And hies for shelter from his naked toil;

Buttoning his doublet closer to his chin,
He bends and scampers o'er the elting soil,
While clouds above him in wild fury boil,
And winds drive heavily the beating rain;
He turns his back to catch his breath awhile,
Then ekes his speed and faces it again,
To seek the shepherd's hut beside the rushy plain.

The boy, that scareth from the spiry wheat
The melancholy crow - in hurry weaves,
Beneath an ivied tree, his sheltering seat,
Of rushy flags and sedges tied in sheaves,
Or from the field a shock of stubble thieves.
There he doth dithering sit, and entertain
His eyes with marking the storm-driven leaves;
Oft spying nests where he spring eggs had ta'en,
And wishing in his heart 'twas summer-time again.

Thus wears the month along, in checker'd moods,
Sunshine and shadows, tempests loud, and calms;
One hour dies silent o'er the sleepy woods,
The next wakes loud with unexpected storms;
A dreary nakedness the field deforms -
Yet many a rural sound, and rural sight,
Lives in the village still about the farms,
Where toil's rude uproar hums from morn till night
Noises, in which the ears of Industry delight.

At length the stir of rural labour's still,
And Industry her care awhile forgoes;
When Winter comes in earnest to fulfil
His yearly task, at bleak November's close,
And stops the plough, and hides the field in snows;
When frost locks up the stream in chill delay,
And mellows on the hedge the jetty sloes,
For little birds - then Toil hath time for play,
And nought but threshers' flails awake the dreary day.

John Clare

The Shepherd's Calendar - October

Nature now spreads around in dreary hue
A pall to cover all that summer knew
Yet in the poets solitary way
Some pleasing objects for his praise delay
Somthing that makes him pause and turn again
As every trifle will his eye detain
The free horse rustling through the stubble land
And bawling herd boy with his motly band
Of hogs and sheep and cows who feed their fill
Oer cleard fields rambling where so ere they will
The geese flock gabbling in the splashy fields
And quaking ducks in pondweeds half conseald
Or seeking worms along the homclose sward
Right glad of freedom from the prison yard
While every cart rut dribbles its low tide
And every hollow splashing sports provide
The hedger stopping gaps wi pointed bough
Made by intruding horse and blundering cow
The milk maid tripping on her morning way
And fodderers oft tho early cutting hay
Dropping the littering forkfulls from his back
Side where the thorn fence circles round the stack
The cotter journying wi his noisev swine
Along the wood side where the brambles twine
Shaking from dinted cups the acorns brown
And from the hedges red awes dashing down
And nutters rustling in the yellow woods
Scaring from their snug lairs the pheasant broods
And squirrels secret toils oer winter dreams
Picking the brown nuts from the yellow beams
And hunters from the thickets avenue
In scarlet jackets startling on the view
Skiming a moment oer the russet plain
Then hiding in the colord woods again
The ploping guns sharp momentary shock
Which eccho bustles from her cave to mock
The sticking groups in many a ragged set
Brushing the woods their harmless loads to get
And gipseys camps in some snug shelterd nook
Where old lane hedges like the pasture brook
Run crooking as they will by wood and dell
In such lone spots these wild wood roamers dwell
On commons where no farmers claims appear
Nor tyrant justice rides to interfere
Such the abodes neath hedge or spreading oak
And but discovered by its curling smoak
Puffing and peeping up as wills the breeze
Between the branches of the colord trees
Such are the pictures that october yields
To please the poet as he walks the fields
Oft dames in faded cloak of red or grey
Loiters along the mornings dripping way

Wi wicker basket on their witherd arms
Searching the hedges of home close or farms
Where brashy elder trees to autum fade
Each cotters mossy hut and garden shade
Whose glossy berrys picturesquly weaves
Their swathy bunches mid the yellow leaves
Where the pert sparrow stains his little bill
And tutling robin picks his meals at will
Black ripening to the wan suns misty ray
Here the industrious huswives wend their way
Pulling the brittle branches carefull down
And hawking loads of berrys to the town
Wi unpretending skill yet half divine
To press and make their eldern berry wine
That bottld up becomes a rousing charm
To kindle winters icy bosom warm
That wi its merry partner nut brown beer
Makes up the peasants christmass keeping cheer
While nature like fair woman in decay
Which pale consumption hourly wastes away
Upon her waining features pale and chill
Wears dreams of beauty that seem lovely still
Among the heath furze still delights to dwell
Quaking as if with cold the harvest bell
The mushroom buttons each moist morning brings
Like spots of snow in the green tawney rings
And fuzz balls swelld like bladders in the grass
Which oft the merry laughing milking lass
Will stoop to gather in her sportive airs
And slive in mimickd fondness unawares
To smut the brown cheek of the teazing swain
Wi the black powder which their balls contain
Who feigns offence at first that love may speed
Then charms a kiss to recompence the deed
The flying clouds urged on in swiftest pace
Like living things as if they runned a race
The winds that oer each coming tempest broods
Waking like spirits in their startling moods
Fluttering the sear leaves on the blasting lea
That litters under every fading tree
And pausing oft as falls the pattering rain
Then gathering strength and twirling them again
The startld stockdove hurried wizzing bye
As the still hawk hangs oer him in the sky
Crows from the oak trees qawking as they spring
Dashing the acorns down wi beating wing
Waking the woodlands sleep in noises low
Pattring on crimpt brakes withering brown below
While from their hollow nest the squirrels (pop)
Adown the tree to pick them as they drop
The starnel crowds that dim the muddy light
The crows and jackdaws flapping home at night

