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Moorman

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SONGS OF THE
RIDINGS ***

Songs of the Ridings

by F. W. Moorman

I DEDICATE
THIS VOLUME TO THE
YORKSHIRE MEMBERS OF THE
WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL
ASSOCIATION

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Preface

Abut two years ago I published a collection of Yorkshire dialect poems, chosen from many authors and extending over a period of two hundred and fifty years^[1]. The volume was well received, and there are abundant signs that the interest in dialect literature is steadily growing in all parts of the county and beyond its borders. What is most encouraging is to find that the book has found an entrance into the homes of Yorkshire peasants and artisans where the works of our great national poets are unknown. I now essay the more venturesome task of publishing dialect verses of my own. Most of the poems contained in this little volume have appeared, anonymously, in the Yorkshire press, and I have now decided to reissue them in book form and with my name on the title-page.

A generation ago the minor poet was, in the eyes of most Englishmen, an object of ridicule. Dickens and Thackeray had done their worst with him: we knew him—or her—as Augustus Snodgrass or Blanche Amory—an amiable fool or an unamiable minx. The twentieth century has already, in its short course, done much to remove this prejudice, and the minor poet is no longer expected to be apologetic; his circle of readers, though small, is sympathetic, and the outside public is learning to tolerate him and to recognise that it is as natural and wholesome for him to write and publish his verses as it is for the minor painter to depict and exhibit in public his interpretation of the beauty and power which he sees in human life and in nature. All this is clear gain, and the time may not be far distant when England will again become what it was in Elizabethan days - a nest of singing birds, where te minor poets will be able to take their share in the chorus of song, leaving the chief parts in the oratorio to the Shakespeares and Spensers of tomorrow.

The twenty-five poems of which this volume consists are meant to serve a double purpose. Most of them are character-sketches or dramatic studies, and my wish is to bring before the notice of my readers the habits of mind of certain Yorkshire men and women whose acquaintance I have made. For ten years I have gone up hill and down dale in the three Ridings, intent on the study of the sounds, words and idioms of the local folk-speech. At first my object was purely philological, but soon I came to realise that men and women were more interesting than words and phrases, and my attention was attracted from dialect speech to dialect speakers. Among Yorkshire farmers, farm labourers, fishermen, miners and mill workers I discovered a vitality and an outlook upon life of which I, a bourgeois professor, had no previous knowledge. Not, only had I never met such men before, but I had not read about them in literature, or seen their portraits painted on canvas. The wish to give a literary interpretation of the world into which I had been privileged to enter grew every day more insistent, and this volume is the fulfilment of that wish.

Of all forms of literature, whether in Verse or prose, the dramatic monologue seemed to me the aptest for the exposition of character and habits of mind. It is the creation—or recreation—of Robert Browning, the most illuminating interpreter of the workings of the human mind that England has produced since Shakespeare died. My first endeavour was therefore

to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

I have been, I fear, a clumsy botcher in applying the lessons that Browning was able to teach, but the dramatic monologues of which this volume is largely composed owe whatever art they may possess to his example. My dramatic studies are drawn from life. For example, the local preacher who expresses his views on the rival merits of Church and Chapel is a Wharfedale acquaintance, and the farmer in *Cambodunum* who declares that "eddcation's nowt but muckment" actually expressed this view to a Chief Inspector of Schools, a member of the West Riding Education Committee, and myself, when we visited him on his farm. I do not claim that I have furnished literal transcripts of what I heard in my conversations with my heroes and heroines, but my purpose throughout has been to hold a mirror up to Nature, to give a faithful interpretation of thought and character, and to show my readers some of the ply of mind and habits of life that still prevail among Yorkshiremen whose individuality has not been blunted by convention and who have the courage to express their reasoned or instinctive views of life and society.

But the interpretation of the minds of Yorkshire peasants and artisans

for the benefit of the so-called general reader is only the secondary object which I have in view. My primary appeal is not to those who have the full chorus of English song, from Chaucer to Masfield, at their beck and call, but to a still larger class of men and women who are not general readers of literature at all, and for whom most English poetry is a closed book. In my dialect wanderings through Yorkshire I discovered that while there was a hunger for poetry in the hearts of the people, the great masterpieces of our national song made little or no appeal to them. They were bidden to a feast of rarest quality and profusion, but it consisted of food that they could not assimilate. Spenser, Milton, Pope, Keats, Tennyson, all spoke to them in a language which they could not understand, and presented to them a world of thought and life in which they had no inheritance. But the Yorkshire dialect verse which circulated through the dales in chap-book or Christmas almanac was welcomed everywhere. Two memories come before my mind as I write. One is that of a North Riding farm labourer who knew by heart many of the dialect poems of the Eskdale poet, John Castillo, and was in the habit of reciting them to himself as he followed the plough. The other is that of a blind girl in a West Riding village who had committed to memory scores of the poems of John Hartley, and, gathering her neighbours round her kitchen fire of a winter evening, regaled them with *Bite Bigger*, *Nelly o' Bob's* and other verses of the Halifax poet. My object is to add something to this chorus of local song. It was the aim of Addison in his *Spectator* essays to bring "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffeehouses"; and, in like manner, it should be the aim of the writer of dialect verse to bring poetry out of the coteries of the people of leisure and to make it dwell in artisans' tenements and in cottagers' kitchens. "Poetry," declared Shelley, "is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds," and it is time that the working men and women of England were made partakers in this inheritance of wealth and joy.

It maybe argued that it should be the aim of our schools and universities to educate the working classes to appreciate what is best in standard English poetry. I do not deny that much maybe done in this way, but let us not forget that something more will be needed than a course of instruction in poetic diction and metrical rhythm. Our great poets depict a world which is only to a very small extent that of the working man. It is a world of courts and drawingrooms and General Headquarters, a world of clubs and academies. The working man or woman finds a place in this charmed world only if his occupation is that of a shepherd, and even then he must be a shepherd of the Golden Age and answer to the name of Corydon. Poets, we are solemnly assured by Pope, must not describe shepherds as they really are, "but as they may be conceived to have been when the best of men followed the employment of shepherd." Class-consciousness—a word often on the lips of our democratic leaders of today—has held far too much sway over the minds of poets from the Elizabethan age onwards. Spenser writes his *Faerie Queene* "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," and Milton's audience, fit but few, is composed of scholars whose ears have been attuned to the harmonies of epic verse from their first lisping of Virgilian hexameters, or of latter-day Puritans, like John Bright, who overhear in *Paradise Lost* the echoes of a faith that once was stalwart.

But what, it may be asked, of Crabbe, and what of Wordsworth? The former by his own confession, paints

the cot,
As truth will paint it and as bards will not;

but as we listen to his verse tales we can never forget that it is the Rev. George Crabbe who is instructing us, or that his pedestal is the topmost story of his three-decker pulpit at Aldborough. Wordsworth's sympathy with the lives of the Cumberland peasantry is profound, and the time is surely not distant when such a poem as 'Michael' will win a place in the hearts of working men; but it is to be feared that in his own generation "Mr Wudsworth" served rather—as a warning than an encouragement to his peasant neighbours. "Many's the time," an old Cumberland innkeeper told Canon Rawnsley, "I've seed him a-takin' his family out in a string, and niver geein' the deariest bit of notice to 'em; standin' by hissel' an' stoppin' behind a-gapin', wi' his jaws workin' the whoal time; but niver no crackin' wi' 'em, nor no pleasure in 'em—a desolate-minded man, ye kna... It was potry as did it."^[2]

Our English non-dramatic poetry from the Renaissance onwards is second to none in richness of thought and beauty of diction, but it lacks

the highest quality of all—universality of interest and appeal. Our poets have turned a cold shoulder to the activities and aims of the working man, and the working man has, in consequence, turned a cold shoulder to the great English classic poets. The loss on either side has been great, though it is only now beginning to be realised. "A literature which leaves large areas of the national activity and aspiration unexpressed is in danger of becoming narrow, esoteric, unhealthy. Areas of activity and aspiration unlit by the cleansing sun of art, untended by the loving consideration of the poet, will be dungeons for the national spirit, mildewed cellars in which rats fight, misers hoard their gold, and Guy Fawkes lays his train to blow the superstructure sky-high."^[3]

There was a time when poetry meant much more to the working men of England. In the later Middle Ages, above all in that fifteenth century which literary historians are fond of describing as the darkest period in English literature, the working man had won for himself what seemed a secure place in poetry. Narrative, lyric and dramatic poetry had all opened their portals to him, and made his life and aims their theme. Side by side with the courtly verse romances, which were read in the bowers of highborn ladies, were the terse and popular ballads, which were chanted by minstrels, wandering from town to town and from village to village. Among the heroes of these ballads we find that "wight yeoman," Robin Hood, who wages war against mediaeval capitalism, as embodied in the persons of the abbot-landholders, and against the class legislation of Norman game laws which is enforced by the King's sheriff. The lyric poetry of the century is not the courtly Troubadour song or the Petrarchian sonnet, but the folk-song that sings from the heart to the heart of the beauty of Alysoun, "seemliest of all things," or, in more convivial mood, accounts good ale of more worth than a table set with many dishes:

Bring us in no capon's flesh, for that is often dear,
Nor bring us in no duck's flesh, for they slobber in the mere,
But bring us in good ale!
Bring us in good ale, and bring us in good ale;
For our blessed Lady sake bring us in good ale.

