COWPER, William

**To a Young Lady**

Sweet stream, that winds through yonder glade,

Apt emblem of a virtuous maid—

Silent and chaste she steals along,

Far from the world’s gay busy throng:

With gentle yet prevailing force,

Intent upon her destined course;

Graceful and useful all she does;

Blessing and blest where’er she goes;

Pure-bosom’d as that watery glass,

And Heaven reflected in her face.  
 **A Comparison**

The lapse of time and rivers is the same,

Both speed their journey with a restless stream;

The silent pace, with which they steal away,

No wealth can bribe, no prayers persuade to stay;

Alike irrevocable both when past,

And a wide ocean swallows both at last.

Though each resemble each in every part,

A difference strikes at length the musing heart;

Streams never flow in vain; where streams abound,

How laughs the land with various plenty crown’d!

But time, that should enrich the nobler mind,

Neglected, leaves a dreary waste behind.  
 **God Moves in a Mysterious Way**God moves in a mysterious way,

His wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea,

And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill;

He treasures up his bright designs,

And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,

The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy, and shall break

In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust him for his grace;

Behind a frowning providence,

He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding ev'ry hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,

And scan his work in vain;

God is his own interpreter,

And he will make it plain.  
 **The Negro's Complaint**

Forc'd from home, and all its pleasures,

Afric's coast I left forlorn;

To increase a stranger's treasures,

O'er the raging billows borne.

Men from England bought and sold me,

Paid my price in paltry gold;

But, though theirs they have enroll'd me,

Minds are never to be sold.

Still in thought as free as ever,

What are England's rights, I ask,

Me from my delights to sever,

Me to torture, me to task?

Fleecy locks, and black complexion

Cannot forfeit nature's claim;

Skins may differ, but affection

Dwells in white and black the same.

Why did all creating Nature

Make the plant for which we toil?

Sighs must fan it, tears must water,

Sweat of ours must dress the soil.

Think, ye masters, iron-hearted,

Lolling at your jovial boards;

Think how many backs have smarted

For the sweets your cane affords.

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,

Is there one who reigns on high?

Has he bid you buy and sell us,

Speaking from his throne the sky?

Ask him, if your knotted scourges,

Matches, blood-extorting screws,

Are the means that duty urges

Agents of his will to use?

Hark! He answers!—Wild tornadoes,

Strewing yonder sea with wrecks;

Wasting towns, plantations, meadows,

Are the voice with which he speaks.

He, foreseeing what vexations

Afric's sons should undergo,

Fix'd their tyrants' habitations

Where his whirlwinds answer—  
 **The Task**

…..  
For I have loved the rural walk through lanes

Of grassy swarth, close cropped by nibbling sheep

And skirted thick with intertexture firm

Of thorny boughs; have loved the rural walk

O’er hills, through valleys, and by rivers’ brink,

E’er since a truant boy I passed my bounds

To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames;

And still remember, nor without regret

Of hours that sorrow since has much endeared,

How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,

Still hungering, penniless and far from home,

I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,

Or blushing crabs, or berries that emboss

The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.

…...  
How oft upon yon eminence our pace

Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne

The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,

While admiration feeding at the eye,

And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.

…..  
  
  
**Yardley Oak**

Survivor sole, and hardly such, of all

That once lived here, thy brethren, at my birth

(Since which I number threescore winters past,)

A shattered veteran, hollow-trunked perhaps

As now, and with excoriate forks deform,

Relicts of ages! Could a mind imbued

With truth from Heaven created thing adore,

I might with reverence kneel and worship thee.

It seems idolatry with some excuse

When our forefather druids in their oaks

Imagined sanctity. The conscience yet

Unpurified by an authentic act

Of amnesty, the meed of blood divine,

Loved not the light, but gloomy into gloom

Of thickest shades, like Adam after taste

Of fruit proscribed, as to a refuge, fled.

Thou wast a bauble once; a cup and ball,

Which babes might play with; and the thievish jay

Seeking her food, with ease might have purloined

The auburn nut that held thee, swallowing down

Thy yet close-folded latitude of boughs

And all thine embryo vastness, at a gulp.

But fate thy growth decreed. Autumnal rains

Beneath thy parent tree mellowed the soil

Designed thy cradle, and a skipping deer

With pointed hoof dibbling the glebe, prepared

The soft receptacle in which secure

Thy rudiments should sleep the winter through.

So Fancy dreams. Disprove it if ye can

Ye reasoners broad awake, whose busy search

Of argument, employed too oft amiss,

Sifts half the pleasures of short life away.

Thou fell'st mature, and in the loamy clod

Swelling, with vegetative force instinct

Didst burst thine egg, as theirs the fabled twins

Now stars, two lobes protruding paired exact.

A leaf succeeded, and another leaf,

And all the elements thy puny growth

Fostering propitious, thou becamest a twig.

