

William Cowper. The Task: Book I.¹

Argument of the First Book.

Historical deduction of seats, from the stool to the Sofa. A schoolboy's ramble. A walk in the country. The scene described. Rural sounds as well as sights delightful. Another walk. Mistake concerning the charms of solitude corrected. Colonnades commended. Alcove, and the view from it. The Wilderness. The Grove. The Thresher. The necessity and the benefits of exercise. The works of nature superior to and in some instances inimitable by art. The wearisomeness of what is commonly called a life of pleasure. Change of scene sometimes expedient. A common described, and the character of crazy Kate introduced upon it. Gipsies. The blessings of civilized life. That state most favourable to virtue. The South Sea islanders compassionated, but chiefly Omai. His present state of mind supposed. Civilized life friendly to virtue, but not great cities. Great cities, and London in particular, allowed their due praise, but censured. *Fête champêtre*. The book concludes with a reflection on the fatal effects of dissipation and effeminacy upon our public measures.

Book I: The Sofa.²

1 I sing the Sofa. I who lately sang
2 Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touch'd with awe
3 The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,
4 Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,
5 Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;
6 The theme though humble, yet august and proud
7 The occasion,---for the Fair commands the song.

8 Time was when clothing, sumptuous or for use,
9 Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.
10 As yet black breeches were not, sattin smooth,
11 Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile.
12 The hardy chief upon the rugged rock
13 Wash'd by the sea, or on the gravelly bank
14 Thrown up by wintry torrents roaring loud,
15 Fearless of wrong, reposed his weary strength.
16 Those barbarous ages past, succeeded next
17 The birthday of invention, weak at first,
18 Dull in design, and clumsy to perform.
19 Joint-stools were then created; on three legs
20 Upborne they stood,---three legs upholding firm
21 A massy slab, in fashion square or round.
22 On such a stool immortal Alfred sat,
23 And sway'd the sceptre of his infant realms;

¹ William Cowper. The works of William Cowper: comprising his poems, correspondence and translations, with a life of the author, edited by Robert Southey, London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1836-37.

² Note particularly from line 218, 'The task of new discoveries falls on me....'
and then the section 288-299, 'Now roves the eye ...'

24 And such in ancient halls and mansions drear
25 May still be seen, but perforated sore
26 And drill'd in holes the solid oak is found,
27 By worms voracious eating through and through.

28 At length a generation more refined
29 Improved the simple plan, made three legs four,
30 Gave them a twisted form vermicular,
31 And o'er the seat with plenteous wadding stuff'd
32 Induced a splendid cover green and blue,
33 Yellow and red, of tapestry richly wrought
34 And woven close, or needle-work sublime.
35 There might ye see the piony spread wide,
36 The full-blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,
37 Lap-dog and lambkin with black staring eyes,
38 And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.

39 Now came the cane from India, smooth and bright
40 With Nature's varnish; sever'd into stripes
41 That interlaced each other, these supplied
42 Of texture firm a lattice-work, that braced
43 The new machine, and it became a chair.
44 But restless was the chair; the back erect
45 Distress'd the weary loins that felt no ease;
46 The slippery seat betray'd the sliding part
47 That press'd it, and the feet hung dangling down,
48 Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.
49 These for the rich: the rest, whom fate had placed
50 In modest mediocrity, content
51 With base materials, sat on well-tann'd hides
52 Obdurate and unyielding, glassy smooth,
53 With here and there a tuft of crimson yarn,
54 Or scarlet crewel in the cushion fixt:
55 If cushion might be call'd, what harder seem'd
56 Than the firm oak of which the frame was form'd.
57 No want of timber then was felt or fear'd
58 In Albion's happy isle. The lumber stood
59 Ponderous, and fixt by its own massy weight.
60 But elbows still were wanting; these, some say,
61 An Alderman of Cripplegate contrived,
62 And some ascribe the invention to a priest
63 Burly and big and studious of his ease.
64 But rude at first, and not with easy slope
65 Receding wide, they press'd against the ribs,
66 And bruised the side, and elevated high
67 Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears.
68 Long time elapsed or ere our rugged sires
69 Complain'd, though incommodiously pent in,
70 And ill at ease behind. The ladies first
71 'Gan murmur, as became the softer sex.
72 Ingenious fancy, never better pleased