Most remarkable of all is the history of the drama in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The drama was clerical and not popular in its origin, and when, in course of time, it passed out of the hands of the clergy it is natural to suppose that it would find a new home at the King's court or the baron's castle. It did nothing of the kind. It passed from the Church to the people, and it was the artisan craftsmen of the English towns, organised in their trade-guilds, to whom we owe the great cycles of our miracle plays. The authors of these plays were restricted to Bible story for their themes, but the popular character of their work is everywhere apparent in the manner in which the material is handled and the characters conceived. The Noah of the Deluge plays is an English master joiner with a shrewish wife, and three sons who are his apprentices. When the divine command to build an ark comes to him, he sets to work with an energy that drives away "the weariness of five hundred winters" and, "ligging on his line," measures his planks, "clenches them with noble new nails", and takes a craftsman's delight in the finished work:

This work I warant both good and true.^[4]

In like manner, the Shepherds of the Nativity plays are conceived and fashioned by men who, fortunate in that they knew nothing of the seductions of Arcadian pastoralism, have studied at first hand the habits and thoughts of English fifteenth-century shepherds, and paint these to the life.

Thus, at the close of the Middle Ages, narrative, lyric and dramatic poetry seemed firmly established among the people. Not unmindful of romance, it was grounded in realism and sought to interpret the life of the peasant and the artisan of fifteenth-century England. The Renaissance follows, and a profound change comes over poetry. The popular note grows fainter and fainter, till at last it becomes inaudible. Poetry leaves the farmyard and the craftsman's bench for the court. The folk-song, fashioned in to a thing of wondrous beauty by the creator of *Amiens*, *Feste* and *Autolycus*, is driven from the stage by Ben Jonson, and its place is taken by a lyric of classic extraction. The popular drama, ennobled and made shapely through contact with Latin drama, passes from the provincial market-place to *Bankside*, and the rude mechanicals of the trade-guilds yield place to the Lord Chamberlain's players. In the dramas of Shakespeare the popular note is still audible, but only as an undertone, furnishing comic relief to the romantic amours of courtly

lovers or the tragic fall of Princes; with Beaumont and Fletcher, and still more with Dryden and the Restoration dramatists, the popular element in the drama passes away, and the triumph of the court is complete. The Elizabethan court could find no use for the popular ballad, but, like other forms of literature, it was attracted from the country-side to the city. Forgetful of the greenwood, it now batted on the garbage of Newgate, and *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisburn* yields place to *The Wofull Lamentation of William Purchas, who for murthuring his Mother at Thaxted, was executed at Chelmsford*.

We are justly proud of the Renaissance and of the glories of our Elizabethan literature, but let us frankly own that in the annals of poetry there was loss as well as gain. The gain was for the courtier and the scholar, and for all those who, in the centuries that followed the Renaissance, have been able, by means of education, to enter into the courtier's and scholar's inheritance. The loss has been for the people. The opposition between courtly taste and popular taste is hard to analyse, but we have only to turn our eyes from England to Scotland, which lost its royal court in 1603, in order to appreciate the reality of the opposition. In Scotland the courtly poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries soon disappeared when James I exchanged Holyrood for Whitehall, but popular poetry continued to live and grow. The folk-song gathered power and sweetness all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, till it culminated at last in the lyric of Burns. Popular drama, never firmly rooted in Scotland, was stamped out by the Reformation, but the popular ballad outlived the mediaeval minstrel, was kept alive in the homes of Lowland farmers and shepherds, and called into being the great ballad revival of the nineteenth century.

It is idle to speculate what would have been the progress of poetry in England if the Renaissance had not come and the Elizabethan courtier had not enriched himself at the expense of the people. What we have to bear in mind is that all through the centuries that followed the Renaissance the working men and women of England looked almost in vain to their poets for a faithful interpretation of their life and aims. The wonder is that the instinct for poetry did not perish in their hearts for lack of sustenance.

There are at the present time clear signs of a revival of popular poetry and popular drama. The verse tales of Masfield and Gibson, the lyrics of Patrick MacGill, the peasant or artisan plays which have been produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, may well be the beginning of a great democratic literary movement. Democracy, in its striving after a richer and fuller life for the people of England, is at last turning its attention to literature and art. It is slowly realising two great truths. The first is that literature may be used as a mighty weapon in the furtherance of political justice and social reform, and that the pied pipers of folk-song have the power to rouse the nation and charm the ears of even the Mother of Parliaments. The second is that the working man needs something more to sustain him than bread and the franchise and a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. Democracy, having obtained for the working man a place in the government of the nation, is now asserting his claim to a place in the temples of poetry. The Arthurian knight, the Renaissance courtier, the scholar and the wit must admit the twentieth-century artisan to their circle. Piers the ploughman must once more become the hero of song, and Saul Kane, the poacher, must find a place, alongside of Tiresias and Merlin, among the seers and mystics. Let democracy look to William Morris, poet, artist and social democrat, for inspiration and guidance, and take to heart the message of prophecy which he has left us: "If art, which is now sick, is to live and not die, it must in the future be of the people, for the people, by the people."

In the creation of this poetry "of the people, by the people" dialect may well be called upon to play a part. Dialect is of the people, though in a varying degree in the different parts of the wide areas of the globe where the English language is spoken; it possesses, moreover, qualities, and is fraught with associations, which are of the utmost value to the poet and to which the standard speech can lay no claim. It may be that for some of the more elaborate kinds of poetry, such as the formal epic, dialect is useless; let it be reserved, therefore, for those kinds which appeal most directly to the hearts of the people. The poetry of the people includes the ballad and the verse tale, lyric in all its forms, and some kinds of satire; and for all these dialect is a fitting instrument. It possesses in the highest degree directness of utterance and racy vigour. How much of their force would the "Biglow Papers" of J. R. Lowell lose if they were transcribed from the Yankee dialect into standard English!

But the highest quality of dialect speech, and that which renders it pre-

eminently fitted for poetic use, is its intimate association with all that lies nearest to the heart of the working man. It is the language of his hearth and home; many of the most cherished memories of his life are bound up with it; it is for him the language of freedom, whereas standard English is that of constraint. In other words, dialect is the working man's poetic diction—a poetic diction as full of savour as that of the eighteenth-century poets was flat and insipid.

It is sometimes said that the use of dialect makes the appeal of poetry provincial instead of national or universal. This is only true when the dialect poet is a pedant and obscures his meaning by fantastic spellings. The Lowland Scots element in *Auld Lang Syne* has not prevented it from becoming the song of friendship of the Anglo-Saxon race all the world over. Moreover, the provincial note in poetry or prose is far from being a bad thing. In the *Idylls* of Theocritus it gave new life to Greek poetry in the third century before Christ, and it may render the same high service to English poetry to-day or to-morrow. The rise of Provincial schools of literature, interpreting local life in local idiom, in all parts of the British Isles and in the Britain beyond the seas, is a goal worth striving for; such a literature, so far from impeding the progress of the literature in the standard tongue, would serve only to enrich it in spirit, substance and form.

[1] *Yorkshire Dialect Poems*, 1673-1915 (Sedgwick and Jackson 1916)

[2] *Reminiscences*.

[3] J. Dover Wilson, Writing in the *Athenæum* under the pseudonym "Muezzin," February, 1917. The quotation is from one of four articles, entitled "Prospects in English Literature," to which the ideas set forth in this Preface owe much.

[4] "York Plays": *The Building of the Ark*.

A Dalesman's Litany

From Hull, Halifax, and Hell, good Lord deliver us.
A Yorkshire Proverb.

It's hard when fowks can't finnd their wark
Wheer they've bin bred an' born;
When I were young I awlus thowt
I'd bide 'mong t' roots an' corn.
But I've bin forced to work i' towns,
So here's my litany:
Frae Hull, an' Halifax, an' Hell,
Gooid Lord, deliver me!

When I were courtin' Mary Ann,
T' owd squire, he says one day:
"I've got no bield^[1] for wedded fowks;
Choose, wilt ta wed or stay?"
I couldn't gie up t' lass I loved,
To t' town we had to flee:
Frae Hull, an' Halifax, an' Hell,
Gooid Lord, deliver me!

I've wrowt i' Leeds an' Huthersfel',
An' addled^[2] honest brass;
I' Bradforth, Keighley, Rotherham,
I've kept my barns an' lass.
I've travelled all three Ridin's round,
And once I went to sea:
Frae forges, mills, an' coalin' boats,
Gooid Lord, deliver me!

I've walked at neet through Sheffield loans,^[3]
'T were same as bein' i' Hell:
Furnaces thrast out tongues o' fire,
An' roared like t' wind on t' fell.
I've sammed up coals i' Barnsley pits,
Wi' muck up to my knee:
Frae Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham,
Gooid Lord, deliver me!

