Classic Poetry Series

Charles Lamb

- poems -

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Charles Lamb (10 February 1775 – 27 December 1834)

Charles Lamb was an English essayist, best known for his Essays of Elia and for the children's book Tales from Shakespeare, which he produced with his sister, Mary Lamb. Lamb has been referred to by E.V. Lucas, his principal biographer, as the most lovable figure in English literature.

Lamb was honoured by The Latymer School, a grammar school in Edmonton, a suburb of London where he lived for a time; it has six houses, one of which, "Lamb", is named after Charles.

Youth and Schooling

Lamb was the son of Elizabeth Field and John Lamb. Lamb was the youngest child, with an 11 year older sister Mary, an even older brother John, and 4 other siblings who did not survive their infancy. John Lamb (father), who was a lawyer's clerk, spent most of his professional life as the assistant and servant to a barrister by the name of Samuel Salt who lived in the Inner Temple in London. It was there in the Inner Temple in Crown Office Row, that Charles Lamb was born and spent his youth. Lamb created a portrait of his father in his "Elia on the Old Benchers" under the name Lovel. Lamb's older brother was too much his senior to be a youthful companion to the boy but his sister Mary, being born eleven years before him, was probably his closest playmate. Lamb was also cared for by his paternal aunt Hetty, who seems to have had a particular fondness for him. A number of writings by both Charles and Mary suggest that the conflict between Aunt Hetty and her sister-in-law created a certain degree of tension in the Lamb household. However, Charles speaks fondly of her and her presence in the house seems to have brought a great deal of comfort to him.

Some of Lamb's fondest childhood memories were of time spent with Mrs. Field, his maternal grandmother, who was for many years a servant to the Plummer family, who owned a large country house called Blakesware, near Widford, Hertfordshire. After the death of Mrs. Plummer, Lamb's grandmother was in sole charge of the large home and, as Mr. Plummer was often absent, Charles had free rein of the place during his visits. A picture of these visits can be glimpsed in the Elia essay Blakesmoor in H—shire.

"Why, every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried [sic] bed-rooms – tapestry so much better than painting – not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots – at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally – all Ovid on the walls, in colours vivider than his descriptions."

Little is known about Charles's life before the age of seven. We know that Mary taught him to read at a very early age and he read voraciously. It is believed that he suffered from smallpox during his early years which forced him into a long period of convalescence. After this period of recovery Lamb began to take lessons from Mrs. Reynolds, a woman who lived in the Temple and is believed to have been the former wife of a lawyer. Mrs. Reynolds must have been a sympathetic schoolmistress because Lamb maintained a relationship with her throughout his life and she is known to have attended dinner parties held by Mary and Charles in the 1820s. E.V. Lucas suggests that sometime in 1781 Charles left Mrs. Reynolds and began to study at the Academy of William Bird.

His time with William Bird did not last long, however, because by October 1782 Lamb was enrolled in Christ's Hospital, a charity boarding school chartered by King Edward VI in 1552. Christ's Hospital was a traditional English boarding school; bleak and full of violence. The headmaster, Mr. Boyer, has become famous for his teaching in Latin and Greek, but also for his brutality. A thorough record of Christ's Hospital in Several essays by Lamb as well as the Autobiography of Leigh Hunt and the Biographia Literaria of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom Charles developed a friendship that would last for their entire lives. Despite the brutality Lamb got along well at Christ's Hospital, due in part, perhaps, to the fact that his home was not far distant thus enabling him, unlike many other boys, to return often to the safety of home. Years later, in his essay "Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," Lamb described these events, speaking of himself in the third person as "L."

“ “I remember L. at school; and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages, which I and other of his schoolfellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us.”

Christ's Hospital was a typical English boarding school and many students later wrote of the terrible violence they suffered there. The upper master of the school from 1778 to 1799 was Reverend James Boyer, a man renowned for his unpredictable and capricious temper. In one famous story Boyer was said to have knocked one of Lee Hunt's teeth out by throwing a copy of Homer at him from across the room. Lamb seemed to have escaped much of this brutality, in part because of his amiable personality and in part because Samuel Salt, his father's employer and Lamb's sponsor at the school was one of the institute's Governors.

Charles Lamb suffered from a stutter and this "an inconquerable impediment" in his speech deprived him of Grecian status at Christ's Hospital and thus disqualifying him for a clerical career. While Coleridge and other scholarly boys were able to go on to Cambridge, Lamb left school at fourteen and was forced to find a more prosaic career. For a short time he worked in the office of Joseph Paice, a London merchant and then, for 23 weeks, until 8 February 1792, held a small post in the Examiner's Office of the South Sea House. Its subsequent downfall in a pyramid scheme after Lamb left would be contrasted to the company's prosperity in the first Elia essay. On 5 April 1792 he went to work in the Accountant's Office for British East India Company, the death of his father's employer having ruined the family's fortunes.Charles would continue to work there for 25 years, until his retirement with pension.

In 1792 while tending to his grandmother, Mary Field, in Hertfordshire, Charles Lamb fell in love with a young woman named Ann Simmons. Although no epistolary record exists of the relationship between the two, Lamb seems to have spent years wooing Miss Simmons. The record of the love exists in several accounts of Lamb's writing. Rosamund Gray is a story of a young man named Allen Clare who loves Rosamund Gray but their relationship comes to nothing because of the sudden death of Miss Gray. Miss Simmons also appears in several Elia essays under the name "Alice M."

The essays "Dream Children," "New Year's Eve," and several others, speak of the many years that Lamb spent pursuing his love that ultimately failed. Miss Simmons eventually went on to marry a silversmith by the name of Bartram and Lamb called the failure of the affair his 'great disappointment.'

Family tragedy

Charles and his sister Mary both suffered periods of mental illness. Charles spent six weeks in a psychiatric hospital during 1795. He was, however, already making his name as a poet.

On 22 September 1796, a terrible event occurred: Mary, "worn down to a state of extreme nervous misery by attention to needlework by day and to her mother at night," was seized with acute mania and stabbed her mother to the heart with a table knife.

Although there was no legal status of 'insanity' at the time, a jury returned a verdict of 'Lunacy' and therefore freed her from guilt of willful murder. With the help of friends Lamb succeeded in obtaining his sister's release from what would otherwise have been lifelong imprisonment, on the condition that he take personal responsibility for her safekeeping. Lamb used a large part of his relatively meagre income to keep his beloved sister in a private 'madhouse' in Islington called Fisher House.

The 1799 death of John Lamb was something of a relief to Charles because his father had been mentally incapacitated for a number of years since suffering a stroke. The death of his father also meant that Mary could come to live again with him in Pentonville, and in 1800 they set up a shared home at Mitre Court Buildings in the Temple, where they lived until 1809.

Despite Lamb's bouts of melancholia and alcoholism, both he and his sister enjoyed an active and rich social life. Their London quarters became a kind of weekly salon for many of the most outstanding theatrical and literary figures of the day. Charles Lamb, having been to school with Samuel Coleridge, counted Coleridge as perhaps his closest, and certainly his oldest, friend. On his deathbed, Coleridge had a mourning ring sent to Lamb and his sister. Fortuitously, Lamb's first publication was in 1796, when four sonnets by "Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House" appeared in Coleridge's Poems on Various Subjects. In 1797 he contributed additional blank verse to the second edition, and met the Wordsworths, William and Dorothy, on his short summer holiday with Coleridge at Nether Stowey, thereby also striking up a lifelong friendship with William. In London, Lamb became familiar with a group of young writers who favoured political reform, including Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt.

Lamb continued to clerk for the East India Company and doubled as a writer in various genres, his tragedy, John Woodvil, being published in 1802. His farce, Mr H, was performed at Drury Lane in 1807, where it was roundly booed. In the same year, Tales from Shakespeare (Charles handled the tragedies; his sister Mary, the comedies) was published, and became a best seller for William Godwin's "Children's Library."

In 1819, at age 44, Lamb, who, because of family commitments, had never married, fell in love with an actress, Fanny Kelly, of Covent Garden, and proposed marriage. She refused him, and he died a bachelor. His collected essays, under the title Essays of Elia, were published in 1823 ("Elia" being the pen name Lamb used as a contributor to the London Magazine). A further collection was published ten years or so later, shortly before Lamb's death. He died of a streptococcal infection, erysipelas, contracted from a minor graze on his face sustained after slipping in the street, on 27 December 1834, just a few months after Coleridge. He was 59. From 1833 till their deaths Charles and Mary lived at Bay Cottage, Church Street, Edmonton north of London (now part of the London Borough of Enfield. Lamb is buried in All Saints' Churchyard, Edmonton. His sister, who was ten years his senior, survived him for more than a dozen years. She is buried beside him.

Work

Lamb's first publication was the inclusion of four sonnets in the Coleridge's Poems on Various Subjects published in 1796 by Joseph Cottle. The sonnets were significantly influenced by the poems of Burns and the sonnets of William Bowles, a largely forgotten poet of the late 18th century. His poems garnered little attention and are seldom read today. Lamb's contributions to the second edition of the Poems showed significant growth as a poet. These poems included The Tomb of Douglas and A Vision of Repentance. Because of a temporary fall-out with Coleridge, Lamb's poems were to be excluded in the third edition of the Poems. As it turned out, a third edition never emerged and instead Coleridge's next publication was the monumentally influential Lyrical Ballads co-published with Wordsworth. Lamb, on the other hand, published a book entitled Blank Verse with Charles Lloyd, the mentally unstable son of the founder of Lloyd's Bank. Lamb's most famous poem was written at this time entitled The Old Familiar Faces. Like most of Lamb's poems it is particularly sentimental but it is still remembered and widely read, often included in Poetic Collections. Of particular interest to Lambarians is the opening verse of the original version of The Old Familiar Faces which is concerned with Lamb's mother. It was a verse that Lamb chose to remove from the edition of his Collected Work published in 1818.

I had a mother, but she died, and left me,

Died prematurely in a day of horrors -

All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

From a fairly young age Lamb desired to be a poet but never gained the success that he had hoped. Lamb lived under the poetic shadow of his friend Coleridge. In the final years of the 18th century Lamb began to work on prose with the novella entitled Rosamund Gray, a story of a young girl who was thought to be inspired by Ann Simmonds, with whom Charles Lamb was thought to be in love. Although the story is not particularly successful as a narrative because of Lamb's poor sense of plot, it was well thought of by Lamb's contemporaries and led Shelley to observe “what a lovely thing is Rosamund Gray! How much knowledge of the sweetest part of our nature in it!"

In the first years of the 19th century Lamb began his fruitful literary cooperation with his sister Mary. Together they wrote at least three books for William Godwin’s Juvenile Library. The most successful of these was of course Tales From Shakespeare which ran through two editions for Godwin and has now been published dozens of times in countless editions, many of them illustrated. Lamb also contributed a footnote to Shakespearean studies at this time with his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," in which he argues that Shakespeare should be read rather than performed in order to gain the proper effect of his dramatic genius. Beside contributing to Shakespeare studies with his book Tales From Shakespeare, Lamb also contributed to the popularization of Shakespeare's contemporaries with his book Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets Who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare.

Although he did not write his first Elia essay until 1820, Lamb’s gradual perfection of the essay form for which he eventually became famous began as early 1802 in a series of open letters to Leigh Hunt’s Reflector. The most famous of these is called "The Londoner" in which Lamb famously derides the contemporary fascination with nature and the countryside

Eserleri:

Blank Verse (1798)
A Tale of Rosamund Gray, and old blind Margaret (1798)
John Woodvil, poetic drama (1802)
Tales from Shakespeare (1807)

The Adventures of Ulysses (1808)
Specimens of English Dramatic poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare (1808)
On the Tragedies of Shakespeare (1811)
Witches and Other Night Fears (1821)
The Pawnbroker's Daughter (1825)
Eliana (1867)
Essays of Elia (1823)
The Last Essays of Elia (1833)

A Ballad

In a costly palace Youth goes clad in gold;
In a wretched workhouse Age's limbs are cold:
There they sit, the old men by a shivering fire,
Still close and closer cowering, warmth is their desire.

In a costly palace, when the brave gallants dine,
They have store of good venison, with old canary wine,
With singing and music to heighten the cheer;
Coarse bits, with grudging, are the pauper's best fare.

In a costly palace Youth is still carest
By a train of attendants which laugh at my young Lord's jest;
In a wretched workhouse the contrary prevails:
Does Age begin to prattle?-no man heark'neth to his tales.

In a costly palace if the child with a pin
Do but chance to prick a finger, straight the doctor is called in;
In a wretched workhouse men are left to perish
For want of proper cordials, which their old age might cherish.

In a costly palace Youth enjoys his lust;
In a wretched workhouse Age, in corners thrust,
Think upon the former days, when he was well to do,
Had children to stand by him, both friends and kinsmen too.

In a costly palace Youth his temples hides
With a new devised peruke that reaches to his sides;
In a wretched workhouse Age's crown is bare,
With a few thin locks just to fence out the cold air.

In peace, as in war, 'tis our young gallants' pride,
To walk, each one i' the streets, with a rapier by his side,
That none to do them injury may have pretence;
Wretched Age, in poverty, must brook offence.

Charles Lamb

A Dramatic Fragment

'Fie upon't!
All men are false, I think. The date of love
Is out, expired, its stories all grown stale,
O'erpast, forgotten, like an antique tale
Of Hero and Leander.'

-John Woodvil

All are not false. I knew a youth who died
For grief, because his Love proved so,
And married with another.
I saw him on the wedding-day,-
For he was present in the church that day,
In festive bravery decked,
As one that came to grace the ceremony,-
I marked him when the ring was given:
His Countenance never changed;
And, when the priest pronounced the marriage blessing,
He put a silent prayer up for the bride-
For so his moving lip interpreted.
He came invited to the marriage-feast
With the bride's friends,
And was the merriest of them all that day:
But they who knew him best called it feigned mirth;
And others said
He wore a smile like death upon his face.
His presence dashed all the beholders' mirth,
And he went away in tears.
What followed then?
O then
He did not, as neglected suitors use,
Affect a life of solitude in shades,
But lived
In free discourse and sweet society
Among his friends who knew his gentle nature best.
Yet ever, when he smiled,
There was a mystery legible in his face;
But whoso saw him, said he was a man
Not long for this world-
And true it was; for even then
The silent love was feeding at his heart,
Of which he died;
Nor ever spoke word of reproach;
Only, he wished in death that his remains
Might find a poor grave in some spot not far
From his mistress' family vault-being the place
Where one day Anna should herself be laid.

Charles Lamb

A Farewell To Tobacco

May the Babylonish curse
Straight confound my stammering verse,
If I can a passage see
In this word-perplexity,
Or a fit expression find,
Or a language to my mind,
(Still the phrase is wide or scant)
To take leave of thee, great plant!
Or in any terms relate
Half my love, or half my hate:
For I hate, yet love, thee so,
That, whichever thing I shew,
The plain truth will seem to be
A constrain'd hyperbole,
And the passion to proceed
More from a mistress than a weed.

Sooty retainer to the vine,
Bacchus' black servant, negro fine;
Sorcerer, that mak'st us dote upon
Thy begrimed complexion,
And, for thy pernicious sake,
More and greater oaths to break
Than reclaimed lovers take
'Gainst women: thou thy siege dost lay
Much too in the female way,
While thou suck'st the lab'ring breath
Faster than kisses or than death.

Thou in such a cloud dost bind us,
That our worst foes cannot find us,
And ill fortune, that would thwart us,
Shoots at rovers, shooting at us;
While each man, thro' thy height'ning steam,
Does like a smoking Etna seem,
And all about us does express
(Fancy and wit in richest dress)
A Sicilian fruitfulness.

Thou through such a mist dost shew us,
That our best friends do not know us,
And, for those allowed features,
Due to reasonable creatures,
Liken'st us to fell Chimeras,
Monsters that, who see us, fear us;
Worse than Cerberus or Geryon,
Or, who first lov'd a cloud, Ixion.

Bacchus we know, and we allow
His tipsy rites. But what art thou,
That but by reflex canst shew
What his deity can do,
As the false Egyptian spell
Aped the true Hebrew miracle?
Some few vapours thou may'st raise,
The weak brain may serve to amaze,
But to the reins and nobler heart
Canst nor life nor heat impart.

Brother of Bacchus, later born,
The old world was sure forlorn,
Wanting thee, that aidest more
The god's victories than before
All his panthers, and the brawls
Of his piping Bacchanals.
These, as stale, we disallow,
Or judge of thee meant: only thou
His true Indian conquest art;
And, for ivy round his dart,
The reformed god now weaves
A finer thyrsus of thy leaves.

Scent to match thy rich perfume
Chemic art did ne'er presume
Through her quaint alembic strain,
None so sov'reign to the brain.
Nature, that did in thee excel,
Fram'd again no second smell.
Roses, violets, but toys
For the smaller sort of boys,
Or for greener damsels meant;
Thou art the only manly scent.

Stinking'st of the stinking kind,
Filth of the mouth and fog of the mind,
Africa, that brags her foyson,
Breeds no such prodigious poison,
Henbane, nightshade, both together,
Hemlock, aconite ---

Nay, rather,
Plant divine, of rarest virtue;
Blisters on the tongue would hurt you.
'Twas but in a sort I blam'd thee;
None e'er prosper'd who defam'd thee;
Irony all, and feign'd abuse,

Such as perplext lovers use,
At a need, when, in despair
To paint forth their fairest fair,
Or in part but to express
That exceeding comeliness
Which their fancies doth so strike,
They borrow language of dislike;
And, instead of Dearest Miss,
Jewel, Honey, Sweetheart, Bliss,
And those forms of old admiring,
Call her Cockatrice and Siren,
Basilisk, and all that's evil,
Witch, Hyena, Mermaid, Devil,
Ethiop, Wench, and Blackamoor,
Monkey, Ape, and twenty more;
Friendly Trait'ress, loving Foe,-
Not that she is truly so,
But no other way they know
A contentment to express,
Borders so upon excess,
That they do not rightly wot
Whether it be pain or not.

Or, as men, constrain'd to part
With what's nearest to their heart,
While their sorrow's at the height,
Lose discrimination quite,
And their hasty wrath let fall,
To appease their frantic gall,
On the darling thing whatever,
Whence they feel it death to sever,
Though it be, as they, perforce,
Guiltless of the sad divorce.

For I must (nor let it grieve thee,
Friendliest of plants, that I must) leave thee.
For thy sake, tobacco, I
Would do any thing but die,
And but seek to extend my days
Long enough to sing thy praise.
But, as she, who once hath been
A king's consort, is a queen
Ever after, nor will bate
Any tittle of her state,
Though a widow, or divorced,
So I, from thy converse forced,
The old name and style retain,
A right Katherine of Spain;
And a seat, too, 'mongst the joys
Of the blest Tobacco Boys;

Where, though I, by sour physician,
Am debarr'd the full fruition
Of thy favours, I may catch
Some collateral sweets, and snatch
Sidelong odours, that give life
Like glances from a neighbour's wife;
And still live in the by-places
And the suburbs of thy graces;
And in thy borders take delight,
An unconquer'd Canaanite.

Charles Lamb

A Parody

Lazy-bones, lazy-bones, wake up and peep;
The Cat's in the cupboard, your Mother's asleep.
There you sit snoring, forgetting her ills:
Who is to give her her Bolus and Pills?
Twenty-five Angels must come into Town,
All for to help you to make your new gown-
Dainty aerial Spinsters & Singers:
Aren't you asham'd to employ such white fingers?
Delicate Hands, unaccustom'd to reels,
To set 'em a washing at poor body's wheels?
Why they came down is to me all a riddle,
And left hallelujah broke off in the middle.
Jove's Court & the Presence Angelical cut,
To eke out the work of a lazy young slut.
Angel-duck, angel-duck, winged & silly,
Pouring a watering pot over a lily,
Gardener gratuitous, careless of pelf,
Leave her to water her Lily herself,
Or to neglect it to death, if she chuse it;
Remember, the loss is her own if she lose it.

Charles Lamb

A timid grace sits trembling in her eye

A timid grace sits trembling in her eye,
As loath to meet the rudeness of men's sight,
Yet shedding a delicious lunar light
That steeps in kind oblivious ecstasy
The care-crazed mind, like some still melody:
Speaking most plain the thoughts which do possess
Her gentle sprite: peace, and meek quietness,
And innocent loves, and maiden purity:
A look whereof might heal the cruel smart
Of changed friends, or fortune's wrongs unkind:
Might to sweet deeds of mercy move the heart
Of him who hates his brethren of mankind.
Turned are those lights from me, who fondly yet
Past joys, vain loves, and buried hopes regret.

Charles Lamb

A Vision Of Repentance

I saw a famous fountain, in my dream,
Where shady path-ways to a valley led;
A weeping willow lay upon that stream,
And all around the fountain brink were spread
Wide branching trees, with dark green leaf rich clad,
Forming a doubtful twilight-desolate and sad.

The place was such, that whoso enter'd in,
Disrobed was of every earthly thought,
And straight became as one that knew not sin,
Or to the world's first innocence was brought;
Enseem'd it now, he stood on holy ground,
In sweet and tender melancholy wrapt around.

A most strange calm stole o'er my soothed sprite;
Long time I stood, and longer had I staid,
When, lo! I saw, saw by the sweet moon-light,
Which came in silence o'er that silent shade,
Where, near the fountain, something like despair
Made, of that weeping willow, garlands for her hair.

And eke with painful fingers she inwove
Many an uncouth stem of savage thorn-
'The willow garland, that was for her love,
And these her bleeding temples would adorn.'
With sighs her heart nigh burst, salt tears fast fell,
As mournfully she bended o'er that sacred well.

To whom when I addrest myself to speak,
She lifted up her eyes, and nothing said;
The delicate red came mantling o'er her cheek,
And, gath'ring up her loose attire, she fled
To the dark covert of that woody shade,
And in her goings seem'd a timid gentle maid.

Revolving in my mind what this should mean,
And why that lovely lady plained so;
Perplex'd in thought at that mysterious scene,
And doubting if 'twere best to stay or go,
I cast mine eyes in wistful gaze around,
When from the shades came slow a small and plaintive sound.

'Psyche am I, who love to dwell
In these brown shades, this woody dell,
Where never busy mortal came,
Till now, to pry upon my shame.

At thy feet what thou dost see
The waters of repentance be,
Which, night and day, I must augment
With tears, like a true penitent,

If haply so my day of grace
Be not yet past; and this lone place,
O'er-shadowy, dark, excludeth hence
All thoughts but grief and penitence.'

'Why dost thou weep, thou gentle maid!
And wherefore in this barren shade
Thy hidden thoughts with sorrow feed?
Can thing so fair repentance need?'

'O! I have done a deed of shame,
And tainted is my virgin fame,
And stain'd the beauteous maiden white,
In which my bridal robes were dight.'