73 Than when employ'd to accommodate the fair,
74 Heard the sweet moan with pity, and devised
75 The soft settee; one elbow at each end,
76 And in the midst an elbow, it received
77 United yet divided, twain at once.
78 So sit two Kings of Brentford on one throne;
79 And so two citizens who take the air
80 Close pack'd and smiling in a chaise and one.
81 But relaxation of the languid frame
82 By soft recumbency of outstretch'd limbs,
83 Was bliss reserved for happier days;---so slow
84 The growth of what is excellent, so hard
85 To attain perfection in this nether world.
86 Thus first necessity invented stools,
87 Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,
88 And luxury the accomplished Sofa last.

89 The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick
90 Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he
91 Who quits the coach-box at the midnight hour
92 To sleep within the carriage more secure,
93 His legs depending at the open door.
94 Sweet sleep enjoys the Curate in his desk,
95 The tedious Rector drawling o'er his head,
96 And sweet the Clerk below: but neither sleep
97 Of lazy nurse, who snores the sick man dead,
98 Nor his who quits the box at midnight hour
99 To slumber in the carriage more secure,
100 Nor sleep enjoy'd by Curate in his desk,
101 Nor yet the dozings of the Clerk are sweet,
102 Compared with the repose the Sofa yields.

103 Oh may I live exempted (while I live
104 Guiltless of pamper'd appetite obscene,)
105 From pangs arthritic that infest the toe
106 Of libertine excess. The Sofa suits
107 The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,
108 Though on a Sofa, may I never feel:
109 For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
110 Of grassy swarth close cropt by nibbling sheep,
111 And skirted thick with intertexture firm
112 Of thorny boughs; have loved the rural walk
113 O'er hills, through valleys, and by river's brink,
114 E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds
115 To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames.
116 And still remember, nor without regret
117 Of hours that sorrow since has much endear'd,
118 How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,
119 Still hungering pennyless and far from home,
120 I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,
121 Or blushing crabs, or berries that emboss

122 The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.
123 Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite
124 Disdains not, nor the palate undepraved
125 By culinary arts unsavoury deems.
126 No Sofa then awaited my return,
127 Nor Sofa then I needed. Youth repairs
128 His wasted spirits quickly, by long toil
129 Incurring short fatigue; and though our years
130 As life declines, speed rapidly away,
131 And not a year but pilfers as he goes
132 Some youthful grace that age would gladly keep,
133 A tooth or auburn lock, and by degrees
134 Their length and colour from the locks they spare;
135 The elastic spring of an unwearied foot
136 That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,
137 That play of lungs inhaling and again
138 Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes
139 Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,
140 Mine have not pilfer'd yet; nor yet impair'd
141 My relish of fair prospect; scenes that soothed
142 Or charm'd me young, no longer young, I find
143 Still soothing and of power to charm me still.
144 And witness, dear companion of my walks,
145 Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
146 Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love
147 Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth
148 And well-tried virtues could alone inspire,---
149 Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
150 Thou knowest my praise of nature most sincere,
151 And that my raptures are not conjured up
152 To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
153 But genuine, and art partner of them all.
154 How oft upon yon eminence our pace
155 Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne
156 The ruffling wind scarce conscious that it blew,
157 While admiration feeding at the eye,
158 And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.
159 Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd
160 The distant plough slow-moving, and beside
161 His labouring team, that swerved not from the track,
162 The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!
163 Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
164 Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,
165 Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
166 Delighted. There, fast rooted in his bank
167 Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms
168 That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
169 While far beyond and overthwart the stream
170 That as with molten glass inlays the vale,
171 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
172 Displaying on its varied side the grace

173 Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
174 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
175 Just undulates upon the listening ear;
176 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.
177 Scenes must be beautiful which daily view'd
178 Please daily, and whose novelty survives
179 Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.
180 Praise justly due to those that I describe.