I've seen grey fog creep ower Leeds Brig
As thick as bastile^[4] soup;
I've lived wheer fowks were stowed away
Like rabbits in a coop.
I've watched snow float down Bradforth Beck
As black as ebiny:
Frae Hunslet, Holbeck, Wibsey Slack,
Gooid Lord, deliver me!

But now, when all wer childer's fligged,^[5]
To t' coountry we've coom back.
There's fotty mile o' heathery moor
Twix' us an' t' coal-pit slack.
And when I sit ower t' fire at neet,
I laugh an' shout wi' glee:
Frae Bradforth, Leeds, an' Huthersfel',
Frae Hull, an' Halifax, an' Hell,
T' gooid Lord's delivered me!

[1] Shelter.

[2] Earned.

[3] Lanes.

[4] Workhouse.

[5] Fledged.

Cambodunum

Cambodunum is the name of a Roman station, situated on a farm at Slack, on the hills above Huddersfield.

Cambodunum, Cambodunum,
how I love the sound o' t' name!
Roman souldiers belt a fort here,
gave th' owd place its lastin' fame.

We've bin lords o' Cambodunum
for well-nigh eight hunderd yeer;
Fowk say our fore-elders
bowt it of a Roman charioteer.

Ay, I know we're nobbut farmers,
mowin' gerse an' tentin' kye,
But we're proud of all we've stood for
i' yon ages that's gone by;

Proud of all the slacks we've drained,
an' proud of all the walls we've belt,
Proud to think we've bred our childer
on the ground wheer Romans dwelt.

"Niver pairt wi' Cambodunum,"
that's what father used to say;
"If thou does, thou'll coom to ruin,
beg thy breed thro' day to day."

I'll noan pairt wi' Cambodunum,
though its roof lets in the rains,
An' its walls wi' age are totterin';
Cambodunum's i' my veins.

Ivery stone about the buildin'
has bin dressed by Roman hands,
An' red blood o' Roman souldiers
has bin temmed^[1] out on its lands.

Often, when I ploo i' springtime,
I leet on their buried hoard—
Coins an' pottery, combs an' glasses;
once I fan' a rusty sword.

Whisht! I'll tell thee what I saw here
of a moon-lit winter neet—
Ghosts o' Romans i' their war-gear,
wheelin' slow wi' silent feet;

Pale their faces, proud their bearin',
an' a strange gloor i' their een,
As they marched past an' saluted,
while th' east wind blew snell an' keen.

Dalewards, dalewards, iver dalewards,
th' hill-fowk wander yeer by yeer,
An' they toss their heeads an' flout me,
when they see me bidin' here.

I've one answer to their fleerin':
"I'll noan be a fact'ry slave,
Breathin' poison i' yon wark-shops,
diggin' ivery day my grave."

"You may addle brass i' plenty,
you'll noan addle peace o' mind;
That sal bide amang us farmers
on th' owd hills you've left behind."

See that place down theer i' t' valley,
wheer yon chimleys spit out smoke?
Huthersfield is what they call it,
wheer fowk live like pigs i' t' poke;

Wheer men grind their hearts to guineas,
an' their mills are awlus thrang,
Turnin' neet-time into day-time,
niver stoppin' th' whole yeer lang.

Cambodunum up on th' hill-tops,
Huthersfield down i' yon dale;
One's a place for free-born Britons,
t'other's ommost like a jail.

Here we live i' t' leet an' sunshine,
free as larks i' t' sky aboon;
Theer men tew^[2] like mowdiwarps^[3]
that grub up muck by t' glent o' t' moon.

See yon motor whizzin' past us,
ower th' owd brig that spans our beck;
That's what fowk call modern progress,
march o' human intelleck.

Modern progress, modern ruin!
March o' int'leck, march o' foails!
All that cooms o' larnin' childer
i' their colleges an' schooils.

Eddication! Sanitation!!—
teeming brass reight down a sink;
Eddication's nowt but muckment,
sanitation's just a stink.

Childer mun have books an' picturs,
bowt at t' most expensive shops,
Teliscowps to go star-gazin',
michaelscowps to look at lops.^[4]

Farmers munnot put their midden
straight afoor their kitchen door;
Once a week they're set spring-cleanin',
fettlin' up their shippin^[5] floor.

Women-fowk have taen to knackin',^[6]
wilent speyk their mother-tongue,
Try to talk like chaps i' t' powpit,
chicken-chisted, wake i' t' lung.

Some fowk say I'm too owd-fashioned;
mebbe, they are tellin' true:
When you've lived wi' ghosts o' Romans,
you've no call for owt that's new.

Weel I know I san't win t' vict'ry:
son's agean me, dowters, wife;
Yit I'll hold my ground bout flinchin',
feight so long as I have life.

An' if t' wick uns are agean me,
I sal feight for them that's deead—
Roman sowdiers i' their trenches,
lapped i' mail thro' foot to heead.

Here I stand for Cambodunum,
eagle's nest on t' Pennine hills,
Wagin' war wi' modern notions,
carin' nowt for forges, mills.

Deeath alone sal call surrender,
stealin' on me wi' his hosts,
And when Deeath has won his battle,
I'll go seek my Roman ghosts.

Then I'll hear their shout o' welcome
"Here cooms Bob 'o Dick 'o Joe's,
Bred an' born at Cambodunum,
held th'owd fort agean his foes;

“Fowt for ancient ways an’ customs,
ne’er to feshion bent his knee;
Oppen t’ ranks, lads, let him enter;
he’s a Roman same as we.”

[1] Poured.

[2] Slave.

[3] Moles.

[4] Fleas.

[5] Cow-house.

[6] Affected pronunciation.

Telling the Bees

On many Yorkshire farms it was—perhaps still is—the custom to tell the bees when a death had taken place in the family. The hive had to be put into mourning, and when the arval, or funeral feast, was held, after the return from the grave, small portions of everything eaten or drunk had to be given to the bees in a saucer. Failure to do this meant either the death or departure of the bees.

Whisht! laattle bees, sad tidings I bear,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low ;
Cauld i' his grave ligs your maister dear,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.
Nea mair he'll ride to t' soond o' t' horn,
Nea mair he'll fettle his sickle for t' corn.
Nea mair he'll coom to your skep of a morn,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.

Muther sits cryin' i' t' ingle nook,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low ;
Parson's anent her wi' t' Holy Book,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.
T' mourners are coom, an' t' arval is spread,
Cakes fresh frae t' yoon,^[1] an' fine havver-bread.
But toom^[2] is t' seat at t' table-head,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.

Look, conny^[3] bees, I's winndin' black crape,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low ;
Slowly an' sadly your skep I mun drape,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.
Else you will sicken an' dwine^[4] reet away,
Heart-brokken bees, now your maister is clay ;
Or, mebbe, you'l leave us wi' t' dawn o' t' day,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.

Sitha ! I bring you your share o' our feast,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low ;
Cakes an' yal^[5] an' wine you mun taste,
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.
Gie some to t' queen on her gowlden throne,
There's foison to feed both worker an' drone ;
Oh ! dean't let us fend for oursels alone ;
Bees, bees, murmurin' low.

[1] Oven.

[2] Empty.

[3] Darling.

[4] Waste.

[5] Ale.

The Two Lamplighters

I niver thowt when I grew owd
I'd tak to leetin' lamps;
I sud have said, I'd rayther pad
My hoof on t' road wi' tramps.
But sin I gate that skelp^[1] i' t' mine,
I'm wankle^[2] i' my heead;
So gaffer said, I'd give ower wark
An' leet town lamps atsteead.

At first, when I were liggin' snug
I' bed, warm as a bee,
'T were hard to rise and get agate
As sooin as t' clock strake three.
An' I were flaid to hear my steps
Echoin' on ivery wall;
An' flaid yet when down by t' church
Ullets would skreek and call.

But now I'm flaid o' nowt; I love
All unkerd^[3] sounds o' t' neet,
Frae childer talkin' i' their dreams
To t' tramp o' p'licemen' feet.
But most of all I love to hark
To t' song o' t' birds at dawn;
They wakken up afore it gloams,
When t' dew ligs thick on t' lawn.

If I feel lonesome, up I look
To t' sky aboon my heead;
An' theer's yon stars all glestrin' breet,
Like daisies in a mead.
But sometimes, when I'm glowerin' up,
I see the Lord hissien;
He's doutin' all yon lamps o' Heaven
That shines on mortal men.

He lowps along frae star to star,
As cobby^[4] as can be;
Mebbe He reckons fowk's asleep,
Wi' niver an eye to see.
But I hae catched Him at his wark,
For all He maks no din;
He leaves a track o' powder'd gowd^[5]
To show where He has bin.

He's got big lamps an' laatile lamps,
An' lamps that twinkles red;
Im capped to see Him dout 'em all
Afore I'm back i' bed.
But He don't laik about His wark,
Or stop to hark to t' birds;
He minds His business, does the Lord,
An' wastes no gaumless words.

