

THE
PEASANT OF AUBURN:

A POEM.



" If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave
" By nature's law design'd
" Why was an independent wif
" E'er plant'd in my mind?
" If not, why am I subject to
" His cruelty, or scorn?
" Or why has Man the will and pow'r--
" To make his fellow mourn?"

BURNS.



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THE PEASANT OF AUBURN.

"The short and simple annals of the poor."

GRAY

DARK was the sky, and fatal was the morn,
When first from Auburn's vale I roam'd forlorn,
The neighbouring swains came pensive o'er the lea,
And parting breath'd their last kind prayers for me,
Ah! gentle souls, your prayers for me how vain,
The man of sorrow, penury, and pain.

Thus Edwin mourn'd, pale, melancholy, slow,
Where wild Ohio's sounding waters flow,
The sun set low'ring on the plaints he made,
And savage howling doubly gloom'd the shade.

O Thou, in public toils with glory tried,
Whose high-born honours are thy humblest pride,
Whose private worth, in Fame's proud sanc'ter
Time shall emblaze in characters of gold; [roll'd
Illustrious HOWARD! shield th' unpolish'd lays
Which twine this cypress wreath around thy bay
And whilst thy breast matures each patriot plan
That gladdens life, and man endears to man,
Hear what big woes the village group beset,
By Auburn's pensive hard foretold too well.

Night o'er the scene her dusky horrors drew,
The stars burn'd dim, the rapid whirlwind flew;
E'en the lone cot denied its cheering ray,
As o'er the wild the wanderer urg'd his way.
No more the birds prolong'd their soothing strain
No more the landscape stole a pang from pain;
In every bush destruction seem'd to hide,
And haste beneath him seem'd the sullen tide.

Amidst uncoffin'd bones, as thus he pass'd,
 Where many a gallant Briton breath'd his last,
 From distant hills strange fires began to glow,
 That mark'd the ravage of the barbarous foe.
 The scene, the hour, renew'd the trickling tear,
 When thus, with mingled groans, the mournful
 God of my life ! protect me as I stray, [seer.
 Where panthers prowl, and murderous men betray.

Once I was blest beyond the peasant's lot,
 In humble neatness rose my little cot.
 I saw my whitening fleece the down adorn,
 I saw my valley wave with golden corn,
 I saw my dutious children round me bloom,
 Nor envied pride its palace and its plume.
 Pleas'd with what heaven had lent, and far from
 Calam, unprov'd, I walk'd the vale of life. [strife,
 But vain the humblest hope the poor can form,
 When fierce oppression wings th' unfeeling storm.
 Nor peace, nor love, nor merit's modest wo,
 Can br avert, or mitigate the blow.
 Alas ! regardless of the suppliant train,
 The tyrant lord usurps the whole domain.
 The peasant's glebe, his garden's decent bound,
 The shade he rear'd, the lane with sweet-brier
 crown'd.

All, all must yield, as wills imperious pride,
 And e'en the straw-thatch'd cottage is denied.
 Hence, at this hour, by desperate sorrow led,
 A banish'd man, I roam the world for bread.

Yet witness Heav'n, tho' such thy chang'd de-
 crees,
 Ne'er did I waste my hours in loit'ring ease ;
 Ne'er did the blessings prompt a wish to stray,
 Health nerv'd my limbs, and virtue bless'd my day.
 Constant at dawn to hardy toils I rose,
 Brav'd the bleak winds, and desolating snows ;

Whilst sweet Contentment lent her magic power,
 Soften'd the gale, and warm'd the frozen shower:
 Still sad remembrance fondly calls to view
 The field, where once the branching poplar grew:
 'Twas there, when spring renew'd the ploughman's
 toil,
 My long-drawn furrow turn'd the rugged soil;
 There, with my sickle, thro' long summer days,
 I work'd, regardless of the noontide blaze,
 And there the labouring band, as leisure sway'd,
 The bough-crown'd reaper, and the village maid,
 Led up their sports along the bord'ring green,
 Whilst age look'd on, and bless'd the harmless
 scene.

