

The Village Grammar School

The Memorial. By Rev. Thomas Maude, Esq., A.B. Oxon.

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Now, while the soft light of these shadowy skies,
Henry! o'erflows at once my heart and eyes,—
While Autumn's variegated leaves around,
Withered and hueless, strew the staining ground,—
Thoughts of departed years come back on me;
And can I muse on them, forgetting thee?

Where Prudhoe's ruined towers o'erlook the Tyne
My heart is wandering, filled with "auld lang syne."
It seems but yesterday since o'er those towers
We saw the April clouds dissolved in showers—
The Summer's gilding beams — or, far and near,
The autumnal yellow-tinted foliage sere;
When on the opposing banks we lived at school,
Happy beneath the kindest master's rule!

O Memory! mystical and undefined
Power of the heart, whose clew is in the mind!
Hath not a cloud sometimes — a leaf — the power
To stir thee, in reflection's tranquil hour?
Life unto me hath nothing strange or new—
Ah, my quick heart my boyhood's years outgrew!
So, when that heart with old affections burns,
To the enchanted morn of life it turns,
Muses o'er feelings fresher, purer still,
And sweetly paints remember'd scenes at will.

Dear O'RINGHAM! whose every nook is known
Still to my heart — though many years are flown
Since, a mere child, among thy hamlets rude
Careless I roamed — and loved the solitude—
(For sure 'tis solitude where never yet
Chilled the warm heart life's frigid etiquette!)
Now let thy peaceful memory warm a strain,
Which, warmed by thee, can ne'er be pour'd in vain!—
There thou, my brother, oft with me hast shared
The pleasures by maternal love prepared
For our young school-boy bosoms — when from home
To see her boys a mother loved to come;—
And we for hours would walk conversing free,
All-lovingly, whate'er the theme might be,—
Wandering afar o'er flowery-scented fields,
Tasting the bliss that Love, not Nature, yields—
How blest! mid joys that leave no sting of pain,
Till the sad hour — when we must part again!

Ye who would blush a mother's love to own!
Smile at a bard who boldly makes it known.
I write no false feign'd sentiments, to gain
Worthless applause from worldly-minded men.
This page is the pure mirror of a breast,
With childhood's memories feelingly imprest:
Throw it, then, by — or pass it o'er in haste—
Ye! in whose polish'd hearts it breeds distaste:
Perhaps your jeers at me are not so true
As is the pity which I feel for you.

But lo! what smiling groups! — In colours bright
They come, to celebrate the nuptial rite.
What happy faces! — Lasses gaily drest,
Ploughmen, in coarse apparel, yet their best,—
They come! — and see, in bridal vesture there,
A modest maiden, ruddy, yet how fair!
Downcast her eyes — a village beauty!— Oft
In the hay-season has she sung aloft
On the sweet-breathing stack, with fork in hand,
Darting the smiles which none can all withstand:—
And, when the day declined, how many wove
Chaplets of wild-flowers for their queen of love!
But one dear youth from all the rest she chose,
Even him, on whom herself she now bestows.—
Ah, happy pair! (whom equal love and truth
Unite in the delicious Spring of youth)—
Happier than some, more splendidly endow'd
With all that makes the feeble heart so proud,
Yet wanting that which only can inspire
The wedded breast with rapture's genuine fire,—
Some — the mere slaves of wealth, of lust, or power,
Who like the name, the person, or the dower,—
Who become fashionably groom and bride,
And call it marriage when the knot is tied!

Another scene loved Memory pictures now—
When round the gossip each, with thoughtful brow,
Would sit and listen, while, enthroned beside
The kitchen's cheerful hearth, in honest pride,
She'd tell the wonders of her vagrant life,
With changing scenes and strange adventures rife.
Poor Nanny! where art thou? — Though oft thine eye
Have glanced on me (who loved thy histories)
While I have turned thy pedlar-goods for sale,
Or hung entranced on every wond'rous tale,
(Which fostered in my bosom's depth, perchance,
The germs of poetry and young romance)
Yet, should I meet thee now, thou could'st not know
Him who admired and loved thy marvels so;
No, thou would'st pass — or, if required to trace,
Could'st recognise no feature in my face,—

For I'm all changed, ah! many years are past,
Since, O thou wandering one thou saw'st me last.—
But I remember thee — thy sun-burnt cheek—
Thine eyes, through which the native fire would break—
Thy form — thy staff, whereof thou lovedst to tell,
How for long, long years it had served thee well!