'And who the promised spouse, declare:
And what those bridal garments were.'

'Severe and saintly righteousness
Compos'd the clear white bridal dress;
Jesus, the son of Heaven's high king,
Bought with his blood the marriage ring.
A wretched sinful creature, I
Deem'd lightly of that sacred tie,
Gave to a treacherous world my heart,
And play'd the foolish wanton's part.

Soon to these murky shades I came,
To hide from the sun's light my shame.
And still I haunt this woody dell,
And bathe me in that healing well,
Whose waters clear have influence
From sin's foul stains the soul to cleanse;
And, night and day, I them augment,
With tears, like a true penitent,
Until, due expiation made,
And fit atonement fully paid,
The lord and bridegroom me present,
Where in sweet strains of high consent,

God's throne before, the Seraphim
Shall chaunt the extatic marriage hymn.'

'Now Christ restore thee soon'-I said,
And thenceforth all my dream was fled.

Charles Lamb

Anger

Anger in its time and place
May assume a kind of grace.
It must have some reason in it,
And not last beyond a minute.
If to further lengths it go,
It does into malice grow.
'Tis the difference that we see
'Twixt the serpent and the bee.
If the latter you provoke,
It inflicts a hasty stroke,
Puts you to some little pain,
But it never stings again.
Close in tufted bush or brake
Lurks the poison-swellëd snake
Nursing up his cherished wrath;
In the purlieux of his path,
In the cold, or in the warm,
Mean him good, or mean him harm,
Whensoever fate may bring you,
The vile snake will always sting you.

Charles Lamb

As when a child...

As when a child on some long winter's night
Affrighted clinging to its Grandam's knees
With eager wond'ring and perturbed delight
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees
Muttered to wretch by necromantic spell;
Or of those hags, who at the witching time
Of murky midnight ride the air sublime,
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of Hell:
Cold Horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear
More gentle starts, to hear the Beldame tell
Of pretty babes, that loved each other dear,
Murdered by cruel Uncle's mandate fell:
Ev'n such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,
Ev'n so thou, Siddons! meltest my sad heart!

Charles Lamb

Beauty And The Beast

A Merchant, who by generous pains
Prospered in honourable gains,
Could boast, his wealth and fame to share,
Three manly Sons, three Daughters fair;
With these he felt supremely blest.-
His latest born surpass'd the rest:
She was so gentle, good and kind,
So fair in feature, form, and mind,
So constant too in filial duty,
The neighbours called her Little Beauty!
And when fair childhood's days were run,
That title still she wore and won;
Lovelier as older still she grew,
Improv'd in grace and goodness too.-
Her elder Sisters, gay and vain,
View'd her with envy and disdain,
Toss'd up their heads with haughty air;
Dress, Fashion, Pleasure, all their care.

'Twas thus, improving and improv'd;
Loving, and worthy to be lov'd,
Sprightly, yet grave, each circling day
Saw Beauty innocently gay.
Thus smooth the May-like moments past;
Blest times! but soon by clouds o'ercast!

Sudden as winds that madd'ning sweep
The foaming surface of the deep,
Vast treasures, trusted to the wave,
Were buried in the billowy grave!
Our Merchant, late of boundless store,
Saw Famine hasting to his door.

With willing hand and ready grace,
Mild Beauty takes the Servant's place;
Rose with the sun to household cares,
And morn's repast with zeal prepares,
The wholesome meal, the cheerful fire:
What cannot filial love inspire?
And when the task of day was done,
Suspended till the rising sun,
Music and song the hours employ'd,
As more deserv'd, the more enjoy'd;
Till Industry, with Pastime join'd,
Refresh'd the body and the mind;
And when the groupe retir'd to rest,
Father and Brothers Beauty blest.

Not so the Sisters; as before
'Twas rich and idle, now 'twas poor.
In shabby finery array'd,
They still affected a parade:
While both insulted gentle Beauty,
Unwearied in the housewife's duty;
They mock'd her robe of modest brown,
And view'd her with a taunting frown;
Yet scarce could hold their rage to see
The blithe effects of Industry.

In this retreat a year had past,
When happier tidings came at last,
And in the Merchant's smile appear'd
Prospects that all the Cotters cheer'd:
A letter came; its purport good;
Part of his ventures brav'd the flood:
'With speed,' said he, 'I must to town,
'And what, my girls, must I bring down?'
The envious Sisters, all confusion,
Commissions gave in wild profusion;
Caps, hats, and bonnets, bracelets, broaches,
To cram the pockets of the coaches,
With laces, linens, to complete
The order, and to fill the seat.

Such wants and wishes now appear'd,
To make them larger Beauty fear'd;
Yet lest her silence might produce
From jealous Sisters more abuse,
Considerately good, she chose,
The emblem of herself,-a Rose.

The good man on his journey went,
His thoughts on generous Beauty bent.
'If Heav'n,' he said, and breath'd a prayer,
'If Heav'n that tender child should spare,
'Whate'er my lot, I must be bless'd,
'I must be rich:'-he wept the rest.
Timely such feelings!-Fortune still,
Unkind and niggard, crost his will.
Of all his hopes, alas, the gains
Were far o'erbalanc'd by the pains;
For after a long tedious round,
He had to measure back his ground.

A short day's travel from his Cot,
New misadventures were his lot;

Dark grew the air, the wind blew high,
And spoke the gathering tempest nigh;
Hail, snow, and night-fog join'd their force,
Bewildering rider and his horse.
Dismay'd, perplext, the road they crost,
And in the dubious maze were lost.

When glimmering through the vapours drear,
A taper shew'd a dwelling near.
And guess our Merchant's glad surprise,
When a rich palace seemed to rise
As on he mov'd! The knee be bent,
Thankful to Heaven; then nearer went.

But, O! how much his wonder grew,
When nothing living met his view!-
Entering a splendid hall, he found,
With every luxury around,
A blazing fire, a plenteous board,
A costly cellaret, well stor'd,
All open'd wide, as if to say,
'Stranger, refresh thee on thy way!'

The Merchant to the fire drew near,
Deeming the owner would appear,
And pardon one who, drench'd in rain,
Unask'd, had ventured to remain.
The court-yard clock had number'd seven,
When first he came; but when eleven
Struck on his ear as mute he sate,
It sounded like the knoll of Fate.

And yet so hungry was he grown,
He pick'd a capon to the bone;
And as choice wines before him stood,
He needs must taste if they were good:
So much he felt his spirits cheer'd-
The more he drank, the less he fear'd.

Now bolder grown, he pac'd along,
(Still hoping he might do no wrong),
When, entering at a gilded door,
High-rais'd upon a sumptuous floor,
A sofa shew'd all Persia's pride,
And each magnificence beside:
So down at once the Merchant lay,
Tir'd with the wonders of the day.

But had it been a rushy bed,
Tuck'd in the corner of a shed,
With no less joy had it been press'd:
The good man pray'd, and sank to rest.

Nor woke he till the noon of day;
And as he thus enchanted lay,
'Now for my storm-sopp'd clothes,' he cries:
When lo! a suit complete he spies;
'Yes, 'tis all fairy-work, no doubt,
'By gentle Pity brought about!'
Tenfold, when risen, amazement grew;
For bursting on his gazing view,
Instead of snow, he saw fair bowers
In all the pride of summer flowers.
Entering again the hall, behold,
Serv'd up in silver, pearl, and gold,
A breakfast, form'd of all things rare,
As if Queen Mab herself were there.

As now he past, with spirits gay,
A shower of Roses strew'd the way,
E'en to his hand the branches bent:
'One of these boughs-I go content!
'Beauty, dear Beauty-thy request
'If I may bear away, I'm blest.'
The Merchant pull'd-the branches broke!-
A hideous growling while he spoke,
Assail'd his startled ears; and then
A frightful Beast, as from a den,
Rushing to view, exclaimed, 'Ingrate!
'That stolen branch has seal'd thy fate.
'All that my castle own'd was thine,
'My food, my fire, my bed, my wine:
'Thou robb'st my Rose-trees in return,
'For this, base Plunderer, thou shalt mourn!'

'My Lord, I swear upon my knees,
'I did not mean to harm your trees;
'But a lov'd Daughter, fair as spring,
'Intreated me a Rose to bring;
'O didst thou know, my lord, the Maid!'-

'I am no Lord,' Beast angry said,
'And so no flattery!-but know,
'If, on your oath before you go,
'Within three wasted Moons you here
'Cause that lov'd Daughter to appear,

'And visit Beast a volunteer
'To suffer for thee, thou mayest live:-
'Speak not!-do this!-and I forgive.'
Mute and deprest the Merchant fled,
Unhappy traveller, evil sped!

Beauty was first her sire to meet,
Springing impatient from her seat;
Her Brothers next assembled round;
Her straying Sisters soon were found.
While yet the Father fondly press'd
The Child of Duty to his Breast,-
'Accept these Roses, ill-starr'd Maid!
'For thee thy Father's life is paid.'

The Merchant told the tale of Beast;
And loud lamentings, when he ceas'd,
From both the jealous Sisters broke,
As thus with taunting rage they spoke:
'And so thou kill'st thy Father, Miss,
'Proud, sinful creature, heardst thou this?
'We only wish'd a few new clothes;
'Beauty, forsooth, must have her Rose!
'Yet, harden'd Wretch, her eyes are dry,
'Tho' for her Pride our Sire must die!'

'Die! Not for worlds!' exclaim'd the Maid;
'Beast kindly will take me instead:
'And O, a thousand deaths I'd prove
'To shew my Father how I love!'
The Brothers cried, 'Let us away,
'We'll perish, or the Monster slay.'

'Vain hope, my gen'rous Sons, his power
'Can troops of men and horse devour:
'Your offer, Beauty, moves my soul;
'But no man can his fate controul:
'Mine was the fault; you, Love, are free;
'And mine the punishment shall be.'
Beauty was firm! the Sire caress'd
Again his Darling to his breast;
With blended love and awe survey'd,
And each good Brother blest the Maid!

Three months elaps'd, her Father's heart
Heav'd high, as she prepar'd to part;
The Sisters try'd a tear to force,

While Beauty smil'd as she took horse;
Yet smil'd thro' many a generous tear,
To find the parting moment near!
And just as evening's shades came on,
The splendid Palace court they won.
Beauty, now lost in wonder all,
Gain'd with her Sire the spacious hall;
Where, of the costliest viands made,
Behold, a sumptuous table laid!
The Merchant, sickening at the sight,
Sat down with looks of dire affright,
But nothing touch'd; tho' Beauty prest,
And strove to lull his fears to rest.

Just as she spoke, a hideous noise
Announc'd the growling monster's voice.
And now Beast suddenly stalk'd forth,
While Beauty well nigh sank to earth:
Scarce could she conquer her alarms,
Tho' folded in a father's arms.
Grim Beast first question'd fierce, if she
Had hither journey'd willingly?
'Yes,' Beauty cried-in trembling tone:
'That's kind,' said Beast, and thus went on-
'Good Merchant, at to-morrow's dawn,
'I charge and warn you to be gone!
'And further, on life's penalty,
'Dare not again to visit me.
'Beauty, farewell!' he now withdrew,
As she return'd the dread adieu.

Each then their separate pillow prest,
And slumber clos'd their eyes in rest.

As zephyr light, from magic sleep,
Soon as the sun began to peep,
Sprang Beauty; and now took her way
To where her anguish'd father lay,-
But envious time stole swiftly on;
'Begone! lov'd Father! ah! begone!
'The early dew now gems the thorn,
'The sun-beams gain upon the morn.
'Haste, Father, haste! Heaven guards the good!'
In wonder rapt the Merchant stood;
And while dread fears his thoughts employ,
A child so generous still was joy.
'My Father's safe!' she cried, 'blest Heaven!
'The rest is light, this bounty given.'

She now survey'd th' enchanting scene,
Sweet gardens of eternal green;
Mirrors, and chandeliers of glass,
And diamonds bright which those surpass;
All these her admiration gain'd;
But how was her attention chain'd,
When she in golden letters trac'd,
High o'er an arch of emeralds plac'd,
'Beauty's apartment! Enter, blest!
'This, but an earnest of the rest!'

The fair one was rejoic'd to find,
Beast studied less her eye, than mind.
But, wishing still a nearer view,
Forth from the shelves a book she drew,
In whose first page, in lines of gold,
She might heart-easing words behold:
'Welcome Beauty, banish fear!
'You are Queen, and Mistress here:
'Speak your wishes, speak your will,
'Swift obedience meets them still.'

'Alas!' said she, with heartfelt sighs,
The daughter rushing to her eyes,
'There's nothing I so much desire,
'As to behold my tender Sire.'

Beauty had scarce her wish express'd,
When it was granted by the Beast:
A wond'rous mirror to her eye,
Brought all her cottage family.
Here her good Brothers at their toil,
For still they dress'd the grateful soil;
And there with pity she perceiv'd,
How much for her the Merchant griev'd;
How much her Sisters felt delight
To know her banish'd from their sight,
Altho' with voice and looks of guile,
Their bosoms full of joy the while,
They labour'd hard to force a tear,
And imitate a grief sincere.

At noon's repast, she heard a sound
Breathing unseen sweet music round;
But when the evening board was spread,
The voice of Beast recall'd her dread:
'May I observe you sup?' he said;

'Ah, tremble not; your will is law;
'One question answer'd, I withdraw.-
'Am I not hideous to your eyes?'
'Your temper's sweet,' she mild replies.
'Yes, but I'm ugly, have no sense:'-
'That's better far, than vain pretence.'-
'Try to be happy, and at ease,'
Sigh'd Beast, 'as I will try to please.'-
'Your outward form is scarcely seen
'Since I arriv'd, so kind you've been.'

One quarter of the rolling year,
No other living creature near,
Beauty with Beast had past serene,
Save some sad hours that stole between.
That she her Father's life had sav'd,
Upon her heart of hearts was grav'd:
While yet she view'd the Beast with dread,
This was the balm that conscience shed.
But now a second solace grew,
Whose cause e'en conscience scarcely knew.
Here on a Monster's mercy cast,-
Yet, when her first dire fears were past,
She found that Monster, timid, mild,
Led like the lion by the child.
Custom and kindness banish'd fear;
Beauty oft wish'd that Beast were near.

Nine was the chosen hour that Beast
Constant attended Beauty's feast,
Yet ne'er presum'd to touch the food,
Sat humble, or submissive stood,
Or, audience crav'd, respectful spoke,
Nor aim'd at wit, or ribald joke,
But oftner bent the raptur'd ear
Or ravish'd eye, to see or hear.
And if th' appointed hour pass'd by,
'Twas marked by Beauty with a sigh.
'Swear not to leave me,' sigh'd the Beast:
'I swear'-for now her fears were ceas'd,
'And willing swear,-so now and then
'I might my Father see again-
'One little week-he's now alone.'
'Granted!' quoth Beast: your will be done!'
'Your Ring upon the table lay
'At night,-you're there at peep of day:
'But oh,-remember, or I die!'
He gaz'd, and went without reply.

At early morn, she rang to rise;
The Maid beholds with glad surprise:
Summons her Father to her side,
Who, kneeling and embracing, cried,
With rapture and devotion wild,
'O bless'd be Heaven, and blest my Child!'

Beauty the Father now address'd,
And strait to see her Sisters press'd.
They both were married, and both prov'd
Neither was happy or belov'd.
And when she told them she was blest
With days of ease, and nights of rest;
To hide the malice of the soul,
Into the garden sly they stole,
And there in floods of tears they vent
Their hate, and feel its punishment.
'If,' said the eldest, 'you agree,
'We'll make that wench more curs'd than we!
'I have a plot, my sister dear:
'More than her week let's keep her here.
'No more with Monster shall she sup,
'Who, in his rage, shall eat her up.'

And now such art they both employ'd,
While Beauty wept, yet was o'erjoy'd;
And when the stated hour was come,-
'Ah! can you quit so soon your home?'
Eager they question'd-tore their hair-
And look'd the Pictures of Despair.
Beauty, tho' blushing at delay,
Promis'd another week to stay.

Meantime, altho' she err'd from love,
Her conscious heart could ill approve-
'Thy vow was giv'n, thy vow was broke!'
Thus Conscience to her bosom spoke.

Thoughts such as these assail'd her breast,
And a sad vision broke her rest!
The palace-garden was the place,
Which her imaginations trace:
There, on a lawn, as if to die,
She saw poor Beast extended lie,
Reproaching with his latest breath
Beauty's ingratitude in death.

Rous'd from her sleep, the contrite Maid
The Ring upon her toilette laid,
And Conscience gave a sound repose:
Balmy her rest; and when she rose,
The palace of poor Beast she found,
Groves, gardens, arbours, blooming round:
The morning shone in summer's pride,
Beauty for fairer evening sigh'd-
Sigh'd for the object once so fear'd,
By worth, by kindness now endear'd.
But when had past the wonted hour,
And no wish'd footstep pass'd the door;-
When yet another hour lagg'd on,-
Then to the wide canal she ran:
'For there in vision,' said the fair,
'Was stretch'd the object of my care!'
And there, alas! he now was found,
Extended on the flowery ground.
'Ah! fond and faithful Beast,' she cried,
'Hast thou for me perfidious died?
'O! could'st thou hear my fervid prayer,
''Twould ease the anguish of despair.'

Beast open'd now his long-clos'd eyes,
And saw the fair with glad surprise.
'In my last moments you are sent;
'You pity, and I die content.'
'Thou shalt not die,' rejoin'd the Maid;
'O rather live to hate, upbraid-
'But no! my grievous fault forgive!
'I feel I can't without thee live.'

Beauty had scarce pronounc'd the word,
When magic sounds of sweet accord,
The music of celestial spheres
As if from seraph harps she hears;
Amaz'd she stood,-new wonders grew;
For Beast now vanish'd from her view;
And, lo! a Prince, with every grace
Of figure, fashion, feature, face,
In whom all charms of Nature meet,
Was kneeling at fair Beauty's feet.
'But where is Beast?' still Beauty cried:
'Behold him here!' the Prince replied.
'Orasmyn, lady, is my name,
'In Persia not unknown to fame;
'Till this re-humanizing hour,
'The victim of a Fairy's pow'r;-
'Till a deliverer could be found,
'Who, while the accursed spell still bound,

'Could first endure, tho' with alarm,
'And break at last by love the charm!'

Beauty delighted gave her hand,
And bade the Prince her fate command;
The Prince now led through rooms of state,
Where Beauty's family await,
In bridal vestments all array'd,
By some superior power convey'd.

'Beauty,' pronounc'd a heavenly voice,
'Now take from me your princely choice.
'Virtue, to every good beside
'While wit and beauty were denied,
'Fix'd your pure heart! for which, unseen,
'I led your steps; and now a Queen,
'Seated on Persia's glittering throne,
''Tis mine and Virtue's task to crown!

'But as for you, ye Sisters vain,
'Still first and last in envy's train,
'Before fair Beauty's Palace-gate,
'Such Justice has decreed your fate,
'Transform'd to statues you must dwell,
'Curs'd with the single power, to feel-
'Unless by penitence and prayer-
'But this will ask long years of care,
'Of promise and performance too,
'A change of mind from false to true-
'A change I scarce can hope from you.'

Instant the Power stretch'd forth her wand,
Her sceptre of supreme command,
When lo! at her resistless call,
Gay crowds came thronging through the hall,
The blissful hour to celebrate
When Persia's Prince resum'd his state:
At once the dome with music rang,
And virgins danc'd, and minstrels sang;
It was the Jubilee of Youth,
Led on by Virtue and by Truth;
The pride of Persia fill'd the scene,
To hail Orasmyn and his Queen!

THE END

Charles Lamb

Beauty's Song

What's Life still changing ev'ry hour?
Tis all the seasons in a Day!
The Smile, the Tear, the Sun, the Show'r'
Tis now December, now tis May
At morn we hail some envied Queen;
At eve she sinks some Cottage guest;
Yet if contentment gilds the scene
Contentment makes the Cottage blest.

Who more than I, this truth can feel?
I feel it yet am charm'd to find
While thus I turn the spinning-wheel
The station humbles not the mind.
Ah no! in days of youth and health
Nature will smile tho' fortune frown
Be this my song Content is wealth'
And duty ev'ry toil shall crown.

Charles Lamb

Blindness

In a stage-coach, where late I chanced to be,
A little quiet girl my notice caught;
I saw she looked at nothing by the way,
Her mind seemed busy on some childish thought.

I with an old man's courtesy addressed
The child, and called her pretty dark-eyed maid,
And bid her turn those pretty eyes and see
The wide extended prospect. 'Sir,' she said,

'I cannot see the prospect, I am blind.'
Never did tongue of child utter a sound
So mournful, as her words fell on my ear.
Her mother then related how she found

Her child was sightless. On a fine bright day
She saw her lay her needlework aside,
And, as on such occasions mothers will,
For leaving off her work began to chide.

'I'll do it when 'tis daylight, if you please,
I cannot work, mamma, now it is night.'
The sun shone bright upon her when she spoke,
And yet her eyes received no ray of light.

Charles Lamb

Breakfast

A dinner party, coffee, tea,
Sandwich, or supper, all may be
In their way pleasant. But to me
Not one of these deserves the praise
That welcomer of new-born days,
A breakfast, merits; ever giving
Cheerful notice we are living
Another day refreshed by sleep,
When its festival we keep.
Now although I would not slight
Those kindly words we use, 'Good night,'
Yet parting words are words of sorrow,
And may not vie with sweet 'Good morrow,'
With which again our friends we greet,
When in the breakfast-room we meet,
At the social table round,
Listening to the lively sound
Of those notes which never tire,
Of urn, or kettle on the fire.
Sleepy Robert never hears
Or urn or kettle; he appears
When all have finished, one by one
Dropping off, and breakfast done.
Yet has he too his own pleasure,
His breakfast hour's his hour of leisure;
And, left alone, he reads or muses,
Or else in idle mood he uses
To sit and watch the venturous fly,
Where the sugar's pilëd high,
Clambering o'er the lumps so white,
Rocky cliffs of sweet delight.

Charles Lamb

Charity

O why your good deeds with such pride do you scan,
And why that self-satisfied smile
At the shilling you gave to the poor working man,
That lifted you over the stile?

'Tis not much; all the bread that can with it be bought,
Will scarce give a morsel to each
Of his eight hungry children;-reflection and thought
Should you more humility teach.

Vainglory's a worm which the very best action
Will taint, and its soundness eat through;
But to give one's self airs for a small benefaction,
Is folly and vanity too.

The money perhaps by your father or mother
Was furnished you but with that view;
If so, you were only the steward of another,
And the praise you usurp is their due.

Perhaps every shilling you give in this way
Is paid back with two by your friends;
Then the bounty you so ostentatious display,
Has little and low selfish ends.

But if every penny you gave were your own,
And giving diminished your purse;
By a child's slender means think how little is done,
And how little for it you're the worse.

