Classic Poetry Series

James Henry Leigh Hunt
- poems -

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James Henry Leigh Hunt(19 October 1784 – 28 August 1859)

James Henry Leigh Hunt, best known as Leigh Hunt, was an English critic, essayist, poet and writer.

Early Life

Leigh Hunt was born at Southgate, London, where his parents had settled after leaving the USA. His father Isaac, a lawyer from Philadelphia, and his mother, Mary Shewell, a merchant's daughter and a devout Quaker, had been forced to come to Britain because of their loyalist sympathies during the American War of Independence. Hunt's father took holy orders and became a popular preacher, but he was unsuccessful in obtaining a permanent living. Hunt's father was then employed by James Brydges, 3rd Duke of Chandos as tutor to his nephew, James Henry Leigh (father of Chandos Leigh), after whom the boy was named.

Education

Leigh Hunt was educated at Christ's Hospital from 1791 to 1799, a period which is detailed in his autobiography. He entered the school shortly after Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Lamb had both left; Thomas Barnes, however, was a school friend of his. One of the current boarding houses at Christ's Hospital is named after him. As a boy, he was an ardent admirer of Thomas Gray and William Collins, writing many verses in imitation of them. A speech impediment, later cured, prevented his going to university. "For some time after I left school," he says, "I did nothing but visit my school-fellows, haunt the book-stalls and write verses." His poems were published in 1801 under the title of Juvenilia, and introduced him into literary and theatrical society. He began to write for the newspapers, and published in 1807 a volume of theatre criticism, and a series of Classic Tales with critical essays on the authors.

Hunt's early essays were published by Edward Quin, editor and owner of The Traveller.

Family

In all of the various references to Leigh Hunt, including his autobiography, little mention is made of his family but he did manage to find time among his literary pursuits to get married and produce a large family. In 1809, he married Marianne Kent (whose parents were Thomas and Ann). Over the next 20 years they had ten children: Thornton (1810-73), John Horatio Leigh (1812-46), Mary Florimel Leigh (1813-49), Swinburne Percy Leigh (1816-27), Percy Bysshe Shelley Leigh (1817-99), Henry Sylvan Leigh (1819-?), Vincent Leigh (1823-52), Julia Trelawney Leigh (1826-?), Jacyntha Leigh (1828-1914), and Arrabella Leigh (1829-30).

The inclusion of the name Leigh into all of his children (except his first) led to the family name being considered to be Leigh-Hunt.
Marianne, who had been in ill health for most of her life, died January 26th 1857, aged sixty-nine.

Newspapers

The Examiner

In 1808 he left the War Office, where he had been working as a clerk, to become editor of the Examiner, a newspaper founded by his brother, John. His brother Robert Hunt, among others, also contributed to its columns; his criticism earned the enmity of William Blake, who described the journal's office at Beaufort Buildings as containing a "nest of villains". Blake's response included Leigh Hunt, who aside from publishing the vitriolic reviews of 1808 and 1809 had added Blake's name on a list of "quacks".

This journal soon acquired a reputation for unusual political independence; it would attack any worthy target, "from a principle of taste," as John Keats expressed it. In 1813, an attack on the Prince Regent, based on substantial truth, resulted in prosecution and a sentence of two years' imprisonment for each of the brothers — Leigh Hunt served his term at the Surrey County Gaol. Leigh Hunt's visitors in prison included Lord Byron, Thomas Moore, Lord Brougham, Charles Lamb and others, whose acquaintance influenced his later career. The stoicism with which Leigh Hunt bore his imprisonment attracted general attention and sympathy. His imprisonment allowed him many luxuries and access to friends and family, Lamb described his

decorations of the cell as something not found outside a fairy tale. When Jeremy Bentham called on him, he was found playing battledore.

A number of essays in The Examiner that were written by Hunt and William Hazlitt between 1814 and 1817 under the series title "The Round Table" were collected in book form in The Round Table, published in two volumes in 1817. Twelve of the fifty-two essays were by Hunt, the rest by Hazlitt.