181 Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds
182 Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
183 The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds
184 That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
185 Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
186 The dash of ocean on his winding shore,
187 And lull the spirit while they fill the mind,
188 Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
189 And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
190 Nor less composure waits upon the roar
191 Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
192 Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip
193 Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall
194 Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
195 In matted grass, that with a livelier green
196 Betrays the secret of their silent course.
197 Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
198 But animated Nature sweeter still
199 To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
200 Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
201 The livelong night: nor these alone whose notes
202 Nice-finger'd art must emulate in vain,
203 But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
204 In still repeated circles, screaming loud,
205 The jay, the pie, and even the boding owl
206 That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.
207 Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
208 Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
209 And only there, please highly for their sake.

210 Peace to the artist, whose ingenious thought
211 Devised the weather-house, that useful toy!
212 Fearless of humid air and gathering rains
213 Forth steps the man, an emblem of myself;
214 More delicate his timorous mate retires.
215 When Winter soaks the fields, and female feet
216 Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,
217 Or ford the rivulets, are best at home,
218 The task of new discoveries falls on me.
219 At such a season and with such a charge
220 Once went I forth, and found, till then unknown,
221 A cottage, whither oft we since repair:

222 'Tis perch'd upon the green-hill top, but close
223 Environ'd with a ring of branching elms
224 That overhang the thatch, itself unseen,
225 Peeps at the vale below; so thick beset
226 With foliage of such dark redundant growth,
227 I call'd the low-roof'd lodge the *peasant's nest* .
228 And hidden as it is, and far remote
229 From such unpleasing sounds as haunt the ear
230 In village or in town, the bay of curs
231 Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,
232 And infants clamorous whether pleased or pain'd,
233 Oft have I wish'd the peaceful covert mine.
234 Here, I have said, at least I should possess
235 The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge
236 The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure.
237 Vain thought! the dweller in that still retreat
238 Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.
239 Its elevated site forbids the wretch
240 To drink sweet waters of the crystal well;
241 He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,
242 And heavy-laden brings his beverage home,
243 Far-fetch'd and little worth; nor seldom waits,
244 Dependent on the baker's punctual call,
245 To hear his creaking panniers at the door,
246 Angry and sad, and his last crust consumed.
247 So farewell envy of the *peasant's nest* .
248 If solitude make scant the means of life,
249 Society for me! Thou seeming sweet,
250 Be still a pleasing object in my view,
251 My visit still, but never mine abode.

252 Not distant far, a length of colonnade
253 Invites us: Monument of ancient taste,
254 Now scorn'd, but worthy of a better fate.
255 Our fathers knew the value of a screen
256 From sultry suns, and in their shaded walks
257 And long-protracted bowers, enjoy'd at noon
258 The gloom and coolness of declining day.
259 We bear our shades about us; self-deprived
260 Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread,
261 And range an Indian waste without a tree.
262 Thanks to Benevolus; he spares me yet
263 These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines,
264 And though himself so polish'd, still relieves
265 The obsolete prolixity of shade.

266 Descending now (but cautious, lest too fast,)
267 A sudden steep, upon a rustic bridge
268 We pass a gulf in which the willows dip
269 Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.
270 Hence ancle-deep in moss and flowery thyme

271 We mount again, and feel at every step
272 Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,
273 Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.
274 He not unlike the great ones of mankind,
275 Disfigures earth, and plotting in the dark
276 Toils much to earn a monumental pile,
277 That may record the mischiefs he has done.