Who lived when thou wast such? Oh could’st thou speak

As in Dodona once thy kindred trees

Oracular, I would not curious ask

The future, best unknown, but at thy mouth

Inquisitive, the less ambiguous past.

By thee I might correct, erroneous oft,

The clock of history, facts and events

Timing more punctual, unrecorded facts

Recovering, and mis-stated setting right.

Desperate attempt till trees shall speak again!

Time made thee what thou wast, king of the woods.

And Time hath made thee what thou art, a cave

For owls to roost in. Once thy spreading boughs

O'erhung the champaign, and the numerous flock

That grazed it stood beneath that ample cope

Uncrowded, yet safe-sheltered from the storm.

No flock frequents thee now; thou hast outlived

Thy popularity, and art become

(Unless verse rescue thee awhile) a thing

Forgotten as the foliage of thy youth.

While thus through all the stages thou hast pushed

Of tree-ship, first a seedling hid in grass,

Then twig, then sapling, and, as century rolled

Slow after century, a giant bulk

Of girth enormous with moss-cushioned root

Upheaved above the soil, and sides embossed

With prominent wens globose, till at the last

The rottenness which Time is charged to inflict

On other mighty ones found also thee -

What exhibitions various hath the world

Witnessed of mutability in all

That we account most durable below!

Change is the diet on which all subsist

Created changeable, and change at last

Destroys them. Skies uncertain, now the heat

Transmitting cloudless, and the solar beam

Now quenching in a boundless sea of clouds,

Calm and alternate storm, moisture and drought,

Invigorate by turns the springs of life

In all that live, plant, animal, and man,

And in conclusion mar them. Nature's threads,

Fine, passing thought, even in her coarsest works,

Delight in agitation, yet sustain

The force that agitates not unimpaired,

But worn by frequent impulse, to the cause

Of their best tone their dissolution owe.

Thought cannot spend itself comparing still

The great and little of thy lot, thy growth

From almost nullity into a state

Of matchless grandeur, and declension thence

Slow into such magnificent decay.

Time was, when settling on thy leaf a fly

Could shake thee to the root, and time has been

When tempests could not. At thy firmest age

Thou hadst within thy bole solid contents

That might have ribbed the sides or planked the deck

Of some flagged admiral, and tortuous arms,

The shipwright's darling treasure, didst present

To the four-quartered winds, robust and bold,

Warped into tough knee-timber, many a load.

But the axe spared thee; in those thriftier days

Oaks fell not, hewn by thousands, to supply

The bottomless demands of contest waged

For senatorial honours. Thus to Time

The task was left to whittle thee away

With his sly scythe, whose ever-nibbling edge

Noiseless, an atom and an atom more

Disjoining from the rest, has unobserved

Achieved a labour, which had far and wide,

(By man performed) made all the forest ring.

Embowelled now, and of thy ancient self

Possessing nought but the scooped rind that seems

An huge throat calling to the clouds for drink

Which it would give in riv’lets to thy root,

Thou temptest none, but rather much forbidd'st

The feller's toil, which thou couldst ill requite.

Yet is thy root sincere, sound as the rock,

A quarry of stout spurs and knotted fangs

Which crook'd into a thousand whimsies, clasp

The stubborn soil, and hold thee still erect.

So stands a kingdom whose foundations yet

Fail not, in virtue and in wisdom laid,

Though all the superstructure by the tooth

Pulverised of venality, a shell

Stands now, and semblance only of itself.

Thine arms have left thee. Winds have rent them off

Long since, and rovers of the forest wild

With bow and shaft, have burnt them. Some have left

A splintered stump bleached to a snowy white,

And some memorial none where once they grew.

Yet life still lingers in thee, and puts forth

Proof not contemptible of what she can

Even where death predominates. The spring

Thee finds not less alive to her sweet force

Than yonder upstarts of the neighbour wood

So much thy juniors, who their birth received

Half a millennium since the date of thine.

But since, although well-qualified by age

To teach, no spirit dwells in thee, nor voice

May be expected from thee, seated here

On thy distorted root, with hearers none

Or prompter save the scene, I will perform

Myself the oracle, and will discourse

In my own ear such matter as I may.

One man alone, the Father of us all,

Drew not his life from woman; never gazed

With mute unconsciousness of what he saw

On all around him; learned not by degrees,

Nor owed articulation to his ear;

But moulded by his maker into man

At once, upstood intelligent, surveyed

All creatures, with precision understood

Their purport, uses, properties, assign'd

To each his name significant, and, filled

With love and wisdom, rendered back to heaven

In praise harmonious the first air he drew.

He was excused the penalties of dull

Minority; no tutor charged his hand

With the thought-tracing quill, or tasked his mind

With problems. History, not wanted yet,

Leaned on her elbow, watching Time, whose course

Eventful should supply her with a theme....