The Reflector

In 1810-1811 he edited a quarterly magazine, the Reflector, for his brother John. He wrote "The Feast of the Poets" for this, a satire, which offended many contemporary poets, particularly William Gifford of the Quarterly.

Poetry

In 1816 he made a mark in English literature with the publication of Story of Rimini. Hunt's preference was decidedly for Chaucer's verse style, as adapted to the Modern English by John Dryden, in opposition to the epigrammatic couplet of Alexander Pope which had superseded it. The poem is an optimistic narrative which runs contrary to the tragic nature of its subject. Hunt's flippancy and familiarity, often degenerating into the ludicrous, subsequently made him a target for ridicule and parody.

In 1818 appeared a collection of poems entitled Foliage, followed in 1819 by Hero and Leander, and Bacchies and Ariadne. In the same year he reprinted these two works with The Story of Rimini and The Descent of Liberty with the title of Poetical Works, and started the Indicator, in which some of his best work appeared. Both Keats and Shelley belonged to the circle gathered around him at Hampstead, which also included William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Bryan Procter, Benjamin Haydon, Charles Cowden Clarke, C.W. Dilke, Walter Coulson and John Hamilton Reynolds.

Friend: Keats and Shelley

He had for some years been married to Marianne Kent. His own affairs were in confusion, and only Shelley's generosity saved him from ruin. In return he

showed sympathy to Shelley during the latter's domestic distresses, and defended him in the Examiner. He introduced Keats to Shelley and wrote a very generous appreciation of him in the Indicator. Keats seems, however, to have subsequently felt that Hunt's example as a poet had been in some respects detrimental to him.

After Shelley's departure for Italy in 1818, Leigh Hunt became even poorer, and the prospects of political reform less satisfactory. Both his health and his wife's failed, and he was obliged to discontinue the Indicator (1819–1821), having, he says, "almost died over the last numbers." Shelley suggested that Hunt go to Italy with him and Byron to establish a quarterly magazine in which Liberal opinions could be advocated with more freedom than was possible at home. An injudicious suggestion, it would have done little for Hunt or the Liberal cause at the best, and depended entirely upon the co-operation of the capricious, parsimonious Byron. Byron's principal motive for agreeing appears to have been the expectation of acquiring influence over the Examiner, and he was mortified to discover that Hunt was no longer interested in the "Examiner". Leigh Hunt left England for Italy in November 1821, but storm, sickness and misadventure retarded his arrival until 1 July 1822, a rate of progress which Thomas Love Peacock appropriately compares to the navigation of Ulysses.

The death of Shelley, a few weeks later, destroyed every prospect of success for the Liberal. Hunt was now virtually dependent upon Byron, who did not relish the idea of being patron to Hunt's large and troublesome family. Byron's friends also scorned Hunt. The Liberal lived through four quarterly numbers, containing contributions no less memorable than Byron's "Vision of Judgment" and Shelley's translations from Faust; but in 1823 Byron sailed for Greece, leaving Hunt at Genoa to shift for himself. The Italian climate and manners, however, were entirely to Hunt's taste, and he protracted his residence until 1825, producing in the interim Ultra-Crepidarius: a Satire on William Gifford (1823), and his matchless translation (1825) of Francesco Redi's Bacco in Toscana.

In 1825 a litigation with his brother brought him back to England, and in 1828 he published Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries, a corrective to idealized portraits of Byron. The public was shocked that Hunt, who had been obliged to Byron for so much, would "bite the hand that fed him" in this way. Hunt especially writhed under the withering satire of Moore. For many years afterwards, the history of Hunt's life is a painful struggle with poverty and sickness. He worked unremittingly, but one effort failed after another. Two journalistic ventures, the Tatler (1830–1832), a daily devoted to literary and dramatic criticism, and Leigh Hunt's London Journal (1834–1835), were discontinued for want of subscribers, although the latter contained some of his

best writing. His editorship (1837–1838) of the Monthly Repository, in which he succeeded William Johnson Fox, was also unsuccessful. The adventitious circumstances which allowed the Examiner to succeed no longer existed, and Hunt's personality was unsuited to the general body of readers.