And puddock circling round its lazy flight
Round the wild sweeing wood in motion slow
Before it perches on the oaks below
And hugh black beetles revelling alone
In the dull evening with their heavy drone
Buzzing from barn door straw and hovel sides
Where fodderd cattle from the night abides
These pictures linger thro the shortning day
And cheer the lone bards mellancholy way
And now and then a solitary boy
Journeying and muttering oer his dreams of joy

John Clare

The Shepherd's Calendar - September

Harvest awakes the morning still
And toils rude groups the valleys fill
Deserted is each cottage hearth
To all life save the crickets mirth
Each burring wheel their sabbath meets
Nor walks a gossip in the streets
The bench beneath its eldern bough
Lined oer with grass is empty now
Where blackbirds caged from out the sun
Could whistle while their mistress spun.
All haunt the thronged fields still to share
The harvests lingering bounty there
As yet no meddling boys resort
About the streets in idle sport
The butterflye enjoys his hour
And flirts unchaced from flower to flower
And humming bees that morning calls
From out the low huts mortar walls
Which passing boy no more controuls
Flye undisturbed about their holes
And sparrows in glad chirpings meet
Unpelted in the quiet street

None but imprison'd childern now
Are seen where dames with angry brow
Threaten each younker to his seat
That thro' the school door eyes the street
Or from his horn book turns away
To mourn for liberty and play
Loud are the mornings early sounds
That farm and cottage yard surrounds
The creaking noise of opening gate
And clanking pumps where boys await
With idle motion to supply
The thirst of cattle crowding bye
The low of cows and bark of dogs
And cackling hens and wineing hogs
Swell high-while at the noise awoke
Old goody seeks her milking cloak
And hastens out to milk the cow
And fill the troughs to feed the sow
Or seeking old hens laid astray
Or from young chickens drives away
The circling kite that round them flyes
Waiting the chance to seize the prize
Hogs trye thro gates the street to gain
And steal into the fields of grain
From nights dull prison comes the duck
Waddling eager thro the muck
Squeezing thro the orchard pales
Where mornings bounty rarely fails
Eager gobbling as they pass

Dew worms thro the padded grass
Where blushing apples round and red
Load down the boughs and pat the head
Of longing maid that hither goes
To hang on lines the drying cloaths
Who views them oft with tempted eye
And steals one as she passes bye
Where the holly oak so tall
Far oer tops the garden wall
That latest blooms for bees provide
Hived on stone benches close beside
The bees their teazing music hum
And threaten war to all that come
Save the old dame whose jealous care
Places a trapping bottle there
Filled with mock sweets in whose disguise
The honey loving hornet dies

Upon the dovecoats mossy slates
The piegons coo around their mates
Where morns sunbeams early fall
By the barn or stable wall
Basking hens in playfull rout
Flap the smoaking dust about
In the barn hole sits the cat
Watching within the thirsty rat
Who oft at morn its dwelling leaves
To drink the moisture from the eves
The redbreast with his nimble eye
Dare scarcely stop to catch the flye
That tangled in the spiders snare
Mourns in vain for freedom there
The dog beside the threshold lyes
Mocking sleep with half shut eyes
With head crouched down upon his feet
Till strangers pass his sunny seat
Then quick he pricks his ears to hark
And bustles up to growl and bark
While boys in fear stop short their song
And sneak on hurrys fears along
And beggar creeping like a snail
To make his hungry hopes prevail
Oer the warm heart of charity
Leaves his lame halt and hastens bye

The maid afield now leaves the farm
With brimming bottles on her arm
Loitering unseen in narrow lane
To be oertook by following swain
Who happy thus her truth to prove
Carrys the load and talks of love
Full soon the harvest waggons sound

Rumbling like thunder all around
In ceasless speed the corn to load
Hurrying down the dusty road
While driving boy with eager eye
Watches the church clock passing bye
Whose gilt hands glitter in the sun
To see how far the hours have run
Right happly in the breathless day
To see it wearing fast away
Yet now and then a sudden shower
Will bring to toil a resting hour
When under sheltering shocks a crowd
Of merry voices mingle loud
Wearing the short lived boon along
With vulgar tale and merry song
Draining with leisures laughing eye
Each welcome bubbling bottle drye
Till peeping suns dry up the rain
Then off they start to toil again

Anon the fields are wearing clear
And glad sounds hum in labours ear
When childern halo 'here they come
And run to meet the harvest home
Stuck thick with boughs and thronged with boys
Who mingle loud a merry noise
Glad that the harvests end is nigh
And weary labour nearly bye
Where when they meet the stack thronged yard
Cross bunns or pence their shouts reward

Then comes the harvest supper night
Which rustics welcome with delight
When merry game and tiresome tale
And songs increasing with the ale
Their mingled uproar interpose
To crown the harvests happy close
While rural mirth that there abides
Laughs till she almost cracks her sides

Now harvests busy hum declines
And labour half its help resigns
Boys glad at heart to play return
The shepherds to their peace sojourn
Rush-bosomed solitudes among
Which busy toil disturbed so long
The gossip happy all is oer
Visits again her neighbours door
For scandals idle tales to dwell
Which harvest had no time to tell
And on each bench at even tide
Which trailing vine leaves nearly hide