You eat, and you drink; when you rise in the morn,
You are clothed; you have health and content;
And you never have known, from the day you were born,
What hunger or nakedness meant.

The most which your bounty from you can subtract
Is an apple, a sweetmeat, a toy;
For so easy a virtue, so trifling an act,
You are paid with an innocent joy.

Give thy bread to the hungry, the thirsty thy cup;
Divide with the afflicted thy lot:
This can only be practised by persons grown up,
Who've possessions which children have not.

Having two cloaks, give one (said our Lord) to the poor;
In such bounty as that lies the trial:
But a child that gives half of its infantile store
Has small praise, because small self-denial.

Charles Lamb

Choosing A Name

I have got a new-born sister;
I was nigh the first that kissed her.
When the nursing woman brought her
To papa, his infant daughter,
How papa's dear eyes did glisten!-
She will shortly be to christen:
And papa has made the offer,
I shall have the naming of her.

Now I wonder what would please her,
Charlotte, Julia, or Louisa.
Ann and Mary, they're too common;
Joan's too formal for a woman;
Jane's a prettier name beside;
But we had a Jane that died.
They would say, if 'twas Rebecca,
That she was a little Quaker.
Edith's pretty, but that looks
Better in old English books;
Ellen's left off long ago;
Blanche is out of fashion now.

None that I have named as yet
Are so good as Margaret.
Emily is neat and fine.
What do you think of Caroline?
How I'm puzzled and perplext
What to choose or think of next!
I am in a little fever.
Lest the name that I shall give her
Should disgrace her or defame her,
I will leave papa to name her.

Charles Lamb

Choosing A Profession

A Creole boy from the West Indies brought,
To be in European learning taught,
Some years before to Westminster he went,
To a preparatory school was sent.
When from his artless tale the mistress found,
The child had not one friend on English ground,
She, even as if she his own mother were,
Made the dark Indian her peculiar care.
Oft on her favourite's future lot she thought;
To know the bent of his young mind she sought,
For much the kind preceptress wished to find
To what profession he was most inclined,
That where his genius led they might him train;
For nature's kindly bent she held not vain.
But vain her efforts to explore his will;
The frequent question he evaded still:
Till on a day at length he to her came,
Joy sparkling in his eyes; and said, the same
Trade he would be those boys of colour were,
Who danced so happy in the open air.
It was a troop of chimney-sweeping boys,
With wooden music and obstreperous noise,
In tarnished finery and grotesque array,
Were dancing in the street the first of May.

Charles Lamb

Cleanliness

Come, my little Robert, near-
Fie! what filthy hands are here-
Who that e'er could understand
The rare structure of a hand,
With its branching fingers fine,
Work itself of hands divine,
Strong, yet delicately knit,
For ten thousand uses fit,
Overlaid with so clear skin
You may see the blood within,
And the curious palm, disposed
In such lines, some have supposed
You may read the fortunes there
By the figures that appear,-
Who this hand would choose to cover
With a crust of dirt all over,
Till it looked in hue and shape
Like the fore-foot of an ape?
Man or boy that works or plays
In the fields or the highways,
May, without offence or hurt,
From the soil contract a dirt,
Which the next clear spring or river
Washes out and out for ever-
But to cherish stains impure,
Soil deliberate to endure,
On the skin to fix a stain
Till it works into the grain,
Argues a degenerate mind,
Sordid, slothful, ill inclined,
Wanting in that self-respect
Which does virtue best protect.

All-endearing cleanliness,
Virtue next to godliness,
Easiest, cheapest, needfull'st duty,
To the body health and beauty,
Who that's human would refuse it,
When a little water does it?

Charles Lamb

Clock Striking

Did I hear the church-clock a few minutes ago,
I was asked, and I answered, I hardly did know,
But I thought that I heard it strike three.
Said my friend then, 'The blessings we always possess
We know not the want of, and prize them the less;
The church-clock was no new sound to thee.

'A young woman, afflicted with deafness a year,
By that sound you scarce heard, first perceived she could hear;
I was near her, and saw the girl start
With such exquisite wonder, such feelings of pride,
A happiness almost to terror allied,
She showed the sound went to her heart.'

Charles Lamb

Conquest Of Prejudice

Unto a Yorkshire school was sent
A negro youth to learn to write,
And the first day young Juba went
All gazed on him as a rare sight.

But soon with altered looks askance
They view his sable face and form,
When they perceive the scornful glance
Of the head boy, young Henry Orme.

He in the school was first in fame:
Said he, 'It does to me appear
To be a great disgrace and shame
A black should be admitted here.'

His words were quickly whispered round,
And every boy now looks offended;
The master saw the change, and found
That Orme a mutiny intended.

Said he to Orme, 'This African
It seems is not by you approved;
I'll find a way, young Englishman,
To have this prejudice removed.

'Nearer acquaintance possibly
May make you tolerate his hue;
At least 'tis my intent to try
What a short month may chance to do.'

Young Orme and Juba then he led
Into a room, in which there were
For each of the two boys a bed,
A table, and a wicker chair.

He locked them in, secured the key,
That all access to them was stopt;
They from without can nothing see;
Their food is through a skylight dropt.

A month in this lone chamber Orme
Is sentenced during all that time
To view no other face or form
Than Juba's parched by Afric clime.

One word they neither of them spoke
The first three days of the first week;
On the fourth day the ice was broke;
Orme was the first that deigned to speak.

The dreary silence o'er, both glad
To hear of human voice the sound,
The negro and the English lad
Comfort in mutual converse found.

Of ships and seas and foreign coast
Juba can speak, for he has been
A voyager: and Orme can boast
He London's famous town has seen.

In eager talk they pass the day,
And borrow hours even from the night;
So pleasantly time passed away,
That they have lost their reckoning quite.

And when their master set them free,
They thought a week was sure remitted,
And thanked him that their liberty
Had been before the time permitted.

Now Orme and Juba are good friends;
The school, by Orme's example won,
Contend who most shall make amends
For former slights to Afric's son.

Charles Lamb

Crumbs To The Birds

A bird appears a thoughtless thing,
He's ever living on the wing,
And keeps up such a carolling,
That little else to do but sing
A man would guess had he.

No doubt he has his little cares,
And very hard he often fares,
The which so patiently he bears,
That, listening to those cheerful airs,
Who knows but he may be

In want of his next meal of seeds?
I think for that his sweet song pleads.
If so, his pretty art succeeds.
I'll scatter there among the weeds
All the small crumbs I see.

Charles Lamb

David

It is not always to the strong
Victorious battle shall belong.
This found Goliath huge and tall:
Mightiest giant of them all,
Who in the proud Philistian host
Defiëd Israel with boast.

With loud voice Goliath said:
'Hear, armed Israel, gatherëd,
And in array against us set:
Ye shall alone by me be met.
For am not I a Philistine?
What strength may be compared to mine?

'Choose ye a man of greatest might:
And if he conquer me in fight,
Then we will all servants be,
King of Israel, unto thee.
But if I prove the victor, then
Shall Saul and all his armëd men
Bend low beneath Philistian yoke.'
Day by day these words he spoke,
Singly traversing the ground.
But not an Israelite was found
To combat man to man with him,
Who such prodigious force of limb
Displayed. Like to a weaver's beam
The ponderous spear he held did seem.
In height six cubits he did pass,
And he was armed all o'er in brass.

Him we will leave awhile, and speak
Of one, the soft down on whose cheek
Of tender youth the tokens bare.
Ruddy he was and very fair.
David, the son of Jesse he,
Small sized, yet beautiful to see.
Three brothers had he in the band
Of warriors under Saul's command;
Himself at home did private keep
In Bethlem's plains his father's sheep.

Jesse said to this his son:
'David, to thy brothers run,
Where in the camp they now abide,
And learn what of them may betide.
These presents for their captains take,
And of their fare inquiries make.'

With joy the youth his sire obeyed.-
David was no whit dismayed
When he arrivëd at the place
Where he beheld the strength and face
Of dread Goliath, and could hear
The challenge. Of the people near
Unmoved he asked, what should be done
To him who slew that boasting one,
Whose words such mischiefs did forebode
To the armies of the living God?

'The king,' they unto David say,
'Most amply will that man repay.
He and his father's house shall be
Evermore in Israel free.
With mighty wealth Saul will endow
That man: and he has made a vow;
Whoever takes Goliath's life,
Shall have Saul's daughter for his wife.'

His eldest brother, who had heard
His question, was to anger stirred
Against the youth: for (as he thought)
Things out of his young reach he sought.
Said he, 'What moved thee to come here,
To question warlike men? say, where
And in whose care are those few sheep
That in the wilderness you keep?
I know thy thoughts, how proud thou art:
In the haughtiness of thy heart,
Hoping a battle thou mayst see,
Thou comest hither down to me.'

Then answered Jesse's youngest son
In these words: 'What have I done?
Is there not cause?' Some there which heard,
And at the manner of his word
Admired, report this to the king.
By his command they David bring
Into his presence. Fearless then,
Before the king and his chief men,
He shows his confident design
To combat with the Philistine.
Saul with wonder heard the youth,
And thus addressed him: 'Of a truth,
No power thy untried sinew hath
To cope with this great man of Gath.'

Lowly David bowed his head,
And with firm voice the stripling said:
'Thy servant kept his father's sheep.-
Rushing from a mountain steep
There came a lion, and a bear,
The firstlings of my flock to tear.
Thy servant hath that lion killed,
And killed that bear, when from the field
Two young lambs by force they seized.
The Lord was mercifully pleased
Me to deliver from the paw
Of the fierce bear, and cruel jaw
Of the strong lion. I shall slay
The unrighteous Philistine this day,
If God deliver him also
To me.' He ceased. The king said, 'Go:
Thy God, the God of Israel, be
In the battle still with thee.'

David departs unarmed, save
A staff in hand he chanced to have.
Nothing to the fight he took,
Save five smooth stones from out a brook;
These in his shepherd's scrip he placed,
That was fastened round his waist.
With staff and sling alone he meets
The armëd giant, who him greets
With nought but scorn. Looking askance
On the fair ruddy countenance
Of his young enemy-'Am I
A dog, that thou comest here to try
Thy strength upon me with a staff?'
Goliath said with scornful laugh.
'Thou comest with sword, with spear, with shield,
Yet thou to me this day must yield.
The Lord of Hosts is on my side,
Whose armies boastful thou'st defied.
All nations of the earth shall hear
He saveth not with shield and spear.'

Thus David spake, and nigher went,
Then choosing from his scrip, he sent
Out of his slender sling a stone.-
The giant uttered fearful moan.
The stone though small had piercëd deep
Into his forehead, endless sleep
Giving Goliath-and thus died
Of Philistines the strength and pride.

Charles Lamb

David In The Cave Of Adullam

David and his three captains bold
Kept ambush once within a hold.
It was in Adullam's cave,
Nigh which no water they could have.
Nor spring nor running brook was near
To quench the thirst that parched them there.
Then David king of Israel
Straight bethought him of a well
Which stood beside the city gate
At Bethlem: where, before his state
Of kingly dignity, he had
Oft drunk his fill, a shepherd lad.
But now his fierce Philistian foe
Encamped before it he does know.
Yet ne'er the less with heat opprest,
Those three bold captains he addrest,
And wished that one to him would bring
Some water from his native spring.
His valiant captains instantly
To execute his will did fly.
Those three brave men the ranks broke through
Of armëd foes, and water drew
For David, their belovëd king,
At his own sweet native spring.
Back through their enemies they haste,
With the hard-earned treasure graced.
What with such danger they had sought,
With joy unto their king they brought.
But when the good king David found
What they had done, he on the ground
The water poured, 'Because,' said he,
'That it was at the jeopardy
Of your three lives this thing ye did,
That I should drink it God forbid.'

Charles Lamb

Discontent And Quarrelling

JANE.
Miss Lydia every day is drest
Better than I am in my best
White cambric-muslin frock.
I wish I had one made of clear
Worked lawn, or leno very dear.-
And then my heart is broke

Almost to think how cheap my doll
Was bought, when hers cost-yes, cost full
A pound, it did, my brother;
Nor has she had it weeks quite five,
Yet, 'tis as true as I'm alive,
She's soon to have another.

ROBERT.
O mother, hear my sister Jane,
How foolishly she does complain,
And tease herself for nought.
But 'tis the way of all her sex,
Thus foolishly themselves to vex.
Envy's a female fault.

JANE.
O brother Robert, say not so;
It is not very long ago,
Ah! brother, you've forgot,
When speaking of a boy you knew,
Remember how you said that you
Envied his happy lot.

ROBERT.
Let's see, what were the words I spoke?
Why, may be I was half in joke-
May be I just might say-
Besides that was not half so bad;
For, Jane, I only said he had
More time than I to play.

JANE.
O may be, may be, very well:
And may be, brother, I don't tell
Tales to mamma like you.

MOTHER.
O cease your wrangling, cease, my dears;

You would not wake a mother's fears
Thus, if you better knew.

Charles Lamb

Envy

This rose-tree is not made to bear
The violet blue, nor lily fair,
Nor the sweet mignonette:
And if this tree were discontent,
Or wished to change its natural bent,
It all in vain would fret.

And should it fret, you would suppose
It ne'er had seen its own red rose,
Nor after gentle shower
Had ever smelled its rose's scent,
Or it could ne'er be discontent
With its own pretty flower.

Like such a blind and senseless tree
As I've imagined this to be,
All envious persons are:
With care and culture all may find
Some pretty flower in their own mind,
Some talent that is rare.

Charles Lamb

Epigram

(Written in the last reign.)

Ye Politicians, tell me, pray,
Why thus with woe and care rent?
This is the worst that you can say,
Some wind has blown the wig away,
And left the hair apparent.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

Eyes

Lucy, what do you espy
In the cast in Jenny's eye
That should you to laughter move?
I far other feelings prove.
When on me she does advance
Her good-natured countenance,
And those eyes which in their way
Saying much, so much would say,
They to me no blemish seem,
Or as none I them esteem;
I their imperfection prize
Above other clearer eyes.

Eyes do not as jewels go
By the brightness and the show,
But the meanings which surround them,
And the sweetness shines around them.

Isabel's are black as jet,
But she cannot that forget,
And the pains she takes to show them
Robs them of the praise we owe them.
Ann's, though blue, affected fall;
Kate's are bright, and fierce withal;
And the sparklers of her sister
From ill-humour lose their lustre.
Only Jenny's eyes we see,
By their very plainness, free
From the vices which do smother
All the beauties of the other.

Charles Lamb

Feigned Courage

Horatio, of ideal courage vain,
Was flourishing in air his father's cane,
And, as the fumes of valour swelled his pate,
Now thought himself this hero, and now that:
'And now,' he cried, 'I will Achilles be;
My sword I brandish; see, the Trojans flee.
Now I'll be Hector, when his angry blade
A lane through heaps of slaughtered Grecians made!
And now by deeds still braver I'll evince
I am no less than Edward the Black Prince.-
Give way, ye coward French-' As thus he spoke,
And aimed in fancy a sufficient stroke
To fix the fate of Cressy or Poictiers
(The Muse relates the hero's fate with tears);
He struck his milk-white hand against a nail,
Sees his own blood, and feels his courage fail.
Ah! where is now that boasted valour flown,
That in the tented field so late was shown!
Achilles weeps, Great Hector hangs the head,
And the Black Prince goes whimpering to bed.

Charles Lamb

Going Into Breeches

Joy to Philip, he this day
Has his long coats cast away,
And (the childish season gone)
Puts the manly breeches on.
Officer on gay parade,
Red-coat in his first cockade,
Bridegroom in his wedding trim,
Birthday beau surpassing him,
Never did with conscious gait
Strut about in half the state,
Or the pride (yet free from sin)
Of my little Manikin:
Never was there pride, or bliss,
Half so rational as his.
Sashes, frocks, to those that need 'em-
Philip's limbs have got their freedom-
He can run, or he can ride,
And do twenty things beside,
Which his petticoats forbad:
Is he not a happy lad?
Now he's under other banners,
He must leave his former manners;
Bid adieu to female games,
And forget their very names,
Puss-in-corners, hide-and-seek,
Sports for girls and punies weak!
Baste-the-bear he now may play at,
Leap-frog, foot-ball, sport away at,
Show his strength and skill at cricket,
Mark his distance, pitch his wicket,
Run about in winter's snow
Till his cheeks and fingers glow,
Climb a tree, or scale a wall,
Without any fear to fall.
If he get a hurt or bruise,
To complain he must refuse,
Though the anguish and the smart
Go unto his little heart,
He must have his courage ready,
Keep his voice and visage steady,
Brace his eye-balls stiff as drum,
That a tear may never come,
And his grief must only speak
From the colour in his cheek.
This and more he must endure,
Hero he in miniature!
This and more must now be done
Now the breeches are put on.

Charles Lamb

Hester

WHEN maidens such as Hester die
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try
   With vain endeavour.

A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed
   And her together.

A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate,
   That flush'd her spirit:

I know not by what name beside
I shall it call: if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied,
   She did inherit.

Her parents held the Quaker rule,
Which doth the human feeling cool;
But she was train'd in Nature's school;
   Nature had blest her.

A waking eye, a prying mind;
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind;
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind;
   Ye could not Hester.

My sprightly neighbour! gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
   Some summer morning--

When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that would not go away,
   A sweet forewarning?

Charles Lamb

Home Delights

To operas and balls my cousins take me,
And fond of plays my new-made friend would make me.
In summer season, when the days are fair,
In my godmother's coach I take the air.
My uncle has a stately pleasure barge,
Gilded and gay, adorned with wondrous charge;
The mast is polished, and the sails are fine,
The awnings of white silk like silver shine;
The seats of crimson satin, where the rowers
Keep time to music with their painted oars;
In this on holidays we oft resort
To Richmond, Twickenham, or to Hampton Court.
By turns we play, we sing-one baits the hook,
Another angles-some more idle look
At the small fry that sport beneath the tides,
Or at the swan that on the surface glides.
My married sister says there is no feast
Equal to sight of foreign bird or beast.
With her in search of these I often roam:
My kinder parents make me blest at home.
Tired of excursions, visitings, and sights,
No joys are pleasing to these home delights.

Charles Lamb

Hypochondriacus

By myself walking,
To myself talking,
When as I ruminate
On my untoward fate,
Scarcely seem I
Alone sufficiently,
Black thoughts continually
Crowding my privacy;
They come unbidden,
Like foes at a wedding,
Thrusting their faces
In better guests' places,
Peevish and malecontent,
Clownish, impertinent,
Dashing the merriment:
So in like fashions
Dim cogitations
Follow and haunt me,
Striving to daunt me,
In my heart festering,
In my ears whispering,
'Thy friends are treacherous,
'Thy foes are dangerous,
'Thy dreams ominous.'

Fierce Anthropophagi,
Spectre, Diaboli,
What scared St. Antony,
Hobgoblins, Lemures,
Dreams of Antipodes,
Night-riding Incubi
Troubling the fantasy,
All dire illusions
Causing confusions;
Figments heretical,
Scruples fantastical,
Doubts diabolical,
Abaddon vexeth me,
Mahu perplexeth me,
Lucifer teareth me-

Jesu! Maria! liberate nos ab his diris tentationibus Inimici.

Charles Lamb

Incorrect Speaking

Incorrectness in your speech
Carefully avoid, my Anna;
Study well the sense of each
Sentence, lest in any manner
It misrepresent the truth;
Veracity's the charm of youth.

You will not, I know, tell lies,
If you know what you are speaking.
Truth is shy, and from us flies;
Unless diligently seeking
Into every word we pry,
Falsehood will her place supply.

Falsehood is not shy, not she,-
Ever ready to take place of
Truth, too oft we Falsehood see,
Or at least some latent trace of
Falsehood, in the incorrect
Words of those who Truth respect.

Charles Lamb

Lines

ON THE CELEBRATED PICTURE BY LEONARDO DA VINCI, CALLED THE VIRGIN OF THE ROCKS

While young John runs to greet
The greater Infant's feet,
The Mother standing by, with trembling passion
Of devout admiration,
Beholds the engaging mystic play, and pretty adoration;
Nor knows as yet the full event
Of those so low beginnings,
From whence we date our winnings,
But wonders at the intent
Of those new rites, and what that strange child-worship meant.
But at her side
An angel doth abide,
With such a perfect joy
As no dim doubts alloy,
An intuition,
A glory, an amenity,
Passing the dark condition
Of blind humanity,
As if he surely knew
All the blest wonders should ensue,
Or he had lately left the upper sphere,
And had read all the sovran schemes and divine riddles there.

Charles Lamb

Lines Addressed From London, To Sara And S.T.C. At Bristol, In The Summer Of 1796

Was it so hard a thing? I did but ask
A fleeting holiday, a little week.
What if the jaded steer who all day long
Had borne the heat and burthen of the plough,
When evening came, and her sweet cooling hour,
Should seek to wander in a neighbour copse,
Where greener herbage waved, or clearer streams
Invited him to slake his burning thirst?
The man were crabbed who should say him nay,
The man were churlish who should drive him thence.

A blessing light upon your worthy heads,
Ye hospitable pair! I may not come
To catch, on Clifden's heights, the summer gale;
I may not come to taste the Avon wave;
Or, with mine eye intent on Redcliffe towers,
To muse in tears on that mysterious youth,
Cruelly slighted, who, in evil hour,
Shaped his adventurous course to London walls!
Complaint, be gone! and, ominous thoughts, away!
Take up, my song, take up a merrier strain;
For yet again, and lo! from Avon's vales,
Another minstrel cometh. Youth endeared,
God and good angels guide thee on thy road,
And gentler fortunes wait the friends I love.

Charles Lamb

Lines Addressed To Lieut. R.W.H. Hardy, R.N.

ON THE PERUSAL OF HIS VOLUME OF TRAVELS IN THE INTERIOR OF MEXICO.

'Tis pleasant, lolling in our elbow-chair,
Secure at home, to read descriptions rare
Of venturous traveller in savage climes;
His hair-breadth 'scapes, toil, hunger-and sometimes
The merrier passages that, like a foil
To set off perils past, sweetened that toil,
And took the edge from danger; and I look
With such fear-mingled pleasure through thy book,
Adventurous Hardy! Thou a diver art,
But of no common form; and, for thy part
Of the adventure, hast brought home to the nation
Pearls of discovery-jewels of observation.

Enfield, January, 1830.