In 1832 a collected edition of his poems was published by subscription, the list of subscribers including many of his opponents. In the same year was printed for private circulation Christianism, the work afterwards published (1853) as The Religion of the Heart. A copy sent to Thomas Carlyle secured his friendship, and Hunt went to live next door to him in Cheyne Row in 1833. Sir Ralph Esher, a romance of Charles II's period, had a success, and Captain Sword and Captain Pen (1835), a spirited contrast between the victories of peace and the victories of war, deserves to be ranked among his best poems. In 1840 his circumstances were improved by the successful representation at Covent Garden of his play Legend of Florence. Lover's Amazements, a comedy, was acted several years afterwards, and was printed in Leigh Hunt's Journal (1850–1851); other plays remained in manuscript. In 1840 he wrote introductory notices to the work of Sheridan and to Edward Moxon's edition of the works of William Wycherley, William Congreve, John Vanbrugh and George Farquhar, a work which furnished the occasion of Macaulay's essay on the Dramatists of the Restoration. The narrative poem The Palfrey was published in 1842.

More Financial Difficulties

The time of Hunt's greatest difficulties was between 1834 and 1840. He was at times in absolute poverty, and his distress was aggravated by domestic complications. By Macaulay's recommendation he began to write for the Edinburgh Review. In 1844 Mary Shelley and her son, on succeeding to the family estates, settled an annuity of £120 upon Hunt (Rossetti 1890); and in 1847 Lord John Russell procured him a pension of £200. Now living in improved comfort, Hunt published the companion books, Imagination and Fancy (1844), and Wit and Humour (1846), two volumes of selections from the English poets, which displayed his refined, discriminating critical tastes. His book on the pastoral poetry of Sicily, A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla (1848), is also delightful. The Town (2 vols., 1848) and Men, Women and Books (2 vols., 1847) are partly made up from former material. The Old Court Suburb (2 vols., 1855; ed. A Dobson, 2002) is a sketch of Kensington, where he long resided. In 1850 he published his Autobiography (3 vols.), a naive and affected, but accurate, piece of self-portraiture. A Book for a Corner (2 vols.) was published in 1849, and his Table Talk appeared in 1851. In 1855 his narrative poems, original and translated, were collected under the title Stories in Verse.

He died in Putney on the 28 August 1859, and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery. In September 1966 Christ's Hospital named one of its Houses in memory of him.

Leigh Hunt was the original of Harold Skimpole in Bleak House. "Dickens wrote in a letter of 25 September 1853, 'I suppose he is the most exact portrait that was ever painted in words! ... It is an absolute reproduction of a real man'; and a contemporary critic commented, 'I recognized Skimpole instantaneously; ... and so did every person whom I talked with about it who had ever had Leigh Hunt's acquaintance.'" G. K. Chesterton suggested that Dickens "may never once have had the unfriendly thought, 'Suppose Hunt behaved like a rascal!'; he may have only had the fanciful thought, 'Suppose a rascal behaved like Hunt!'" (Chesterton 1906).

A Fish Answers

Amazing monster! that, for aught I know,
With the first sight of thee didst make our race
For ever stare! O flat and shocking face,
Grimly divided from the breast below!
Thou that on dry land horribly dost go
With a split body and most ridiculous pace,
Prong after prong, disgracer of all grace,
Long-useless-finned, haired, upright, unwet, slow!

O breather of unbreathable, sword-sharp air,
How canst exist? How bear thyself, thou dry
And dreary sloth? WHat particle canst share
Of the only blessed life, the watery?
I sometimes see of ye an actual pair
Go by! linked fin by fin! most odiously.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

A Night-Rain In Summer

Open the window, and let the air
Freshly blow upon face and hair,
And fill the room, as it fills the night,
With the breath of the rain's sweet might.
Hark! the burthen, swift and prone!
And how the odorous limes are blown!
Stormy Love's abroad, and keeps
Hopeful coil for gentle sleeps.