And free from all its sultry strife
Enjoy once more their idle life
A few whom waning toil reprieves
Thread the forests sea of leaves
Where the pheasant loves to hide
And the darkest glooms abide
Beneath the old oaks mossd and grey
Whose shadows seem as old as they
Where time hath many seasons won
Since aught beneath them saw the sun.
Within these brambly solitudes
The ragged noisy boy intrudes
To gather nuts that ripe and brown
As soon as shook will patter down
Thus harvest ends its busy reign
And leaves the fields their peace again
Where autumns shadows idly muse
And tinge the trees with many hues
Amid whose scenes I'm feign to dwell
And sing of what I love so well
But hollow winds and tumbling floods
And humming showers and moaning woods
All startle into sudden strife
And wake a mighty lay to life
Making amid their strains divine
All songs in vain so mean as mine

John Clare

The Shepherd's Tree

Huge elm, with rifted trunk all notched and scarred,
Like to a warrior's destiny! I love
To stretch me often on thy shadowed sward,
And hear the laugh of summer leaves above;
Or on thy buttressed roots to sit, and lean
In careless attitude, and there reflect
On times and deeds and darings that have been -
Old castaways, now swallowed in neglect, -
While thou art towering in thy strength of heart,
Stirring the soul to vain imaginings
In which life's sordid being hath no part.
The wind of that eternal ditty sings,
Humming of future things, that burn the mind
To leave some fragment of itself behind.

John Clare

The Skylark

The rolls and harrows lie at rest beside
The battered road; and spreading far and wide
Above the russet clods, the corn is seen
Sprouting its spiry points of tender green,
Where squats the hare, to terrors wide awake,
Like some brown clod the harrows failed to break.
Opening their golden caskets to the sun,
The buttercups make schoolboys eager run,
To see who shall be first to pluck the prize -
Up from their hurry, see, the skylark flies,
And o'er her half-formed nest, with happy wings
Winnows the air, till in the cloud she sings,
Then hangs a dust-spot in the sunny skies,
And drops, and drops, till in her nest she lies,
Which they unheeded passed - not dreaming then
That birds which flew so high would drop agen
To nests upon the ground, which anything
May come at to destroy. Had they the wing
Like such a bird, themselves would be too proud,
And build on nothing but a passing cloud!
As free from danger as the heavens are free
From pain and toil, there would they build and be,
And sail about the world to scenes unheard
Of and unseen - Oh, were they but a bird!
So think they, while they listen to its song,
And smile and fancy and so pass along;
While its low nest, moist with the dews of morn,
Lies safely, with the leveret, in the corn.

John Clare

The Sleep Of Spring

O for that sweet, untroubled rest
That poets oft have sung!--
The babe upon its mother's breast,
The bird upon its young,
The heart asleep without a pain--
When shall I know that sleep again?

When shall I be as I have been
Upon my mother's breast
Sweet Nature's garb of verdant green
To woo to perfect rest--
Love in the meadow, field, and glen,
And in my native wilds again?

The sheep within the fallow field,
The herd upon the green,
The larks that in the thistle shield,
And pipe from morn to e'en--
O for the pasture, fields, and fen!
When shall I see such rest again?

I love the weeds along the fen,
More sweet than garden flowers,
For freedom haunts the humble glen
That blest my happiest hours.
Here prison injures health and me:
I love sweet freedom and the free.

The crows upon the swelling hills,
The cows upon the lea,
Sheep feeding by the pasture rills,
Are ever dear to me,
Because sweet freedom is their mate,
While I am lone and desolate.

I loved the winds when I was young,
When life was dear to me;
I loved the song which Nature sung,
Endearing liberty;
I loved the wood, the vale, the stream,
For there my boyhood used to dream.

There even toil itself was play;
Twas pleasure een to weep;
Twas joy to think of dreams by day,
The beautiful of sleep.
When shall I see the wood and plain,
And dream those happy dreams again?

John Clare

The Soldier

Home furthest off grows dearer from the way;
And when the army in the Indias lay
Friends' letters coming from his native place
Were like old neighbours with their country face.
And every opportunity that came
Opened the sheet to gaze upon the name
Of that loved village where he left his sheep
For more contented peaceful folk to keep;
And friendly faces absent many a year
Would from such letters in his mind appear.
And when his pockets, chafing through the case,
Wore it quite out ere others took the place,
Right loath to be of company bereft
He kept the fragments while a bit was left.

John Clare

The Stranger

When trouble haunts me, need I sigh?
No, rather smile away despair;
For those have been more sad than I,
With burthens more than I could bear;
Aye, gone rejoicing under care
Where I had sunk in black despair.

When pain disturbs my peace and rest,
Am I a hopeless grief to keep,
When some have slept on torture's breast
And smiled as in the sweetest sleep,
Aye, peace on thorns, in faith forgiven,
And pillowed on the hope of heaven?

Though low and poor and broken down,
Am I to think myself distrest?
No, rather laugh where others frown
And think my being truly blest;
For others I can daily see
More worthy riches worse than me.

Aye, once a stranger blest the earth
Who never caused a heart to mourn,
Whose very voice gave sorrow mirth--
And how did earth his worth return?
It spurned him from its lowliest lot,
The meanest station owned him not;

An outcast thrown in sorrow's way,
A fugitive that knew no sin,
Yet in lone places forced to stray--
Men would not take the stranger in.
Yet peace, though much himself he mourned,
Was all to others he returned.