I grow more like Him ivery day,
For all I walk so lame;
An', happen, there will coom a time
I'll beat Him at His game.
Thrang as Throp's wife, I'll dout my lamps
Afore He's gotten so far;
An' then I'll shout—"I've won my race,
I've bet Him by a star."

[1] Blow.

[2] Unsteady.

[3] Strange, eerie.

[4] Active.

[5] The Milky Way.

Our Beck

I niver heerd its name; we call it just "Our beck."
Mebbe, there's bigger streams down Ripon way;
But if thou wants clean watter, by my neck!
Thou'll travel far for cleaner, ony day.

Clear watter! Why, when t' sun is up i' t' sky,
I've seen yon flickerin' shadows o' lile trout
Glidin' ower t' shingly boddom. Step thou nigh,
An' gloor at t' minnows dartin' in an' out.

Our beck flows straight frae slacks o' moorland peat,
An' gethers sweetness out o' t' ling an' gorse;
At first its voice sounds weantly^[1] saft an' leet,
But graws i' strength wi' lowpin ower yon force.

Then thou sud see the birds alang its banks—
Grey heronsews, that coom to fish at dawn;
Dippers, that under t' watter play sike pranks,
An' lang-nebbed curlews, swaimish^[2] as a fawn.

Soomtimes I've seen young otters leave their holes,
An' laik like kitlins ower the silver dew;
An' I've watched squirrels climmin' up the boles
O' beech trees, lowpin' leet frae beugh to beugh.

Fowers! Why, thou'd fill thy skeep,^[3] lass, in an hour,
Wi' gowlands, paigles, blobs,^[4] an' sike-like things;
We've daffydills to deck a bridal bower,
Pansies, wheer lady-cows^[5] can dry their wings.

Young childer often bathe, when t' weather's fine,
Up yonder, wheer t' owd miller's bigged his weir;
I like to see their lish,^[6] nakt bodies shine,
An' watch 'em dive i' t' watter widoot fear.

Ay, yon's our brig, bent like an archer's bow,
It's t' meetin' place o' folk frae near an' far;
Young 'uns coom theer wi' lasses laughin' low,
Owd 'uns to talk o' politics an' t' war.

It's daft when chaps that sit i' Parliament
Weant tak advice frae lads that talk farm-twang;
If t' coontry goes to t' dogs, it's 'cause they've sent
Ower mony city folk to mend what's wrang.

They've taen our day-tale men^[7] to feight for t' land,
Then tell us we mun keep our staggarths^[8] full.
What's lasses, gauvies,^[9] greybeards stark^[10] i' t' hand,
To strip wer kye, an' ploo, an' tew wi' t' shool?^[11]

But theer, I'll nurse my threapin' while it rains,
An' while my rheumatiz is bad to bide;
I mun step heamwards now, through t' yatts^[12] an' lanes,
Wheer t' owd lass waits for me by t' fireside.

[1] Strangely.

[2] Timid.

[3] Basket.

[4] Kingcups, cowslips, globe-flowers.

[5] Ladybirds.

[6] Smooth.

[7] Day Labourers.

[8] Stock Yards.

[9] Simpletons.

[10] Stiff.

[11] Shovel.

[12] Gates.

Lord George

These verses were written soon after the Old Age Pensions Bill came into operation.

I'd walk frae here to Skipton,
Ten mile o' clarty^[1] lanes,
If I might see him face to face
An' thank him for his pains.
He's ta'en me out o' t' Bastile,^[2]
He's gi'en me life that's free:
Five shill'n a week for fuglin'^[3] Death
Is what Lord George gives me.

He gives me leet an' firin',
An' flour to bak i' t' yoon.^[4]
I've tea to mesh for ivery meal
An' sup all t' afternoon.
I've nowt to do but thank him,
An' mak' a cross wi' t' pen;
Five shillin' a week for nobbut that!
Gow! he's the jewel o' men.

I niver mell on pol'tics,
But I do love a lord;
He spends his savin's like a king,
Wheer other fowks 'll hoard.
I know a vast o' widdies
That's seen their seventieth year;
Lord George, he addles brass for all,
Though lots on 't goes for beer.

If my owd man were livin',
He'd say as I spak true;
He couldn't thole them yallow Rads,
But awlus voted blue.
An' parson's wife, shoo telled me
That we'll sooin go to t' poll;
I hope shoo's reight; I'll vote for George,
Wi' all my heart an' soul.

I don't know wheer he springs frae,
Happen it's down Leeds way;
But ivery neet an' mornin'
For his lang life I pray.
He's ta'en me out o' t' Bastile,
He's gi'en me life that's free:
Five shill'n a week for fuglin' Death
Is what Lord George gives me.

[1] Muddy.

[2] Workhouse.

[3] Cheating.

[4] Oven.

Jenny Storm

Young Jenny, she walked ower t' ribbed sea-sand,
(T' lairocks sing sae sweetly, O!)
Wheer she met a fisher-lad, net i' t' hand,
As t' tide cam hoamin'^[1] in.

"Jenny, thy farm is twee mile away;
(T' wing-mouse flits sae featly, O!)
Say, what is thou latin'^[2] at dusk 'o day,
When t' tide cooms hoamin' in."

"I's latin' waif an' strai^[3]f by the feam,
(O! esh an' yak are good for bield)
I's latin' timmer to big me a heam,
As t' tide cooms hoamin' in."

"What for is thou latin' waif an' strai^[4]f?
(T' summer-gauze^[4] floats ower hedge an' field)
What for is thou biggin' a heam an' a hafe,^[5]
When t' tide cooms hoamin' in?"

"To-morn is t' day when I sal be wed,
(T' bride-wain's plenished wi' serge an' silk)
Jock's anchored his boat i' t' lang road-stead,
An' t' tide cooms hoamin' in.

To-morn we gan to t' kirk on t' brow,
(Nesh satin shoon as white as milk)
Fisher-folk wi' me, an' ploo-lads enow,
When t' tide cooms hoamin' in."

"Frae thy jilted lad what gift mun thou get?
(T' lairocks sing sae sweetly, O!))
Twee lucky-steanes, or fine ear-rings o' jet,
When t' tide cooms hoamin' in?"

"I'll tak nayther rings nor steanes frae thee,
(T' wing-mouse flits sae featly, O!)
But yon token I gave thee gie back to me,
Noo t' tide cooms hoamin' in."

"Thy token is safe i' t' Boggle Nook
(T' sea-mew plains when t' sun climns doon)
Thou can finnd it thisel, if thou'll gan an' look,
When t' tide cooms hoamin' in."

Young Jenny, she tripped ower t' yallow strand,
(White ullets^[6] dance i' t' glent o' t' moon)
Her step was ower leet to dimple t' sand,
As t' tide cam hoamin' in.

I' t' Boggle Nook lay t' lad she sud wed;
T' neet-hags skreek sae dowly, O!)
Foul sea-weed cluthered^[7] aboon his head,
An' t' mouth she had kissed wi' blood was red,
As t' tide cam hoamin' in.

Nea tear she shed, nea word she spak,
(T' witches gloor sae foully, O!)
But an awfish^[8] laugh flew ower t' sea-wrack,^[9]
As t' tide cam hoamin' in.

They carried them heam by t' leet o' t' moon,
(T' neet-hags skreek sae dowly, O!)
Him to his grave on t' brow aboon,
Her to yon mad-house i' Scarbro' toon,
Wheer t' tide cooms hoamin' in.

[1] Murmuring.

[2] Searching for.

[3] Flotsam and jetsam.

[4] Gossamer.

[5] Shelter.

[6] Owls.

[7] Tangled.

[8] Eldritch / hideous.

[9] Drifts of sea-weed.

The New Englishman

I've lived all my life i' Keighley,
I'm a Yorkshire artisan;
An' when I were just turned seventy
I became an Englishman.

Nat'ralised German! nay, deng it!
I'm British-born, same as thee!
But I niver thowt mich to my country,
While^[1] my country thowt mich to me.

I were proud o' my lodge an' my union,
An' proud o' my town an' my shire;
But all t' consans o' t' nation,
I left to t' parson an' t' squire.

Class-war were t' faith that I lived for,
I call'd all capit'lists sharks;
An' "T' workin' man has no country,"
Were my Gospel accordin' to Marx.

When I'd lossen my job back i' t' eighties,
An were laikin' for well-nigh two year,
Who said that an out-o'-wark fettler
Were costin' his country dear?

Owd England cared nowt about me,
I could clem^[2] wi' my barns an' my wife;
Shoo were ower thrang wi' buildin' up t' empire
To build up a brokken life.

"Ivery man for hissen," shoo said,
"An' t' dule can catch what he can;
Labour's cheap an' trade's worth more
Nor t' life of a workin' man."

When t' country were chuff,^[3] an' boasted
That t' sun niver set on her flags,
I thowt o' wer back-to-back houses,
Wer childer i' spetches^[4] an' rags,

When t' country drave by i' her carriage,
Wi' flunkies afore an' behind,
I left her to bettermy bodies,
An' I gav her a taste o' my mind.