Not a blink shall burn to-night
In my chamber, of sordid light;
Nought will I have, not a window-pane,
'Twixt me and the air and the great good rain,
Which ever shall sing me sharp lullabies;
And God's own darkness shall close mine eyes;
And I will sleep, with all things blest,
In the pure earth-shadow of natural rest.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

A Thought Of The Nile

It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,
  Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,
  And times and things, as in that vision, seem
Keeping along it their eternal stands,--
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands
  That roamed through the young world, the glory extreme
  Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,
The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.

Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,
As of a world left empty of its throng,
  And the void weighs on us; and then we wake,
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along
  Twixt villages, and think how we shall take
  Our own calm journey on for human sake.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

A Thought Or Two On Reading Pomfret's

I have been reading Pomfret's "Choice" this spring,
A pretty kind of--sort of--kind of thing,
Not much a verse, and poem none at all,
Yet, as they say, extremely natural.
And yet I know not. There's an art in pies,
In raising crusts as well as galleries;
And he's the poet, more or less, who knows
The charm that hallows the least truth from prose,
And dresses it in its mild singing clothes.
Not oaks alone are trees, nor roses flowers;
Much humble wealth makes rich this world of ours.
Nature from some sweet energy throws up
Alike the pine-mount and the buttercup;
And truth she makes so precious, that to paint
Either, shall shrine an artist like a saint,
And bring him in his turn the crowds that press
Round Guido's saints or Titian's goddesses.

Our trivial poet hit upon a theme
Which all men love, an old, sweet household dream:--
Pray, reader, what is yours?--I know full well
What sort of home should grace my garden-bell,--
No tall, half-furnish'd, gloomy, shivering house,
That worst of mountains labouring with a mouse;
Nor should I choose to fill a tawdry niche in
A Grecian temple, opening to a kitchen.
The frogs in Homer should have had such boxes,
Or Aesop's frog, whose heart was like the ox's.
Such puff about high roads, so grand, so small,
With wings and what not, portico and all,
And poor drench'd pillars, which it seems a sin
Not to mat up at night-time, or take in.
I'd live in none of those. Nor would I have
Veranda'd windows to forestall my grave;
Veranda'd truly, from the northern heat!
And cut down to the floor to comfort one's cold feet!
My house should be of brick, more wide than high,
With sward up to the path, and elm-trees nigh;
A good old country lodge, half hid with blooms

Of honied green, and quaint with straggling rooms,
A few of which, white-bedded and well swept,
For friends, whose name endear'd them, should be kept.
The tip-toe traveller, peeping through the boughs
O'er my low wall, should bless the pleasant house:
And that my luck might not seem ill-bestow'd,
A bench and spring should greet him on the road.

My grounds should not be large. I like to go
To Nature for a range, and prospect too,
And cannot fancy she'd comprise for me,
Even in a park, her all-sufficiency.
Besides, my thoughts fly far, and when at rest
Love not a watch-tow'r but a lulling nest.
A Chiswick or a Chatsworth might, I grant,
Visit my dreams with an ambitious want;
But then I should be forc'd to know the weight
Of splendid cares, new to my former state;
And these 'twould far more fit me to admire,
Borne by the graceful ease of noblest Devonshire.
Such grounds, however, as I had should look
Like "something" still; have seats, and walks, and brook;
One spot for flowers, the rest all turf and trees;
For I'd not grow my own bad lettuces.
I'd build a cover'd path too against rain,
Long, peradventure, as my whole domain,
And so be sure of generous exercise,
The youth of age and med'cine of the wise.
And this reminds me, that behind some screen
About my grounds, I'd have a bowling-green;
Such as in wits' and merry women's days
Suckling preferr'd before his walk of bays.
You may still see them, dead as haunts of fairies,
By the old seats of Killigrews and Careys,
Where all, alas! is vanish'd from the ring,
Wits and black eyes, the skittles and the king!
Fishing I hate, because I think about it,
Which makes it right that I should do without it.
A dinner, or a death, might not be much,
But cruelty's a rod I dare not touch.
I own I cannot see my right to feel
For my own jaws, and tear a trout's with steel;