* * * * *

His presence was a peace to all,
He bade the sorrowful rejoice.
Pain turned to pleasure at his call,
Health lived and issued from his voice.
He healed the sick and sent abroad
The dumb rejoicing in the Lord.

The blind met daylight in his eye,
The joys of everlasting day;
The sick found health in his reply;
The cripple threw his crutch away.
Yet he with troubles did remain
And suffered poverty and pain.

Yet none could say of wrong he did,

And scorn was ever standing bye;
Accusers by their conscience chid,
When proof was sought, made no reply.
Yet without sin he suffered more
Than ever sinners did before.

John Clare

The Swallow

Pretty swallow, once again
Come and pass me in the rain.
Pretty swallow, why so shy?
Pass again my window by.

The horsepond where he dips his wings,
The wet day prints it full of rings.
The raindrops on his [ ] track
Lodge like pearls upon his back.

Then again he dips his wing
In the wrinkles of the spring,
Then oer the rushes flies again,
And pearls roll off his back like rain.

Pretty little swallow, fly
Village doors and windows by,
Whisking oer the garden pales
Where the blackbird finds the snails;

Whewing by the ladslove tree
For something only seen by thee;
Pearls that on the red rose hing
Fall off shaken by thy wing.

On that low thatched cottage stop,
In the sooty chimney pop,
Where thy wife and family
Every evening wait for thee.

John Clare

The Thrush's Nest

Within a thick and spreading hawthorn bush
That overhung a molehill large and round,
I heard from morn to morn a merry thrush
Sing hymns to sunrise, and I drank the sound
With joy; and often, an intruding guest,
I watched her secret toil from day to day -
How true she warped the moss to form a nest,
And modelled it within with wood and clay;
And by and by, like heath-bells gilt with dew,
There lay her shining eggs, as bright as flowers,
Ink-spotted over shells of greeny blue;
And there I witnessed, in the sunny hours,
A brood of nature's minstrels chirp and fly,
Glad as the sunshine and the laughing sky.

John Clare

The Tramp

He eats (a moment's stoppage to his song)
The stolen turnip as he goes along;
And hops along and heeds with careless eye
The passing crowded stage coach reeling bye.
He talks to none but wends his silent way,
And finds a hovel at the close of day,
Or under any hedge his house is made.
He has no calling and he owns no trade.
An old smoaked blanket arches oer his head,
A whisp of straw or stubble makes his bed.
He knows a lawless law that claims no kin
But meet and plunder on and feel no sin--
No matter where they go or where they dwell
They dally with the winds and laugh at hell.

John Clare

The Vanities Of Life

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.--_Solomon_

What are life's joys and gains?
What pleasures crowd its ways,
That man should take such pains
To seek them all his days?
Sift this untoward strife
On which thy mind is bent:
See if this chaff of life
Is worth the trouble spent.

Is pride thy heart's desire?
Is power thy climbing aim?
Is love thy folly's fire?
Is wealth thy restless game?
Pride, power, love, wealth, and all
Time's touchstone shall destroy,
And, like base coin, prove all
Vain substitutes for joy.

Dost think that pride exalts
Thyself in other's eyes,
And hides thy folly's faults,
Which reason will despise?
Dost strut, and turn, and stride,
Like walking weathercocks?
The shadow by thy side
Becomes thy ape, and mocks.

Dost think that power's disguise
Can make thee mighty seem?
It may in folly's eyes,
But not in worth's esteem,
When all that thou canst ask,
And all that she can give,
Is but a paltry mask
Which tyrants wear and live.

Go, let thy fancies range
And ramble where they may;
View power in every change,
And what is the display?
--The country magistrate,
The meanest shade in power,
To rulers of the state,
The meteors of an hour.

View all, and mark the end
Of every proud extreme,
Where flattery turns a friend,
And counterfeits esteem;
Where worth is aped in show,

That doth her name purloin,
Like toys of golden glow
That's sold for copper coin.

Ambition's haughty nod
With fancies may deceive,
Nay, tell thee thou'rt a god,
And wilt thou such believe?
Go, bid the seas be dry;
Go, hold earth like a ball,
Or throw thy fancies by,
For God can do it all.

Dost thou possess the dower
Of laws to spare or kill?
Call it not heavenly power
When but a tyrant's will.
Know what a God will do,
And know thyself a fool,
Nor, tyrant-like, pursue
Where He alone should rule.

O put away thy pride,
Or be ashamed of power
That cannot turn aside
The breeze that waves a flower.
Or bid the clouds be still:
Though shadows, they can brave
Thy poor power mocking will:
Then make not man a slave.

Dost think, when wealth is won,
Thy heart has its desire?
Hold ice up to the sun,
And wax before the fire;
Nor triumph oer the reign
Which they so soon resign;
In this world's ways they gain,
Insurance safe as thine.

Dost think life's peace secure
In house and in land?
Go, read the fairy lure
To twist a cord in sand;
Lodge stones upon the sky,
Hold water in a sieve,
Nor give such tales the lie,
And still thine own believe.

Whoso with riches deals,
And thinks peace bought and sold,
Will find them slipping eels,

That slide the firmest hold:
Though sweet as sleep with health
Thy lulling luck may be,
Pride may oerstride thy wealth,
And check prosperity.

