

THERE was a roaring in the wind all night;  
 The rain came heavily and fell in floods;  
 But now the sun is rising calm and bright;  
 The birds are singing in the distant woods;  
 Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;  
 The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;  
 And all the air is fill'd with pleasant noise of waters.

All things that love the sun are out of doors;  
 The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;  
 The grass is bright with rain-drops; on the moors 10  
 The Hare is running races in her mirth;  
 And with her feet she from the plashy earth  
 Raises a mist; which, glittering in the sun,  
 Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

I was a Traveller then upon the moor;  
 I saw the Hare that rac'd about with joy;  
 I heard the woods, and distant waters, roar;  
 Or heard them not, as happy as a Boy:  
 The pleasant season did my heart employ:  
 My old remembrances went from me wholly; 20  
 And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might  
 Of joy in minds that can no farther go,  
 As high as we have mounted in delight  
 In our dejection do we sink as low,  
 To me that morning did it happen so;  
 And fears, and fancies, thick upon me came;  
 Dim sadness, and blind thoughts I knew not nor could name.

I heard the Sky-lark singing in the sky;  
 And I bethought me of the playful Hare: 30  
 Even such a happy Child of earth am I;  
 Even as these blissful Creatures do I fare;  
 Far from the world I walk, and from all care;  
 But there may come another day to me,  
 Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

My whole life I have liv'd in pleasant thought,  
 As if life's business were a summer mood;  
 As if all needful things would come unsought  
 To genial faith, still rich in genial good;  
 But how can He expect that others should 40  
 Build for him, sow for him, and at his call  
 Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,

The sleepless Soul that perish'd in its pride;  
Of Him who walk'd in glory and in joy  
Behind his plough, upon the mountain-side:  
By our own spirits are we deified;  
We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;  
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace, 50  
A leading from above, a something given,  
Yet it befel, that, in this lonely place,  
When up and down my fancy thus was driven,  
And I with these untoward thoughts had striven,  
I saw a Man before me unawares:  
The oldest Man he seem'd that ever wore grey hairs.

My course I stopped as soon as I espied  
The Old Man in that naked wilderness:  
Close by a Pond, upon the further side,  
He stood alone: a minute's space I guess 60  
I watch'd him, he continuing motionless:  
To the Pool's further margin then I drew;  
He being all the while before me full in view.

As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie  
Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence;  
Wonder to all who do the same espy  
By what means it could thither come, and whence;  
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:  
Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth, which on a shelf  
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself. 70

Such seem'd this Man, not all alive nor dead,  
Nor all asleep; in his extreme old age:  
His body was bent double, feet and head  
Coming together in their pilgrimage;  
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage  
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,  
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

Himself he propp'd, his body, limbs, and face,  
Upon a long grey Staff of shaven wood:  
And, still as I drew near with gentle pace, 80  
Beside the little pond or moorish flood  
Motionless as a Cloud the Old Man stood;  
That heareth not the loud winds when they call;  
And moveth altogether, if it move at all.

At length, himself unsettling, he the Pond  
Stirred with his Staff, and fixedly did look  
Upon the muddy water, which he conn'd,  
As if he had been reading in a book:

And now such freedom as I could I took;  
And, drawing to his side, to him did say,  
`This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.'

90

A gentle answer did the Old Man make,  
In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew:  
And him with further words I thus bespake,  
`What kind of work is that which you pursue?  
This is a lonesome place for one like you.'  
He answer'd me with pleasure and surprize;  
And there was, while he spake, a fire about his eyes.

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,  
Yet each in solemn order follow'd each,  
With something of a lofty utterance drest;  
Choice word, and measured phrase; above the reach  
Of ordinary men; a stately speech!  
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,  
Religious men, who give to God and Man their dues.

100

He told me that he to this Pond had come  
To gather Leeches, being old and poor:  
Employment hazardous and wearisome!  
And he had many hardships to endure:  
From Pond to Pond he roam'd, from moor to moor,  
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance:  
And in this way he gain'd an honest maintenance.

110

The Old Man still stood talking by my side;  
But now his voice to me was like a stream  
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;  
And the whole Body of the man did seem  
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;  
Or like a Man from some far region sent,  
To give me human strength, and strong admonishment.

My former thoughts return'd: the fear that kills;  
The hope that is unwilling to be fed;  
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;  
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.  
And now, not knowing what the Old Man had said,  
My question eagerly did I renew,  
`How is it that you live, and what is it you do?'

120

He with a smile did then his words repeat;  
And said, that, gathering Leeches, far and wide  
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet  
The waters of the Ponds where they abide.  
`Once I could meet with them on every side;  
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;  
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.'

130

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,  
The Old Man's shape, and speech, all troubled me:  
In my mind's eye I seem'd to see him pace  
About the weary moors continually,  
Wandering about alone and silently.  
While I these thoughts within myself pursued,  
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

140

And soon with this he other matter blended,  
Chearfully uttered, with demeanour kind,  
But stately in the main; and, when he ended,  
I could have laugh'd myself to scorn, to find  
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.  
'God,' said I, 'be my help and stay secure;  
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor.'