278 The summit gain'd, behold the proud alcove
279 That crowns it! yet not all its pride secures
280 The grand retreat from injuries impress'd
281 By rural carvers, who with knives deface
282 The panels, leaving an obscure rude name
283 In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.
284 So strong the zeal to immortalize himself
285 Beats in the breast of man, that even a few
286 Few transient years won from the abyss abhorr'd
287 Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,
288 And even to a clown. Now roves the eye,
289 And posted on this speculative height
290 Exults in its command. The sheep-fold here
291 Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.
292 At first, progressive as a stream, they seek
293 The middle field; but scatter'd by degrees
294 Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.
295 There, from the sun-burnt hay-field homeward creeps
296 The loaded wain, while lighten'd of its charge
297 The wain that meets it passes swiftly by,
298 The boorish driver leaning o'er his team
299 Vociferous, and impatient of delay.
300 Nor less attractive is the woodland scene,
301 Diversified with trees of every growth
302 Alike yet various. Here the grey smooth trunks
303 Of ash, or lime, or beech, distinctly shine,
304 Within the twilight of their distant shades;
305 There lost behind a rising ground, the wood
306 Seems sunk, and shorten'd to its topmost boughs.
307 No tree in all the grove but has its charms,
308 Though each its hue peculiar; paler some,
309 And of a wannish grey; the willow such
310 And poplar, that with silver lines his leaf,
311 And ash far-stretching his umbrageous arm;
312 Of deeper green the elm; and deeper still,
313 Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak.
314 Some glossy-leaved and shining in the sun,
315 The maple, and the beech of oily nuts
316 Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve
317 Diffusing odours: nor unnoted pass
318 The sycamore, capricious in attire,
319 Now green, now tawny, and ere autumn yet
320 Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.

321 O'er these, but far beyond, (a spacious map
322 Of hill and valley interposed between,)
323 The Ouse, dividing the well-water'd land,
324 Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,
325 As bashful, yet impatient to be seen.

326 Hence the declivity is sharp and short,
327 And such the re-ascent; between them weeps
328 A little Naiad her impoverish'd urn
329 All summer long, which winter fills again.
330 The folded gates would bar my progress now,
331 But that the Lord of this enclosed demesne,
332 Communicative of the good he owns,
333 Admits me to a share: the guiltless eye
334 Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.
335 Refreshing change! where now the blazing sun?
336 By short transition we have lost his glare,
337 And stepp'd at once into a cooler clime.
338 Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn
339 Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice
340 That yet a remnant of your race survives.
341 How airy and how light the graceful arch,
342 Yet awful as the consecrated roof
343 Reechoing pious anthems! while beneath
344 The chequer'd earth seems restless as a flood
345 Brush'd by the wind. So sportive is the light
346 Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,
347 Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,
348 And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves
349 Play wanton, every moment, every spot.

350 And now with nerves new-braced and spirits cheer'd
351 We tread the wilderness, whose well-roll'd walks
352 With curvature of slow and easy sweep,---
353 Deception innocent,---give ample space
354 To narrow bounds. The grove receives us next;
355 Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms
356 We may discern the thresher at his task.
357 Thump after thump, resounds the constant flail,
358 That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
359 Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff,
360 The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist
361 Of atoms sparkling in the noon-day beam.
362 Come hither, ye that press your beds of down
363 And sleep not,---see him sweating o'er his bread
364 Before he eats it.---'Tis the primal curse,
365 But soften'd into mercy; made the pledge
366 Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.