Dost think that beauty's power
Life sweetest pleasure gives?
Go, pluck the summer flower,
And see how long it lives:
Behold, the rays glide on
Along the summer plain
Ere thou canst say 'they're gone,'
And measure beauty's reign.

Look on the brightest eye,
Nor teach it to be proud;
View but the clearest sky,
And thou shalt find a cloud;
Nor call each face ye meet
An angel's, cause it's fair,
But look beneath your feet,
And think of what they are.

Who thinks that love doth live
In beauty's tempting show,
Shall find his hopes ungive,
And melt in reason's thaw.
Who thinks that pleasure lies
In every fairy bower,
Shall oft, to his surprise,
Find poison in the flower.

Dost lawless passions grasp?
Judge not thou deal'st in joy:
Its flowers but hide the asp,
Thy revels to destroy.
Who trusts an harlot's smile,
And by her wiles are led,
Plays, with a sword the while
Hung dropping oer his head.

Dost doubt my warning song?
Then doubt the sun gives light,
Doubt truth to teach thee wrong,
And wrong alone as right;
And live as lives the knave,
Intrigue's deceiving guest;
Be tyrant, or be slave,
As suits thy ends the best.

Or pause amid thy toils

For visions won and lost,
And count the fancied spoils,
If eer they quit the cost:
And if they still possess
Thy mind, as worthy things,
Plat straws with bedlam Bess,
And call them diamond rings.

Thy folly's past advice,
Thy heart's already won,
Thy fall's above all price,
So go, and be undone;
For all who thus prefer
The seeming great for small
Shall make wine vinegar,
And sweetest honey gall.

Wouldst heed the truths I sing,
To profit wherewithal,
Clip folly's wanton wing,
And keep her within call.
I've little else to give,
What thou canst easy try;
The lesson how to live
Is but to learn to die.

John Clare

The Vixen

Among the taller wood with ivy hung,
The old fox plays and dances round her young.
She snuffs and barks if any passes by
And swings her tail and turns prepared to fly.
The horseman hurries by, she bolts to see,
And turns agen, from danger never free.
If any stands she runs among the poles
And barks and snaps and drive them in the holes.
The shepherd sees them and the boy goes by
And gets a stick and progs the hole to try.
They get all still and lie in safety sure,
And out again when everything's secure,
And start and snap at blackbirds bouncing by
To fight and catch the great white butterfly.

John Clare

The Winter's Come

Sweet chestnuts brown like soling leather turn;
The larch trees, like the colour of the Sun;
That paled sky in the Autumn seemed to burn,
What a strange scene before us now does run--
Red, brown, and yellow, russet, black, and dun;
White thorn, wild cherry, and the poplar bare;
The sycamore all withered in the sun.
No leaves are now upon the birch tree there:
All now is stript to the cold wintry air.

See, not one tree but what has lost its leaves--
And yet the landscape wears a pleasing hue.
The winter chill on his cold bed receives
Foliage which once hung oer the waters blue.
Naked and bare the leafless trees repose.
Blue-headed titmouse now seeks maggots rare,
Sluggish and dull the leaf-strewn river flows;
That is not green, which was so through the year
Dark chill November draweth to a close.

Tis Winter, and I love to read indoors,
When the Moon hangs her crescent up on high;
While on the window shutters the wind roars,
And storms like furies pass remorseless by.
How pleasant on a feather bed to lie,
Or, sitting by the fire, in fancy soar
With Dante or with Milton to regions high,
Or read fresh volumes we've not seen before,
Or oer old Burton's Melancholy pore.

John Clare

The Winter's Spring

The winter comes; I walk alone,
I want no bird to sing;
To those who keep their hearts their own
The winter is the spring.
No flowers to please--no bees to hum--
The coming spring's already come.

I never want the Christmas rose
To come before its time;
The seasons, each as God bestows,
Are simple and sublime.
I love to see the snowstorm hing;
'Tis but the winter garb of spring.

I never want the grass to bloom:
The snowstorm's best in white.
I love to see the tempest come
And love its piercing light.
The dazzled eyes that love to cling
O'er snow-white meadows sees the spring.

I love the snow, the crumpling snow
That hangs on everything,
It covers everything below
Like white dove's brooding wing,
A landscape to the aching sight,
A vast expanse of dazzling light.

It is the foliage of the woods
That winters bring--the dress,
White Easter of the year in bud,
That makes the winter Spring.
The frost and snow his posies bring,
Nature's white spurts of the spring.

John Clare

The Wood-Cutter's Night Song

Welcome, red and roundy sun,
Dropping lowly in the west;
Now my hard day's work is done,
I'm as happy as the best.

Joyful are the thoughts of home,
Now I'm ready for my chair,
So, till morrow-morning's come,
Bill and mittens, lie ye there!

Though to leave your pretty song,
Little birds, it gives me pain,
Yet to-morrow is not long,
Then I'm with you all again.

If I stop, and stand about,
Well I know how things will be,
Judy will be looking out
Every now-and-then for me.

So fare ye well! and hold your tongues,
Sing no more until I come;
They're not worthy of your songs
That never care to drop a crumb.

All day long I love the oaks,
But, at nights, yon little cot,
Where I see the chimney smokes,
Is by far the prettiest spot.

