

P O E M S.

MY NATIVE VILLAGE.

Dear Native Village ; poor, yet dear to me,
Well pleas'd again thy smiling woods I see;
Thy hedge-rows green beside the shady lane,
That oft' have screen'd me from the sun or rain.
Now I again behold the straw-roof'd cot,
The pile of fagots and the garden plot ;
Again I see my happy childhood's home,
Still dear to me whatever change may come.
Here was the green whereon I've often play'd,
Or sat, and caps and whips of rushes made;

And the old gate on which we used to swing,
That old clap gate, a loved and valued thing;
How have I breathless ran to ope' thee wide,
If I by chance a coming horseman spied:
From one perhaps a penny we might gain,
Or promise of one when he came again.

Oh! years of innocence, how swift ye've sped;
Oh, days of happiness, for ever fled.
Here in this cot once lived an ancient dame,
Whose pastry through the village spread her fame:
How have I stood and look'd with longing eyes
When she display'd her prunes, her cakes, and pies.

Just down the road beside the bowling green
The weather-beaten sign post still is seen;
No artist's labour could the host afford,
But three hot horse-shoes branded on the board,
Here once a-year at what was call'd the fair,
Though horse was never bought nor cow sold there,
Here met the village youths on pleasure bent,
And the long-hoarded halfpence freely spent:

The stalls were doors placed on a barrel's head,
With cakes, and sweets, and penny whistles spread.
In the old parlour was the rustic ball,
Shone on by candles stuck against the wall;
And on the green was seen the crowded ring,
Where wrestlers tugg'd, each tried his man to fling;
And youth feels proud when age his skill approves,
Pleas'd by sore legs to win a pair of gloves.
In the old kitchen by the chimney wide,
With foaming ale in good stone mugs supplied,
The old folks talk'd of times when they were young,
And the same songs, year after year, were sung:
"Lord Bateman," "Spanking Jack," and "Black-eyed-Sue,"
"Will Watch," and "Crazy Jane," and "Bonnets o' Blue."
'Twas here the jolly hostess sat and smiled,
Whilst on the ample grate the logs were piled:
Here was the roasting jack with wheels and weights,
And on the dresser shone the pewter plates.

And still the peaceful brook doth gently run,
Now hid in shades, now sparkling in the sun;

Here are the pebbles at the bottom seen,
And on it flows o'er weeds and cresses green.
Where is the rustic bridge by which 'twas cross'd?
Alas, the plank, the rail, and stile are lost.
The foot-paths leading through the fields and grove,
Where once a careless boy I loved to rove,
Are overturn'd by the encroaching plough;
And I should trespass if I walk'd there now.
Ye fields and woods, ye haunts of early days,
Scenes of my rambles, pleasures, and my plays,
How often have I stroll'd ye round and round,
And feasted on the berries I have found.
How have I scratch'd my hands and torn my clothes,
In search of sour crabbs and jetty sloes!
And I have wander'd through the gloomy wood,
And robb'd the squirrel of his winter's food;
Or cut the fallows from the leafy shade,
And strawberry pottles of the peelings made.
Oh! when the melting fruit has met mine eyes,
My heart has bounded at the ruddy prize.

'The honeysuckles flow'r that twin'd the thorn
I've carried home our cottage to adorn,
And through the house' they shed their sweet perfume,
And well my mother lov'd their fragrant bloom.
My mother, oh! my mother was to me
All that a mother could or ought to be.
'Twas thou my mother taught me first to write,
And told me in my books to take delight:
Unceasing was thy love and care for me;
I all my little learning owe to thee:
The grass is growing green above thy grave,
And green the chesnut trees that o'er thee wave;
Over thy sleeping dust no tomb, no stone,
No sculptur'd marble, and thou needest none.'
Thy love to me is on my mem'ry traced
In lines too deep e'er to be eras'd;
And should it be to me at last denied
To lay me down and slumber by thy side,
Yet do I hope to meet thee in the skies,
Where clouds and tempests never shall arise,
But tears be wip'd for ever from our eyes.

Near yonder mansion, belted round by trees,
Stood the old farm, so fam'd for milk and cheese;
And from the yard on summer's morn was seen
The herd of lazy cows stroll o'er the green;
And when the winter froze the waters o'er,
How pleas'd was I to hear the horse-pond bore:
How many sliding on that pond were found,
And many a fall and many a laugh went round;
Sometimes the ice has broke beneath our weight,
And then we shiv'ring mourn'd our hapless fate;
We must not then go home with dripping clothes,
And water gushing from our soddened shoes.
What's to be done? The blacksmith's shop is nigh,
We'll sit beside the fire until we're dry.
Well I remember now that old shop door,
With brands and horse nail stumps bestudded o'er,
And from the window on a winter's night
Across the road was thrown a stream of light:
I lov'd to hear the heavy anvil ring,
The roaring bellows and the workmen sing;

The rising wreaths of smoke I lov'd to see,
Curl slowly upwards by the great ash tree ;
Nor have I yet forgot a man uncouth,
For once he put tobacco in my mouth ;
His beard unshaven and his features grim,
And ev'ry child I knew then feared him,
And noisy children oft would quiet be,
If mothers said they'd send for Dr. Key.
Where are they now? Among the things that were,
That time has pilfered from us year by year.
And when I come, I surely find removed
Some old familiar object which I loved.
The old farm-house where happy faces smiled ;
The stern old blacksmith, terror of the child,
And young companions of my early day,
Like to a pleasant stream have pass'd away.