To troll him here and there, and spike, and strain,
And let him loose to jerk him back again.
Fancy a preacher at this sort of work,
Not with his trout or gudgeon, but his clerk:
The clerk leaps gaping at a tempting bit,
And, hah! an ear-ache with a knife in it!
That there is pain and evil is no rule
That I should make it greater, like a fool;
Or rid me of my rust so vile a way,
As long as there's a single manly play.
Nay, "fool"'s a word my pen unjustly writes,
Knowing what hearts and brains have dozed o'er "bites";
But the next inference to be drawn might be,
That higher beings made a trout of me;
Which I would rather should not be the case,
Though Isaak were the saint to tear my face,
And, stooping from his heaven with rod and line,
Made the fell sport, with his old dreams divine,
As pleasant to his taste, as rough to mine.
Such sophistry, no doubt, saves half the hell,
But fish would have preferr'd his reasoning well,
And, if my gills concern'd him, so should I.
The dog, I grant, is in that "equal sky,"
But, heaven be prais'd, he's not my deity.
All manly games I'd play at,--golf and quoits,
And cricket, to set lungs and limbs to rights,
And make me conscious, with a due respect,
Of muscles one forgets by long neglect.
With these, or bowls aforesaid, and a ride,
Books, music, friends, the day I would divide,
Most with my family, but when alone,
Absorb'd in some new poem of my own,
A task which makes my time so richly pass,
So like a sunshine cast through painted glass
(Save where poor Captain Sword crashes the panes),
That cold my friends live too, and were the gains
Of toiling men but freed from sordid fears,
Well could I walk this earth a thousand years.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Abou Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Presence in the room he said
"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still, and said "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Anonymous Submission

James Henry Leigh Hunt

An Angel In The House

How sweet it were, if without feeble fright,
Or dying of the dreadful beauteous sight,
An angel came to us, and we could bear
To see him issue from the silent air
At evening in our room, and bend on ours
His divine eyes, and bring us from his bowers
News of dear friends, and children who have never
Been dead indeed,--as we shall know forever.
Alas! we think not what we daily see
About our hearths,--angels that are to be,
Or may be if they will, and we prepare
Their souls and ours to meet in happy air;--
A child, a friend, a wife whose soft heart sings
In unison with ours, breeding its future wings.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Ariadne Waking

The moist and quiet morn was scarcely breaking,
When Ariadne in her bower was waking;
Her eyelids still were closing, and she heard
But indistinctly yet a little bird,
That in the leaves o’erhead, waiting the sun,
Seemed answering another distant one.
She waked, but stirred not, only just to please
Her pillow-nestling cheek; while the full seas,
The birds, the leaves, the lulling love o’ernight
The happy thought of the returning light,
The sweet, self-willed content, conspired to keep
Her senses lingering in the feel of sleep;
And with a little smile she seemed to say,
“I know my love is near me, and ’tis day.”

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Bacchus And Ariadne

The moist and quiet morn was scarcely breaking.
When Ariadne in her bower was waking;
Her eyelids still were closing, and she heard
But indistinctly yet a little bird.
That in the leaves o'erhead, waiting the sun.
Seemed answering another distant one.
She wakes, but stirred not, only just to please
Her pillow-nestling cheek; while the full seas.
* * * * *
Her senses lingering in the feel of sleep;
And with a little smile she seemed to say,
'I know my love is near me, and 'tis day.'
At length, not feeling the accustomed arm.
That from all sense of fancied want and harm
Used to enclose her, when she turned that way.
She stretched her hand to feel where Theseus lay.