Wife and children all are there,
To revive with pleasant looks,
Table ready set, and chair,
Supper hanging on the hooks.

Soon as ever I get in,
When my faggot down I fling,
Little prattlers they begin
Teasing me to talk and sing.

Welcome, red and roundy sun,
Dropping lowly in the west;
Now my hard day's work is done,
I'm as happy as the best.

Joyful are the thoughts of home,
Now I'm ready for my chair,
So, till morrow-morning's come,
Bill and mittens, lie ye there!

John Clare

The Yellowhammer

When shall I see the white-thorn leaves agen,
And yellowhammers gathering the dry bents
By the dyke side, on stilly moor or fen,
Feathered with love and nature's good intents?
Rude is the tent this architect invents,
Rural the place, with cart ruts by dyke side.
Dead grass, horse hair, and downy-headed bents
Tied to dead thistles--she doth well provide,
Close to a hill of ants where cowslips bloom
And shed oer meadows far their sweet perfume.
In early spring, when winds blow chilly cold,
The yellowhammer, trailing grass, will come
To fix a place and choose an early home,
With yellow breast and head of solid gold.

John Clare

Thou Flower Of Summer

When in summer thou walkest
In the meads by the river,
And to thyself talkest,
Dost thou think of one ever--
A lost and a lorn one
That adores thee and loves thee?
And when happy morn's gone,
And nature's calm moves thee,
Leaving thee to thy sleep like an angel at rest,
Does the one who adores thee still live in thy breast?

Does nature eer give thee
Love's past happy vision,
And wrap thee and leave thee
In fancies elysian?
Thy beauty I clung to,
As leaves to the tree;
When thou fair and young too
Looked lightly on me,
Till love came upon thee like the sun to the west
And shed its perfuming and bloom on thy breast.

John Clare

To a Fallen Elm

Old Elm that murmured in our chimney top
The sweetest anthem autumn ever made
And into mellow whispering calms would drop
When showers fell on thy many coloured shade
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made
While darkness came as it would strangle light
With the black tempest of a winter night
That rocked thee like a cradle to thy root
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid
Thy strength without while all within was mute
It seasoned comfort to our hearts desire
We felt thy kind protection like a friend
And pitched our chairs up closer to the fire
Enjoying comforts that was was never penned

Old favourite tree thoust seen times changes lower
But change till now did never come to thee
For time beheld thee as his sacred dower
And nature claimed thee her domestic tree
Storms came and shook thee with aliving power
Yet stedfast to thy home thy roots hath been
Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower
Till earth grew iron - still thy leaves was green
The children sought thee in thy summer shade
And made their play house rings of sticks and stone
The mavis sang and felt himself alone
While in they leaves his early nest was made
And I did feel his happiness mine own
Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed

Friend not inanimate- tho stocks and stones
There are and many cloathed in flesh and bones
Thou ownd a lnaguage by which hearts are stirred
Deeper than by the attribute of words
Thine spoke a feeling known in every tongue
Language of pity and the force of wrong
What cant assumes what hypocrites may dare
Speaks home to truth and shows it what they are

I see a picture that thy fate displays
And learn a lesson from thy destiny
Self interest saw thee stand in freedoms ways
So thy old shadow must a tyrant be
Thoust heard the knave abusing those in power
Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free
Thoust sheltered hypocrites in many an hour
That when in power would never shelter thee
Thoust heard the knave supply his canting powers
With wrongs illusions when he wanted friends
That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers
And when clouds vanished made thy shade ammends
With axe at root he felled thee to the ground

And barked of freedom - O I hate that sound

It grows the cant terms of enslaving tools
To wrong another by the name of right
It grows a liscence with oer bearing fools
To cheat plain honesty by force of might
Thus came enclosure- ruin was her guide
But freedoms clapping hands enjoyed the sight
Tho comforts cottage soon was thrust aside
And workhouse prisons raised upon the scite
Een natures dwelling far away from men
The common heath became the spoilers prey
The rabbit had not where to make his den
And labours only cow was drove away
No matter- wrong was right and right was wrong
And freedoms brawl was sanction to the song

Such was thy ruin music making Elm
The rights of freedom was to injure thine
As thou wert served so would they overwhelm
In freedoms name the little so would they over whelm
And these are knaves that brawl for better laws
And cant of tyranny in stronger powers
Who glut their vile unsatiated maws
And freedoms birthright from the weak devours

John Clare

To Anna Three Years Old

My Anna, summer laughs in mirth,
And we will of the party be,
And leave the crickets in the hearth
For green fields' merry minstrelsy.

I see thee now with little hand
Catch at each object passing bye,
The happiest thing in all the land
Except the bee and butterfly.

* * * * *

And limpid brook that leaps along,
Gilt with the summer's burnished gleam,
Will stop thy little tale or song
To gaze upon its crimping stream.

Thou'lt leave my hand with eager speed
The new discovered things to see--
The old pond with its water weed
And danger-daring willow tree,
Who leans an ancient invalid
Oer spots where deepest waters be.

In sudden shout and wild surprise
I hear thy simple wonderment,
As new things meet thy childish eyes
And wake some innocent intent;

As bird or bee or butterfly
Bounds through the crowd of merry leaves
And starts the rapture of thine eye
To run for what it neer achieves.

But thou art on the bed of pain,
So tells each poor forsaken toy.
Ah, could I see that happy hour
When these shall be thy heart's employ,
And see thee toddle oer the plain,
And stoop for flowers, and shout for joy.