But when shoo were liggin' i' t' gutter,
Wi' a milit'rist mob at her throat,
"Hands off her!" I cried, "shoo's my mother:"
An' I doffed my cap an' my coit.

I'd gien ower wark at seventy,
But I gat agate once more;
"I'll live for my country, not on her"
Were my words on t' fettle's floor.

Shoo's putten her trust i' us workers,
We'll save her, niver fear;
Feight for her, live for her, dee for her,
Her childer that loves her dear.

Eight o' my grandsons has fallen,
My youngest lad's crippled i' t' arm;
But I'll give her choose-what^[5] shoo axes,
Afore I'll see her tak harm.

T' war is a curse an' a blessin',
If fowks could understand;
It's brokken my home an' my childer,
But it's made me an Englishman.

[1] Until.

[2] Starve.

[3] Arrogant.

[4] Patches.

[5] Whatever.

The Bells of Kirkby Overblow

Draw back my curtains, Mary,
An' oppen t' windey wide;
Ay, ay, I know I'm deein',
While to-morn I'll hardlins bide.
But yit afore all's ovver,
An' I lig cowl as snow,
I'll hear once more them owd church bells
O' Kirkby Overblow.

Mony a neet an' mornin'
I've heerd yon church bells peal;
An' how I've threaped an' cursed 'em
When I was strong an' weel!
Gert, skelpin', chunterin' taistrils,^[1]
All janglin' in a row!
Ay, mony a time I've cursed yon bells
O' Kirkby Overblow.

When you hear yon church bells ringin',
You can't enjoy your sin;
T' bells clutches at your heart-strings
I t' ale-house ower your gin.
At pitch-an'-toss you're laikin',
Down theer i' t' wood below;
An' then you damn them rowpy^[2] bells
O' Kirkby Overblow.

An' when I've set off poachin'
At back-end o' the year,
Wi' ferret, bag an' snickle,^[3]
Church bells have catched my ear.
"Thou's takken t' road to Hell, lad,
Wheer t' pit-fire's bummin' slow;"
That's what yon bells kept shoutin' out
At Kirkby Overblow.

But now I'm owd an' bed-fast,
I ommost like their sound,
Ringin' so clear i' t' star-leet
Across the frozen ground.
I niver mell on^[4] parsons,
There ain't a prayer I know;
But prayer an' sarmon's i' yon bells
O' Kirkby Overblow.

Six boards o' gooid stout ellum
Is what I'll want to-morn;
Then lay me low i' t' church-yard
Aneath t' owd crooked thorn.
I'll have no funeral sarvice
When I'm browt down below,
But let 'em touzle t' bells like mad
At Kirkby Overblow.

I don't know wheer I'm boun' for,
It hardlins can be Heaven;
I've sinned more sins nor most men
'Twixt one an' seven-seven.
But this I'll tak my oath on:
Wheeriver I mun go,
I'll hark to t' echoes o' yon bells
O' Kirkby Overblow.

[1] Unwieldy, grumbling rascals.

[2] Hoarse.

[3] Snare.

[4] Meddle with.

The Gardener and the Robin

Why! Bobbie, so thou's coom agean!
I'm fain to see thee here;
It's lang sin I've set een on thee,
It's ommost hauf a yeer.
What's that thou says? Thou's taen a wife
An' raised a family.
It seems thou's gien 'em all the slip
Now back-end's drawin' nigh.

I mun forgi'e thee; we're owd friends,
An' fratchin's not for us;
Blackbirds an' spinks^[1] I can't abide,
At doves an' crows I cuss.
But thou'll noan steal my strawberries,
Or nip my buds o' plum;
Most feather-fowl I drive away,
But thou can awlus coom.

Ay, that's thy place, at top o' t' clod,
Thy heead cocked o' one side,
Lookin' as far-learnt as a judge.
Is that a worrm thou's spied?
By t' Megs! he's well-nigh six inch lang,
An' reed as t' gate i' t' park;
If thou don't mesh him up a bit,
He'll gie thee belly-wark.

My missus awlus lets me know
I'm noan so despert thin;
If I ate sausages as thou
Eats worrms, I'd brust my skin!
Howd on! leave soom for t' mowdiwarps^[2]
That scrats down under t' grund ;
Of worrms, an' mawks,^[3] an' bummel-clocks^[4]
Thou's etten hauf a pund.

So now thou'll clear thy pipes an' sing:
Grace after meat, I s'pose.
Thou looks as holy as t' owd saint
I' church wi' t' brokken nose.
Thou's plannin' marlocks^[5] all the time,
Donned i' thy sowdier coat;
An' what we tak for hymns o' praise
Is just thy fratchin' note.

I've seen thee feightin' theer on t' lawn,
Beneath yon laurel tree;
Thy neb was reed wi' blood, thou looked
As chuffy^[6] as could be.
Thou's got no mense nor morals, Bob,
But weel I know thy charm.
Ay, thou can stand upon my spade.
I'll niver do thee harm.

[1] Chaffinches.

[2] Moles.

[3] Maggots.

[4] Beetles.

[5] Tricks.

[6] Haughty.

Lile Doad

The Lord's bin hard on me, Sir,
He's stown my barn away.
O dowly, dowly was that neet
He stole lile Doad away!

'Twas Whissuntide we wedded,
Next Easter he was born,
Just as t' last star i' t' April sky
Had faded into t' morn.
Throstles were singin, canty,^[1]
For they'd their young i' t' nest;
But birds don't know a mother's love
That howds her barn to t' breast.

When wark was ower i' summer,
I nussed him on my knees;
An' Mike browt home at lowsin'-time
Wild rasps an' strawberries.
We used to sit on t' door-sill
I' t' leet o' t' harvist-moon,
While our lile Doad would clench his fists
An' suck his toes an' croon.

But when t' mell-sheaf^[2] was gotten,
An' back-end days set in,
Wi' frost at neet an' roke^[3] by day,
His face gate pinched an' thin.
We niver knew what ailed him,
He faded like a floor,
He faded same as skies'll fade
When t' sun dips into t' moor.

Church bells on Kersmas mornin'
Rang out so merrily,
But coud an' dreesome were our hearts:
We knew lile Doad must dee.
He lay so still in his creddle,
An' slowly he dwined away,
While^[4] I laid two pennies on his een
On Holy Innocents' Day.

The Lord's bin hard on me, Sir,
He's stown my barn away.
O, dowly, dowly was that neet
He stole lile Doad away!

[1] Briskly.

[2] The last sheaf of the harvest.

[3] Mist.

[4] Until.

His Last Sail

GRANDFATHER

T' watter is blue i' t' offin',
An' blue is t' sky aboon;
Swallows are settin' sou'ard,
An' wanin' is t' harvist moon.
Ower lang I've bin cowerin' idle
I' my neuk by t' fire-side;
I'll away yance mair i' my coble,
I'll away wi' t' ebbin' tide.

MALLY

Nay, Gransir, thoo moant gan sailin',
Thoo mun bide at yam to-neet;
At eighty-two thoo sudn't think
O' t' Whitby fishin' fleet.
North cone's up on t' flagstaff,
There's a cap-full o' wind i' t' bay;
T' waves wap loud on t' harbour bar,
Thoo can hardlins fish to-day.

GRANDFATHER

It's leansome here i' t' hoose, lass,
When t' fisher-folk's at sea,
Watchin' yon eldin^[1] set i' t' fire
Bleeze up, dwine doon, an' dee.
An' t' sea-gulls they coom flyin'
Aboon our red roof-tiles;
They call me doon the chimley,
An' laugh at other whiles.

"There's mack'rel oot at sea, lad,"
Is what I hear 'em say;
"Their silver scales are glestrin' breet,
Look oot across the bay;
But mack'rel's not for thee, lad,
For thoo's ower weak to sail."
My een wi' saut tears daggles^[2]
When I hear their mockin' tale.

MALLY

Dean't mind their awfish^[3] skreekin',
They 'tice folk to their death;
Then ride aboon yon billows
An' gloor at them beneath.
They gloor at eenless corpses
Slow driftin' wi' the tide,
Deep doon amang the weedy wrack,
Wheer t' scaly fishes glide.

GRANDFATHER

I'd fain lig wi' my kinsfolk,
Fore-elders, brothers, sons,
Wheer t' star-fish shine like twinklin' leets,
An' t' spring-tide watter runs.
T' kirkyard's good for farm-folk,
That ploo an' milk their kye,
But I could sleep maist soondly
Wheer t' ships gan sailin' by.

T' grave is whisht^[4] an' fousome,
But clean is t' saut sea-bed;
Thoo can hark to t' billows dancin'
To t' tune o' t' tide owerhead.
Yon wreaths o' floors i' t' kirkyard
Sean wither an' fade away,
But t' sea-tang wreaths round a droon'd man's head
Will bide while Judgment Day.

