

Miscellaneous Poetry 1  
Early Casual Poems  
(1811-1814)

By

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(Felicia Hemans)

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by  
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These three poems are each a bit of fun and should not be taken seriously.  
In particular, the ‘celebrated’ mineralogist was still very much alive.

## TO MR EDWARDS, THE HARPER OF CONWAY.

[Some of the happiest days the young poetess ever passed were during occasional visits to some friends at Conway, where the charms of the scenery, combining all that is most beautiful in wood, water, and ruin, are sufficient to inspire the most prosaic temperament with a certain degree of enthusiasm; and it may therefore well be supposed how fervently a soul constituted like hers would worship Nature at so fitting a shrine. With that happy versatility which was at all times a leading characteristic of her mind, she would now enter with child-like playfulness into the enjoyments of a mountain scramble, or a pic-nic water party, the gayest of the merry band, of whom some are now, like herself, laid low, some far away in foreign lands, some changed by sorrow, and all by time; and then, in graver mood, dream away hours of pensive contemplation amidst the gray ruins of that noblest of Welsh castles, standing, as it then did, in solitary grandeur, unapproached by bridge or causeway, flinging its broad shadow across the tributary waves which washed its regal walls. These lovely scenes never ceased to retain their hold over the imagination of her whose youthful muse had so often celebrated their praises. Her peculiar admiration of Mrs Joanna Baillie's play of *Ethwald* was always pleasingly associated with the recollection of her having first read it amidst the ruins of Conway Castle. At Conway, too, she first made acquaintance with the lively and graphic *Chronicles of the chivalrous Froissart*, whose inspiring pages never lost their place in her favour. Her own little poem, "The Ruin and its Flowers," which will be found amongst the earlier pieces in the present collection, was written on an excursion to the old fortress of Dyganwy, the remains of which are situated on a bold promontory near the entrance of the river Conway; and whose ivied walls, now fast mouldering into oblivion, once bore their part bravely in the defence of Wales; and are further endeared to the lovers of song and tradition as having echoed the complaints of the captive Elphin, and resounded to the harp of Taliesin. A scarcely degenerate representative of that gifted bard<sup>1</sup> had, at the time now alluded to, his appropriate dwelling-place at Conway; but his strains have long been silenced, and there now remain few, indeed, on whom the Druidical mantle has fallen so worthily. In the days when his playing was heard by one so fitted to enjoy its originality and beauty,

"The minstrel was infirm and old;"

but his inspiration had not yet forsaken him; and the following lines (written in 1811) will give an idea of the magic power he still knew how to exercise over the feelings of his auditors.]

MINSTREL! whose gifted hand can bring  
Life, rapture, soul, from every string;  
And wake, like bards of former time,  
The spirit of the harp sublime;—  
Oh! still prolong the varying strain!  
Oh! touch th' enchanted chords again!

Thine is the charm, suspending care,  
The heavenly swell, the dying close,  
The cadence melting into air,  
That lulls each passion to repose ;  
While transport, lost in silence near,  
Breathes all her language in a tear.

Exult, O Cambria !—now no more  
With sighs thy slaughter'd bards deplore :  
What though Plinlimmon's misty brow  
And Mona's woods be silent now,  
Yet can thy Conway boast a strain  
Unrivall'd in thy proudest reign.

For Genius, with divine control,  
Wakes the bold chord neglected long,  
And pours Expression's glowing soul  
O'er the wild Harp, renown'd in song ;  
And Inspiration, hovering round,  
Swells the full energies of sound.

Now Grandeur, pealing in the tone,  
Could rouse the warrior's kindling fire,  
And now, 'tis like the breeze's moan,  
That murmurs o'er th' Eolian lyre :  
As if some sylph, with viewless wing,  
Were sighing o'er the magic string.