Charles Lamb

Lines Suggested By A Sight Of Waltham Cross

Time-mouldering crosses, gemmed with imagery
Of costliest work and Gothic tracery,
Point still the spot, to hallowed Wedlock dear,
Where rested on its solemn way the bier
That bore the bones of Edward's Elinor
To mix with Royal dust at Westminster.
Far different rites did thee to dust consign,
Duke Brunswick's daughter, princely Caroline:
A hurrying funeral, and a banished grave,
High-minded Wife, were all that thou couldst have.
Grieve not, great Ghost, nor count in death in losses;
Thou in thy life-time hadst thy share of crosses

Charles Lamb

Living Without God In The World

Mystery of God! thou brave & beauteous world!
Made fair with light, & shade, & stars, & flowers;
Made fearful and august with woods & rocks,
Jagg'd precipice, black mountain, sea in storms;
Sun, over all-that no co-rival owns,
But thro' heaven's pavement rides in despite
Or mockery of the Littleness of Man!
I see a mighty Arm, by Man unseen,
Resistless-not to be controuled; that guides,
In solitude of unshared energies,
All these thy ceaseless miracles, O World!
Arm of the world, I view thee, & I muse
On Man; who, trusting in his mortal strength,
Leans on a shadowy staff-a staff of dreams.

We consecrate our total hopes and fears
To idols, flesh & blood, our love (heaven's due),
Our praise & admiration; praise bestowed
By man on man, and acts of worship done
To a kindred nature, certes do reflect
Some portion of the glory, & rays oblique,
Upon the politic worshipper-so man
Extracts a pride from his humility.
Some braver spirits, of the modern stamp,
Affect a Godhead nearer: these talk loud
Of mind, & independent intellect;
Of energies omnipotent in man;
And man of his own fate artificer-
Yea, of his own life lord, & of the days
Of his abode on earth, when time shall be
That life immortal shall become an Art;
Or Death, by chemic practices deceived,
Forego the scent which for six thousand years,
Like a good hound, he has followed, or at length,
More manners learning, & a decent sense,
And rev'rence of a philosophic world,
Relent, & leave to prey on carcasses.

But these are fancies of a few: the rest,
Atheists, or Deists only in the name,
By word or deed deny a God. They eat
Their daily bread, & draw the breath of heaven,
Without a thought or thanks; heav'n's roof to them
Is but a painted ceiling hung with lamps,
No more, that light them to their purposes.
They 'wander loose about.' They nothing see,
Themselves except, and creatures like themselves,
That liv'd short-sighted, impotent to save.
So on their dissolute spirits, soon or late,
Destruction cometh 'like an armed man,'

Or like a dream of murder in the night,
Withering their mortal faculties, & breaking
The bones of all their pride.-

Charles Lamb

Moderation In Diet

The drunkard's sin, excess in wine,
Which reason drowns, and health destroys,
As yet no failing is of thine,
Dear Jim; strong drink's not given to boys.

You from the cool fresh stream allay
Those thirsts which sultry suns excite;
When choked with dust, or hot with play,
A cup of water yields delight.

And reverence still that temperate cup,
And cherish long the blameless taste;
To learn the faults of men grown up,
Dear Jim, be wise and do not haste.

They'll come too soon.-But there's a vice,
That shares the world's contempt no less;
To be in eating over-nice,
Or to court surfeits by excess.

The first, as finical, avoid;
The last is proper to a swine:
By temperance meat is best enjoyed;
Think of this maxim when you dine.

Prefer with plain food to be fed,
Rather than what are dainties styled;
A sweet tooth in an infant's head
Is pardoned, not in a grown child.

If parent, aunt, or liberal friend,
With splendid shilling line your purse,
Do not the same on sweetmeats spend,
Nor appetite with pampering nurse.

Go buy a book; a dainty eaten
Is vanished, and no sweets remain;
They who their minds with knowledge sweeten,
The savour long as life retain.

Purchase some toy; a horse of wood,
A pasteboard ship; their structure scan;
Their mimic uses understood
The school-boy make a kind of man.

Go see some show; pictures or prints;
Or beasts far brought from Indian land;
Those foreign sights oft furnish hints,
That may the youthful mind expand.

And something of your store impart,
To feed the poor and hungry soul;
What buys for you the needless tart,
May purchase him a needful roll.

Charles Lamb

Motes In The Sunbeams

The motes up and down in the sun
Ever restlessly moving we see;
Whereas the great mountains stand still,
Unless terrible earthquakes there be.

If these atoms that move up and down
Were as useful as restless they are,
Than a mountain I rather would be
A mote in the sunbeam so fair.

Charles Lamb

My Birthday

A dozen years since in this house what commotion,
What bustle, what stir, and what joyful ado;
Every soul in the family at my devotion,
When into the world I came twelve years ago.

I've been told by my friends (if they do not belie me)
My promise was such as no parent would scorn;
The wise and the aged who prophesied by me
Augured nothing but good of me when I was born.

But vain are the hopes which are formed by a parent,
Fallacious the marks which in infancy shine;
My frail constitution soon made it apparent,
I nourished within me the seeds of decline.

On a sick bed I lay, through the flesh my bones started,
My grief-wasted frame to a skeleton fell;
My physicians foreboding took leave and departed,
And they wished me dead now, who wishëd me well.

Life and soul were kept in by a mother's assistance,
Who struggled with faith, and prevailed 'gainst despair;
Like an angel she watched o'er the lamp of existence,
And never would leave while a glimmer was there.

By her care I'm alive now-but what retribution
Can I for a life twice bestowed thus confer?
Were I to be silent, each year's revolution
Proclaims-each new birthday is owing to her.

The chance-rooted tree that by waysides is planted,
Where no friendly hand will watch o'er its young shoots,
Has less blame if in autumn, when produce is wanted,
Enriched by small culture it put forth small fruits.

But that which with labour in hot-beds is reared,
Secured by nice art from the dews and the rains,
Unsound at the root may with justice be feared,
If it pay not with interest the tiller's hard pains.

Charles Lamb

Neatness In Apparel

In your garb and outward clothing
A reservëd plainness use;
By their neatness more distinguished
Than the brightness of their hues.

All the colours in the rainbow
Serve to spread the peacock's train;
Half the lustre of his feathers
Would turn twenty coxcombs vain.

Yet the swan that swims in rivers,
Pleases the judicious sight;
Who, of brighter colours heedless,
Trusts alone to simple white.

Yet all other hues, comparëd
With his whiteness, show amiss;
And the peacock's coat of colours
Like a fool's coat looks by his.

Charles Lamb

Nurse Green

'Your prayers you have said, and you've wished good night:
What cause is there yet keeps my darling awake?
This throb in your bosom proclaims some affright
Disturbs your composure. Can innocence quake?

'Why thus do you cling to my neck, and enfold me,
What fear unimparted your quiet devours?'
'O mother, there's reason-for Susan has told me,
A dead body lies in the room next to ours.'

'I know it; and, but for forgetfulness, dear,
I meant you the coffin this day should have seen,
And read the inscription, and told me the year
And day of the death of your poor old Nurse Green.'

'O not for the wealth of the world would I enter
A chamber wherein a dead body lay hid,
Lest somebody bolder than I am should venture
To go near the coffin and lift up the lid.'

'And should they do so and the coffin uncover,
The corpse underneath it would be no ill sight;
This frame, when its animal functions are over,
Has nothing of horror the living to fright.

To start at the dead is preposterous error,
To shrink from a foe that can never contest;
Shall that which is motionless move thee to terror;
Or thou become restless, 'cause they are at rest?

To think harm of her our good feelings forbid us
By whom when a babe you were dandled and fed;
Who living so many good offices did us,
I ne'er can persuade me would hurt us when dead.

But if no endeavour your terrors can smother,
If vainly against apprehension you strive,
Come, bury your fears in the arms of your mother;
My darling, cling close to me, I am alive.'

Charles Lamb

Nursing

O hush, my little baby brother;
Sleep, my love, upon my knee.
What though, dear child, we've lost our mother;
That can never trouble thee.

You are but ten weeks old to-morrow;
What can you know of our loss?
The house is full enough of sorrow.
Little baby, don't be cross.

Peace, cry not so, my dearest love;
Hush, my baby-bird, lie still.-
He's quiet now, he does not move,
Fast asleep is little Will.

My only solace, only joy,
Since the sad day I lost my mother,
Is nursing her own Willy boy,
My little orphan brother.

Charles Lamb

On A Late Impiric Of Balmy Memory

His namesake, born of Jewish breeder,
Knew 'from the Hyssop to the Cedar;'
But he, unlike the Jewish leader,
Scarce knew the Hyssop from the Cedar.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

On A Picture Of The Finding Of Moses By Pharoah's Daughter

This picture does the story express
Of Moses in the bulrushes.
How livelily the painter's hand
By colours makes us understand!

Moses that little infant is.
This figure is his sister. This
Fine stately lady is no less
A personage than a princess,
Daughter of Pharaoh, Egypt's king;
Whom Providence did hither bring
This little Hebrew child to save.
See how near the perilous wave
He lies exposëd in the ark,
His rushy cradle, his frail bark!
Pharaoh, king of Egypt land,
In his greatness gave command
To his slaves, they should destroy
Every new-born Hebrew boy.
This Moses was an Hebrew's son.
When he was born, his birth to none
His mother told, to none revealed,
But kept her goodly child concealed.
Three months she hid him; then she wrought
With bulrushes this ark, and brought
Him in it to this river's side,
Carefully looking far and wide
To see that no Egyptian eye
Her ark-hid treasure should espy.
Among the river-flags she lays
The child. Near him his sister stays.
We may imagine her affright,
When the king's daughter is in sight.
Soon the princess will perceive
The ark among the flags, and give
Command to her attendant maid
That its contents shall be displayed.
Within the ark the child is found,
And now he utters mournful sound.
Behold he weeps, as if he were
Afraid of cruel Egypt's heir!
She speaks, she says, 'This little one
I will protect, though he the son
Be of an Hebrew.' Every word
She speaks is by the sister heard.-
And now observe, this is the part
The painter chose to show his art.
Look at the sister's eager eye,
As here she seems advancing nigh.
Lowly she bends, says, 'Shall I go
And call a nurse to thee? I know

A Hebrew woman liveth near,
Great lady, shall I bring her here?'
See! Pharaoh's daughter answers, 'Go.'-
No more the painter's art can show.
He cannot make his figures move.-
On the light wings of swiftest love
The girl will fly to bring the mother
To be the nurse, she'll bring no other.
To her will Pharaoh's daughter say,
'Take this child from me away:
For wages nurse him. To my home
At proper age this child may come.
When to our palace he is brought,
Wise masters shall for him be sought
To train him up, befitting one
I would protect as my own son.
And Moses be a name unto him,
Because I from the waters drew him.'

Charles Lamb

On A Projected Journey

To gratify his people's wish
See G--e at length prepare-
He's setting out for Hanover-
We've often wish'd him there.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

On an Infant dying as soon as born

I SAW where in the shroud did lurk
A curious frame of Nature's work;
A floweret crush'd in the bud,
A nameless piece of Babyhood,
Was in her cradle-coffin lying;
Extinct, with scarce the sense of dying:
So soon to exchange the imprisoning womb
For darker closets of the tomb!
She did but ope an eye, and put
A clear beam forth, then straight up shut
For the long dark: ne'er more to see
Through glasses of mortality.
  Riddle of destiny, who can show
What thy short visit meant, or know
What thy errand here below?
Shall we say that Nature blind
Check'd her hand, and changed her mind,
Just when she had exactly wrought
A finish'd pattern without fault?
Could she flag, or could she tire,
Or lack'd she the Promethean fire
(With her nine moons' long workings sicken'd)
That should thy little limbs have quicken'd?
Limbs so firm, they seem'd to assure
Life of health, and days mature:
Woman's self in miniature!
Limbs so fair, they might supply
(Themselves now but cold imagery)
The sculptor to make Beauty by.
Or did the stern-eyed Fate descry
That babe or mother, one must die;
So in mercy left the stock
And cut the branch; to save the shock
Of young years widow'd, and the pain
When single state comes back again
To the lone man who, reft of wife,
Thenceforward drags a maimed life?
The economy of Heaven is dark,
And wisest clerks have miss'd the mark,
Why human buds, like this, should fall,
More brief than fly ephemeral
That has his day; while shrivell'd crones
Stiffen with age to stocks and stones;
And crabbed use the conscience sears
In sinners of an hundred years.
  Mother's prattle, mother's kiss,
Baby fond, thou ne'er wilt miss:
Rites, which custom does impose,
Silver bells, and baby clothes;
Coral redder than those lips
Which pale death did late eclipse;
Music framed for infants' glee,

Whistle never tuned for thee;
Though thou want'st not, thou shalt have them,
Loving hearts were they which gave them.
Let not one be missing; nurse,
See them laid upon the hearse
Of infant slain by doom perverse.
Why should kings and nobles have
Pictured trophies to their grave,
And we, churls, to thee deny
Thy pretty toys with thee to lie--
A more harmless vanity?

Charles Lamb

On Being Asked To Write In Miss Westwood's Album

My feeble Muse, that fain her best would
Write, at command of Frances Westwood,
But feels her wits not in their best mood,
Fell lately on some idle fancies,
As she's much given to romances,
About this self-same style of Frances;
Which seems to be a name in common
Attributed to man or woman.
She thence contrived this flattering moral,
With which she hopes no soul will quarrel,
That she, whom this twin title decks,
Combines what's good in either sex;
Unites-how very rare the case is!-
Masculine sense to female graces;
And, quitting not her proper rank,
Is both in one-Fanny and frank.

Oct. 12, 1827.

Charles Lamb

On The Lord's Prayer

I have taught your young lips the good words to say over,
Which form the petition we call the Lord's Prayer,
And now let me help my dear child to discover
The meaning of all the good words that are there.

'Our Father,'-the same appellation is given
To a parent on earth, and the Parent of all-
O gracious permission! the God that's in heaven
Allows his poor creatures him Father to call.

To 'hallow his name,' is to think with devotion
Of it, and with reverence mention the same;
Though you are so young, you should strive for some notion
Of the awe we should feel at the Holy One's name.

His 'will done on earth, as it is done in heaven,'
Is a wish and a hope we are suffered to breathe
That such grace and favour to us may be given,
Like good angels on high we may live here beneath.

'Our daily bread give us,' your young apprehension
May well understand is to pray for our food;
Although we ask bread, and no other thing mention,
God's bounty gives all things sufficient and good.

You pray that your 'trespasses may be forgiven,
As you forgive those that are done unto you.'
Before this you say to the God that's in heaven,
Consider the words which you speak. Are they true?

If any one has in the past time offended
Us angry creatures who soon take offence,
These words in the prayer are surely intended
To soften our minds, and expel wrath from thence.

We pray that 'temptations may never assail us,'
And 'deliverance beg from all evil' we find:
But we never can hope that our prayer will avail us,
If we strive not to banish ill thoughts from our mind.

'For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever:' these titles are meant
To express God's dominion and majesty o'er ye:
And 'Amen' to the sense of the whole gives assent.

Charles Lamb

On the sight of swans in Kensington Gardens

Queen-bird, that sittest on thy shining nest
And thy young cygnets without sorrow hatchest,
And thou, thou other royal bird, that watchest
Lest the white mother wandering feet molest:
Shrined are your offspring in a crystal cradle,
Brighter than Helen's ere she yet had burst
Her shelly prison. They shall be born at first
Strong, active, graceful, perfect, swan-like, able
To tread the land or waters with security,
Unlike poor human births, conceived in sin,
In grief brought forth, both outwardly and in
Confessing weakness, error, and impurity.
Did heavenly creatures own succession's line,
The births of heaven like to yours would shine.

Charles Lamb

Parental Recollections

A child's a plaything for an hour;
Its pretty tricks we try
For that or for a longer space;
Then tire, and lay it by.

But I knew one that to itself
All seasons could control;
That would have mocked the sense of pain
Out of a grievëd soul.

Thou straggler into loving arms,
Young climber up of knees,
When I forget thy thousand ways,
Then life and all shall cease.

Charles Lamb

Penny Pieces

'I keep it, dear papa, within my glove.'
'You do-what sum then usually, my love,
Is there deposited? I make no doubt,
Some penny pieces you are not without.'

'O no, papa, they'd soil my glove, and be
Quite odious things to carry. O no-see,
This little bit of gold is surely all
That I shall want; for I shall only call
For a small purchase I shall make, papa,
And a mere trifle I'm to buy mamma;
Just to make out the change: so there's no need
To carry penny pieces, sir, indeed.'

'O now I know then why a blind man said
Unto a dog which this blind beggar led,-
'Where'er you see some fine young ladies, Tray,
Be sure you lead me quite another way.
The poor man's friend fair ladies used to be;
But now I find no tale of misery
Will ever from their pockets draw a penny:'
The blind man did not see they wear not any.'

Charles Lamb

Prince Dorus

In days of yore, as Ancient Stories tell,
A King in love with a great Princess fell.
Long at her feet submiss the Monarch sigh'd,
While she with stern repulse his suit denied.
Yet was he form'd by birth to please the fair,
Dress'd, danc'd, and courted, with a Monarch's air;
But Magic Spells her frozen breast had steel'd
With stubborn pride, that knew not how to yield.

This to the King a courteous Fairy told,
And bade the Monarch in his suit be bold;
For he that would the charming Princess wed,
Had only on her cat's black tail to tread,
When straight the Spell would vanish into air,
And he enjoy for life the yielding fair.

He thank'd the Fairy for her kind advice.-
Thought he, 'If this be all, I'll not be nice;
Rather than in my courtship I will fail,
I will to mince-meat tread Minon's black tail.'

To the Princess's court repairing strait,
He sought the cat that must decide his fate;
But when he found her, how the creature stared!
How her back bristled, and her great eyes glared!
That tail, which he so fondly hop'd his prize,
Was swell'd by wrath to twice its usual size;
And all her cattish gestures plainly spoke,
She thought the affair he came upon, no joke.

With wary step the cautious King draws near,
And slyly means to attack her in her rear;
But when he thinks upon her tail to pounce,
Whisk-off she skips-three yards upon a bounce-
Again he tries, again his efforts fail-
Minon's a witch-the deuce is in her tail.-

The anxious chase for weeks the Monarch tried,
Till courage fail'd, and hope within him died.
A desperate suit 'twas useless to prefer,
Or hope to catch a tail of quicksilver.-
When on a day, beyond his hopes, he found
Minon, his foe, asleep upon the ground;
Her ample tail hehind her lay outspread,
Full to the eye, and tempting to the tread.
The King with rapture the occasion bless'd,
And with quick foot the fatal part he press'd.

Loud squalls were heard, like howlings of a storm,
And sad he gazed on Minon's altered form,-
No more a cat, but chang'd into a man
Of giant size, who frown'd, and thus began:

'Rash King, that dared with impious design
To violate that tail, that once was mine;
What tho' the spell be broke, and burst the charms,
That kept the Princess from thy longing arms,-
Not unrevenged shalt thou my fury dare,
For by that violated tail I swear,
From your unhappy nuptials shall be born
A Prince, whose Nose shall be thy subjects' scorn.
Bless'd in his love thy son shall never be,
Till he his foul deformity shall see,
Till he with tears his blemish shall confess,
Discern its odious length, and wish it less!'

This said, he vanish'd; and the King awhile
Mused at his words, then answer'd with a smile,
'Give me a child in happy wedlock born,
And let his Nose be made like a French horn;
His knowledge of the fact I ne'er can doubt,-
If he have eyes, or hands, he'll find it out.'

So spake the King, self-flatter'd in his thought,
Then with impatient step the Princess sought;
His urgent suit no longer she withstands,
But links with him in Hymen's knot her hands.

Almost as soon a widow as a bride,
Within a year the King her husband died;
And shortly after he was dead and gone
She was deliver'd of a little son,
The prettiest babe, with lips as red as rose,
And eyes like little stars-but such a nose-
The tender Mother fondly took the boy
Into her arms, and would have kiss'd her joy;
His luckless nose forbade the fond embrace-
He thrust the hideous feature in her face.

Then all her Maids of Honour tried in turn,
And for a Prince's kiss in envy burn;
By sad experience taught, their hopes they miss'd,
And mourn'd a Prince that never could be kiss'd.
In silent tears the Queen confess'd her grief,
Till kindest Flattery came to her relief.

Her maids, as each one takes him in her arms,
Expatiate freely o'er his world of charms-
His eyes, lips, mouth-his forehead was divine-
And for the nose-they call'd it Aquiline-
Declared that Cæsar, who the world subdued,
Had such a one-just of that longitude-
That Kings like him compell'd folks to adore them,
And drove the short-nos'd sons of men before them-
That length of nose portended length of days,
And was a great advantage many ways-
To mourn the gifts of Providence was wrong-
Besides, the Nose was not so very long.-

These arguments in part her grief redrest,
A mother's partial fondness did the rest;
And Time, that all things reconciles by use,
Did in her notions such a change produce,
That, as she views her babe, with favour blind,
She thinks him handsomest of human kind.

Meantime, in spite of his disfigured face,
Dorus (for so he's call'd) grew up a pace;
In fair proportion all his features rose,
Save that most prominent of all-his Nose.
That Nose, which in the infant could annoy,
Was grown a perfect nuisance in the boy.
Whene'er he walk'd, his Handle went before,
Long as the snout of Ferret, or Wild Boar;
Or like the Staff, with which on holy day
The solemn Parish Beadle clears the way.

But from their cradle to their latest year,
How seldom Truth can reach a Prince's ear!
To keep the unwelcome knowledge out of view,
His lesson well each flattering Courtier knew;
The hoary Tutor, and the wily Page,
Unmeet confederates! dupe his tender age.
They taught him that whate'er vain mortals boast-
Strength, Courage, Wisdom-all they value most-
Whate'er on human life distinction throws-
Was all comprized-in what?-a length of nose!
Ev'n Virtue's self (by some suppos'd chief merit)
In short-nosed folks was only want of spirit.

While doctrines such as these his guides instill'd,
His Palace was with long-nosed people fill'd;
At Court whoever ventured to appear
With a short nose, was treated with a sneer.

Each courtier's wife, that with a babe is blest,
Moulds its young nose betimes; and does her best,
By pulls, and hauls, and twists, and lugs, and pinches,
To stretch it to the standard of the Prince's.

Dup'd by these arts, Dorus to manhood rose,
Nor dream'd of ought more comely than his Nose;
Till Love, whose power ev'n Princes have confest,
Claim'd the soft empire o'er his youthful breast.
Fair Claribel was she who caus'd his care;
A neighb'ring Monarch's daughter, and sole heir.
For beauteous Claribel his bosom burn'd;
The beauteous Claribel his flame return'd;
Deign'd with kind words his passion to approve,
Met his soft vows, and yielded love for love.
If in her mind some female pangs arose
At sight (and who can blame her?) of his Nose,
Affection made her willing to be blind;
She loved him for the beauties of his mind;
And in his lustre, and his royal race,
Contented sunk-one feature of his face.