In scenes secluded from all great events,
The mind is struck with simplest incidents.
The pedlar's cart, with all his wares of trade
On the green sward in shining pomp display'd—
The mountebank — the conj'ror, whose profound
Looks and sly tricks diffuse the marvel round—
The strolling troop, whose histrionic art
Wins vulgar praise, and strikes th' untutored heart—
The gypsy wanderers, who awhile remain
Encamped within the hawthorn-scented lane—
These all, with picturesque effect, combine
To charm the fancy — one at least like mine.

But hark! that joyous shout! Methinks I hear
The cry of gladness — yes, it fills my ear—
When from the prison school-room all rush out,
Wild with delight — a noisy, laughing rout!
A holiday! — The tasks were just begun,
Bright through the window shone the mocking sun,
When with the master's Sunday's coat his dame,
Bustling and smiling, to the school-room came,
And called him thence! A gentle stranger's come,
To take his little prattling urchin home;
And the young smiler, ere he rides away,
Begs his papa to ask a holiday
'Tis asked — 'tis granted! With reluctance feign'd
The double favour is in form obtain'd;
But the good master chuckles while he grants,
Well-pleas'd to tend his orchard-trees and plants.
What gladdening tidings! — Oh, the joy within
Twenty young hearts, and ah! the deafening din!
Quickly the Latin books are thrown aside,
The hats snatched up; and, like a flooding tide,
Out rush the merry hearts, o'erjoyed to be,
Thus early in the fragrant morning, free!
Away they scamper; they've a feeling now
Of liberty, enlightening every brow;
Away they scamper, full of sport, away—
With careless minds, intent on various play:
Huzza! — a long and sunny holiday!

Now, when the first wild transport of delight
Subsides, they congregate with faces bright,
Loud clamorous tongues, and speaking sparkling eyes,
And sports and games — how innocent! — devise.

Ah! how unlike the headlong passions strong,
Which hurry man's maturer heart along,—
Passions, in evil pleasures seeking vent,
Intenser — but how much less innocent!—
Alas! to these, ere few brief years be flown,
Will all their fiery tyranny be known!
But hence, O hence, anticipations vain;
Age! view their frolics — and be young again.

Some o'er the chalky flags the marble, shoot;
Some buy sweet spice, or sweeter summer fruit;
Some the projected racing-match decide;
Some strut on stilts with ill-dissembled pride;
Some play the truant, wandering far and wide,
Exploring, fearful of each distant sound,
The simple wonders of the country round;
Some tend their little gardens; some (and thee
'Mongst these, my brother, Fancy still can see)
Some watch their nibbling rabbits feeding near,
Or hold the sparrow-hawk in pleasing fear;
While Nature smiles around, and every boy
Feels in his bounding heart the pulse of joy!

"Eheu fugaces" — Horace sang of old—
And, Henry! while my artless rhymes unfold
Boyhood's dear pleasures, unforgotten still,
While all their charms revived thy bosom fill,
Doth not thy feeling heart at once incline
To sympathize with Horace' strain and mine?—
Yes, brother, we have tasted joys like these,
With undistracted minds and hearts at ease;
And half their memory's blessedness to me
Is that those early joys were shared with thee.
Ay, we have climbed the tree, the marble shot,
Run the swift race, explored the rural spot,
Gathered sweet wood-nuts from the hazel bough,
Dammed the bright-flowing burn (which flows on now)
Shot coral berries through the hollow reed,
Drawn the strong bow, impowered to wound indeed,—
Ay, we have mingled in each joyous play,
Each pastime loved, through many a holiday,—
Or talked of home — sweet home! — alone, apart—
Still, still together: — we were one in heart.

But, if those pleasures we can ne'er forget,
Oh there were others purer, dearer yet
When, mid our tasks, when now the morn was new,
We heard that John was come — with ponies too,
And a delighting letter, winged with joys,
From a kind father to his absent boys!—
Then, with the smiling sympathizing groom,
(Whose very aspect breathed of happy home)

How we would trot all merrily along,
Our hearts and voices leaping into song;—
Anticipating, with a warmth of heart
Which few maturer raptures can impart,
The dear enjoyments of that home endeared,
Which hope's elysian Paradise appeared.