367 By ceaseless action, all that is subsists.
368 Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel

369 That nature rides upon, maintains her health,
 370 Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads
 371 An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.
 372 Its own revolency upholds the world.
 373 Winds from all quarters agitate the air,
 374 And fit the limpid element for use,
 375 Else noxious: oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams
 376 All feel the freshening impulse, and are cleansed
 377 By restless undulation. Even the oak
 378 Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm;
 379 He seems indeed indignant, and to feel
 380 The impression of the blast with proud disdain,
 381 Frowning as if in his unconscious arm
 382 He held the thunder. But the monarch owes
 383 His firm stability to what he scorns,
 384 More fixt below, the more disturb'd above.
 385 The law by which all creatures else are bound,
 386 Binds man the lord of all. Himself derives
 387 No mean advantage from a kindred cause,
 388 From strenuous toil his hours of sweetest ease.
 389 The sedentary stretch their lazy length
 390 When custom bids, but no refreshment find,
 391 For none they need: the languid eye, the cheek
 392 Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,
 393 And wither'd muscle, and the vapid soul,
 394 Reproach their owner with that love of rest
 395 To which he forfeits even the rest he loves.
 396 Not such the alert and active. Measure life
 397 By its true worth, the comforts it affords,
 398 And theirs alone seems worthy of the name.
 399 Good health, and its associate in the most,
 400 Good temper; spirits prompt to undertake,
 401 And not soon spent, though in an arduous task;
 402 The powers of fancy and strong thought are theirs;
 403 Even age itself seems privileged in them
 404 With clear exemption from its own defects.
 405 A sparkling eye beneath a wrinkled front
 406 The veteran shows, and gracing a grey beard
 407 With youthful smiles, descends towards the grave
 408 Sprightly, and old almost without decay.

409 Like a coy maiden, ease, when courted most,
 410 Farthest retires,---an idol, at whose shrine
 411 Who oftenest sacrifice are favour'd least.
 412 The love of Nature, and the scenes she draws
 413 Is Nature's dictate. Strange! there should be found
 414 Who self-imprison'd in their proud saloons,
 415 Renounce the odours of the open field
 416 For the unscented fictions of the loom;
 417 Who satisfied with only pencil'd scenes,
 418 Prefer to the performance of a God

419 The inferior wonders of an artist's hand.
420 Lovely indeed the mimic works of art,
421 But Nature's works far lovelier. I admire---
422 None more admires the painter's magic skill,
423 Who shows me that which I shall never see,
424 Conveys a distant country into mine,
425 And throws Italian light on English walls.
426 But imitative strokes can do no more
427 Than please the eye, sweet Nature every sense.
428 The air salubrious of her lofty hills,
429 The cheering fragrance of her dewy vales
430 And music of her woods,---no works of man
431 May rival these; these all bespeak a power
432 Peculiar, and exclusively her own.
433 Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast;
434 'Tis free to all,---'tis every day renew'd,
435 Who scorns it, starves deservedly at home.
436 He does not scorn it, who imprison'd long
437 In some unwholesome dungeon, and a prey
438 To sallow sickness, which the vapours dank
439 And clammy of his dark abode have bred,
440 Escapes at last to liberty and light.
441 His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue,
442 His eye relumines its extinguish'd fires,
443 He walks, he leaps, he runs,---is wing'd with joy,
444 And riots in the sweets of every breeze.
445 He does not scorn it, who has long endured
446 A fever's agonies, and fed on drugs.
447 Nor yet the mariner, his blood inflamed
448 With acrid salts; his very heart athirst
449 To gaze at Nature in her green array.
450 Upon the ship's tall side he stands, possess'd
451 With visions prompted by intense desire;
452 Fair fields appear below, such as he left
453 Far distant, such as he would die to find,---
454 He seeks them headlong, and is seen no more.

455 The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns;
456 The lowering eye, the petulance, the frown,
457 And sullen sadness that o'ershade, distort,
458 And mar the face of beauty, when no cause
459 For such immeasurable woe appears,
460 These Flora banishes, and gives the fair
461 Sweet smiles and bloom less transient than her own.
462 It is the constant revolution stale
463 And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,
464 That palls and satiates, and makes languid life
465 A pedler's pack, that bows the bearer down.
466 Health suffers, and the spirits ebb; the heart
467 Recoils from its own choice,---at the full feast
468 Is famish'd,---finds no music in the song,