Blooming to sight, and lovely to behold,
Herself was cast in Beauty's richest mould;
Sweet female majesty her person deck'd-
Her face an angel's-save for one defect-
Wise Nature, who to Dorus over kind,
A length of nose too liberal had assign'd,
As if with us poor mortals to make sport,
Had given to Claribel a nose too short:
But turn'd up with a sort of modest grace;
It took not much of beauty from her face;
And subtle Courtiers, who their Prince's mind
Still watch'd, and turn'd about with every wind,
Assur'd the Prince, that though man's beauty owes
Its charms to a majestic length of nose,
The excellence of Woman (softer creature)
Consisted in the shortness of that feature.
Few arguments were wanted to convince
The already more than half persuaded Prince;
Truths, which we hate, with slowness we receive,
But what we wish to credit, soon believe.

The Princess's affections being gain'd,
What but her Sire's approval now remain'd?
Ambassadors with solemn pomp are sent
To win the aged Monarch to consent
(Seeing their States already were allied)
That Dorus might have Claribel to bride.

Her Royal Sire, who wisely understood
The match propos'd was for both kingdoms' good,
Gave his consent; and gentle Claribel
With weeping bids her father's court farewell.

With gallant pomp, and numerous array,
Dorus went forth to meet her on her way;
But when the Princely pair of lovers met,
Their hearts on mutual gratulations set,
Sudden the Enchanter from the ground arose,
(The same who prophesied the Prince's nose)
And with rude grasp, unconscious of her charms,
Snatch'd up the lovely Princess in his arms,
Then bore her out of reach of human eyes,
Up in the pathless regions of the skies.

Bereft of her that was his only care,
Dorus resign'd his soul to wild despair;
Resolv'd to leave the land that gave him birth,
And seek fair Claribel throughout the earth.
Mounting his horse, he gives the beast the reins,
And wanders lonely through the desert plains;
With fearless heart the savage heath explores,
Where the wolf prowls, and where the tiger roars,
Nor wolf, nor tiger, dare his way oppose;
The wildest creatures see, and shun, his Nose.
Ev'n lions fear! the elephant alone
Surveys with pride a trunk so like his own.

At length he to a shady forest came,
Where in a cavern lived an aged dame;
A reverend Fairy, on whose silver head
A hundred years their downy snows had shed.
Here ent'ring in, the Mistress of the place
Bespoke him welcome with a cheerful grace;
Fetch'd forth her dainties, spread her social board
With all the store her dwelling could afford.
The Prince, with toil and hunger sore opprest,
Gladly accepts, and deigns to be her guest.
But when the first civilities were paid,
The dishes rang'd, and Grace in order said;
The Fairy, who had leisure now to view
Her guest more closely, from her pocket drew
Her spectacles, and wip'd them from the dust,
Then on her nose endeavour'd to adjust;
With difficulty she could find a place
To hang them on in her unshapely face;
For, if the Princess's was somewhat small,
This Fairy scarce had any nose at all.

But when by help of spectacles the Crone
Discern'd a Nose so different from her own,
What peals of laughter shook her aged sides!
While with sharp jests the Prince she thus derides.

FAIRY.
'Welcome, great Prince of Noses, to my cell;
'Tis a poor place,-but thus we Fairies dwell.
Pray, let me ask you, if from far you come-
And don't you sometimes find it cumbersome?'

PRINCE.
'Find what?'

FAIRY.
'Your Nose-'

PRINCE.
'My Nose, Ma'am!'

FAIRY.
'No offence-
The King your Father was a man of sense,
A handsome man (but lived not to be old)
And had a Nose cast in the common mould.
Ev'n I myself, that now with age am grey,
Was thought to have some beauty in my day,
And am the Daughter of a King.-Your Sire
In this poor face saw something to admire-
And I to shew my gratitude made shift-
Have stood his friend-and help'd him at a lift-
'Twas I that, when his hopes began to fail,
Shew'd him the spell that lurk'd in Minon's tail-
Perhaps you have heard-but come, Sir, you don't eat-
That Nose of yours requires both wine and meat-
Fall to, and welcome, without more ado-
You see your fare-what shall I help you to?
This dish the tongues of nightingales contains;
This, eyes of peacocks; and that, linnets' brains;
That next you is a Bird of Paradise-
We Fairies in our food are somewhat nice.-
And pray, Sir, while your hunger is supplied,
Do lean your Nose a little on one side;
The shadow, which it casts upon the meat,
Darkens my plate, I see not what I eat-'

The Prince, on dainty after dainty feeding,
Felt inly shock'd at the old Fairy's breeding,
But held it want of manners in the Dame,
And did her country education blame.
One thing he only wonder'd at,-what she
So very comic in his Nose could see.
Hers, it must be confest, was somewhat short,
And time and shrinking age accounted for't;
But for his own, thank heaven, he could not tell
That it was ever thought remarkable;
A decent nose, of reasonable size,
And handsome thought, rather than otherwise.
But that which most of all his wonder paid,
Was to observe the Fairy's waiting Maid;
How at each word the aged Dame let fall;
She curtsied low, and smil'd assent to all;
But chiefly when the rev'rend Grannam told
Of conquests, which her beauty made of old.-
He smiled to see how Flattery sway'd the Dame,
Nor knew himself was open to the same!
He finds her raillery now increase so fast,
That making hasty end of his repast,
Glad to escape her tongue, he bids farewell
To the old Fairy, and her friendly cell.

But his kind Hostess, who had vainly tried
The force of ridicule to cure his pride,
Fertile in plans, a surer method chose,
To make him see the error of his Nose;
For, till he view'd that feature with remorse,
The Enchanter's direful spell must be in force.

Midway the road by which the Prince must pass,
She rais'd by magic art a House of Glass;
No mason's hand appear'd, nor work of wood;
Compact of glass the wondrous fabric stood.
Its stately pillars, glittering in the sun,
Conspicuous from afar, like silver, shone.
Here, snatch'd and rescued from th' Enchanter's might,
She placed the beauteous Claribel in sight.

The admiring Prince the chrystal dome survey'd,
And sought access unto his lovely Maid:
But, strange to tell, in all that mansion's bound,
Nor door, nor casement, was there to be found.
Enrag'd he took up massy stones, and flung
With such a force, that all the palace rung;
But made no more impression on the glass,
Than if the solid structure had been brass.

To comfort his despair, the lovely maid
Her snowy hand against her window laid;
But when with eager haste he thought to kiss,
His Nose stood out, and robb'd him of the bliss.
Thrice he essay'd th' impracticable feat;
The window and his lips can never meet.

The painful Truth, which Flattery long conceal'd,
Rush'd on his mind, and 'O!' he cried, 'I yield;
Wisest of Fairies, thou wert right, I wrong-
I own, I own, I have a Nose too long.'

The frank confession was no sooner spoke,
But into shivers all the palace broke.
His Nose of monstrous length, to his surprise
Shrunk to the limits of a common size:
And Claribel with joy her Lover view'd,
Now grown as beautiful as he was good.
The aged Fairy in their presence stands,
Confirms their mutual vows, and joins their hands.
The Prince with rapture hails the happy hour,
That rescued him from self-delusion's power;
And trains of blessings crown the future life
Of Dorus, and of Claribel, his wife.

THE END

Charles Lamb

Prologue To Faulkener

A TRAGEDY BY WILLIAM GODWIN, 1807.

An author who has given you all delight
Furnished the tale our stage presents to-night.
Some of our earliest tears he taught to steal
Down our young cheeks, and forced us first to feel.
To solitary shores whole years confined,
Who has not read how pensive Crusoe pined?
Who, now grown old, that did not once admire
His goat, his parrot, his uncouth attire,
The stick, due-notched, that told each tedious day
That in the lonely island wore away?
Who has not shuddered, where he stands aghast
At sight of human footsteps in the waste?
Or joyed not, when his trembling hands unbind
Thee, Friday, gentlest of the savage kind?

The genius who conceived that magic tale
Was skilled by native pathos to prevail.
His stories, though rough-drawn and framed in haste,
Had that which pleased our homely grandsires' taste.

His was a various pen, that freely roved
Into all subjects, was in most approved.
Whate'er the theme, his ready Muse obeyed-
Love, courtship, politics, religion, trade-
Gifted alike to shine in every sphere,
Novelist, historian, poet, pamphleteer.

In some blest interval of party-strife,
He drew a striking sketch from private life,
Whose moving scenes of intricate distress
We try to-night in a dramatic dress:
A real story of domestic woe,
That asks no aid from music, verse, or show,
But trusts to truth, to Nature, and Defoe.

Charles Lamb

Queen Oriana's Dream

On a bank with roses shaded,
Whose sweet scent the violets aided,
Violets whose breath alone
Yields but feeble smell or none,
(Sweeter bed Jove ne'er repos'd on
When his eyes Olympus closed on,)
While o'er head six slaves did hold
Canopy of cloth o' gold,
And two more did music keep,
Which might Juno lull to sleep,
Oriana who was queen
To the mighty Tamerlane,
That was lord of all the land
Between Thrace and Samarchand,
While the noon-tide fervor beam'd,
Mused herself to sleep, and dream'd.

Thus far, in magnific strain,
A young poet sooth'd his vein,
But he had nor prose nor numbers
To express a princess' slumbers.-
Youthful Richard had strange fancies,
Was deep versed in old romances,
And could talk whole hours upon
The great Cham and Prester John,-
Tell the field in which the Sophi
From the Tartar won a trophy-
What he read with such delight of,
Thought he could as eas'ly write of-
But his over-young invention
Kept not pace with brave intention.
Twenty suns did rise and set,
And he could no further get;
But, unable to proceed,
Made a virtue out of need,
And, his labours wiselier deem'd of,
Did omit what the queen dream'd of.

Charles Lamb

Repentance And Reconciliation

JANE.
Mamma is displeased and looks very grave,
And I own, brother, I was to blame
Just now when I told her I wanted to have,
Like Miss Lydia, a very fine name.
'Twas foolish, for, Robert, Jane sounds very well,
When mamma says, 'I love my good Jane.'
I've been lately so naughty, I hardly can tell
If she ever will say so again.

ROBERT.
We are each of us foolish, and each of us young,
And often in fault and to blame.
Jane, yesterday I was too free with my tongue,
I acknowledge it now to my shame.
For a speech in my good mother's hearing I made,
Which reflected upon her whole sex;
And now like you, Jenny, I am much afraid
That this might my dear mother vex.

JANE.
But yet, brother Robert, 'twas not quite so bad
As that naughty reflection of mine,
When I grumbled because Liddy Bellenger had
Dolls and dresses expensive and fine.
For then 'twas of her, her own self, I complained;
Since mamma does provide all I have.

MOTHER.
Your repentance, my children, I see is unfeigned,
You are now my good Robert, and now my good Jane;
And if you will never be naughty again,
Your fond mother will never look grave.

Charles Lamb

Song For The C--N

Roi's wife of Brunswick Oëls!
Roi's wife of Brunswick Oëls!
Wot you how she came to him,
While he supinely dreamt of no ills?
Vow! but she is a canty Queen,
And well can she scare each royal orgie.-
To us she ever must be dear,
Though she's for ever cut by Georgie.-
Roi's wife, &c. Da capo.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

Sonnet

The Lord of Life shakes off his drowsihed,
And 'gins to sprinkle on the earth below
Those rays that from his shaken locks do flow;
Meantime, by truant love of rambling led,
I turn my back on thy detested walls,
Proud city! and thy sons I leave behind,
A sordid, selfish, money-getting kind;
Brute things, who shut their ears when Freedom calls.
I pass not thee so lightly, well-known spire,
That mindest me of many a pleasure gone,
Of merrier days, of love and Islington;
Kindling afresh the flames of past desire.
And I shall muse on thee slow journeying on
To the green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire.

1795.

Charles Lamb

Sonnet To A Friend

Friend of my earliest years and childish days,
My joys, my sorrows, thou with me hast shared,
Companion dear, and we alike have fared
(Poor pilgrims we) through life's unequal ways;
It were unwisely done, should we refuse
To cheer our path as featly as we may,
Our lonely path to cheer, as travellers use,
With merry song, quaint tale, or roundelay;
And we will sometimes talk past troubles o'er,
Of mercies shown, and all our sickness healed,
And in his judgments God remembering love;
And we will learn to praise God evermore
For those glad tidings of great joy revealed
By that sooth messenger sent from above.

Charles Lamb

Sonnet to Mathew Wood, Esq., Alderman and M. P.

Hold on thy course uncheck'd, heroic Wood!
Regardless what the player's son may prate,
Saint Stephens' fool, the Zany of Debate-
Who nothing generous ever understood.
London's twice Prætor! scorn the fool-born jest-
The stage's scum, and refuse of the players-
Stale topics against Magistrates and Mayors-
City and Country both thy worth attest.
Bid him leave off his shallow Eton wit,
More fit to sooth the superficial ear
Of drunken Pitt, and that pickpocket Peer,
When at their sottish orgies they did sit,
Hatching mad counsels from inflated vein,
Till England, and the nations, reeled with pain.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

Sonnet VIII

As when a child on some long winter's night
Affrighted clinging to its Grandam's knees
With eager wond'ring and perturb'd delight
Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees
Mutter'd to wretch by necromantic spell;
Or of those hags, who at the witching time
Of murky midnight ride the air sublime,
And mingle foul embrace with fiends of Hell:
Cold Horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear
More gentle starts, to hear the Beldame tell
Of pretty babes, that lov'd each other dear,
Murder'd by cruel Uncle's mandate fell:
Ev'n such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,
Ev'n so thou, Siddons! meltest my sad heart!

Charles Lamb

Suffer Little Children, And Forbid Them Not, To Come Unto Me

To Jesus our Saviour some parents presented
Their children-what fears and what hopes they must feel!
When this the disciples would fain have prevented,
Our Saviour reproved their unseasonable zeal.

Not only free leave to come to him was given
But 'of such' were the blessed words Christ our Lord spake,
'Of such is composed the kingdom of heaven:'
The disciples, abashëd, perceived their mistake.

With joy then the parents their children brought nigher
And earnestly begged that his hands he would lay
On their heads; and they made a petition still higher,
That he for a blessing upon them would pray.

O happy young children, thus brought to adore him,
To kneel at his feet, and look up in his face;
No doubt now in heaven they still are before him,
Children still of his love, and enjoying his grace.

For being so blest as to come to our Saviour,
How deep in their innocent hearts it must sink!
'Twas a visit divine; a most holy behaviour
Must flow from that spring of which then they did drink.

Charles Lamb

The Ape

An Ape is but a trivial beast,
Men count it light and vain;
But I would let them have their thoughts,
To have my Ape again.

To love a beast in any sort
Is no great sign of grace;
But I have loved a flouting Ape's
'Bove any lady's face.

I have known the power of two fair eyes,
In smile or else in glance,
And how (for I a lover was)
They make the spirits dance;

But I would give two hundred smiles
Of them that fairest be,
For one look of my staring Ape
That used to stare on me.

This beast, this Ape, it had a face-
If face it might be styled-
Sometimes it was a staring Ape,
Sometimes a beauteous child-

A Negro flat-a Pagod squat,
Cast in a Chinese mould-
And then it was a Cherub's face
Made of the beaten gold!

But Time, that's meddling, meddling still,
And always altering things-
And what's already at the best
To alteration brings,

That turns the sweetest buds to flowers,
And chops and changes toys,
That breaks up dreams, and parts old friends,
And still commutes our joys-

Has changed away my Ape at last
And in its place conveyed,
Thinking therewith to cheat my sight,
A fresh and blooming maid!

And fair to sight is she-and still
Each day doth sightlier grow,
Upon the ruins of the Ape,
My ancient playfellow!

The tale of Sphinx, and Theban jests
I true in me perceive;
I suffer riddles; death from dark
Enigmas I receive:

Whilst a hid being I pursue,
That lurks in a new shape,
My darling in herself I miss,
And, in my ape, the ape.

1806.

Charles Lamb

The Beasts In The Tower

Within the precincts of this yard,
Each in his narrow confines barred,
Dwells every beast that can be found
On Afric or on Indian ground.
How different was the life they led
In those wild haunts where they were bred,
To this tame servitude and fear,
Enslaved by man, they suffer here!

In that uneasy close recess
Couches a sleeping lioness;
That next den holds a bear; the next
A wolf, by hunger ever vext;
There, fiercer from the keeper's lashes
His teeth the fell hyena gnashes;
That creature on whose back abound
Black spots upon a yellow ground,
A panther is, the fairest beast
That haunteth in the spacious East.
He underneath a fair outside
Does cruelty and treachery hide.

That cat-like beast that to and fro
Restless as fire does ever go,
As if his courage did resent
His limbs in such confinement pent,
That should their prey in forests take,
And make the Indian jungles quake,
A tiger is. Observe how sleek
And glossy smooth his coat: no streak
On satin ever matched the pride
Of that which marks his furry hide.
How strong his muscles! he with ease
Upon the tallest man could seize,
In his large mouth away could bear him,
And into thousand pieces tear him:
Yet cabined so securely here,
The smallest infant need not fear.

That lordly creature next to him
A lion is. Survey each limb.
Observe the texture of his claws,
The massy thickness of those jaws;
His mane that sweeps the ground in length,
Like Samson's locks, betokening strength.
In force and swiftness he excels
Each beast that in the forest dwells;
The savage tribes him king confess
Throughout the howling wilderness.

Woe to the hapless neighbourhood,
When he is pressed by want of food!
Of man, or child, of bull, or horse,
He makes his prey; such is his force.
A waste behind him he creates,
Whole villages depopulates.
Yet here within appointed lines
How small a grate his rage confines!

This place methinks resembleth well
The world itself in which we dwell.
Perils and snares on every ground
Like these wild beasts beset us round.
But Providence their rage restrains,
Our heavenly Keeper sets them chains;
His goodness saveth every hour
His darlings from the lion's power.

Charles Lamb

The Beggar-Man

Abject, stooping, old, and wan,
See yon wretched beggar-man;
Once a father's hopeful heir,
Once a mother's tender care.
When too young to understand
He but scorched his little hand,
By the candle's flaming light
Attracted, dancing, spiral, bright,
Clasping fond her darling round,
A thousand kisses healed the wound.
Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,
No mother tends the beggar-man.

Then nought too good for him to wear,
With cherub face and flaxen hair,
In fancy's choicest gauds arrayed,
Cap of lace with rose to aid,
Milk-white hat and feather blue,
Shoes of red, and coral too
With silver bells to please his ear,
And charm the frequent ready tear.
Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,
Neglected is the beggar-man.

See the boy advance in age,
And learning spreads her useful page;
In vain! for giddy pleasure calls,
And shows the marbles, tops, and balls.
What's learning to the charms of play?
The indulgent tutor must give way.
A heedless wilful dunce, and wild,
The parents' fondness spoiled the child;
The youth in vagrant courses ran;
Now abject, stooping, old, and wan,
Their fondling is the beggar-man.

Charles Lamb

The Boy And The Skylark

A FABLE.
'A wicked action fear to do,
When you are by yourself; for though
You think you can conceal it,
A little bird that's in the air
The hidden trespass shall declare,
And openly reveal it.'

Richard this saying oft had heard,
Until the sight of any bird
Would set his heart a-quaking;
He saw a host of wingëd spies
For ever o'er him in the skies,
Note of his actions taking.

This pious precept, while it stood
In his remembrance, kept him good
When nobody was by him;
For though no human eye was near,
Yet Richard still did wisely fear
The little bird should spy him.

But best resolves will sometimes sleep;
Poor frailty will not always keep
From that which is forbidden;
And Richard, one day, left alone,
Laid hands on something not his own,
And hoped the theft was hidden.

His conscience slept a day or two,
As it is very apt to do
When we with pains suppress it:
And though at times a slight remorse
Would raise a pang, it had not force
To make him yet confess it.

When on a day, as he abroad
Walked by his mother, in their road
He heard a skylark singing;
Smit with the sound, a flood of tears
Proclaimed the superstitious fears
His inmost bosom wringing.

His mother, wondering, saw him cry,
And fondly asked the reason why;
Then Richard made confession,

And said, he feared the little bird
He singing in the air had heard
Was telling his transgression.

The words which Richard spoke below,
As sounds by nature upwards go,
Were to the skylark carried;
The airy traveller with surprise
To hear his sayings, in the skies
On his mid journey tarried.

His anger then the bird exprest:
'Sure, since the day I left the nest,
I ne'er heard folly uttered
So fit to move a skylark's mirth,
As what this little son of earth
Hath in his grossness muttered.

'Dull fool! to think we sons of air
On man's low actions waste a care,
His virtues or his vices;
Or soaring on the summer gales,
That we should stoop to carry tales
Of him or his devices!

'Our songs are all of the delights
We find in our wild airy flights,
And heavenly exaltation;
The earth you mortals have at heart
Is all too gross to have a part
In skylark's conversation.

'Unless it be in what green field
Or meadow we our nest may build,
Midst flowering broom, or heather;
From whence our new-fledged offspring may
With least obstruction wing their way
Up to the walks of ether.

'Mistaken fool! man needs not us
His secret merits to discuss,
Or spy out his transgression;
When once he feels his conscience stirred,
That voice within him is the bird
That moves him to confession.'

Charles Lamb

The Boy And The Snake

Henry was every morning fed
With a full mess of milk and bread.
One day the boy his breakfast took,
And eat it by a purling brook
Which through his mother's orchard ran.
From that time ever when he can
Escape his mother's eye, he there
Takes his food in th'open air.
Finding the child delight to eat
Abroad, and make the grass his seat,
His mother lets him have his way.
With free leave Henry every day
Thither repairs, until she heard
Him talking of a fine grey bird.
This pretty bird, he said, indeed,
Came every day with him to feed,
And it loved him, and loved his milk,
And it was smooth and soft like silk.
His mother thought she'd go and see
What sort of bird this same might be.
So the next morn she follows Harry,
And carefully she sees him carry
Through the long grass his heaped-up mess.
What was her terror and distress,
When she saw the infant take
His bread and milk close to a snake!
Upon the grass he spreads his feast,
And sits down by his frightful guest,
Who had waited for the treat;
And now they both begin to eat.
Fond mother! shriek not, O beware
The least small noise, O have a care-
The least small noise that may be made,
The wily snake will be afraid-
If he hear the lightest sound,
He will inflict th'envenomed wound.
She speaks not, moves not, scarce does breathe,
As she stands the trees beneath;
No sound she utters; and she soon
Sees the child lift up its spoon,
And tap the snake upon the head,
Fearless of harm; and then he said,
As speaking to familiar mate,
'Keep on your own side, do, Grey Pate:'
The snake then to the other side,
As one rebukëd, seems to glide;
And now again advancing nigh,
Again she hears the infant cry,
Tapping the snake, 'Keep further, do;
Mind, Grey Pate, what I say to you.'
The danger's o'er-she sees the boy
(O what a change from fear to joy!)

Rise and bid the snake 'good-bye;'
Says he, 'Our breakfast's done, and I
Will come again to-morrow day:'
Then, lightly tripping, ran away.