Such were my toils, in days too bright to last,
 Such joys were mine, but all those joys are past:
 Mean tho' I was, and circled too with care,
 Yet, blest with little, I had still to spare.
 No neighbour's sorrows but assail'd my breast,
 No poorer brother left my door unbless'd.
 To all my mite, to some, more singly dear,
 I gave the tender tribute of a tear.
 Oft times, returning from the task of day,
 I hail'd the weary trav'ler on his way,
 Remark'd the hour of rest was nearly come,
 And press'd the stranger to my social home.
 Heedless of future ills, the playful train,
 To meet their fire, came shouting o'er the plain,
 With eager joy their little news convey'd,
 Or round the green their mimic dance display'd.
 Perhaps, some neighb'ring swain of genial soul
 Would lift the latch, and join our sober bowl;
 And, whilst his soothing tales engag'd the guest,
 Of slighted love, or modest worth distress'd,
 Whate'er our dairy, or our fields afford,
 In frugal plenty finil'd upon the board.

Blest social home, and ye dear distant bow'rs!
 Scenes of my youth, and all my blissful hours,
 Where'er by fortune's hand neglected thrown,
 This heart, this faithful heart, is all your own!
 E'en now, weak nature, rous'd to keener pain,
 Dwells on your charms, and bleeds in every vein.

Good Heav'n! what anguish wrung this boding
 heart;

When the rough boatwain gave the word to part,
 Then fast the tear, at nature's bidding, fell,
 As bleeding Friendship press'd its long farewell.
 Pale on thine arm consubstantial mildness hung;
 Fond filial duty round my bosom clung.
 Firm for their sakes, along the surf-beat strand,
 And whisp'ring peace, I led the weeping band;
 Deceiv'd their thoughts from Auburn's much-lov'd
 plain,

And talk'd of happier seats beyond the main.
 Poor aged man! since that eventful day,
 Despair and terror mark'd thee for their prey.
 War, sickness, famine, bursting on thine head,
 Mock thy vain toils, and weigh thee to the dead.

Ah me! the words our pious preacher spoke,
 When first to him my mournful mind I broke.
 "Edwin," he said, with looks of kind dismay,
 "Earth's meteor-hopes but glitter to betray."
 "Thou canst not fly from God's all-haft'ning hand,
 "Storms sweep the ocean, discord blasts the land,
 "No change of climate can reverse our doom,
 "Life's various roads all center in the tomb."
 Thus the meek sage my rash resolve repress,
 Whilst tears of pity bath'd his hoary breast.
 Oh! had I listen'd to his wise alarms,
 Then had I died at home in Friendship's arms.

Twelve tedious weeks we plough'd the wintry
 main,
 And hop'd the port, but hop'd alas! in vain.

Till left of Heav'n, and press'd for daily bread,
 Each gaz'd at each, and hung the sickly head.
 Two little sons, my hope, my humble pride,
 Too weak to combat, languish'd; wail'd; and died.
 Stretch'd on the deck the breathless cherubs lay,
 As buds put forth in April's stormy day.
 Not Emma's self remain'd my woes to cheer,
 Borne with her babes upon a wat'ry bier.
 Five days she struggled with the fever's fire,
 The sixth sad morn beheld my saint expire.
 These trembling lips, her lips convulsive prest,
 These trembling hands sustain'd her sinking breast;
 These trembling hands discharg'd each mournful
 rite,

Soctn'd her last pang, and seal'd her dying sight.
 To the same deep their dear remains were given,
 Their mingled spirits wing'd their flight to heaven.