Long, long, fair Conway ! boast the skill  
That soothes, inspires, commands, at will !  
And oh ! while rapture hails the lay,  
Far distant be the closing day,  
When Genius, Taste, again shall weep,  
And Cambria's Harp lie hush'd in sleep !

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1 Mr Edwards, the Harper of Conway, as he was generally called, had been blind from his birth, and was endowed with that extraordinary musical genius by which persons suffering under such a visitation are not unfrequently indemnified. From the respectability of his circumstances, he was not called upon to exercise his talents with any view to remuneration. He played to delight himself and others; and the innocent complacency with which he enjoyed the ecstasies called forth by his skill, and the degree of appreciation with which he regarded himself, as in a manner consecrated, by being made the depository of a direct gift from Heaven, were as far as possible removed from any of the common modifications of vanity or self-conceit.

Epitaph on Mr W—  
A Celebrated Mineralogist

<sup>1</sup> "Whilst on the subject of Conway, it may not be amiss to introduce two little pieces of a very different character from the foregoing, [Lines to Mr Edward the Harper,] which were written at the same place, three or four years afterwards, and will serve as a proof of that versatility of talent before alluded to. As may easily be supposed, they were never intended for publication, but were merely a *jeu d'esprit* of the moment, in good-humoured railery of the indefatigable zeal and perseverance of one of the party in his geological researches."—*Memoir*, p. 20.

EPITAPH ON MR W——,

A CELEBRATED MINERALOGIST.<sup>1</sup>

STOP, passenger ! a wondrous tale to list—  
Here lies a famous Mineralogist.

Famous indeed ! such traces of his power,  
He's left from Penmaenbach to Penmaenmawr,  
Such caves, and chasms, and fissures in the rocks,  
His works resemble those of earthquake shocks ;  
And future ages very much may wonder  
What mighty giant rent the hills asunder,  
Or whether Lucifer himself had ne'er  
Gone with his crew to play at foot-ball there.

His fossils, flints, and spars, of every hue,  
With him, good reader, here lie buried too—  
Sweet specimens ! which, toiling to obtain,  
He split huge cliffs, like so much wood, in twain.  
We knew, so great the fuss he made about them,  
Alive or dead, he ne'er would rest without them ;  
So, to secure soft slumber to his bones,  
We paved his grave with all his favourite stones.  
His much-loved hammer's resting by his side ;  
Each hand contains a shell-fish petrified :  
His mouth a piece of pudding-stone incloses,  
And at his feet a lump of coal reposes :  
Sure he was born beneath some lucky planet!—  
His very coffin-plate is made of granite.

Weep not, good reader ! he is truly blest  
Amidst chalcedony and quartz to rest :  
Weep not for him ! but envied be his doom,  
Whose tomb, though small, for all he loved had  
room :

And, O ye rocks !—schist, gneiss, whate'er ye be,  
Ye varied strata !—names too hard for me—  
Sing, " Oh, be joyful ! " for your direst foe  
By death's fell hammer is at length laid low.  
Ne'er on your spoils again shall W—— riot.  
Clear up your cloudy brows, and rest in quiet—  
He sleeps—no longer planning hostile actions,  
As cold as any of his petrifications ;  
Enshrined in specimens of every hue,  
Too tranquil e'en to dream, ye rocks, of you.

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## EPITAPH

ON THE HAMMER OF THE AFORESAID MINERALOGIST.