Charles Lamb

The Broken Doll

An infant is a selfish sprite;
But what of that? the sweet delight
Which from participation springs,
Is quite unknown to these young things.
We elder children then will smile
At our dear little John awhile,
And bear with him, until he see
There is a sweet felicity
In pleasing more than only one
Dear little craving selfish John.

He laughs, and thinks it a fine joke,
That he our new wax doll has broke.
Anger will never teach him better;
We will the spirit and the letter
Of courtesy to him display
By taking in a friendly way
These baby frolics; till he learn
True sport from mischief to discern.

Reproof a parent's province is:
A sister's discipline is this;
By studied kindness to effect
A little brother's young respect.
What is a doll? a fragile toy.
What is its loss? if the dear boy,
Who half perceives he's done amiss,
Retain impression of the kiss
That followed instant on his cheek;
If the kind, loving words we speak
Of 'Never mind it,' 'We forgive,'-
If these in his short memory live
Only, perchance, for half a day-
Who minds a doll-if that should lay
The first impression in his mind
That sisters are to brothers kind?
For thus the broken doll may prove
Foundation to fraternal love.

Charles Lamb

The Brother's Reply

Sister, fie, for shame, no more,
Give this ignorant babble o'er,
Nor with little female pride
Things above your sense deride.
Why this foolish under-rating
Of my first attempts at Latin?
Know you not each thing we prize
Does from small beginnings rise?
'Twas the same thing with your writing,
Which you now take such delight in.
First you learnt the down-stroke line,
Then the hair-stroke thin and fine,
Then a curve, and then a better,
Till you came to form a letter;
Then a new task was begun,
How to join them two in one;
Till you got (these first steps past)
To your fine text-hand at last.
So though I at first commence
With the humble accidence,
And my study's course affords
Little else as yet but words,
I shall venture in a while
At construction, grammar, style,
Learn my syntax, and proceed
Classic authors next to read,
Such as wiser, better, make us,
Sallust, Phædrus, Ovid, Flaccus:
All the poets (with their wit),
All the grave historians writ,
Who the lives and actions show
Of men famous long ago;
Even their very sayings giving
In the tongue they used when living.

Think not I shall do that wrong
Either to my native tongue,
English authors to despise,
Or those books which you so prize;
Though from them awhile I stray,
By new studies called away,
Them when next I take in hand,
I shall better understand.
For I've heard wise men declare
Many words in English are
From the Latin tongue derived,
Of whose sense girls are deprived
'Cause they do not Latin know.-
But if all this anger grow
From this cause, that you suspect
By proceedings indirect,

I would keep (as misers pelf)
All this learning to myself;
Sister, to remove this doubt,
Rather than we will fall out,
(If our parents will agree)
You shall Latin learn with me.

Charles Lamb

The Butterfly

SISTER.
Do, my dearest brother John,
Let that butterfly alone.

BROTHER.
What harm now do I do?
You're always making such a noise-

SISTER.
O fie, John; none but naughty boys
Say such rude words as you.

BROTHER.
Because you're always speaking sharp:
On the same thing you always harp.
A bird one may not catch,
Nor find a nest, nor angle neither,
Nor from the peacock pluck a feather,
But you are on the watch
To moralize and lecture still.

SISTER.
And ever lecture, John, I will,
When such sad things I hear.
But talk not now of what is past;
The moments fly away too fast,
Though endlessly they seem to last
To that poor soul in fear.

BROTHER.
Well, soon (I say) I'll let it loose;
But, sister, you talk like a goose,
There's no soul in a fly.

SISTER.
It has a form and fibres fine,
Were tempered by the hand divine
Who dwells beyond the sky.
Look, brother, you have hurt its wing-
And plainly by its fluttering
You see it's in distress.
Gay painted coxcomb, spangled beau,
A butterfly is called, you know,
That's always in full dress:
The finest gentleman of all
Insects he is-he gave a ball,
You know the poet wrote.
Let's fancy this the very same,
And then you'll own you've been to blame
To spoil his silken coat.

BROTHER.

Your dancing, spangled, powdered beau,
Look, through the air I've let him go:
And now we're friends again.
As sure as he is in the air,
From this time, Ann, I will take care,
And try to be humane.

Charles Lamb

The Christening

Arrayed-a half angelic sight-
In nests of pure baptismal white,
The mother to the font doth bring
The little, helpless, nameless thing,
With hushes soft, and mild caressing,
At once to get-a name and blessing!
Close to the babe the priest doth stand,
The sacred water at his hand,
That must assoil the soul within
From every stain of Adam's sin.
The Infant eyes the mystic scenes,
Nor knows what all this wonder means;
And now he smiles, as if to say,
'I am a Christian made to-day;'
Now, frighted, clings to nurse's hold,
Shrinking from the water cold,
Whose virtues, rightly understood,
Are, as Bethesda's waters, good-
Strange words! 'The World, the Flesh, the Devil.'
Poor Babe, what can it know of evil?
But we must silently adore
Mysterious truths, and not explore.
Enough for him, in after times,
When he shall read these artless rhymes,
If, looking back upon this day,
With easy conscience he can say-
'I have in part redeemed the pledge
Of my baptismal privilege
And vow, and more will strive to flee
All that my sponsors kind renounced for me.

Charles Lamb

The Coffee Slips

Whene'er I fragrant coffee drink,
I on the generous Frenchman think,
Whose noble perseverance bore
The tree to Martinico's shore.
While yet her colony was new,
Her island products but a few,
Two shoots from off a coffee-tree
He carried with him o'er the sea.
Each little tender coffee slip
He waters daily in the ship,
And as he tends his embryo trees,
Feels he is raising midst the seas
Coffee groves, whose ample shade
Shall screen the dark Creolian maid.
But soon, alas! his darling pleasure
In watching this his precious treasure
Is like to fade,-for water fails
On board the ship in which he sails.
Now all the reservoirs are shut,
The crew on short allowance put;
So small a drop is each man's share,
Few leavings you may think there are
To water these poor coffee plants;-
But he supplies their gasping wants,
Even from his own dry parchëd lips
He spares it for his coffee slips.
Water he gives his nurslings first,
Ere he allays his own deep thirst
Lest, if he first the water sip,
He bear too far his eager lip.
He sees them droop for want of more;-
Yet when they reach the destined shore,
With pride the heroic gardener sees
A living sap still in his trees.
The islanders his praise resound;
Coffee plantations rise around;
And Martinico loads her ships
With produce from those dear-saved slips.

Charles Lamb

The Confidant

Anna was always full of thought
As if she'd many sorrows known,
Yet mostly her full heart was fraught
With troubles that were not her own;
For the whole school to Anna used to tell
Whatever small misfortunes unto them befell.

And being so by all beloved,
That all into her bosom poured
Their dearest secrets, she was moved
To pity all-her heart a hoard,
Or storehouse, by this means became for all
The sorrows can to girls of tender age befall.

Though individually not much
Distress throughout the school prevailed,
Yet as she shared it all, 'twas such
A weight of woe that her assailed,
She lost her colour, loathed her food, and grew
So dull, that all their confidence from her withdrew.

Releasëd from her daily care,
No longer listening to complaint,
She seems to breathe a different air,
And health once more her cheek does paint.
Still Anna loves her friends, but will not hear
Again their list of grievances which cost so dear.

Charles Lamb

The Dessert

With the apples and the plums
Little Carolina comes,
At the time of the dessert she
Comes and drops her last new curtsy;
Graceful curtsy, practised o'er
In the nursery before.
What shall we compare her to?
The dessert itself will do.
Like preserves she's kept with care,
Like blanched almonds she is fair,
Soft as down on peach her hair,
And so soft, so smooth is each
Pretty cheek as that same peach,
Yet more like in hue to cherries;
Then her lips, the sweet strawberries,
Caroline herself shall try them
If they are not like when nigh them;
Her bright eyes are black as sloes,
But I think we've none of those
Common fruit here-and her chin
From a round point does begin,
Like the small end of a pear;
Whiter drapery she does wear
Than the frost on cake; and sweeter
Than the cake itself, and neater,
Though bedecked with emblems fine,
Is our little Caroline.

Charles Lamb

The Duty Of A Brother

Why on your sister do you look,
Octavius, with an eye of scorn,
As scarce her presence you could brook?-
Under one roof you both were born.

Why, when she gently proffers speech,
Do you ungently turn your head?
Since the same sire gave life to each;
With the same milk ye both were fed.

Such treatment to a female, though
A perfect stranger she might be,
From you would most unmanly show;
In you to her 'tis worse to see.

When any ill-bred boys offend her,
Showing their manhood by their sneers,
It is your business to defend her
'Gainst their united taunts and jeers.

And not to join the illiberal crew
In their contempt of female merit;
What's bad enough in them, from you
Is want of goodness, want of spirit.

What if your rougher out-door sports
Her less robustious spirits daunt;
And if she join not the resorts
Where you and your wild playmates haunt:

Her milder province is at home;
When your diversions have an end,
When over-toiled from play you come,
You'll find in her an in-doors friend.

Leave not your sister to another;
As long as both of you reside
In the same house, who but her brother
Should point her books, her studies guide?

If Nature, who allots our cup,
Than her has made you stronger, wiser;
It is that you, as you grow up,
Should be her champion, her adviser.

It is the law that hand intends
Which framed diversity of sex;
The man the woman still defends,
The manly boy the girl protects.

Charles Lamb

The End Of May

'Our governess is not in school,
So we may talk a bit;
Sit down upon this little stool,
Come, little Mary, sit:

'And, my dear playmate, tell me why
In dismal black you're drest?
Why does the tear stand in your eye?
With sobs why heaves your breast?

'When we're in grief, it gives relief
Our sorrows to impart;
When you've told why, my dear, you cry,
'Twill ease your little heart.'

'O, it is trouble very bad
Which causes me to weep;
All last night long we were so sad,
Not one of us could sleep.

'Beyond the seas my father went,
'Twas very long ago;
And he last week a letter sent
(I told you so, you know)

'That he was safe in Portsmouth bay,
And we should see him soon,
Either the latter end of May,
Or by the first of June.

'The end of May was yesterday,
We all expected him;
And in our best clothes we were dressed,
Susan, and I, and Jim.

'O how my poor dear mother smiled,
And clapped her hands for joy;
She said to me, 'Come here, my child,
And Susan, and my boy.

''Come all, and let us think,' said she,
'What we can do to please
Your father, for to-day will he
Come home from off the seas.

''That you have won, my dear young son,
A prize at school, we'll tell,
Because you can, my little man,
In writing all excel:

''And you have made a poem, nearly
All of your own invention:

Will not your father love you dearly
When this to him I mention?

''Your sister Mary, she can say
Your poetry by heart;
And to repeat your verses may
Be little Mary's part.

''Susan, for you, I'll say you do
Your needlework with care,
And stitch so true the wristbands new
Dear father's soon to wear!'

''O hark!' said James; 'I hear one speak;
'Tis like a seaman's voice.'-
Our mother gave a joyful shriek;
How did we all rejoice!

''My husband's come!' 'My father's here!'
But O, alas, it was not so;
It was not as we said:
A stranger seaman did appear,
On his rough cheek there stood a tear,
For he brought to us a tale of woe,-
Our father dear was dead.'

Charles Lamb

The Fairy

Said Ann to Matilda, 'I wish that we knew
If what we've been reading of fairies be true.
Do you think that the poet himself had a sight of
The fairies he here does so prettily write of?
O what a sweet sight if he really had seen
The graceful Titania, the Fairy-land Queen!
If I had such dreams, I would sleep a whole year;
I would not wish to wake while a fairy was near.-
Now I'll fancy that I in my sleep have been seeing
A fine little delicate lady-like being,
Whose steps and whose motions so light were and airy,
I knew at one glance that she must be a fairy.
Her eyes they were blue, and her fine curling hair
Of the lightest of browns, her complexion more fair
Than I e'er saw a woman's; and then for her height,
I verily think that she measured not quite
Two feet, yet so justly proportioned withal,
I was almost persuaded to think she was tall.
Her voice was the little thin note of a sprite-
There-d'ye think I have made out a fairy aright?
You'll confess, I believe, I've not done it amiss.'
'Pardon me,' said Matilda, 'I find in all this
Fine description, you've only your young sister Mary
Been taking a copy of here for a fairy.'

Charles Lamb

The First Leaf Of Spring

WRITTEN ON THE FIRST LEAF OF A LADY'S ALBUM.

Thou fragile, filmy, gossamery thing,
First leaf of spring!
At every lightest breath that quakest,
And with a zephyr shakest;
Scarce stout enough to hold thy slender form together
In calmest halcyon weather:
Next sister to the web that spiders weave,
Poor flutterers to deceive
Into their treacherous silken bed:
O! how art thou sustained, how nourishëd!
All trivial as thou art,
Without dispute,
Thou play'st a mighty part;
And art the herald to a throng
Of buds, blooms, fruit,
That shall thy cracking branches sway,
While birds on every spray
Shall pay the copious fruitage with a sylvan song.
So 'tis with thee, whoe'er on thee shall look,
First leaf of this beginning modest book.
Slender thou art, God knowest,
And little grace bestowest,
But in thy train shall follow after,
Wit, wisdom, seriousness, in hand with laughter;
Provoking jests, restraining soberness,
In their appropriate dress;
And I shall joy to be outdone
By those who brighter trophies won,
Without a grief,
That I thy slender promise have begun,
First leaf.

1832.

Charles Lamb

The First Tooth

SISTER.
Through the house what busy joy,
Just because the infant boy
Has a tiny tooth to show.
I have got a double row,
All as white, and all as small;
Yet no one cares for mine at all.
He can say but half a word,
Yet that single sound's preferred
To all the words that I can say
In the longest summer day.
He cannot walk, yet if he put
With mimic motion out his foot,
As if he thought he were advancing,
It's prized more than my best dancing.

BROTHER.
Sister, I know, you jesting are,
Yet O! of jealousy beware.
If the smallest seed should be
In your mind of jealousy,
It will spring, and it will shoot,
Till it bear the baneful fruit.
I remember you, my dear,
Young as is this infant here.
There was not a tooth of those
Your pretty even ivory rows,
But as anxiously was watched,
Till it burst its shell new hatched,
As if it a Phoenix were,
Or some other wonder rare.
So when you began to walk-
So when you began to talk-
As now, the same encomiums past.
'Tis not fitting this should last
Longer than our infant days;
A child is fed with milk and praise.

Charles Lamb

The Force Of Habit

A little child, who had desired
To go and see the Park guns fired,
Was taken by his maid that way
Upon the next rejoicing day.
Soon as the unexpected stroke
Upon his tender organs broke,
Confused and stunned at the report,
He to her arms fled for support,
And begged to be conveyed at once
Out of the noise of those great guns,
Those naughty guns, whose only sound
Would kill (he said) without a wound:
So much of horror and offence
The shock had given his infant sense.

Yet this was he in after days
Who filled the world with martial praise,
When from the English quarter-deck
His steady courage swayed the wreck
Of hostile fleets, disturbed no more
By all that vast conflicting roar,
That sky and sea did seem to tear,
When vessels whole blew up in air,
Than at the smallest breath that heaves,
When Zephyr hardly stirs the leaves.

Charles Lamb

The Godlike

In one great man we view with odds
A parallel to all the gods.
Great Jove, that shook heaven with his brow,
Could never match his princely bow.
In him a Bacchus we behold:
Like Bacchus, too, he ne'er grows old.
Like Phoebus next, a flaming lover;
And then he's Mercury-all over.
A Vulcan, for domestic strife,
He lamely lives without his wife.
And sure-unless our wits be dull-
Minerva-like, when moon was full,
He issued from paternal skull.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

The Great Grandfather

My father's grandfather lives still,
His age is fourscore years and ten;
He looks a monument of time,
The agedest of aged men.

Though years lie on him like a load,
A happier man you will not see
Than he, whenever he can get
His great grandchildren on his knee.

When we our parents have displeased,
He stands between us as a screen;
By him our good deeds in the sun,
Our bad ones in the shade are seen.

His love's a line that's long drawn out,
Yet lasteth firm unto the end;
His heart is oak, yet unto us
It like the gentlest reed can bend.

A fighting soldier he has been-
Yet by his manners you would guess,
That he his whole long life had spent
In scenes of country quietness.

His talk is all of things long past,
For modern facts no pleasure yield-
Of the famed year of forty-five,
Of William, and Culloden's field.

The deeds of this eventful age,
Which princes from their thrones have hurled,
Can no more interest wake in him
Than stories of another world.

When I his length of days revolve,
How like a strong tree he hath stood,
It brings into my mind almost
Those patriarchs old before the flood.

Charles Lamb

The Journey From School And To School

O what a joyous joyous day
Is that on which we come
At the recess from school away,
Each lad to his own home!

What though the coach is crammëd full,
The weather very warm;
Think you a boy of us is dull,
Or feels the slightest harm?

The dust and sun is life and fun;
The hot and sultry weather
A higher zest gives every breast,
Thus jumbled all together.

Sometimes we laugh aloud, aloud,
Sometimes huzzah, huzzah.
Who is so buoyant, free, and proud
As we home travellers are?

But sad, but sad is every lad
That day on which we come,
That last last day on which away
We all come from our home.

The coach too full is found to be;
Why is it crammëd thus?
Now every one can plainly see
There's not half room for us.

Soon we exclaim, O shame, O shame,
This hot and sultry weather,
Who but our master is to blame
Who packed us thus together!

Now dust and sun does every one
Most terribly annoy;
Complaints begun, soon every one
Elbows his neighbour boy.

Not now the joyous laugh goes round,
We shout not now huzzah;
A sadder group may not be found
Than we returning are.

Charles Lamb

The Lame Brother

My parents sleep both in one grave;
My only friend's a brother.
The dearest things upon the earth
We are to one another.

A fine stout boy I knew him once,
With active form and limb;
Whene'er he leaped, or jumped, or ran,
O I was proud of him!

He leaped too far, he got a hurt,
He now does limping go.-
When I think on his active days,
My heart is full of woe.

He leans on me, when we to school
Do every morning walk;
I cheer him on his weary way,
He loves to hear my talk:

The theme of which is mostly this,
What things he once could do.
He listens pleased-then sadly says,
'Sister, I lean on you.'

Then I reply, 'Indeed you're not
Scarce any weight at all.-
And let us now still younger years
To memory recall.

'Led by your little elder hand,
I learned to walk alone;
Careful you used to be of me,
My little brother John.

'How often, when my young feet tired,
You've carried me a mile!-
And still together we can sit,
And rest a little while.

'For our kind master never minds,
If we're the very last;
He bids us never tire ourselves
With walking on too fast.'

Charles Lamb

The Magpie's Nest, Or A Lesson Of Docility

A FABLE

When the arts in their infancy were,
In a fable of old 'tis exprest,
A wise magpie constructed that rare
Little house for young birds, called a nest.

This was talked of the whole country round,
You might hear it on every bough sung,
'Now no longer upon the rough ground
Will fond mothers brood over their young.

'For the magpie with exquisite skill
Has invented a moss-covered cell,
Within which a whole family will
In the utmost security dwell.'

To her mate did each female bird say,
'Let us fly to the magpie, my dear;
If she will but teach us the way,
A nest we will build us up here.

'It's a thing that's close arched over head,
With a hole made to creep out and in;
We, my bird, might make just such a bed,
If we only knew how to begin.'

To the magpie soon every bird went,
And in modest terms made their request,
That she would be pleased to consent
To teach them to build up a nest.

She replied, 'I will show you the way,
So observe every thing that I do.
First two sticks cross each other I lay'-
'To be sure,' said the crow; 'why, I knew

'It must be begun with two sticks,
And I thought that they crossëd should be.'
Said the pie, 'Then some straw and moss mix,
In the way you now see done by me.'

'O yes, certainly,' said the jackdaw,
'That must follow of course, I have thought;
Though I never before building saw,
I guessed that without being taught.'

'More moss, straw, and feathers, I place,
In this manner,' continued the pie.
'Yes, no doubt, madam, that is the case;
Though no builder myself, even I,'

Said the starling, 'conjectured 'twas so;
It must of necessity follow:
For more moss, straw, and feathers, I know,
It requires, to be soft, round, and hollow.'

Whatever she taught them beside,
In his turn every bird of them said,
Though the nest-making art he ne'er tried,
He had just such a thought in his head.

Still the pie went on showing her art,
Till a nest she had built up half way;
She no more of her skill would impart,
But in anger went fluttering away.

And this speech in their hearing she made,
As she perched o'er their heads on a tree,
'If ye all were well skilled in my trade,
Pray, why came ye to learn it of me?'-

When a scholar is willing to learn,
He with silent submission should hear.
Too late they their folly discern;
The effect to this day does appear:

For whenever a pie's nest you see,
Her charming warm canopy view,
All birds' nests but hers seem to be
A magpie's nest just cut in two.

Charles Lamb

The Men And Women, And The Monkeys

A FABLE

When beasts by words their meanings could declare,
Some well-dressed men and women did repair
To gaze upon two monkeys at a fair:

And one who was the spokesman in the place
Said, in their countenance you might plainly trace
The likeness of a withered old man's face.

His observation none impeached or blamed,
But every man and woman when 'twas named
Drew in the head, or slunk away ashamed.

One monkey, who had more pride than the other,
His infinite chagrin could scarcely smother;
But Pug the wiser said unto his brother:

'The slights and coolness of this human nation
Should give a sensible ape no mortification;
'Tis thus they always serve a poor relation.'

Charles Lamb

The Mimic Harlequin

'I'll make believe, and fancy something strange:
I will suppose I have the power to change
And make all things unlike to what they were,
To jump through windows and fly through the air,
And quite confound all places and all times,
Like harlequins we see in pantomimes.
These thread-papers my wooden sword must be,
Nothing more like one I at present see.
And now all round this drawing-room I'll range,
And every thing I look at I will change.
Here's Mopsa, our old cat, shall be a bird;
To a Poll parrot she is now transferred.
Here's mamma's work-bag, now I will engage
To whisk this little bag into a cage;
And now, my pretty parrot, get you in it,
Another change I'll show you in a minute.'

'O fie, you naughty child, what have you done?
There never was so mischievous a son.
You've put the cat among my work, and torn
A fine laced cap that I but once have worn.'

Charles Lamb

The New-Born Infant

Whether beneath sweet beds of roses,
As foolish little Ann supposes,
The spirit of a babe reposes
Before it to the body come;
Or, as philosophy more wise
Thinks, it descendeth from the skies,-
We know the babe's now in the room

And that is all which is quite clear
Even to philosophy, my dear.
The God that made us can alone
Reveal from whence a spirit's brought
Into young life, to light, and thought;
And this the wisest man must own.