Sae fettle^[5] my owd blue coble,
I kessen'd her "Mornin' Star,"
An' I'll away through t' offin'
Wheer t' skooals o' mack'rel are.
Thoo can look for my boat i' t' harbour,
When thoo's said thy mornin' psalm;
Mebbe I'll fill my fish-creel full—
Mebbe I'll nean coom yam.

[1] Kindling.

[2] Grow moist.

[3] Elfish.

[4] Silent.

[5] Get ready.

One Year Older

One yeer owder, one yeer dearer:
That's what I sal awlus say.
Draw thy chair a little nearer,
Put yon stockin's reight away.
Thou hast done enough i' thy time,
Tewed i' t' house an' wrowt at loom;
Just for once thou mun sit idle,
Feet on t' hear'stone, fingers toom.^[1]

One yeer owder, one yeer dearer:
So I promised when we wed.
Then thy een were glest'rin' clearer
Nor the stars aboon us spread.
If they're dimmer now, they're tend'rer,
An' yon wrinkles on thy face
Tell a lesson true as t' Bible,
Speik o' charity an' grace.

One yeer owder, one yeer dearer:
We've supped sorrow, tasted joy,
But our love has grown sincerer,
Gethered strength nowt can destroy.
Love is like an oak i' t' forest,
Ivery yeer it adds a ring;
Love is like yon ivin tendrils,
Ivery day they closer cling.

One yeer owder, one yeer dearer:
Time's the shuttle, life's the yarn.
Have thy crosses seemed severer
'Cause thou niver had a barn?
Mebbe I sud not have loved thee
Hauf so weel, if I mud share
All our secret thowts wi' childer,
Twinin' round my owd arm-chair.

One yeer owder, one yeer dearer:
'Tis our gowden weddin' day.
There sal coom no gaumless fleerer
To break in upon our play.
Look, I've stecked^[2] wer door and window
Let me lap thee i' my arms;
Hushed to-neet be ivery murmur,
While my kiss thy pale face warms.

[1] Empty.

[2] Latched.

The Hungry Forties

Thou wants my vote, young man wi' t' carpet-bags,
Weel, sit thee down, an' hark what I've to say.
It's noan so varry oft wer kitchen flags
Are mucked by real live lords down Yelland^[1] way.

I've read thy speyks i' t' paper of a neet,
Thou lets a vast o' words flow off thy tongue;
Thou's gotten facts an' figures, plain as t' leet,
An' argiments to slocken^[2] owd an' young.

But what are facts an' figures 'side o' truths
We've bowt wi' childer' tears an' brokken lives?
An' what are argiments o' cockered youths
To set agean yon groans o' caitiff^[3] wives?

'Twere "hungry forties" when I were a lad,
An' fowks were clemmed, an' weak i' t' airm an' brain;
We lived on demick'd^[4] taties, bread gone sad,
An' wakkened up o' neets croodled^[5] wi' pain.

When t' quartern loaf were raised to one and four,
We'd watter-brewis, swedes stown out o' t' field;
Farmers were t' landlords' jackals, an' us poor
Tewed in Egyptian bondage unrepealed.

I mind them times when lads marched down our street
Wi' penny loaves on pikes all steeped i' blood;
"It's breead or blood," they cried. "We've nowt to eat;
To Hell wi' all that taxes t' people's fooid."

There was a papist duke^[6] that com aleng
Wi' curry powders, an' he telled our boss
That when fowk's bellies felt pination's teng,^[7]
For breead, yon stinkin' powders they mun soss.^[8]

I went to wark when I were eight yeer owd;
I tended galloways an' sammed up coils.
'Twere warm i' t' pit, aboon 't were despert cowl,
An' clothes were nobbut spetches,^[9] darns an' hoils.

Thro' six to eight I worked, then two mile walk
Across yon sumpy^[10] fields to t' kitchen door.
I've often fainted, face as white as chalk,
Then fall'n lang-length upon wer cobble-floor.

My mother addled seven and six a week,
Slavin' all t' day at Akeroyd's weyvin'-shed:
Fayther at t' grunstone wrowt, while he fell sick;
Steel filin's gate intul his lungs, he said.

I come thee then no thank for all thy speyks,
Thou might as weel have spared thisen thy pains;
I see no call to laik at ducks an' drakes
Wi' t' bitter truth that's burnt intul our brains.

"Corn laws be damned," said dad i' forty-eight;
"Corn laws be damned," say I i' nineteen-five.
Tariff reform, choose, how, will have to wait
Down Yelland way, so lang as I'm alive.

If thou an' thine sud tax us workers' fooid,
An' thrust us back in our owd misery,
May t' tears o' our deead childer thin thy blood,
An' t' curse o' t' "hungry forties" leet on thee.

[1] Elland.

[2] Satiated.

[3] Infirm.

[4] Diseased.

[5] Bent double.

[6] Duke of Norfolk.

[7] Sting.

[8] Sip.

[9] Patches.

[10] Swampy.

The Flowers of Knaresborough Forest

But now they are moaning, on ilka green loaning
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.
Jane Elliot (1727-1805).

O! day-time is weary, an' dark o' dusk dreary
For t' lasses i' t' mistal, or rakin' ower t' hay;
When t' kye coom for strippin', or t' yowes for their clippin',
We think on our sowdiers now gone reet away.

The courtin'-gate's idle, nae lad flings his bridle
Ower t' yak-stoup,^[1] an' sleely cooms seekin' his may;
The trod by the river is green as a sliver,^[2]
For the Flowers o' the Forest have all stown away.

At Marti'mas hirin's, nae ribbins, nae tirin's,
When t' godspenny's^[3] addled, an' t' time's coom for play;
Nae Cheap-Jacks, nae dancin', wi' t' teamster' clogs prancin',
The Flowers o' the Forest are all flown a way.

When at neet church is lowsin', an' t' owd ullet is rousin'
Hissel i' our laithe,^[4] wheer he's slummered all t' day,
Wae's t' heart! but we misses our lads' saftest kisses,
Now the Flowers o' the Forest are gone reet away.

Ploo-lads frae Pannal have crossed ower the Channel,
Shipperds frae Fewston have taen the King's pay,
Thackrays frae Dacre have sold ivery acre;
Thou'll finnd ne'er a delver^[5] frae Haverah to Bray.

When t' north wind is howlin', an' t' west wind is yowlin',
It's for t' farm lads at sea that us lasses mun pray;
Tassey-Will o' t' new biggin, keepin' watch i' his riggin',
Lile Jock i' his fo'c'sle, torpedoed i' t' bay.

Mony a lass now is weepin' for her marrow that's sleepin',
Wi' nae bield for his corp but the cowl Flanthers clay;
He'll ne'er lift his limmers,^[6] he'll ne'er wean his gimmers^[7]:
Ay, there's Flowers o' the Forest are withered away.

[1] Oak-post.

[2] Branch of a leafing tree.

[3] Earnest money.

[4] Barn.

[5] Quarryman.

[6] Wagon-shafts.

[7] Ewe lambs.

The Miller by the Shore an East Coast Chanty

The miller by the shore am I,
A man o' despert sense;
I've fotty different soorts o' ways
O' addlin' honest pence.
Good wheat and wuts and barley-corns
My mill grinds all t' day lang ;
Frae faave 'o t' morn while seven o' t' neet
My days are varra thrang.

Chorus

I mill a bit, I till a bit,
I dee all maks 'o jobs,
Frae followin' ploos and hollowin' coos
To mendin' chairs and squabs.^[1]
Oh! folks they laugh and girn at me,
I niver tak it ill;
If I's the Jack 'o ivery trade,
They all bring grist to t' mill.

I tend my hunderd yakker farm,
An' milk my Kyloe kye.
I've Lincoln yowes an' Leicester tups
An' twenty head 'o wye.^[2]
I've stirks to tak to Scarbro' mart,
I've meers for farmers' gigs;
And oh! I wish that you could see
My laatile sookin' pigs.

I mill a bit. ...

When summer days graws lang an' breet,
Oot cooms my "Noah's Arks,"
Wheer city folk undriss theirsels
An' don my bathin' sarks.^[3]
An' when they git on land agean,
I rub' em smooth as silk;
Then bring' em oot, to fill their weeams,
My parkin ceakes an' milk.

I mill a bit. ...

I pike^[4] stray timmer on the shore,
An' cuvins^[5] on the scar;
I know wheer crabs 'll hugger up,^[6]
I know wheer t' lobsters are.
I've cobles fishin' oot i' t' bay,
For whittings, dabs and cods,
I've herrin' trawls and salmon nets,
I've hooks and lines and rods.

I mill a bit. ...

On darksome neets, back-end 'o t' yeer,
I like another sport;
I row my boat wheer t' lugger lies,
Coom frae some foreign port;
A guinea in a coastguard's poke
Will mak him steck his een ;
So he says nowt when I coom yam
Wi' scent and saccharine.

I mill a bit. ...

[1] Settles.

[2] Heifers.

[3] Shirts.

[4] Pick up.

[5] Periwinkles.

[6] Crowd together.

The Bride's Homecoming

A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!
A Yorkshire Wedding-Rhyme.