HERE in the dust, its strange adventures o'er,  
A hammer rests, that ne'er knew rest before.  
Released from toil, it slumbers by the side  
Of one who oft its temper sorely tried ;  
No day e'er pass'd, but in some desperate strife  
He risk'd the faithful hammer's limbs and life :  
Now laying siege to some old limestone wall,  
Some rock now battering, proof to cannon-ball  
Now scaling heights like Alps or Pyrenees,  
Perhaps a flint, perhaps a slate to seize ;  
But, if a piece of copper met his eyes,  
He'd mount a precipice that touch'd the skies,  
And bring down lumps so precious, and so many,  
I'm sure they almost would have made—a penny !  
Think, when such deeds as these were daily done,  
What fearful risks this hammer must have run.  
And, to say truth, its praise deserves to shine  
In lays more lofty and more famed than mine :  
Oh ! that in strains which ne'er should be forgot,  
its deeds were blazon'd forth by Walter Scott !  
Then should its name with his be closely link'd,  
And live till every mineral were extinct.  
Rise, epic bards ! be yours the ample field—  
Bid W——'s hammer match Achilles' shield :  
As for my muse, the chaos of her brain,  
I search for specimens of wit in vain ;  
Then let me cease ignoble rhymes to stammer,  
And seek some theme less arduous than the ham-  
mer ;  
Remembering well, " what perils do environ "  
Woman or " man that meddles with cold iron."

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PROLOGUE TO THE *POOR GENTLEMAN*,

AS INTENDED TO BE PERFORMED BY THE OFFICERS OF THE  
34TH REGIMENT AT CLONMEL.<sup>1</sup>

*Enter Captain GEORGE BROWNE, in the character of  
Corporal FOSS.*

To-NIGHT, kind friends, at your tribunal here,  
Stands "The Poor Gentleman," with many a fear ;  
Since well he knows, whoe'er may judge his cause,  
That Poverty's no title to applause.  
Genius or Wit, pray, who'll admire or quote,  
If all their drapery be a threadbare coat ?  
Who, in a world where all is bought and sold,  
Minds a man's worth—except his worth in gold ?  
Who'll greet poor Merit if she lacks a dinner !  
Hence, starving saint, but welcome, wealthy sinner !  
Away with Poverty ! let none receive her,  
She bears contagion as a plague or fever ;  
"Bony, and gaunt, and grim"—like jaundiced eyes,  
Discolouring all within her sphere that lies.  
"Poor Gentleman !" and by poor soldiers, too !  
Oh, matchless impudence ! without a sous !  
In scenes, in actors poor, and what far worse is,  
With heads, perhaps, as empty as their purses,  
How shall they dare at such a bar appear ?  
What are their tactics and manœuvres here ?

While thoughts like these come rushing o'er  
our mind,  
Oh ! may we still indulgence hope to find !  
Brave sons of Erin ! whose distinguish'd name  
Shines with such brilliance in the page of Fame,

<sup>1</sup> These verses were written about the same time as the preceding humorous epitaphs.

And you, fair daughters of the Emerald Isle !  
View our weak efforts with approving smile !  
School'd in rough camps, and still disdaining art,  
Ill can the soldier act a borrow'd part ;  
The march, the skirmish, in this warlike age,  
Are his rehearsals, and the field his stage ;  
His theatre is found in every land,  
Where wave the ensigns of a hostile band :  
Place him in danger's front—he recks not where—  
Be your own Wellington his prompter there,  
And on that stage he trusts, with fearful mien,  
He'll act his part in glory's tragic scene.  
Yet here, though friends are gaily marshall'd  
    round,  
And from bright eyes alone he dreads a wound,  
Here, though in ambush no sharpshooter's wile  
Aims at his breast, save hid in beauty's smile ;  
Though all unused to pause, to doubt, to fear,  
Yet his heart sinks, his courage fails him here.  
No scenic pomp to him its aid supplies,  
No stage effect of glittering pageantries :  
No, to your kindness he must look alone  
To realise the hope he dares not own ;  
And trusts, since here he meets no cynic eye,  
His wish to please may claim indemnity.

And why despair, indulgence when we crave  
From Erin's sons, the generous and the brave ?  
Theirs the high spirit, and the liberal thought,  
Kind, warm, sincere, with native candour fraught ;  
Still has the stranger, in their social isle,  
Met the frank welcome and the cordial smile,  
And well their hearts can share, though unexpress'd,  
Each thought, each feeling, of the soldier's breast.