We'll now talk of the babe's surprise,
When first he opens his new eyes,
And first receives delicious food.
Before the age of six or seven,
To mortal children is not given
Much reason; or I think he would

(And very naturally) wonder
What happy star he was born under,
That he should be the only care
Of the dear sweet-food-giving lady,
Who fondly calls him her own baby,
Her darling hope, her infant heir.

Charles Lamb

The Offer

'Tell me, would you rather be
Changed by a fairy to the fine
Young orphan heiress Geraldine,
Or still be Emily?

'Consider, ere you answer me,
How many blessings are procured
By riches, and how much endured
By chilling poverty.'

After a pause, said Emily:
'In the words orphan heiress I
Find many a solid reason why
I would not changëd be.

'What though I live in poverty,
And have of sisters eight-so many,
That few indulgencies, if any,
Fall to the share of me:

'Think you that for wealth I'd be
Of even the least of them bereft,
Or lose my parent, and be left
An orphaned Emily?

'Still should I be Emily,
Although I looked like Geraldine;
I feel within this heart of mine
No change could workëd be.'

Charles Lamb

The Old Familiar Faces

I HAVE had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days--
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies--
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a Love once, fairest among women:
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her--
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man:
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces--

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed--
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Charles Lamb

The Orange

The month was June, the day was hot,
And Philip had an orange got,
The fruit was fragrant, tempting, bright,
Refreshing to the smell and sight;
Not of that puny size which calls
Poor customers to common stalls,
But large and massy, full of juice,
As any Lima can produce.
The liquor would, if squeezëd out,
Have filled a tumbler-thereabout.

The happy boy, with greedy eyes,
Surveys and re-surveys his prize.
He turns it round, and longs to drain,
And with the juice his lips to stain,
His throat and lips were parched with heat;
The orange seemed to cry, Come eat,
He from his pocket draws a knife-
When in his thoughts there rose a strife,
Which folks experience when they wish
Yet scruple to begin a dish,
And by their hesitation own
It is too good to eat alone.
But appetite o'er indecision
Prevails, and Philip makes incision.

The melting fruit in quarters came,-
Just then there passëd by a dame,
One of the poorer sort she seemed,
As by her garb you would have deemed,-
Who in her toil-worn arms did hold
A sickly infant ten months old;
That from a fever, caught in spring,
Was slowly then recovering.
The child, attracted by the view
Of that fair orange, feebly threw
A languid look-perhaps the smell
Convinced it that there sure must dwell
A corresponding sweetness there,
Where lodged a scent so good and rare-
Perhaps the smell the fruit did give
Felt healing and restorative-
For never had the child been graced
To know such dainties by their taste.

When Philip saw the infant crave,
He straightway to the mother gave
His quartered orange; nor would stay
To hear her thanks, but tripped away.

Then to the next clear spring he ran
To quench his drought, a happy man!

Charles Lamb

The Peach

Mamma gave us a single peach,
She shared it among seven;
Now you may think that unto each
But a small piece was given.

Yet though each share was very small,
We owned when it was eaten,
Being so little for us all
Did its fine flavour heighten.

The tear was in our parent's eye,
It seemed quite out of season;
When we asked wherefore she did cry,
She thus explained the reason:-

'The cause, my children, I may say,
Was joy, and not dejection;
The peach, which made you all so gay,
Gave rise to this reflection:

'It's many a mother's lot to share,
Seven hungry children viewing,
A morsel of the coarsest fare,
As I this peach was doing.'

Charles Lamb

The Rainbow

After the tempest in the sky
How sweet yon rainbow to the eye!
Come, my Matilda, now while some
Few drops of rain are yet to come,
In this honeysuckle bower
Safely sheltered from the shower,
We may count the colours o'er.-
Seven there are, there are no more;
Each in each so finely blended,
Where they begin, or where are ended,
The finest eye can scarcely see.
A fixed thing it seems to be;
But, while we speak, see how it glides
Away, and now observe it hides
Half of its perfect arch-now we
Scarce any part of it can see.
What is colour? If I were
A natural philosopher,
I would tell you what does make
This meteor every colour take:
But an unlearned eye may view
Nature's rare sights, and love them too.
Whenever I a rainbow see,
Each precious tint is dear to me;
For every colour find I there,
Which flowers, which fields, which ladies wear:
My favourite green, the grass's hue,
And the fine deep violet-blue,
And the pretty pale blue-bell,
And the rose I love so well,
All the wondrous variations
Of the tulips, pinks, carnations,
This woodbine here both flower and leaf.
'Tis a truth that's past belief,
That every flower and every tree,
And every living thing we see,
Every face which we espy,
Every cheek and every eye,
In all their tints, in every shade,
Are from the rainbow's colours made.

Charles Lamb

The Reaper's Child

If you go to the field where the reapers now bind
The sheaves of ripe corn, there a fine little lass,
Only three months of age, by the hedge-row you'll find,
Left alone by its mother upon the low grass.

While the mother is reaping, the infant is sleeping;
Not the basket that holds the provision is less
By the hard-working reaper, than this little sleeper,
Regarded, till hunger does on the babe press.

Then it opens its eyes, and it utters loud cries,
Which its hard-working mother afar off will hear;
She comes at its calling, she quiets its squalling,
And feeds it, and leaves it again without fear.

When you were as young as this field-nursëd daughter,
You were fed in the house, and brought up on the knee;
So tenderly watched, thy fond mother thought her
Whole time well bestowed in nursing of thee.

Charles Lamb

The Reproof

Mamma heard me with scorn and pride
A wretched beggar-boy deride.
'Do you not know,' said I, 'how mean
It is to be thus begging seen?
If for a week I were not fed,
I'm sure I would not beg my bread.'
And then away she saw me stalk
With a most self-important walk.
But meeting her upon the stairs,
All these my consequential airs
Were changed to an entreating look.
'Give me,' said I, 'the pocket-book,
Mamma, you promised I should have.'
The pocket-book to me she gave;
After reproof and counsel sage
She bade me write in the first page
This naughty action all in rhyme;
No food to have until the time,
In writing fair and neatly worded,
The unfeeling fact I had recorded.
Slow I compose, and slow I write;
And now I feel keen hunger bite.
My mother's pardon I entreat,
And beg she'll give me food to eat.
Dry bread would be received with joy
By her repentant beggar-boy.

Charles Lamb

The Ride

Lately an equipage I overtook,
And helped to lift it o'er a narrow brook.
No horse it had except one boy, who drew
His sister out in it the fields to view.
O happy town-bred girl, in fine chaise going
For the first time to see the green grass growing.
This was the end and purport of the ride
I learned, as walking slowly by their side
I heard their conversation. Often she-
'Brother, is this the country that I see?'
The bricks were smoking, and the ground was broke,
There were no signs of verdure when she spoke.
He, as the well-informed delight in chiding
The ignorant, these questions still deriding,
To his good judgment modestly she yields;
Till, brick-kilns past, they reached the open fields.
Then, as with rapturous wonder round she gazes
On the green grass, the buttercups, and daisies,
'This is the country sure enough,' she cries;
'Is't not a charming place?' The boy replies,
'We'll go no further.' 'No,' says she, 'no need;
'No finer place than this can be indeed.'
I left them gathering flowers, the happiest pair
That ever London sent to breathe the fine fresh air.

Charles Lamb

The Rook And The Sparrows

A little boy with crumbs of bread
Many a hungry sparrow fed.
It was a child of little sense,
Who this kind bounty did dispense;
For suddenly it was withdrawn,
And all the birds were left forlorn,
In a hard time of frost and snow,
Not knowing where for food to go.
He would no longer give them bread,
Because he had observed (he said)
That sometimes to the window came
A great black bird, a rook by name,
And took away a small bird's share.
So foolish Henry did not care
What became of the great rook,
That from the little sparrows took,
Now and then, as 'twere by stealth,
A part of their abundant wealth;
Nor ever more would feed his sparrows.
Thus ignorance a kind heart narrows.
I wish I had been there, I would
Have told the child, rooks live by food
In the same way that sparrows do.
I also would have told him too,
Birds act by instinct, and ne'er can
Attain the rectitude of man.
Nay that even, when distress
Does on poor human nature press,
We need not be too strict in seeing
The failings of a fellow being.

Charles Lamb

The Sister's Expostulation On The Brother's Learning Latin

Shut these odious books up, brother;
They have made you quite another
Thing from what you used to be:
Once you liked to play with me,
Now you leave me all alone,
And are so conceited grown
With your Latin, you'll scarce look
Upon any English book.
We had used on winter eves
To con over Shakespeare's leaves,
Or on Milton's harder sense
Exercise our diligence-
And you would explain with ease
The obscurer passages,
Find me out the prettiest places,
The poetic turns, and graces,
Which, alas! now you are gone,
I must puzzle out alone,
And oft miss the meaning quite,
Wanting you to set me right.
All this comes since you've been under
Your new master. I much wonder
What great charm it is you see
In those words, musa, musæ;
Or in what they do excel
Our word, song. It sounds as well
To my fancy as the other.
Now believe me, dearest brother,
I would give my finest frock,
And my cabinet, and stock
Of new playthings, every toy,
I would give them all with joy
Could I you returning see
Back to English and to me.

Charles Lamb

The Sparrow And The Hen

A sparrow, when sparrows like parrots could speak,
Addressed an old hen who could talk like a jay:
Said he, 'It's unjust that we sparrows must seek
Our food, when your family's fed every day.

'Were you like the peacock, that elegant bird,
The sight of whose plumage her master may please,
I then should not wonder that you are preferred
To the yard, where in affluence you live at your ease.

'I affect no great style, am not costly in feathers,
A good honest brown I find most to my liking,
It always looks neat, and is fit for all weathers,
But I think your grey mixture is not very striking.

'We know that the bird from the isles of Canary
Is fed, foreign airs to sing in a fine cage;
But your note from a cackle so seldom does vary,
The fancy of man it cannot much engage.

'My chirp to a song sure approaches much nearer,
Nay the nightingale tells me I sing not amiss;
If voice were in question I ought to be dearer;
But the owl he assures me there's nothing in this.

'Nor is it your proneness to domestication,
For he dwells in man's barn, and I build in man's thatch,
As we say to each other-but, to our vexation,
O'er your safety alone man keeps diligent watch.'

'Have you e'er learned to read?' said the hen to the sparrow,
'No, madam,' he answered, 'I can't say I have.'
'Then that is the reason your sight is so narrow,'
The old hen replied, with a look very grave.

'Mrs. Glasse in a Treatise-I wish you could read-
Our importance has shown, and has proved to us why
Man shields us and feeds us: of us he has need
Even before we are born, even after we die.'

Charles Lamb

The Spartan Boy

When I the memory repeat
Of the heroic actions great,
Which, in contempt of pain and death,
Were done by men who drew their breath
In ages past, I find no deed
That can in fortitude exceed
The noble boy, in Sparta bred,
Who in the temple ministered.

By the sacrifice he stands,
The lighted incense in his hands.
Through the smoking censer's lid
Dropped a burning coal, which slid
Into his sleeve, and passëd in
Between the folds even to the skin.
Dire was the pain which then he proved;
But not for this his sleeve he moved,
Or would the scorching ember shake
Out from the folds, lest it should make
Any confusion, or excite
Disturbance at the sacred rite.
But close he kept the burning coal,
Till it eat itself a hole
In his flesh. The standers by
Saw no sign, and heard no cry,
Of his pangs had no discerning,
Till they smelled the flesh a-burning.
All this he did in noble scorn,
And for he was a Spartan born.

Young student, who this story readest,
And with the same thy thoughts now feedest,
Thy weaker nerves might thee forbid
To do the thing the Spartan did;
Thy feebler heart could not sustain
Such dire extremity of pain.
But in this story thou mayst see,
What may useful prove to thee.
By his example thou wilt find,
That to the ingenuous mind
Shame can greater anguish bring
Than the body's suffering;
That pain is not the worst of ills,
Not when it the body kills;
That in fair religion's cause,
For thy country, or the laws,
When occasion due shall offer,
'Tis reproachful not to suffer.
If thou shouldst a soldier be,
And a wound should trouble thee,

If without the soldier's fame
Thou to chance shouldst owe a maim,
Do not for a little pain
On thy manhood bring a stain;
But to keep thy spirits whole,
Think on the Spartan and the coal.

Charles Lamb

The Text

One Sunday eve a grave old man,
Who had not been at church, did say,
'Eliza, tell me, if you can,
What text our Doctor took to-day?'

She hung her head, she blushed for shame,
One single word she did not know,
Nor verse nor chapter she could name,
Her silent blushes told him so.

Again said he, 'My little maid,
What in the sermon did you hear?
Come tell me that, for that may aid
Me to find out the text, my dear.'

A tear stole down each blushing cheek,
She wished she better had attended;
She sobbing said, when she could speak,
She heard not till 'twas almost ended.

'Ah! little heedless one, why what
Could you be thinking on? 'tis clear
Some foolish fancies must have got
Possession of your head, my dear.

'What thoughts were they, Eliza, tell,
Nor seek from me the truth to smother.'-
'O I remember very well,
I whispered something to my brother.

'I said, 'Be friends with me, dear Will;'
We quarrelled, sir, at the church door,-
Though he cried, 'Hush, don't speak, be still,'
Yet I repeated these words o'er

'Seven or eight times, I have no doubt.
But here comes William, and if he
The good things he has heard about
Forgets too, sir, the fault's in me.'

'No, sir,' said William, 'though perplext
And much disturbed by my sister,
I in this matter of the text,
I thank my memory, can assist her.

'I have, and pride myself on having,
A more retentive head than she.'-
Then gracefully his right hand waving,
He with no little vanity

Recited gospel, chapter, verse-
I should be loth to spoil in metre

All the good words he did rehearse,
As spoken by our Lord to Peter.

But surely never words from heaven
Of peace and love more full descended;
That we should seventy times seven
Forgive our brother that offended.

In every point of view he placed it,
As he the Doctor's self had been,
With emphasis and action graced it:
But from his self-conceit 'twas seen

Who had brought home the words, and who had
A little on the meaning thought;
Eliza now the old man knew had
Learned that which William never caught.

Without impeaching William's merit,
His head but served him for the letter;
Hers missed the words, but kept the spirit;
Her memory to her heart was debtor.

Charles Lamb

The Three Friends

Three young girls in friendship met;
Mary, Martha, Margaret.
Margaret was tall and fair,
Martha shorter by a hair;
If the first excelled in feature,
The other's grace and ease were greater;
Mary, though to rival loth,
In their best gifts equalled both.
They a due proportion kept;
Martha mourned if Margaret wept;
Margaret joyed when any good
She of Martha understood;
And in sympathy for either
Mary was outdone by neither.
Thus far, for a happy space,
All three ran an even race,
A most constant friendship proving,
Equally beloved and loving;
All their wishes, joys, the same;
Sisters only not in name.

Fortune upon each one smiled,
As upon a favourite child;
Well to do and well to see
Were the parents of all three;
Till on Martha's father crosses
Brought a flood of worldly losses,
And his fortunes rich and great
Changed at once to low estate;
Under which o'erwhelming blow
Martha's mother was laid low;
She a hapless orphan left,
Of maternal care bereft,
Trouble following trouble fast,
Lay in a sick bed at last.

In the depth of her affliction
Martha now received conviction,
That a true and faithful friend
Can the surest comfort lend.
Night and day, with friendship tried,
Ever constant by her side
Was her gentle Mary found,
With a love that knew no bound;
And the solace she imparted
Saved her dying broken-hearted.

In this scene of earthly things
There's no good unmixëd springs.

That which had to Martha proved
A sweet consolation, moved
Different feelings of regret
In the mind of Margaret.
She, whose love was not less dear,
Nor affection less sincere
To her friend, was, by occasion
Of more distant habitation,
Fewer visits forced to pay her,
When no other cause did stay her;
And her Mary living nearer,
Margaret began to fear her,
Lest her visits day by day
Martha's heart should steal away.
That whole heart she ill could spare her
Where till now she'd been a sharer.
From this cause with grief she pined,
Till at length her health declined.
All her cheerful spirits flew,
Fast as Martha gathered new;
And her sickness waxëd sore,
Just when Martha felt no more.

Mary, who had quick suspicion
Of her altered friend's condition,
Seeing Martha's convalescence
Less demanded now her presence,
With a goodness built on reason,
Changed her measures with the season;
Turned her steps from Martha's door,
Went where she was wanted more;
All her care and thoughts were set
Now to tend on Margaret.
Mary living 'twixt the two,
From her home could oftener go,
Either of her friends to see,
Than they could together be.

Truth explained is to suspicion
Evermore the best physician.
Soon her visits had the effect;
All that Margaret did suspect,
From her fancy vanished clean;
She was soon what she had been,
And the colour she did lack
To her faded cheek came back.
Wounds which love had made her feel,
Love alone had power to heal.

Martha, who the frequent visit
Now had lost, and sore did miss it,
With impatience waxed cross,
Counted Margaret's gain her loss:
All that Mary did confer
On her friend, thought due to her.
In her girlish bosom rise
Little foolish jealousies,
Which into such rancour wrought,
She one day for Margaret sought;
Finding her by chance alone,
She began, with reasons shown,
To insinuate a fear
Whether Mary was sincere;
Wished that Margaret would take heed
Whence her actions did proceed;
For herself, she'd long been minded
Not with outsides to be blinded;
All that pity and compassion,
She believed was affectation;
In her heart she doubted whether
Mary cared a pin for either;
She could keep whole weeks at distance,
And not know of their existence,
While all things remained the same;
But, when some misfortune came,
Then she made a great parade
Of her sympathy and aid,-
Not that she did really grieve,
It was only make-believe;
And she cared for nothing, so
She might her fine feelings show,
And get credit, on her part,
For a soft and tender heart.

With such speeches, smoothly made,
She found methods to persuade
Margaret (who, being sore
From the doubts she felt before,
Was prepared for mistrust)
To believe her reasons just;
Quite destroyed that comfort glad,
Which in Mary late she had;
Made her, in experience' spite,
Think her friend a hypocrite,
And resolve, with cruel scoff,
To renounce and cast her off.

See how good turns are rewarded!
She of both is now discarded,

Who to both had been so late
Their support in low estate,
All their comfort, and their stay-
Now of both is cast away.
But the league her presence cherished,
Losing its best prop, soon perished;
She, that was a link to either,
To keep them and it together,
Being gone, the two (no wonder)
That were left, soon fell asunder;
Some civilities were kept,
But the heart of friendship slept;
Love with hollow forms was fed,
But the life of love lay dead:
A cold intercourse they held
After Mary was expelled.

Two long years did intervene
Since they'd either of them seen,
Or, by letter, any word
Of their old companion heard,
When, upon a day, once walking,
Of indifferent matters talking,
They a female figure met.-
Martha said to Margaret,
'That young maid in face does carry
A resemblance strong of Mary.'
Margaret, at nearer sight,
Owned her observation right;
But they did not far proceed
Ere they knew 'twas she indeed.
She-but, ah! how changed they view her
From that person which they knew her!
Her fine face disease had scarred,
And its matchless beauty marred:
But enough was left to trace
Mary's sweetness-Mary's grace.
When her eye did first behold them
How they blushed!-but when she told them
How on a sick bed she lay
Months, while they had kept away,
And had no inquiries made
If she were alive or dead;-
How, for want of a true friend,
She was brought near to her end,
And was like so to have died,
With no friend at her bedside;-
How the constant irritation,
Caused by fruitless expectation
Of their coming, had extended
The illness, when she might have mended;

Then, O then, how did reflection
Come on them with recollection!
All that she had done for them,
How it did their fault condemn!

But sweet Mary, still the same,
Kindly eased them of their shame;
Spoke to them with accents bland,
Took them friendly by the hand;
Bound them both with promise fast
Not to speak of troubles past;
Made them on the spot declare
A new league of friendship there;
Which, without a word of strife,
Lasted thenceforth long as life.
Martha now and Margaret
Strove who most should pay the debt
Which they owed her, nor did vary
Ever after from their Mary.

Charles Lamb

The Triumph Of The Whale

(Written in the last reign.)

Io! Pæan! Io! sing
To the finny people's King.
Not a mightier whale than this
In the vast Atlantic is;
Not a fatter fish than he
Flounders round the polar sea.
See his blubbers-at his gills
What a world of drink he swills,
From his trunk, as from a spout,
Which next moment he pours out.
Such his person-next declare,
Muse, who his companions are.-
Every fish of generous kind
Scuds aside, or slinks behind;
But about his presence keep
All the Monsters of the Deep;
Mermaids, with their tails and singing.
His delighted fancy stinging;
Crooked Dolphins, they surround him,
Dog-like Seals, they fawn around him.
Following hard, the progress mark,
Of the intolerant salt sea shark.
For his solace and relief,
Flat fish are his courtiers chief.
Last and lowest in his train,
Ink-fish (libellers of the main)
Their black liquor shed in spite:
(Such on earth the things that write.)
In his stomach, some do say,
No good thing can ever stay.
Had it been the fortune of it,
To have swallowed that old Prophet,
Three days there he'd not have dwell'd,
But in one have been expell'd.
Hapless mariners are they,
Who beguil'd (as seamen say),
Deeming him some rock or island,
Footing sure, safe spot, and dry land,
Anchor in his scaly rind;
Soon the difference they find;
Sudden plumb, he sinks beneath them;
Does to ruthless seas bequeath them.

Name or title what has he?
Is he Regent of the Sea?
From this difficulty free us,
Buffon, Banks, or sage Linnæus.
With his wondrous attributes

Say what appellation suits.
By his bulk, and by his size,
By his oily qualities,
This (or else my eyesight fails),
This should be the Prince of Whales.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

The Two Bees

But a few words could William say,
And those few could not speak plain,
Yet thought he was a man one day;
Never saw I boy so vain.

From what could vanity proceed
In such a little lisping lad?
Or was it vanity indeed?
Or was he only very glad?

For he without his maid may go
To the heath with elder boys,
And pluck ripe berries where they grow:
Well may William then rejoice.

Be careful of your little charge;
Elder boys, let him not rove;
The heath is wide, the heath is large,
From your sight he must not move.

But rove he did: they had not been
One short hour the heath upon,
When he was nowhere to be seen;
'Where,' said they, 'is William gone?'

Mind not the elder boys' distress;
Let them run, and let them fly.
Their own neglect and giddiness
They are justly suffering by.

William his little basket filled
With his berries ripe and red;
Then, naughty boy, two bees he killed,
Under foot he stamped them dead.

William had coursed them o'er the heath,
After them his steps did wander;
When he was nearly out of breath,
The last bee his foot was under.

A cruel triumph which did not
Last but for a moment's space,
For now he finds that he has got
Out of sight of every face.

What are the berries now to him?
What the bees which he has slain?
Fear now possesses every limb,
He cannot trace his steps again.

The poor bees William had affrighted
In more terror did not haste
Than he from bush to bush, benighted
And alone amid the waste.