But how? Not there? She starts with a small cry,
And feels the empty space, and runs her eye
O'er all the bower, and stretches from the bed
One hasty foot, and listens with wild head.
No sight—no voice: she tries to smile, heart-sick.
And murmurs, 'Oh, 'tis but some hiding trick;
He sees me through the boughs:' and so she rose.
And, like a wood-nymph, through the glimmering goes.
And for a while delays to call his name,
Pretending she should spoil his amorous game;
But stops at last, her throat full-pulsed with fears.
And calls convulsively with bursting tears;
Then calls again; and then in the open air
Rushes, and fiercely calls. He is not there.

The faithless bark, far off, leaning away.
And now with gleaming sail, and now with dim.
Hastening to slip o'er the horizon's brim.
'Tis gone; and as a dead thing, down falls she.
In the great eye of morn, then breaking quietly. (lines 41–45)

Some say that Theseus took this selfish flight

From common causes — a cloyed appetite;
Others, that having brought her sister there
As well, he turned his easy love to her;
And others, who are sure to quote Heaven's orders 50
For great men's crimes, though not for small disorders.
Pretend that Bacchus in the true old way,
A dream, advised him sternly not to stay.
But go and cut up nations limb by limb.
And leave the lady and the bower to him.
One tiling looks certain,—that the chief that day
Was not alone a skulking runaway.
But left the woman that believed his smile
To all the horrors of a desert isle. (lines 41–59)

'Oh, Theseus, Theseus!' then awhile she stopped,
And turned, and in her hand her poor face dropped,
Shaking her head, and cried, 'How could you go.
And leave me here to die, that loved you so!
I would not have left you, even for mirth.
Not in the best and safest place on earth;
Nor, had you been never so false a one, 90
Denied you this poor breast to lean upon;
Much less for loving too confidingly;
And yet, for nothing worse, have you left me;
Left me—left Ariadne, sleeping too
Fast by your side; and yet for you, for you,
She left her father, country, home, and all. (lines 84–96)

Suddenly from a wood his dancers rush.
Leaping like wines that from the bottle gush;
Bounding they come, and twirl, and thrust on high
Their thyrsuses, as they would rouse the sky;
And hurry here and there, in loosened bands,
And trill above their heads their cymballed hands:
Some, brawny males, that almost show from far
Their forceful arms, cloudy and muscular;
Some, smoother females, who have nevertheless
Strong limbs, and hands, to fling with and to press;
And shapes, which they can bend with heavenward glare.
And tortuous wrists, and backward streaming hair.
A troop of goat-foot shapes came trampling after. (lines 161–173)

Bacchus took in his arms his bridal lass.
And gave and shared as much more happiness
Than Theseus, as a noble spirit's caress.
Full of sincerity, and mind, and heart.
Out-relishes mere fire and self-embittering art. (lines 339–343)

The grateful god took off from his love's hair
Her fervid crown; and with a leap i' the air,
As when a quoiter springs to his firm eye.
Whirled it in buzzing swiftness to the sky.
Starry already, and with heat within,
It fired as it flew up with that fierce spin.
And opening into grandeur, round and even.
Shook its immortal sparkles out of heaven.
* * * * *
The easy wear of inward gracefulness.
Beneath this star, this star, where'er she be.
Sits the accomplished female womanly:
Part of its light is round about her hair;
And should her gentle cheek be wet with care,
The tears shall be kissed off, as Ariadne's were.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Bellman's Verses For 1814

Huzza, my boys! our friends the Dutch have risen,
Our good old friends, and burst the Tyrant's prison!
Aye, and have done it without bloodshed too,
Like men, to sense as well as freedom true.
The moment, I'll be sworn, that Ocean heard it,
With a new dance of waters it bestirr'd it;
And Trade, reviving from her trance of death,
Took a new lease of sunshine and of breath.
Let's aid them, my fine fellows, all we can:—
Where's finer business for an Englishman—
Who knows what 'tis to eat his own good bread,
And see his table-cloth securely spread—
Than helping to set free a neighbour's oven?
Huzza! The Dutch for ever! Orange Boven!