John Clare

To John Clare

Well, honest John, how fare you now at home?
The spring is come, and birds are building nests;
The old cock-robin to the sty is come,
With olive feathers and its ruddy breast;
And the old cock, with wattles and red comb,
Struts with the hens, and seems to like some best,
Then crows, and looks about for little crumbs,
Swept out by little folks an hour ago;
The pigs sleep in the sty; the bookman comes--
The little boy lets home-close nesting go,
And pockets tops and taws, where daisies blow,
To look at the new number just laid down,
With lots of pictures, and good stories too,
And Jack the Giant-killer's high renown.

John Clare

To John Milton

'From his honoured friend, William Davenant'

Poet of mighty power, I fain
Would court the muse that honoured thee,
And, like Elisha's spirit, gain
A part of thy intensity;
And share the mantle which she flung
Around thee, when thy lyre was strung.

Though faction's scorn at first did shun
With coldness thy inspired song,
Though clouds of malice passed thy sun,
They could not hide it long;
Its brightness soon exhaled away
Dank night, and gained eternal day.

The critics' wrath did darkly frown
Upon thy muse's mighty lay;
But blasts that break the blossom down
Do only stir the bay;
And thine shall flourish, green and long,
With the eternity of song.

Thy genius saw, in quiet mood,
Gilt fashion's follies pass thee by,
And, like the monarch of the wood,
Towered oer it to the sky,
Where thou couldst sing of other spheres,
And feel the fame of future years.

Though bitter sneers and stinging scorns
Did throng the muse's dangerous way,
Thy powers were past such little thorns,
They gave thee no dismay;
The scoffer's insult passed thee by,
Thou smild'st and mad'st him no reply.

Envy will gnaw its heart away
To see thy genius gather root;
And as its flowers their sweets display
Scorn's malice shall be mute;
Hornets that summer warmed to fly,
Shall at the death of summer die.

Though friendly praise hath but its hour.
And little praise with thee hath been;
The bay may lose its summer flower,
But still its leaves are green;
And thine, whose buds are on the shoot,
Shall only fade to change to fruit.

Fame lives not in the breath of words,

In public praises' hue and cry;
The music of these summer birds
Is silent in a winter sky,
When thine shall live and flourish on,
Oer wrecks where crowds of fames are gone.

The ivy shuns the city wall,
When busy clamorous crowds intrude,
And climbs the desolated hall
In silent solitude;
The time-worn arch, the fallen dome,
Are roots for its eternal home.

The bard his glory neer receives
Where summer's common flowers are seen,
But winter finds it when she leaves
The laurel only green;
And time from that eternal tree,
Shall weave a wreath to honour thee;

A sunny wreath for poets meet,
From Helicon's immortal soil,
Where sacred Time with pilgrim feet
Walks forth to worship, not to spoil,
A wreath which Fame creates and bears,
And deathless genius only heirs.

Nought but thy ashes shall expire;
Thy genius, at thy obsequies,
Shall kindle up its living fire
And light the muse's skies;
Ay, it shall rise, and shine, and be
A sun in song's posterity.

John Clare

To Mary

I sleep with thee, and wake with thee,
And yet thou art not there;
I fill my arms with thoughts of thee,
And press the common air.
Thy eyes are gazing upon mine,
When thou art out of sight;
My lips are always touching thine,
At morning, noon, and night.

I think and speak of other things
To keep my mind at rest:
But still to thee my memory clings
Like love in woman's breast.
I hide it from the world's wide eye,
And think and speak contrary;
But soft the wind comes from the sky,
And whispers tales of Mary.

The night wind whispers in my ear,
The moons shines in my face;
A burden still of chilling fear
I find in every place.
The breeze is whispering in the bush,
And the dews fall from the tree,
All sighing on, and will not hush,
Some pleasant tales of thee.

John Clare

To Napoleon

The heroes of the present and the past
Were puny, vague, and nothingness to thee:
Thou didst a span grasp mighty to the last,
And strain for glory when thy die was cast.
That little island, on the Atlantic sea,
Was but a dust-spot in a lake: thy mind
Swept space as shoreless as eternity.
Thy giant powers outstript this gaudy age
Of heroes; and, as looking at the sun,
So gazing on thy greatness, made men blind
To merits, that had adoration won
In olden times. The world was on thy page
Of victories but a comma. Fame could find
No parallel, thy greatness to presage.

John Clare

Turkeys

The turkeys wade the close to catch the bees
In the old border full of maple trees
And often lay away and breed and come
And bring a brood of chelping chickens home.
The turkey gobbles loud and drops his rag
And struts and sprunts his tail and then lets drag
His wing on ground and makes a huzzing noise,
Nauntles at passer-bye and drives the boys
And bounces up and flies at passer-bye.
The old dog snaps and grins nor ventures nigh.
He gobbles loud and drives the boys from play;
They throw their sticks and kick and run away.

John Clare

What is Life?

And what is Life? An hour-glass on the run,
A mist retreating from the morning sun,
A busy, bustling, still-repeated dream.
Its length? A minute's pause, a moment's thought.
And Happiness? A bubble on the stream,
That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought.

And what is Hope? The puffing gale of morn,
That of its charms divests the dewy lawn,
And robs each flow'ret of its gem -and dies;
A cobweb, hiding disappointment's thorn,
Which stings more keenly through the thin disguise.