Late in the night the child was found:
He who these two bees had crushed
Was lying on the cold damp ground,
Sleep had then his sorrows hushed.

A fever followed from the fright,
And from sleeping in the dew;
He many a day and many a night
Suffered ere he better grew.

His aching limbs while sick he lay
Made him learn the crushed bees' pain;
Oft would he to his mother say,
'I ne'er will kill a bee again.'

Charles Lamb

The Two Boys

I saw a boy with eager eye
Open a book upon a stall,
And read as he'd devour it all:
Which when the stall-man did espy,
Soon to the boy I heard him call,
'You, sir, you never buy a book,
Therefore in one you shall not look.'
The boy passed slowly on, and with a sigh
He wished he never had been taught to read,
Then of the old churl's books he should have had no need.

Of sufferings the poor have many,
Which never can the rich annoy.
I soon perceived another boy
Who looked as if he'd not had any
Food for that day at least, enjoy
The sight of cold meat in a tavern-larder.
This boy's case, thought I, is surely harder,
Thus hungry longing, thus without a penny,
Beholding choice of dainty dressed meat:
No wonder if he wish he ne'er had learned to eat.

Charles Lamb

The Unbeloved

Not a woman, child, or man in
All this isle, that loves thee, C--ng.
Fools, whom gentle manners sway,
May incline to C--gh,
Princes, who old ladies love,
Of the Doctor may approve,
Chancery lads do not abhor
Their chatty, childish Chancellor.
In Liverpool some virtues strike,
And little Van's beneath dislike.
Tho, if I were to be dead for 't,
I could never love thee, H--t:
(Every man must have his way)
Other grey adulterers may.
But thou unamiable object,-
Dear to neither prince, nor subject;-
Veriest, meanest scab, for pelf
Fastning on the skin of Guelph,
Thou, thou must, surely, loathe thyself.

R. et R.

Charles Lamb

The Young Letter Writer

Dear Sir, Dear Madam, or Dear Friend,
With ease are written at the top;
When those two happy words are penned,
A youthful writer oft will stop,

And bite his pen, and lift his eyes
As if he thinks to find in air
The wished-for following words, or tries
To fix his thoughts by fixëd stare.

But haply all in vain-the next
Two words may be so long before
They'll come, the writer, sore perplext,
Gives in despair the matter o'er;

And when maturer age he sees
With ready pen so swift inditing,
With envy he beholds the ease
Of long-accustomed letter-writing.

Courage, young friend; the time may be
When you attain maturer age,
Some young as you are now may see
You with like ease glide down a page.

Even then when you, to years a debtor,
In varied phrase your meanings wrap,
The welcomest words in all your letter
May be those two kind words at top.

Charles Lamb

Thoughtless Cruelty

There, Robert, you have killed that fly,
And should you thousand ages try
The life you've taken to supply,
You could not do it.

You surely must have been devoid
Of thought and sense, to have destroyed
A thing which no way you annoyed-
You'll one day rue it.

'Twas but a fly perhaps you'll say,
That's born in April, dies in May;
That does but just learn to display
His wings one minute,

And in the next is vanished quite:
A bird devours it in his flight,
Or come a cold blast in the night,
There's no breath in it.

The bird but seeks his proper food;
And Providence, whose power endued
That fly with life, when it thinks good,
May justly take it.

But you have no excuses for't;
A life by Nature made so short,
Less reason is that you for sport
Should shorter make it.

A fly a little thing you rate,
But, Robert, do not estimate
A creature's pain by small or great;
The greatest being

Can have but fibres, nerves, and flesh,
And these the smallest ones possess,
Although their frame and structure less
Escape our seeing.

Charles Lamb

Time Spent In Dress

In many a lecture, many a book,
You all have heard, you all have read,
That time is precious. Of its use
Much has been written, much been said.

The accomplishments which gladden life,
As music, drawing, dancing, are
Encroachers on our precious time;
Their praise or dispraise I forbear.

They should be practised or forborne,
As parents wish, or friends desire:
What rests alone in their own will
Is all I of the young require.

There's not a more productive source
Of waste of time to the young mind
Than dress; as it regards our hours
My view of it is now confined.

Without some calculation, youth
May live to age and never guess,
That no one study they pursue
Takes half the time they give to dress.

Write in your memorandum-book
The time you at your toilette spend;
Then every moment which you pass,
Talking of dress with a young friend:

And ever when your silent thoughts
Have on this subject been intent,
Set down as nearly as you can
How long on dress your thoughts were bent.

If faithfully you should perform
This task, 'twould teach you to repair
Lost hours, by giving unto dress
Not more of time than its due share.

Charles Lamb

To A Young Lady, On Being Too Fond Of Music

Why is your mind thus all day long
Upon your music set;
Till reason's swallowed in a song,
Or idle canzonet?

I grant you, Melesinda, when
Your instrument was new,
I was well pleased to see you then
Its charms assiduous woo.

The rudiments of any art
Or mastery that we try,
Are only on the learner's part
Got by hard industry.

But you are past your first essays;
Whene'er you play, your touch,
Skilful and light, ensures you praise:
All beyond that's too much.

Music's sweet uses are, to smooth
Each rough and angry passion;
To elevate at once, and soothe:
A heavenly recreation.

But we misconstrue, and defeat
The end of any good;
When what should be our casual treat,
We make our constant food.

While, to the exclusion of the rest,
This single art you ply,
Your nobler studies are supprest,
Your books neglected lie.

Could you in what you so affect
The utmost summit reach;
Beyond what fondest friends expect,
Or skilfullest masters teach:

The skill you learned would not repay
The time and pains it cost,
Youth's precious season thrown away,
And reading-leisure lost.

A benefit to books we owe
Music can ne'er dispense;
The one does only sound bestow,
The other gives us sense.

Charles Lamb

To A River In Which A Child Was Drowned

Smiling river, smiling river,
On thy bosom sun-beams play;
Though they're fleeting, and retreating,
Thou hast more deceit than they.

In thy channel, in thy channel,
Choak'd with ooze and grav'lly stones,
Deep immersed, and unhearsed,
Lies young Edward's corse: his bones

Ever whitening, ever whitening,
As thy waves against them dash;
What thy torrent, in the current,
Swallow'd, now it helps to wash.

As if senseless, as if senseless
Things had feeling in this case;
What so blindly, and unkindly,
It destroy'd, it now does grace.

Charles Lamb

To Charles Lloyd

A stranger, and alone, I past those scenes
We past so late together; and my heart
Felt something like desertion, when I look'd
Around me, and the well-known voice of friend
Was absent, and the cordial look was there
No more to smile on me. I thought on Lloyd;
All he had been to me. And now I go
Again to mingle with a world impure,
With men who make a mock of holy things,
Mistaken, and of man's best hope think scorn.
The world does much to warp the heart of man,
And I may sometimes join its ideot laugh.
Of this I now complain not. Deal with me,
Omniscient Father! as thou judgest best,
And in thy season tender thou my heart.
I pray not for myself; I pray for him,
Whose soul is sore perplex'd: shine thou on him,
Father of Lights! and in the difficult paths
Make plain his way before him. His own thoughts
May he not think, his own ends not pursue;
So shall he best perform thy will on earth.
Greatest and Best, thy will be ever ours!

August 1797

Charles Lamb

To Charles Lloyd: An Unexpected Visitor

Alone, obscure, without a friend,
A cheerless, solitary thing,
Why seeks, my Lloyd, the stranger out?
What offering can the stranger bring

Of social scenes, home-bred delights,
That him in aught compensate may
For Stowey's pleasant winter nights,
For loves and friendships far away?

In brief oblivion to forego
Friends, such as thine, so justly dear,
And be awhile with me content
To stay, a kindly loiterer, here:

For this a gleam of random joy
Hath flush'd my unaccustom'd cheek;
And, with an o'er-charg'd bursting heart,
I feel the thanks I cannot speak.

Oh! sweet are all the Muses' lays,
And sweet the charm of matin bird;
'Twas long since these estranged ears
The sweeter voice of friend had heard.

The voice hath spoke: the pleasant sounds
In memory's ear in after time
Shall live, to sometimes rouse a tear,
And sometimes prompt an honest rhyme.

For, when the transient charm is fled,
And when the little week is o'er,
To cheerless, friendless, solitude
When I return, as heretofore,

Long, long, within my aching heart
The grateful sense shall cherish'd be;
I'll think less meanly of myself,
That Lloyd will sometimes think on me.

Charles Lamb

To Margaret W------

Margaret, in happy hour,
Christen'd from that humble flower
Which we a daisy call!
May thy pretty name-sake be
In all things a type of thee,
And image thee in all.

Like it you show a modest face,
An unpretending native grace; —
The tulip, and the pink,
The china and the damask rose,
And every flaunting flower that blows,
In the comparing shrink.

Of lowly fields you think no scorn;
Yet gayest gardens would adorn,
And grace, wherever set.
Home-seated in your lonely bower,
Or wedded — a transplanted flower —
I bless you, Margaret!

Charles Lamb

To T.L.H.

A CHILD

Model of thy parent dear,
Serious infant worth a fear:
In thy unfaultering visage well
Picturing forth the son of Tell,
When on his forehead, firm and good,
Motionless mark, the apple stood;
Guileless traitor, rebel mild,
Convict unconscious, culprit-child!
Gates that close with iron roar
Have been to thee thy nursery door;
Chains that chink in cheerless cells
Have been thy rattles and thy bells;
Walls contrived for giant sin
Have hemmed thy faultless weakness in;
Near thy sinless bed black Guilt
Her discordant house hath built,
And filled it with her monstrous brood-
Sights, by thee not understood-
Sights of fear, and of distress,
That pass a harmless infant's guess!

But the clouds, that overcast
Thy young morning, may not last.
Soon shall arrive the rescuing hour,
That yields thee up to Nature's power.
Nature, that so late doth greet thee,
Shall in o'er-flowing measure meet thee.
She shall recompense with cost
For every lesson thou hast lost.
Then wandering up thy sire's lov'd hill,
Thou shalt take thy airy fill
Of health and pastime. Birds shall sing
For thy delight each May morning.
'Mid new-yean'd lambkins thou shalt play,
Hardly less a lamb than they.
Then thy prison's lengthened bound
Shall be the horizon skirting round.
And, while thou fill'st thy lap with flowers,
To make amends for wintery hours,
The breeze, the sunshine, and the place,
Shall from thy tender brow efface
Each vestige of untimely care,
That sour restraint had graven there;
And on thy every look impress
A more excelling childishness.

So shall be thy days beguil'd,

Thornton Hunt, my favourite child.

Charles Lamb

To The Poet Cowper, On His Recovery From An Indisposition

WRITTEN SOME TIME BACK.

Cowper, I thank my God that thou art healed.
Thine was the sorest malady of all,
And I am sad to think that it should light
Upon the worthy head; but thou art healed,
And thou art yet, we trust, the destined man,
Born to re-animate the lyre, whose chords
Have slumbered, and have idle lain so long;
To the immortal sounding of whose strings
Did Milton frame the stately-paced verse;
Among whose wires with lighter finger playing
Our elder bard, Spenser, a gentler name,
The lady Muses' dearest darling child,
Enticëd forth the deftest tunes yet heard
In hall or bower; taking the delicate ear
Of the brave Sidney, and the Maiden Queen.
Thou, then, take up the mighty epic strain,
Cowper, of England's bards the wisest and the best!

Charles Lamb

Wasps In A Garden

The wall-trees are laden with fruit;
The grape, and the plum, and the pear,
The peach and the nectarine, to suit
Every taste, in abundance are there.

Yet all are not welcome to taste
These kind bounties of Nature; for one
From her open-spread table must haste
To make room for a more favoured son:

As that wasp will soon sadly perceive,
Who has feasted awhile on a plum;
And, his thirst thinking now to relieve,
For a sweet liquid draught he is come.

He peeps in the narrow-mouthed glass,
Which depends from a branch of the tree;
He ventures to creep down,-alas!
To be drowned in that delicate sea.

'Ah say,' my dear friend, 'is it right
These glass bottles are hung upon trees?
Midst a scene of inviting delight
Should we find such mementos as these?'

'From such sights,' said my friend, 'we may draw
A lesson, for look at that bee;
Compared with the wasp which you saw,
He will teach us what we ought to be.

'He in safety industriously plies
His sweet honest work all the day,
Then home with his earnings he flies;
Nor in thieving his time wastes away.'-

'O hush, nor with fables deceive,'
I replied, 'which, though pretty, can ne'er
Make me cease for that insect to grieve,
Who in agony still does appear.

'If a simile ever you need,
You are welcome to make a wasp do;
But you ne'er should mix fiction indeed
With things that are serious and true.'

Charles Lamb

Weeding

As busy Aurelia, 'twixt work and 'twixt play,
Was labouring industriously hard
To cull the vile weeds from the flowerets away,
Which grew in her father's court-yard;

In her juvenile anger, wherever she found,
She plucked, and she pulled, and she tore;
The poor passive sufferers bestrewed all the ground;
Not a weed of them all she forbore.

At length 'twas her chance on some nettles to light
(Things, till then, she had scarcely heard named);
The vulgar intruders called forth all her spite;
In a transport of rage she exclaimed,

'Shall briars so unsightly and worthless as those
Their great sprawling leaves thus presume
To mix with the pink, the jonquil, and the rose,
And take up a flower's sweet room?'

On the odious offenders enragëd she flew;
But she presently found to her cost
A tingling unlooked for, a pain that was new,
And rage was in agony lost.

To her father she hastily fled for relief,
And told him her pain and her smart;
With kindly caresses he soothëd her grief,
Then smiling he took the weed's part.

'The world, my Aurelia, this garden of ours
Resembles: too apt we're to deem
In the world's larger garden ourselves as the flowers,
And the poor but as weeds to esteem.

'But them if we rate, or with rudeness repel,
Though some will be passive enough,
From others who 're more independent 'tis well
If we meet not a stinging rebuff.'

Charles Lamb

What Is Fancy?

SISTER.
I am to write three lines, and you
Three others that will rhyme.
There-now I've done my task.

BROTHER.
Three stupid lines as e'er I knew.
When you've the pen next time,
Some question of me ask.

SISTER.
Then tell me, brother, and pray mind,
Brother, you tell me true:
What sort of thing is fancy?

BROTHER.
By all that I can ever find,
'Tis something that is very new,
And what no dunces can see.

SISTER.
That is not half the way to tell
What fancy is about;
So pray now tell me more.

BROTHER.
Sister, I think 'twere quite as well
That you should find it out;
So think the matter o'er.

SISTER.
It's what comes in our heads when we
Play at 'Let's-make-believe,'
And when we play at 'Guessing.'

BROTHER.
And I have heard it said to be
A talent often makes us grieve,
And sometimes proves a blessing.

Charles Lamb

Which Is The Favourite?

Brothers and sisters I have many:
Though I know there is not any
Of them but I love, yet I
Will just name them all; and try
If there be one a little more
Loved by me than all the rest.
Yes; I do think, that I love best
My brother Henry, because he
Has always been most fond of me.
Yet, to be sure, there's Isabel;
I think I love her quite as well.
And, I assure you, little Ann,
No brother nor no sister can
Be more dear to me than she.
Only I must say, Emily,
Being the eldest, it's right her
To all the rest I should prefer.
Yet after all I've said, suppose
My greatest favourite should be Rose.
No, John and Paul are both more dear
To me than Rose, that's always here,
While they are half the year at school;
And yet that neither is no rule.
I've named them all, there's only seven;
I find my love to all so even,
To every sister, every brother,
I love not one more than another.

Charles Lamb

Why Not Do It, Sir, Today?

'Why so I will, you noisy bird,
This very day I'll advertise you,
Perhaps some busy ones may prize you.
A fine-tongued parrot as was ever heard,
I'll word it thus-set forth all charms about you,
And say no family should be without you.'

Thus far a gentleman addressed a bird,
Then to his friend: 'An old procrastinator,
Sir, I am: do you wonder that I hate her?
Though she but seven words can say,
Twenty and twenty times a day
She interferes with all my dreams,
My projects, plans, and airy schemes,
Mocking my foible to my sorrow:
I'll advertise this bird to-morrow.'

To this the bird seven words did say:
'Why not do it, sir, to-day?'

Charles Lamb

Written A Year After The Events

Alas! how am I chang'd! Where be the tears,
The sobs, and forc'd suspensions of the breath,
And all the dull desertions of the heart,
With which I hung o'er my dead mother's corse?
Where be the blest subsidings of the storm
Within, the sweet resignedness of hope
Drawn heavenward, and strength of filial love,
In which I bow'd me to my father's will?
My God, and my Redeemer! keep not thou
My soul in brute and sensual thanklessness
Seal'd up; oblivious ever of that dear grace,
And health restor'd to my long-loved friend,
Long-lov'd, and worthy known. Thou didst not leave
Her soul in death! O leave not now, my Lord,
Thy servants in far worse, in spiritual death!
And darkness blacker than those feared shadows
Of the valley all must tread. Lend us thy balms,
Thou dear Physician of the sin-sick soul,
And heal our cleansed bosoms of the wounds
With which the world has pierc'd us thro' and thro'.
Give us new flesh, new birth. Elect of heav'n
May we become; in thine election sure
Contain'd, and to one purpose stedfast drawn,
Our soul's salvation!

Thou, and I, dear friend,
With filial recognition sweet, shall know
One day the face of our dear mother in heaven;
And her remember'd looks of love shall greet
With looks of answering love; her placid smiles
Meet with a smile as placid, and her hand
With drops of fondness wet, nor fear repulse.
Be witness for me, Lord, I do not ask
Those days of vanity to return again
(Nor fitting me to ask, nor thee to give).
Vain loves and wanderings with a fair-hair'd maid,
Child of the dust as I am, who so long
My captive heart steep'd in idolatry
And creature-loves. Forgive me, O my Maker!
If in a mood of grief I sin almost
In sometimes brooding on the days long past,
And from the grave of time wishing them back,
Days of a mother's fondness to her child,
Her little one.

O where be now those sports,
And infant play-games? where the joyous troops
Of children, and the haunts I did so love?
O my companions, O ye loved names
Of friend or playmate dear; gone are ye now;

Gone diverse ways; to honour and credit some,
And some, I fear, to ignominy and shame!
I only am left, with unavailing grief
To mourn one parent dead, and see one live
Of all life's joys bereft and desolate:
Am left with a few friends, and one, above
The rest, found faithful in a length of years,
Contented as I may, to bear me on
To the not unpeaceful evening of a day
Made black by morning storms!

September 1797

Charles Lamb

Written Christmas Day 1797

I am a widow'd thing, now thou art gone!
Now thou art gone, my own familiar friend,
Companion, sister, help-mate, counsellor!
Alas! that honour'd mind, whose sweet reproof
And meekest wisdom in times past have smooth'd
The unfilial harshness of my foolish speech,
And made me loving to my parents old,
(Why is this so, ah God! why is this so?)
That honour'd mind become a fearful blank,
Her senses lock'd up, and herself kept out
From human sight or converse, while so many
Of the foolish sort are left to roam at large,
Doing all acts of folly, and sin, and shame?
Thy paths are mystery!

Yet I will not think,
Sweet friend, but we shall one day meet, and live
In quietness, and die so, fearing God.
Or if not, and these false suggestions be
A fit of the weak nature, loth to part
With what it lov'd so long, and held so dear;
If thou art to be taken, and I left
(More sinning, yet unpunish'd, save in thee),
It is the will of God, and we are clay
In the potter's hands; and, at the worst, are made
From absolute nothing, vessels of disgrace,
Till, his most righteous purpose wrought in us,
Our purified spirits find their perfect rest.

Charles Lamb

Written In The First Leaf Of A Child's Memorandum-Book

My neat and pretty book, when I thy small lines see
They seem for any use to be unfit for me.
My writing, all misshaped, uneven as my mind,
Within this narrow space can hardly be confined.
Yet I will strive to make my hand less awkward look;
I would not willingly disgrace thee, my neat book.
The finest pens I'll use, and wondrous pains I'll take,
And I these perfect lines my monitors will make.
And every day I will set down in order due
How that day wasted is; and should there be a few
At the year's end that show more goodly to the sight,
If haply here I find some days not wasted quite,
If a small portion of them I have passed aright,
Then shall I think the year not wholly was misspent,
And that my Diary has been by some good angel sent.

Charles Lamb

Written On The Day Of My Aunt's Funeral

Thou too art dead, ---! very kind
Hast thou been to me in my childish days,
Thou best good creature. I have not forgot
How thou didst love thy Charles, when he was yet
A prating school-boy: I have not forgot
The busy joy on that important day,
When, child-like, the poor wanderer was content
To leave the bosom of parental love,
His childhood's play-place, and his early home,
For the rude fosterings of a stranger's hand,
Hard uncouth tasks, and school-boy's scanty fare.
How did thine eye peruse him round and round,
And hardly know him in his yellow coats[1],
Red leathern belt, and gown of russet blue!
Farewell, good aunt!
Go thou, and occupy the same grave-bed
Where the dead mother lies.
Oh my dear mother, oh thou dear dead saint!
Where's now that placid face, where oft hath sat
A mother's smile, to think her son should thrive
In this bad world, when she was dead and gone;
And where a tear hath sat (take shame, O son!)
When that same child has prov'd himself unkind.
One parent yet is left-a wretched thing,
A sad survivor of his buried wife,
A palsy-smitten, childish, old, old man,
A semblance most forlorn of what he was,
A merry cheerful man. A merrier man,
A man more apt to frame matter for mirth,
Mad jokes, and anticks for a Christmas eve;
Making life social, and the laggard time
To move on nimbly, never yet did cheer
The little circle of domestic friends.

February 1797

Charles Lamb

Written Soon After The Preceding Poem

Thou should'st have longer liv'd, and to the grave
Have peacefully gone down in full old age!
Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.
We might have sat, as we have often done,
By our fireside, and talk'd whole nights away,
Old times, old friends, and old events recalling;
With many a circumstance, of trivial note,
To memory dear, and of importance grown.
How shall we tell them in a stranger's ear?
A wayward son ofttimes was I to thee;
And yet, in all our little bickerings,
Domestic jars, there was, I know not what,
Of tender feeling, that were ill exchang'd
For this world's chilling friendships, and their smiles
Familiar, whom the heart calls strangers still.
A heavy lot hath he, most wretched man!
Who lives the last of all his family.
He looks around him, and his eye discerns
The face of the stranger, and his heart is sick.
Man of the world, what canst thou do for him?
Wealth is a burden, which he could not bear;
Mirth a strange crime, the which he dares not act;
And wine no cordial, but a bitter cup.
For wounds like his Christ is the only cure,
And gospel promises are his by right,
For these were given to the poor in heart.
Go, preach thou to him of a world to come,
Where friends shall meet, and know each other's face.
Say less than this, and say it to the winds.

October 1797

Charles Lamb