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Death

Death is a road our dearest friends have gone;
Why with such leaders, fear to say, "Lead on?"
Its gate repels, lest it too soon be tried,
But turns in balm on the immortal side.
Mothers have passed it: fathers, children; men
Whose like we look not to behold again;
Women that smiled away their loving breath;
Soft is the travelling on the road to death!
But guilt has passed it? men not fit to die?
O, hush -- for He that made us all is by!
Human we're all -- all men, all born of mothers;
All our own selves in the worn-out shape of others;
Our used, and oh, be sure, not to be ill-used brothers!

James Henry Leigh Hunt

How Robin And His Outlaws Lived In The Woods

Robin and his merry men
 : Lived just like the birds;
They had almost as many tracks as thoughts,
 : And whistles and songs as words.

Up they were with the earliest sign
  Of the sun's up-looking eye;
But not an archer breakfasted
  Till he twinkled from the sky.

All the morning they were wont
  To fly their grey-goose quills
At butts, or wands, or trees, or twigs,
  Till theirs was the skill of skills.

With swords too they played lustily,
  And at quarter-staff;
Many a hit would have made some cry,
  Which only made them laugh.

The horn was then their dinner-bell;
  When like princes of the wood,
Under the glimmering summer trees,
  Pure venison was their food.

Pure venison and a little wine,
  Except when the skies were rough;
Or when they had a feasting day;
  For their blood was wine enough.

And story then, and joke, and song,
  And Harry's harp went round;
And sometimes they'd get up and dance,
  For pleasure of the sound.

Tingle, tangle! said the harp,
  As they footed in and out:
Good lord! it was a sight to see
    Their feathers float about;--

A pleasant sight, especially
 : If Margery was there,
Or little Ciss, or laughing Bess,
 : Or Moll with the clumps of hair;

Or any other merry lass
 : From the neighbouring villages,
Who came with milk and eggs, or fruit,
 : A singing through the trees.

For all the country round about
 : Was fond of Robin Hood,
With whom they got a share of more
 : Than the acorns in the wood;

Nor ever would he suffer harm
 : To woman, above all;
No plunder, were she ne'er so great,
 : No fright to great or small;

No,—not a single kiss unliked,
 : Nor one look-saddening clip;
Accurst be he, said Robin Hood,
 : Makes pale a woman's lip.

Only on the haughty rich,
 : And on their unjust store,
He'd lay his fines of equity
 : For his merry men and the poor.

And special was his joy, no doubt
 : (Which made the dish to curse)
To light upon a good fat friar,
 : And carve him of his purse.

A monk to him was a toad in the hole,
 : And an abbot a pig in grain,
But a bishop was a baron of beef,
 : With cut and come again.

Never poor man came for help,

And wnet away denied;
Never woman for redress,
And went away wet-eyed.

Says Robin to the poor who came
: To ask of him relief,
You do but get your goods again,
: That were altered by the thief;

There, ploughman, is a sheaf of your's
: Turned to yellow gold;
And, miller, there's your last year's rent,
: 'Twill wrap thee from the cold:

And you there, Wat of Lancashire,
: Who such a way have come,
Get upon your land-tax, man,
: And ride it merrily home.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Jenny Kissed Me

Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kissed me.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

May And The Poets

There is May in books forever;
May will part from Spenser never;
May's in Milton, May's in Prior,
May's in Chaucer, Thomson, Dyer;
May's in all the Italian books:--
She has old and modern nooks,
Where she sleeps with nymphs and elves,
In happy places they call shelves,
And will rise and dress your rooms
With a drapery thick with blooms.
Come, ye rains, then if ye will,
May's at home, and with me still;
But come rather, thou, good weather,
And find us in the fields together.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

On Receiving A Crown Of Ivy From John Keats

It is a lofty feeling, yet a kind,
Thus to be topped with leaves;--to have a sense
Of honour-shaded thought,--an influence
As from great nature's fingers, and be twined
With her old, sacred, verdurous ivy-bind,
As though she hallowed with that sylvan fence
A head that bows to her benevolence,
Midst pomp of fancied trumpets in the wind.