469 No smartness in the jest, and wonders why.
470 Yet thousands still desire to journey on,
471 Though halt and weary of the path they tread.
472 The paralytic who can hold her cards
473 But cannot play them, borrows a friend's hand
474 To deal and shuffle, to divide and sort
475 Her mingled suits and sequences, and sits
476 Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad
477 And silent cypher, while her proxy plays.
478 Others are dragg'd into the crowded room
479 Between supporters; and once seated, sit
480 Through downright inability to rise,
481 Till the stout bearers lift the corpse again.
482 These speak a loud memento. Yet even these
483 Themselves love life, and cling to it, as he
484 That overhangs a torrent to a twig.
485 They love it, and yet loathe it; fear to die,
486 Yet scorn the purposes for which they live.
487 Then wherefore not renounce them? No---the dread,
488 The slavish dread of solitude that breeds
489 Reflection and remorse, the fear of shame,
490 And their inveterate habits, all forbid.

491 Whom call we gay? That honour has been long
492 The boast of mere pretenders to the name.
493 The innocent are gay;---the lark is gay
494 That dries his feathers saturate with dew
495 Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams
496 Of day-spring overshoot his humble nest.
497 The peasant too, a witness of his song,
498 Himself a songster, is as gay as he.
499 But save me from the gaiety of those
500 Whose head-aches nail them to a noonday bed;
501 And save me too from theirs whose haggard eyes
502 Flash desperation, and betray their pangs
503 For property stripp'd off by cruel chance;
504 From gaiety that fills the bones with pain,
505 The mouth with blasphemy, the heart with woe.
506 The earth was made so various, that the mind

507 Of desultory man, studious of change,
508 And pleased with novelty, might be indulged.
509 Prospects however lovely may be seen
510 Till half their beauties fade; the weary sight,
511 Too well acquainted with their smiles, slides off
512 Fastidious, seeking less familiar scenes.
513 Then snug inclosures in the shelter'd vale,
514 Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,
515 Delight us, happy to renounce a while,
516 Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,
517 That such short absence may endear it more.

518 Then forests, or the savage rock may please,
519 That hides the sea-mew in his hollow clefts
520 Above the reach of man: his hoary head
521 Conspicuous many a league, the mariner
522 Bound homeward, and in hope already there,
523 Greets with three cheers exulting. At his waist
524 A girdle of half-wither'd shrubs he shows,
525 And at his feet the baffled billows die.
526 The common overgrown with fern, and rough
527 With prickly goss, that shapeless and deform
528 And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom
529 And decks itself with ornaments of gold,
530 Yields no unpleasing ramble; there the turf
531 Smells fresh, and rich in odoriferous herbs
532 And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense
533 With luxury of unexpected sweets.

534 There often wanders one, whom better days
535 Saw better clad, in cloak of sattin trimm'd
536 With lace, and hat with splendid ribband bound.
537 A serving-maid was she, and fell in love
538 With one who left her, went to sea and died.
539 Her fancy follow'd him through foaming waves
540 To distant shores, and she would sit and weep
541 At what a sailor suffers; fancy too,
542 Delusive most where warmest wishes are,
543 Would oft anticipate his glad return,
544 And dream of transports she was not to know.
545 She heard the doleful tidings of his death,
546 And never smiled again. And now she roams
547 The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day,
548 And there, unless when charity forbids,
549 The livelong night. A tatter'd apron hides,
550 Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides a gown
551 More tatter'd still; and both but ill conceal
552 A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.
553 She begs an idle pin of all she meets,
554 And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,
555 Though press'd with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,
556 Though pinch'd with cold, asks never.---Kate is crazed.
557 I see a column of slow-rising smoke
558 O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild.
559 A vagabond and useless tribe there eat
560 Their miserable meal. A kettle slung
561 Between two poles upon a stick transverse,
562 Receives the morsel; flesh obscene of dog,
563 Or vermin, or at best, of cock purloin'd
564 From his accustom'd perch. Hard-faring race!
565 They pick their fuel out of every hedge,
566 Which kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquench'd
567 The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide

568 Their fluttering rags, and shows a tawny skin,
569 The vellum of the pedigree they claim.
570 Great skill have they in palmistry, and more
571 To conjure clean away the gold they touch,
572 Conveying worthless dross into its place.
573 Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.
574 Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
575 In human mould, should brutalize by choice
576 His nature, and though capable of arts
577 By which the world might profit and himself,
578 Self-banish'd from society, prefer
579 Such squalid sloth to honourable toil.
580 Yet even these, though feigning sickness oft
581 They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb
582 And vex their flesh with artificial sores,
583 Can change their whine into a mirthful note
584 When safe occasion offers, and with dance
585 And music of the bladder and the bag
586 Beguile their woes and make the woods resound.
587 Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy
588 The houseless rovers of the sylvan world;
589 And breathing wholesome air, and wandering much,
590 Need other physic none to heal the effects
591 Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold.

592 Blest he, though undistinguish'd from the crowd
593 By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure
594 Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside
595 His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn,
596 The manners and the arts of civil life.
597 His wants, indeed, are many; but supply
598 Is obvious; placed within the easy reach
599 Of temperate wishes and industrious hands.
600 Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil;
601 Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,
602 And terrible to sight, as when she springs,
603 (If e'er she spring spontaneous,) in remote
604 And barbarous climes, where violence prevails,
605 And strength is lord of all; but gentle, kind,
606 By culture tamed, by liberty refresh'd,
607 And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.
608 War and the chase engross the savage whole:
609 War follow'd for revenge, or to supplant
610 The envied tenants of some happier spot,
611 The chase for sustenance, precarious trust!
612 His hard condition with severe constraint
613 Binds all his faculties, forbids all growth
614 Of wisdom, proves a school in which he learns
615 Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate,
616 Mean self-attachment, and scarce aught beside.
617 Thus fare the shivering natives of the north,

618 And thus the rangers of the western world
619 Where it advances far into the deep,
620 Towards the Antarctic. Even the favour'd isles
621 So lately found, although the constant sun
622 Cheer all their seasons with a grateful smile,
623 Can boast but little virtue; and inert
624 Through plenty, lose in morals what they gain
625 In manners, victims of luxurious ease.
626 These therefore I can pity, placed remote
627 From all that science traces, art invents,
628 Or inspiration teaches; and inclosed
629 In boundless oceans never to be pass'd
630 By navigators uninform'd as they,
631 Or plough'd perhaps by British bark again.
632 But far beyond the rest, and with most cause,
633 Thee, gentle savage! whom no love of thee
634 Or thine, but curiosity perhaps,
635 Or else vain-glory, prompted us to draw
636 Forth from thy native bowers, to show thee here
637 With what superior skill we can abuse
638 The gifts of Providence, and squander life.
639 The dream is past. And thou hast found again
640 Thy cocoas and bananas, palms and yams,
641 And homestall thatch'd with leaves. But hast thou found
642 Their former charms? And having seen our state,
643 Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp
644 Of equipage, our gardens, and our sports,
645 And heard our music; are thy simple friends,
646 Thy simple fare, and all thy plain delights
647 As dear to thee as once? And have thy joys
648 Lost nothing by comparison with ours?
649 Rude as thou art (for we return'd thee rude
650 And ignorant, except of outward show,)
651 I cannot think thee yet so dull of heart
652 And spiritless, as never to regret
653 Sweets tasted here, and left as soon as known.
654 Methinks I see thee straying on the beach,
655 And asking of the surge that bathes thy foot
656 If ever it has wash'd our distant shore.
657 I see thee weep, and thine are honest tears,
658 A patriot's for his country. Thou art sad
659 At thought of her forlorn and abject state,
660 From which no power of thine can raise her up.
661 Thus fancy paints thee, and though apt to err,
662 Perhaps errs little, when she paints thee thus.
663 She tells me too, that duly every morn
664 Thou climb'st the mountain top, with eager eye
665 Exploring far and wide the watery waste
666 For sight of ship from England. Every speck
667 Seen in the dim horizon, turns thee pale
668 With conflict of contending hopes and fears.