And what is Death? Is still the cause unfound?
That dark mysterious name of horrid sound?
A long and lingering sleep the weary crave.
And Peace? Where can its happiness abound?
Nowhere at all, save heaven and the grave.

Then what is Life? When stripped of its disguise,
A thing to be desired it cannot be;
Since everything that meets our foolish eyes
Gives proof sufficient of its vanity.
'Tis but a trial all must undergo,
To teach unthankful mortals how to prize
That happiness vain man's denied to know,
Until he's called to claim it in the skies.

John Clare

Where She Told Her Love

I saw her crop a rose
Right early in the day,
And I went to kiss the place
Where she broke the rose away
And I saw the patten rings
Where she o'er the stile had gone,
And I love all other things
Her bright eyes look upon.
If she looks upon the hedge or up the leafing tree,
The whitethorn or the brown oak are made dearer things to me.

I have a pleasant hill
Which I sit upon for hours,
Where she cropt some sprigs of thyme
And other little flowers;
And she muttered as she did it
As does beauty in a dream,
And I loved her when she hid it
On her breast, so like to cream,
Near the brown mole on her neck that to me a diamond shone;
Then my eye was like to fire, and my heart was like to stone.

There is a small green place
Where cowslips early curled,
Which on Sabbath day I traced,
The dearest in the world.
A little oak spreads o'er it,
And throws a shadow round,
A green sward close before it,
The greenest ever found:
There is not a woodland nigh nor is there a green grove,
Yet stood the fair maid nigh me and told me all her love.

John Clare

Wild Bees

These children of the sun which summer brings
As pastoral minstrels in her merry train
Pipe rustic ballads upon busy wings
And glad the cotters' quiet toils again.
The white-nosed bee that bores its little hole
In mortared walls and pipes its symphonies,
And never absent couzen, black as coal,
That Indian-like bepaints its little thighs,
With white and red bedight for holiday,
Right earlily a-morn do pipe and play
And with their legs stroke slumber from their eyes.
And aye so fond they of their singing seem
That in their holes abed at close of day
They still keep piping in their honey dreams,
And larger ones that thrum on ruder pipe
Round the sweet smelling closen and rich woods
Where tawny white and red flush clover buds
Shine bonnily and bean fields blossom ripe,
Shed dainty perfumes and give honey food
To these sweet poets of the summer fields;
Me much delighting as I stroll along
The narrow path that hay laid meadow yields,
Catching the windings of their wandering song.
The black and yellow bumble first on wing
To buzz among the sallow's early flowers,
Hiding its nest in holes from fickle spring
Who stints his rambles with her frequent showers;
And one that may for wiser piper pass,
In livery dress half sables and half red,
Who laps a moss ball in the meadow grass
And hoards her stores when April showers have fled;
And russet commoner who knows the face
Of every blossom that the meadow brings,
Starting the traveller to a quicker pace
By threatening round his head in many rings:
These sweeten summer in their happy glee
By giving for her honey melody.

John Clare

Winter Walk

The holly bush, a sober lump of green,
Shines through the leafless shrubs all brown and grey,
And smiles at winter be it eer so keen
With all the leafy luxury of May.
And O it is delicious, when the day
In winter's loaded garment keenly blows
And turns her back on sudden falling snows,
To go where gravel pathways creep between
Arches of evergreen that scarce let through
A single feather of the driving storm;
And in the bitterest day that ever blew
The walk will find some places still and warm
Where dead leaves rustle sweet and give alarm
To little birds that flirt and start away.

John Clare

Wood Rides

Who hath not felt the influence that so calms
The weary mind in summers sultry hours
When wandering thickest woods beneath the arms
Of ancient oaks and brushing nameless flowers
That verge the little ride who hath not made
A minutes waste of time and sat him down
Upon a pleasant swell to gaze awhile
On crowding ferns bluebells and hazel leaves
And showers of lady smocks so called by toil
When boys sprote gathering sit on stulps and weave
Garlands while barkmen pill the fallen tree
- Then mid the green variety to start
Who hath (not) met that mood from turmoil free
And felt a placid joy refreshed at heart

John Clare

Written in Northampton County Asylum

I am! yet what I am who cares, or knows?
My friends forsake me like a memory lost.
I am the self-consumer of my woes;
They rise and vanish, an oblivious host,
Shadows of life, whose very soul is lost.
And yet I am—I live—though I am toss'd

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dream,
Where there is neither sense of life, nor joys,
But the huge shipwreck of my own esteem
And all that's dear. Even those I loved the best
Are strange—nay, they are stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod—
For scenes where woman never smiled or wept—
There to abide with my Creator, God,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Full of high thoughts, unborn. So let me lie,—
The grass below; above, the vaulted sky.

John Clare

Young Lambs

The spring is coming by a many signs;
The trays are up, the hedges broken down,
That fenced the haystack, and the remnant shines
Like some old antique fragment weathered brown.
And where suns peep, in every sheltered place,
The little early buttercups unfold
A glittering star or two--till many trace
The edges of the blackthorn clumps in gold.
And then a little lamb bolts up behind
The hill and wags his tail to meet the yoe,
And then another, sheltered from the wind,
Lies all his length as dead--and lets me go
Close bye and never stirs but baking lies,
With legs stretched out as though he could not rise.

John Clare