Since those long-fled, but ne'er forgotten, hours,
Kind Heaven hath strewn our path with varied flowers;
Yet — oh my brother! — we have felt since then
The breath of passions which belong to men.
Pleasure has lured us with her siren tongue;
Me hath ambition fired — at least in song:
And to young Love we've poured the heart in sighs,
And felt the glow of indignation rise.
Ay, indignation! Who can play a part
In life, nor feel it struggling in his heart?—
Who can see felon gamesters wear the smile
Of kindly intercourse, and rob the while,—
Who can see ninety of an hundred trained
Time-serving deacons perjured when ordained,
Who can see fathers prostitute for gold
Their unresisting girls, in wedlock sold,
Bartering all bliss for loveless splendour's lot,—
Nor feel indignant? — I, for one, can not!—
Yet some there are, a brazen-visaged crew,
Who ne'er the glow of indignation knew;
Who have no choice 'twixt good and evil fame,
Who boast of folly, and are proud of shame.
With such the Muse no kindred impulse knows—
Foes to true feeling, to herself they're foes!—
To other hearts my verse would make appeal,
Ingenuous hearts alone, that warmly feel!

Something we've gained in bliss since boyhood's day—
But careless confidence is worn away.
Now we have learned mistrust; for who can see
His manhood's noon, and all confiding be?
We've witnessed (thanks to Heaven! we have not proved)
The faithlessness of hearts too dearly loved;
We've witnessed (I have felt) the bitter hate
Which in weak bosoms envy can create;
We've witnessed kind professions, kindly made,
To hearts, when credulous, at once betray'd;
We've witnessed fraud in bosoms seeming just;—
And thus, in the world's school, we've learned mistrust.

Ah! truth severe! — In this so transient scene,
Where, mid joy's sunshine, clouds still intervene,
Shall enmity's factitious load oppress
The fellow-pilgrims of the wilderness?
The chart of life is but a chequered span—

And the grave closes every path to man:
To Pleasures victim, and to Glory's slave,
Yes, there's one goal — illumed by hope — the grave!
All reach it soon; but some achieve the race
While youth's bright dawn yet lightens o'er the face,
And hope is winged! — Woe's me! the funeral cry
Strikes my sad heart, while sorrow palls mine eye!
Now wherefore should I tune my lyre? for she,
Whose kinder ear had loved its melody,
Sleeps in the grave — the beautiful, the young—
Quenched the bright eye, and silenced the sweet tongue!
Oh Eloisa! sainted spirit! — I see
Thy narrow bed, and weep, remembering thee!
Who would forbid the Muse to mourn thy doom,
While heart-wrung tears flow gushing o'er thy tomb?—
When last I saw thee, dear departed one!
Youth's sparkling life in every feature shone;
And o'er thy sylphic form and Grecian face
Beamed the mild lustre of attractive grace.
Then, in a pensive (yet not joyless) hour,
Thee once I likened to a token flower:—
I saw thee, fairest! in the flush of youth,
And sang — ('twas but a common-place of truth,
How cruelly true!) — "thy life is of a day"—
And thou art wither'd, like the rose, away!

Ah! thou wert good as lovely! But 'tis o'er—
Thy soul shall speak from beauteous dust no more:
Thy sweet form lieth beneath the unheeded sod,
Cold and corrupted — but thy soul's with God!
Henry! forgive — forgive the bursting tear,
Which, as I write, bedews an angel's bier!
Forgive the grief commingling with my strain—
Can the heart ever plead to speak in vain?

Go on thy way! May God himself look down,
And with his blessing all your labours crown!
And spare your life — long, very long — to prove
A spring of happiness to all you love!—
So, when few fleeting years have rolled away,
Thou may'st the prompting of thy heart obey;
So the "glad tidings of great joy" ere long
May stream in heavenly mercies from thy tongue!

For me — who hope forgiveness from above
For sins unnumbered against heavenly love—
Pitying alike the hearts that ne'er relent,
And him who sang — "the weak alone repent"—
I rather hold, against his erring song,
The weak alone are obstinate in wrong.
So let this final page speak peace to those
Whom Satire made, in earlier youth, my foes,—

Hearts, ne'ertheless, the most removed from hate,
Gentle, and generous, and affectionate!
Can these forgive the lay, repealed in shame,
Poured from a school-boy's breast for spurious fame?
Can these forget the mischief idly done?—
Yet — though it rankle still — I am foe to none!
No foul resentments lurk within my mind,
Hasty too oft — ne'er sullenly unkind.
And if my satire caused a tear to flow,
Oh! none can tell the sting of keener woe,
Whereby Remorse for one repented deed
Hath made my own o'ertortured bosom bleed!

[pp. 13-28]