669 But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,
670 And sends thee to thy cabin, well-prepared
671 To dream all night of what the day denied.
672 Alas! expect it not. We found no bait
673 To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,
674 Disinterested good, is not our trade.
675 We travel far 'tis true, but not for nought;
676 And must be bribed to compass earth again
677 By other hopes and richer fruits than yours.

678 But though true worth and virtue, in the mild
679 And genial soil of cultivated life
680 Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there,
681 Yet not in cities oft,---in proud and gay
682 And gain-devoted cities; thither flow,
683 As to a common and most noisome sewer,
684 The dregs and fæculence of every land.
685 In cities foul example on most minds
686 Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds
687 In gross and pamper'd cities sloth and lust,
688 And wantonness and gluttonous excess.
689 In cities, vice is hidden with most ease,
690 Or seen with least reproach; and virtue taught
691 By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there
692 Beyond the achievement of successful flight.
693 I do confess them nurseries of the arts,
694 In which they flourish most; where in the beams
695 Of warm encouragement, and in the eye
696 Of public note they reach their perfect size.
697 Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaim'd
698 The fairest capital of all the world,
699 By riot and incontinence the worst.
700 There touch'd by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes
701 A lucid mirror, in which nature sees
702 All her reflected features. Bacon there
703 Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
704 And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.
705 Nor does the chisel occupy alone
706 The powers of sculpture, but the style as much;
707 Each province of her art her equal care.
708 With nice incision of her guided steel
709 She ploughs a brazen field, and clothes a soil
710 So sterile with what charms soe'er she will,
711 The richest scenery and the loveliest forms.
712 Where finds philosophy her eagle eye
713 With which she gazes at yon burning disk
714 Undazzled, and detects and counts his spots?
715 In London. Where her implements exact
716 With which she calculates, computes and scans
717 All distance, motion, magnitude, and now
718 Measures an atom, and now girds a world?

719 In London. Where has commerce such a mart,
720 So rich, so throng'd, so drain'd, and so supplied
721 As London, opulent, enlarged, and still
722 Increasing London? Babylon of old
723 Not more the glory of the earth, than she
724 A more accomplish'd world's chief glory now.

725 She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two
726 That so much beauty would do well to purge;
727 And show this Queen of Cities, that so fair
728 May yet be foul, so witty, yet not wise.
729 It is not seemly, nor of good report
730 That she is slack in discipline,---more prompt
731 To avenge than to prevent the breach of law.
732 That she is rigid in denouncing death
733 On petty robbers, and indulges life
734 And liberty, and oft-times honour too
735 To peculators of the public gold.
736 That thieves at home must hang; but he that puts
737 Into his overgorged and bloated purse
738 The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.
739 Nor is it well, nor can it come to good,
740 That through profane and infidel contempt
741 Of holy writ, she has presumed to annul
742 And abrogate, as roundly as she may,
743 The total ordonance and will of God;
744 Advancing fashion to the post of truth,
745 And centering all authority in modes
746 And customs of her own, till sabbath rites
747 Have dwindled into unrespected forms,
748 And knees and hassocks are well-nigh divorced.

749 God made the country, and man made the town.
750 What wonder then, that health and virtue, gifts
751 That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
752 That life holds out to all, should most abound
753 And least be threatened in the fields and groves?
754 Possess ye therefore, ye who borne about
755 In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue
756 But that of idleness, and taste no scenes
757 But such as art contrives,---possess ye still
758 Your element; there only ye can shine,
759 There only minds like yours can do no harm.
760 Our groves were planted to console at noon
761 The pensive wanderer in their shades. At eve
762 The moon-beam sliding softly in between
763 The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,
764 Birds warbling all the music. We can spare
765 The splendour of your lamps, they but eclipse
766 Our softer satellite. Your songs confound
767 Our more harmonious notes. The thrush departs

768 Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.
769 There is a public mischief in your mirth,
770 It plagues your country. Folly such as yours
771 Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,
772 Has made, which enemies could ne'er have done,
773 Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,
774 A mutilated structure, soon to fall.