Across that garden that was once the green,
Hem'd round with houses now and hardly seen,
Here the shoemaker plied his busy trade,
Here many pairs of heavy shoes were made.

Late through his window gleam'd his candle bright,
Then up again before the morning's light.
Here when the winter nights were dark and cold
The plough boys met, and tales of mirth were told,
And all the news and scandal of the place
Was here discuss'd with comments on each case,
Whose horses now look'd well, and whose look'd bad,
Who was a handy, who an awkward lad;
This by the plough was skill'd his bread to earn,
And this was good for nothing but the barn;
What girl had left her place and gone to town,
And who in silks and satins had come down;
She look'd so fine, and talked in such a strain,
That hardly her old friends knew her again.
Oh, that old shop, I think I see it now,
The same it was near thirty years ago;
The pots of blacking and the horns of paste,
That boys who went to sleep were forced to taste.
Oh, the mischievous tricks that here were play'd;
Sometimes the pitch has on the seats been laid,

And when they rose to go, how they would storm
To find themselves stuck fast unto the form.

Here was the cage in which the squirrel swung,
And by its side the chattering magpie hung ;
And scores of ballads cleav'd against the wall,
I well remember, for I've read them all.

But many a young and many a hoary head
That once met there, are number'd with the dead.

Who is this man that comes with pace so slow,
That seems beneath a weight of years to bow ?
Of all his young companions he has none,
He has outliv'd them, and he stands alone,
And like the fruit that hangs beyond it's time,
While some fall green and some in mellow prime,
Though through the naked tree the tempests blow,
Still trembling clings unto the leafless bough ;
So man, tho' sorrow on his age attends
And death has taken one by one his friends,
Though health, youth, strength, and beauty all are past,
Still clings to life and hugs it to the last.

How pleasant is the lane up to the mill,
That leads to the small church below the hill ;
The banks on either side with hazels crown'd,
While creeping ivy clasps their roots around :
The spotted fern-leaves still are growing here,
And fragrant odour speaks the violet near.
Oft have I seen slow moving down this lane,
In sad procession, the dark funeral train ;
And heard the bell, first faintly on the ear,
Then loud and louder as we drew more near,
And louder yet until we trod the ground
Where sleeps the dead in graves with briars bound ;
And one just open'd, yawning to receive
Some friend belov'd for whom these mourners grieve.
I've stood upon the heap of earth and stones,
Mix'd up with fragments of long buried bones,
And thought, these all liv'd once and stood where I
Now stand perhaps, and then I heay'd a sigh,
And wept to think of man thus made to mourn,
Then pass away, his very name unknown.

Here have I seen the brown and fleshless skull—
The eyeless sockets now with dust were full,
And wonder'd who he was, and what his life :
Was he a man of peace or man of strife?
Was he some hectoring bully of the green?
Or did he love the calm and quiet scene?
Was he a man of toil, by want oppress'd,
Longing to lie down here and be at rest?
Or did he toil to get, and get to save?
His riches could not keep him from the grave!
 'Tis vain to ask; no answer will be given,
And what he was is only known in heaven.
 And now, farewell, man's low and last abode;
My course is onward down the dusty road :
Here in this meadow once the malting stood;
And here the pathway through the fields and wood;
And round this turning now the spot I've gained
Where noble falcons long were fed and trained—
A bird with plumage bright and eye of fire,
Once the delight of Weston's worthy squire :

Pleas'd have I stood and thought the sight quite grand,
To see him pass with hawk upon his hand ;
For well he lov'd this ancient princely sport,
Lov'd long ago by knights and dames at court.

I praise him for it, but I thank him more
For all his kindness to the village poor,
No theme more grateful could my thoughts employ,
For I have shared his favours when a boy,
And friends and kindred and my parents dead,
Were by his Christmas bounty yearly fed.

I know no village now that has such cheer
On merry Christmas as the poor have here :
Here have I seen, and 'twas a charming sight,
In ev'ry house a coal fire burning bright ;
And I have asked and have been told by all,
This is the bounteous gift of Squire Hall.
May heaven bless him, as his years increase,
And crown his latter days with joy and peace.

But now the glorious sun is sinking low,
The western clouds with gold and crimson glow,

Over the woods the evening shadows creep :
And every leaf has hushed itself to sleep :
The dew is gently falling all around :
Hark ! from the woods those thrilling notes of sound ;
It is the nightingale that all night long
Pours to the moon her strains of lonely song.

And now farewell, ye scenes of early days ;
Once more I've traced your fields and winding ways,
And though I see such changes as I go,
They're called improvements and they may be so,
Yet ev'ry stile and tree and hedge-row wild,
So dear to me when I was but a child,
Long pass'd away forgot by other men,
I want to see them as I saw them then.

But changes come to all, are come to me,
I am not now what once I used to be ;
Still the same feelings in my heart do dwell.
Home of my happy childhood, fare thee well !