One only daughter, in life's vernal pride,
 Surviv'd the wreck that whelm'd my all beside.
 Snatch'd from the peace of death, and loathing
 On bleak Henlopen's coast the mourner lay. {day,
 These aged arms her languid body bore
 Through the rude breakers to that ruder shore.
 Mercy, sweet Heav'n! and did the pitying storm
 Spare but for deeper ills that angel form!
 Blest had we sunk unheeded in the wave,
 And mine and Lucy's been one common grave.
 But I am lost, a worn-out, ruin'd man,
 And find complete what tyranny began.

Much had I heard, from men abus'd to reign,
 Of this New World, and Freedom's gentle reign:
 'Twas fam'd that here, by no proud master spurn'd,
 The poor man ate secure the bread he earn'd;
 That verdant vales were fed by brighter streams
 Than my own Medway, or the silv'ry Thames;
 Fields without bounds spontaneous fruitage bore,
 And peace and virtue bless'd the favour'd shore.

Such were the hopes which once beguil'd my care,
 Hopes form'd in dreams, and baseless as the air!

Is this, O dire reverse, is this the land,
 Where nature sway'd, and peaceful worthies
 plann'd!

Where injur'd freedom, through the world im-
 Her hallow'd seat, her last asylum held! (pell'd
 Ye glitt'ring towns that crown th' Atlantic deep,
 Witnesses the change, and as ye witness weep.

Mourn all ye streams, and all ye fields deplore
 Your slaughter'd sons, your verdure stain'd with
 gore.

Time was, blest time, to weeping thousands dear
 When all that poets picture flourish'd here.

Then war was not, religion smil'd and spread,
 Arts, manners, learning, rear'd their polish'd head;
 Commerce, her sails to every breeze unfurl'd,
 Pour'd on their coasts the treasures of the world.

Past are those halcyon days. The very land
 Droops a weak mourner, wither'd and unmann'd.
 Brothers against brothers rise in vengeful strife,
 The parent's weapon drinks the children's life;
 Sons, leagu'd with foes, unsheath their impious
 sword,

And gore the nurturing breast they late ador'd.

How vain my search to find some lowly bower,
 Far from those scenes of death, this rage for power;
 Some quiet spot, conceal'd from every eye,
 In which to pause from wo, and calmly die.

No such retreat these boundless shades embrace,
 But man with beast divides the bloody chase.

What tho' some cottage rise amid the gloom,
 In vain its pastures spring, its orchards bloom:
 Far, far away the wretched owners roam,
 Exiles like me, the world their only home.

Here, as I trace my melancholy way,
 The prowling Indian snuffs his wonted prey.

Ha!—should I meet him in his dusky round—
 Late in these woods I heard his murd'rous sound—
 Still the deep war-whoop vibrates on mine ear,
 And still I hear his tread, or seem to hear.
 Hark, the leaves rustle! what a shriek was there!
 'Tis he! 'tis he! his triumphs rend the air.
 Hold, coward heart, I'll answer to the yell,
 And chase the murderer to his gory cell.
 Savage!—but oh! I rave—o'er yonder wild,
 E'en at this hour he drives my only child;
 She, the dear source and soother of my pain,
 My tender daughter, drags the captive chain.

Ah my poor Lucy! in whose face, whose breast,
 My long-lost Emma liv'd again confess,
 Thus robb'd of thee, and every comfort fled,
 Soon shall the turf infold this wearied head;
 Soon shall my spirit reach that peaceful shore,
 Where bleeding friends unite; to part no more.
 Then shall I cease to rue the fatal morn
 When first from Auburn's vale I roam'd forlorn.

He spoke—and frantic with the sad review,
 Prone on the shore his tottering limbs he threw.
 Life's crimson strings were bursting round his heart,
 And his torn soul was throbbing to depart;
 No pitying friend, no meek-ey'd stranger near
 To tend his throes or calm them with a tear.
 Angels of grace, your golden pinions spread,
 Temper the winds and shield his houseless head.
 Let no rude sounds disturb life's awful close,
 And guard his relics from inhuman foes.
 O haste, and waft him to those radiant plains,
 Where fiends torment no more, and love eternal
 reigns.

F I N I S.