Thoo mun hod on tight, my darlin',
We've mony a beck to cross;
Twix' thy father's hoose an' mine, love,
There's a vast o' slacks an' moss.
But t' awd mare, shoo weant whemmle^[1]
Though there's twee on her back astride;
Shoo's as prood as me, is Snowball,
Noo I's fetchin' heame my bride.
A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!

Gow! but I feel sae leetsome,
Sin I've lived to see this day;
My heart is like a blackbod's
Efter a shoor i' May.
I' t' sky aboon nea lairock
Has sae mich reet to sing
As I have, noo I've wedded
T' lile lass o' Fulsa Ing.
A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!

Does ta hear yon watter bubblin',
Deep doon i' t' moorland streams?
It sounds like childer' voices
When they're laughin' i' their dreams.
An' look at yon lang-tailed pyots,^[2]
There s three on 'em, I'll uphod!
Folks say that three's for a weddin',
Ay, a pyot's a canny bod.
A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!

I love to feel thee clingin'
Wi' thy hands aroond my breast;
Thy bosom's leetly heavin',
Like a ship on t' saut waves' crest.
An' thy breath is sweet as t' breezes,
That cooms ower t' soothern hills,
When t' violet blows i' t' springtime
Wi' t' yollow daffydills.
A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!

Is ta gittin' tired, my honey,
We'll be heame i' hafe an hour;
Thoo'll see our hoose an' staggarth,
Wi' t' birk-trees bendin' ower.
There's a lillilow^[3] i' our cham'er
To welcome my viewly bride ;
An' sean we'll be theer oorsels, lass,
Liggin' cosy side by side.
A weddin', a woo,
A clog an' a shoe,
A pot full o' porridge; away we go!

[1] Stumble.

[2] Magpies.

[3] Light.

The Artist

Lang-haired gauvies^[1] coom my way, drawin' t' owd abbey an' brig,
All their crack is o' Art-staities an' picturs an' paints;
Want to put me on their canvas, donned i' my farmer's rig,
Tell me I'm pairt o' t' scenery, stained-glass windeys an' saints.

I reckon I'm artist an' all, though I niver gave it a thowt;
Breeder o' stock is my trade, Mike Pullan o' t' Abbey Close.
What sud a farmer want wi' picturs that brass has bowt?
All his art is i' t' mistal, wheer t' heifers are ranged i' rows.

Look at yon pedigree bull, wi' an eye as breet as a star,
An' a coat that shines like velvet, when it catches t' glent o' t' sun;
Hark to him bealin' for t' cows, wi' a voice like t' thunner on t' scar,
Watch them sinews i' t' neck, ripplin' wi' mischief an' fun.

Three generations o' men have lived their lives for yon bull,
Tewed at his keep all t' day, dreamed o' his sleekness all t' neet;
Moulded the bugth o' his buttocks, fashioned the breadth o' his skull—
Ivery one on 'em artists, sculptors o' butcher's meat.

What are your Rubens and Vandykes anent the craft that is Breed?
Anent the art that is Life, what's figures o' bronze or stone?
Us farmers 'll mould you models, better nor staities that's deead—
Strength that is wick i' the flesh, Beauty that's bred i' the bone.

Bailiff's doughter at t' Hollins, shoo's Breed, an' shoo's Life, an shoo's
Art,
Bred frae a Westmorland statesman out o' a Craven lass;
Carries hersen like a queen when shoo drives to markit i' t' cart:
Noan o' yon scraumy-legged^[2] painters sal iver git howd o' her brass.

Picturs is reight enough for fowks cluttered up i' Leeds,
Fowks that have ne'er hannled beasts, can't tell a tup frae a yowe ;
But the art for contry lads is the art that breathes an' feeds,
An' t' finest gallery i' t' worrld is a Yorkshire cattle-show.

[1] Simpletons.

[2] Spindle-legged.

Marra to Bonney

What would you do wi' a daughter—
Pray wi' her, bensil^[1] her, flout her?—
Say, what would you do wi' a daughter
That's marra to Bonney^[2] hissen?

I prayed wi' her first, of a Sunday,
When chapil was lowsin' for t' neet;
An' I laid all her cockaloft marlocks^[3]
'Fore th' Almighty's mercy-seat.
When I looked for her tears o' repentance,
I jaloused^[4] that I saw her laugh;
An' she said that t' Powers o' Justice
Would scatter my words like chaff.

Then I bensilled her hard in her cham'er,
As I bensils owd Neddy i' t' cart.
If prayers willent teach thee, my dolly,
Happen whip-stock will mak thy tears start.
But she stood there as chuff as a mawmet,^[5]
Not one chunt'rin^[6] word did she say:
But she hoped that t' blood o' t' martyrs
Would waish all my sins away.

Then I thought, mebbe floutin' will mend her;
So I watched while she cam out o' t' mill,
And afore all yon Wyke lads an' lasses
I fleered at her reight up our hill.
She winced when she heeard all their girnin',
Then she whispered, a sob i' her throat:
"I reckon I'll noan think o' weddin'
While women are given their vote."

What would you do wi' a daughter—
Pray wi' her, bensil her, flout her?—
Say, what would you do wi' a daughter
That's marra to Bonney hissen?

[1] Beat.

[2] A match for Bonaparte.

[3] Conceited tricks.

[4] Suspected.

[5] As proud as an idol.

[6] Grumbling.

Mary Mecca

Mary Mecca,^[1] Mary Mecca,
I'm fain to see thee here,
A Devon lass to fill my glass
O' home-brewed Yorkshire beer.
I awlus said that foreigners
Sud niver mel on me;
But sike a viewly face as thine
I'd travel far to see.

Mary Mecca, Mary Mecca,
I'm sad to see thee here,
Wheer t' wind blows hask^[2] frae Norway
I' t' spring-time o' the year.
I'd liever finnd thee sittin',
Wi' a bowl o' cruds an' cream,
Wheer t' foxglove bells ring through the dells,
Anent a Dartmoor stream.

Mary Mecca, Mary Mecca,
The way thou snods thy hair,
It maks my heart go dancin'
Like winnlestraws^[3] i' t' air.
One neet I heard thee singin',
As I cam home frae toon;
'Twas sweet as curlews makkin' love
Agean a risin' moon.

Mary Mecca, Mary Mecca,
I dream o' thy gray een;
I think on all I've wasted,
An' what I might hae been.
I'm nowt but muck off t' midden,
So all I axe is this:
Just blow the froth from off my yal^[4];
'Twill seem most like a kiss.

[1] Metcalfe.

[2] Keenly.

[3] Whisps of grass or straw.

[4] Ale.

The Local Preacher

Ay, I'm a ranter, so at least fowks say;
Happen they'd tell t' same tale o' t' postle Paul.
I've ranted fifty yeer, coom first o' May,
An' niver changed my gospil through 'em all.

There's nowt like t' Blooid o' t' Lamb an' t' Fire o' Hell
To bring a hardened taistril^[1] to his knees;
If fowks want more nor that, then thou can tell
'Em straight, I've got no cure for their disease.

I willent thole this New Theology
That blends up Hell wi' Heaven, sinners wi' saints
For black was black when I turned Methody,
An' white was white, i' souls as weel as paints.

That's awlus t' warp an' t' weft o' my discourse,
An' awlus will be, lang as I can teach;
If fowks won't harken tul it, then, of course,
They go to church and hear t' owd parson preach.

His sarmon's like his baccy, sweet an' mild;
Fowk's ommost hauf asleep at t' second word.
By t' Mass! they're wick as lops,^[2] ay, man an' child,
When I stan' up an' wrastle wi' the Lord.

Nay, I'm not blamin' parson, I'll awant^[3];
Preachin's his trade, same way as millin's mine.
I' trade you've got to gie fowks what they want,
An' that is mostly sawcum^[4] meshed reet fine.

Tak squire theer; he don't want no talk o' Hell,
He likes to hark to t' parable o' t' teares ;
He reckons church is wheat that's gooid to sell,
But chapil's nobbut kexes,^[5] thorns, an' brears.

Squire's lasses, they can't do wi' t' Blooid o' t' Lamb
They're all for t' blooid o' t' foxes, like our Bob.
The Lord Hissen will have to save or damn
Church fowks wid out me mellin' on^[6] His job.

But gie me chapil lasses gone astray,
Or lads that cooms home druffen of a neet,
An' I'll raise Cain afore I go away,
If I don't gie 'em t' glent o' t' Gospil leet.

I'll mak 'em sit on t' penitential stooils,
An' roar as loud as t' buzzer down at t' mill;
I'll mak 'em own that they've bin despert foils,
Wi' all their pride o' life a bitter pill.

I've many texts, but all to one point keep,
Same as all t' becks flow down to one saut sea:
Damnation an' salvation, goats an' sheep—
That's t' Bible gospil that thou'll get thro' me.

[1] Reprobate.

[2] Lively as fleas.

[3] Warrant.

[4] Sawdust.

[5] Dried stems of weeds.

[6] Meddling with.

The Courting Gate

There's dew upon the meadows,
An' bats are wheelin' high;
The sun has set an hour sin',
An' evenin' leet's i' t' sky.
Swalows i' t' thack are sleepin ,
Neet-hawks are swift on t' wing,
An' grey moths gethers honey
Amang the purple ling .
O coom an' meet me, Mally,
O coom an' greet me, Mally,
Meet me, greet me, at the courtin' gate.

The fire-leet casts thy shadow
Owerthwart the kitchen wall;
It's dancin' up an' doon, lass,
My heart does dance an' all.
Three times I've gien oor love-call
To bring my bird to t' nest.
When wilt a coom, my throstle,
An' shelter on my breast?
O coom an' meet me, Mally,
O coom an' greet me, Mally,
Meet me, greet me, at the courtin' gate.

I've wrowt all t' day at t' harvist,
But ivery hour seemed sweet,
Acause I thowt I'd haud thee
Clasped i' my airms to-neet.
Black Bess she raked aside me
An' leuked at me an' smiled;
I telled her I loved Mally,
It made her despert wild.
O coom an' meet me, Mally,
O coom an' greet me, Mally,
Meet me, greet me, at the courtin' gate.

Thy shadow's gone frae t' kitchen,
T' hoose-door is oppened wide.
It's she, my viewly Mally,
The lass I'll mak my bride.
White lilies in her garden,
Fling oot your scent i' t' air,
An' mingle breath wi' t' roses
I've gethered for her hair.
O let me haud thee, Mally,
O let me faud thee, Mally,
Haud thee, faud thee, at the courtin' gate.

Fieldfares

Fieldfares, bonny fieldfares, feedin' 'mang the bent,
Wheer the sun is shinin' through yon cloud's wide rent,
Welcom back to t' moorlands,
Frae Norway's fells an' shorelands,
Welcom back to Whardill,^[1] now October's ommost spent.

Noisy, chackin' fieldfares, weel I ken your cry,
When i' flocks you're sweepin' ower the hills sae high:
Oft on trees you gethers,
Preenin' out your feathers,
An' I'm fain to see your coats as blue as t' summer sky.

Curlews, larks an' tewits,^[2] all have gone frae t' moors,
Frost has nipped i' t' garden all my bonny floors;
Roses, lilies, pansies,
Stocks an' yallow tansies
Fade away, an' soon the leaves 'll clutter^[3] doon i' shoors.

Here i' bed I'm liggin', liggin' day by day
Hay-cart whemmled ower,^[4] and underneath I lay;
I was nobbut seven,
Soon I'll be eleven;
Fower times have I seen you fieldfares coom an' flee away.

You'll be gone when t' swallow bigs his nest o' loam,
April winds 'll blaw you far ower t' saut sea foam;
You'll not wait while May-time,
Summer dewes an' hay-time;
Lang afore our gerse is mawn your mates 'll call you home.

Fieldfares, liltin'^[5] fieldfares, you'll noan sing to me.
Why sud you bide silent while you've crossed the sea?
Are you brokken-hearted,
Sin frae home you've parted,
Leavin' far frae Yorkshire moors your nests i' t' tall fir tree?

Storm-cock sings at new-yeer, swingin' on yon esh,
Sings his loudest song when t' winds do beat an' lesh;
Robins, throstles follow,
An' when cooms the swalloww,
All the birds 'll chirm to see our woodlands green an' nesh.

Fieldfares, bonny fieldfares, I'll be gone 'fore you;
I'm sae weak an' dowly, hands are thin an' blue.
Pain is growin' stranger,
As the neets get langer.
Will you miss my face at whiles, when t' owd yeer's changed to t' new?

[1] Wharfdale.

[2] Peewits.

[3] Huddle.

[4] Upset.

[5] Light-hearted.

A Song of the Yorkshire Dales

A song I sing o' t' Yorkshire dales,
That Winnd frae t' moors to t' sea;
Frae t' breast o' t' fells, wheer t' cloud-rack sails,
Their becks flow merrily.
Their banks are breet wi' moss an' broom,
An' sweet is t' scent o' t' thyme;
You can hark to t' bees' saft, dreamy soom^[1]
I' t' foxglove bells an' t' lime.

Chorus

O! Swawdill's good for horses, an' Wensladill for cheese,
An' Airedill fowk are busy as a bee;
But wheerso'er I wander,
My owd heart aye grows fonder
O Whardill, wheer I'll lig me down an' dee.

Reet bonny are our dales i' March,
When t' curlews tak to t' moors,
There's ruddy buds on ivery larch,
Primroses don their floors.
But bonnier yet when t' August sun
Leets up yon plats o' ling;
An' gert white fishes lowp an' scun,^[2]
Wheer t' weirs ower t' watter hing.

O! Swawdill's good...

By ivery beck an abbey sleeps,
An' t' ullet is t' owd prior.
A jackdaw thruf each windey peeps,
An' bigs his nest i' t' choir.
In ivery dale a castle stands—
Sing, Clifford, Percy, Scrope!—
They threaped amang theirsels for t' lands,
But fowt for t' King or t' Pope.

O! Swawdill's good...

O! Eastward ho! is t' song o' t' gales,
As they sweep ower fell an' lea;
And Eastward ho! is t' song o' t' dales,
That winnd frae t' moors to t' sea.
Coom winter frost, coom summer druft,
Their watters munnot bide;
An' t' rain that's fall'n when bould winds soughed
Sal iver seawards glide.

O! Swawdill' s good...

[1] Hum.

[2] Leap and dart away.

The Flower of Wensleydale

She leaned o'er her latticed casement,
The Flower of Wensleydale;
'Twas St Agnes Eve at midnight,
Through the mist the stars burnt pale.

In her hand she held twelve sage-leaves,
Plucked in her garden at noon;
And over them she had whispered thrice
The spell of a mystic rune.

For many had come a-wooing
The maid with the sloe-blue eyes;
Fain would she learn of St Agnes
To whom should fall the prize.

They said she must drop a sage-leaf
At each stroke of the midnight hour;
Then should the knight of her father's choice
Obey the summons of her voice,
And appear 'neath her oriel'd bowwer.

To the holy virgin-martyr
She lifted her hands in prayer;
Then she watched the rooks that perched asleep
In the chestnut branches bare.

At last on the frosty silence
There rang out the midnight chime;
And the hills gave back in echoes
The knell of the dying time.

She held her breath as she counted
The beats of the chapel bell;
At every stroke of the hammer
A sage-leaf fluttered and fell,
Slowly fluttered and fell.

Her heart stood still a moment,
As the last leaf touched the ground;
And her hand went swift to her maiden breast,
For she heard a far-off sound;

'Twas the sound of a horseman spurring
His steed through the woodland glade;
And ever the sound drew nearer,
And the footfalls echoed clearer,
Till before her bower they stayed.

She strained her eyes to discover,
By the light of a ghostly moon,
Who was the knight had heard and obeyed
The hest of the mystic rune.

But naught could she see from her casement,
Save a man on a coal-black steed;
For his mantle was muffled about him,
His blazon she could not read.

She crossed herself and she whispered—
Her voice was faint but clear—
"Oh! Who art thou that darest ride,
Through the aspen glade, by the river's side,
My chamber window near?"

"Say, art thou the lord of Bainbridge,
Or Gervase of Bolton Hall,
That comest so late on St Agnes Eve
Within my manor wall?"

"I am not the lord of Bainbridge,
Nor Gervase of Bolton Hall,

But I marked the light in thy casement,
And I saw the sage-leaves fall,
Flutter awhile and fall."

"Camest thou over the moorlands,
Or camest thou through the dale?
Speak no guile to a witless maid,
But tell me a soothfast tale."

"I came not over the moorlands,
Nor along the dale did ride;
But thou seeest thy plighted lover,
That has come to claim his bride."

"Say, art thou knight or yeoman,
Of noble or simple birth?
Fain would I know thy lineage,
Thy prowess and thy worth."

"Nor knight nor lowly yeoman,
But a mighty king am I;
Bold vassals do my bidding,
And on mine errands hie.

"They come to court and castle,
They climb the palace stairs;
Nor pope nor king may entrance bar
To him my livery wears."

"But why should a king so mighty
Pay court to a simple maid?
My father's a knight of low degree,
No princely realm he holds in fee,
No proud-foot damsels wait on me:
Thy steps have surely strayed."

"No step of mine hath wandered
From the goal of my desires;
'Tis on thee my hopes are centred,
'Tis to thee my heart aspires.

"I love thee for thy beauty,
I love thee for thy grace,
I love thee for the dancing lights
That gleam in thy moon-lit face:
And these I deem a peerless dower
To win a king's embrace."

"One boon, O royal lover,
I ask on St Agnes Day;
I fain would gaze on thy visage fair
Ere with thee I steal away.

"Unmuffle thou the mantle
That hides thee like a pall;
And let the purple trappings
From off thy shoulders fall."

Slowly he loosed the mantle,
And showed his face beneath.
The lights went out in the maiden's eyes;
One swooning word she breathed to the skies:
The gaunt hills echoed "Death."

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RIDINGS ***

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