It is what's within us crowned. And kind and great
Are all the conquering wishes it inspires,
Love of things lasting, love of the tall woods,
Love of love's self, and ardour for a state
Of natural good befitting such desires,
Towns without gain, and hunted solitudes.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

On The Same (On Receiving A Crown Of Ivy From Keats)

It is a lofty feeling, yet a kind,
Thus to be topped with leaves; -- to have a sense
Of honour-shaded thought,-- an influence
As from great nature's fingers, and be twined
With her old, sacred, verdurous ivy-bind,
As though she hallowed with that sylvan fence
A head that bows to her benevolence,
Midst pomp of fancied trumpets in the wind.
It is what's within us crowned. And kind and great
Are all the conquering wishes it inspires,
Love of things lasting, love of the tall woods,
Love of love's self, and ardour for a state
Of natural good befitting such desires,
Towns without gain, and hunted solitudes.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Robin Hood, A Child.

It was the pleasant season yet,
  When the stones at cottage doors
Dry quickly, while the roads are wet,
  After the silver showers.

The green leaves they looked greener still,
  And the thrush, renewing his tune,
Shook a loud note from his gladsome bill
  Into the bright blue noon.

Robin Hood's mother looked out, and said
  "It were a shame and a sin
For fear of getting a wet head
  To keep such a day within,
Nor welcome up from his sick bed
  Your uncle Gamelyn."

And Robin leaped, and thought so too;
  And so he has grasped her gown,
And now looking back, they have lost the view
   Of merry sweet Locksley town.

Robin was a gentle boy,
  And therewithal as bold;
To say he was his mother's joy,
  It were a phrase too cold.

His hair upon his thoughtful brow
  Came smoothly clipped, and sleek,
But ran into a curl somehow
  Beside his merrier cheek.

Great love to him his uncle too
  The noble Gamelyn bare,
And often said, as his mother knew,
  That he should be his heir.

Gamelyn's eyes, now getting dim,
  Would twinkle at his sight,

And his ruddy wrinkles laugh at him
  Between his locks so white:

For Robin already let him see
  He should beat his playmates all
At wrestling, running, and archery,
  Yet he cared not for a fall.

Merriest he was of merry boys,
  And would set the old helmets bobbing;
If his uncle asked about the noise,
  'Twas "If you please, Sir, Robin."

And yet if the old man wished no noise,
  He'd come and sit at his knee,
And be the gravest of grave-eyed boys;
  And not a word spoke he.

So whenever he and his mother came
  To brave old Gamelyn Hall,
'Twas nothing there but sport and game,
  And holiday folks all:
The servants never were to blame,
  Though they let the physic fall.

And now the travellers turn the road,
  And now they hear the rooks;
And there it is, — the old abode,
  With all its hearty looks.

Robin laughed, and the lady too,
  And they looked at one another;
Says Robin, "I'll knock, as I'm used to do,
  At uncle's window, mother."

And so he pick'd up some pebbles and ran,
  And jumping higher and higher,
He reach'd the windows with tan a ran tan,
  And instead of the kind old white-haired man,
There looked out a fat friar.

"How now," said the fat friar angrily,

"What is this knocking so wild?"
But when he saw young Robin's eye,
He said "Go round, my child.

"Go round to the hall, and I'll tell you all."
"He'll tell us all!" thought Robin;
And his mother and he went quietly,
Though her heart was set a throbbing.

The friar stood in the inner door,
And tenderly said, "I fear
You know not the good squire's no more,
Even Gamelyn de Vere.

"Gamelyn de Vere is dead,
He changed but yesternight:"
"Now make us way," the lady said,
"To see that doleful sight."

"Good Gamelyn de Vere is dead,
And has made us his holy heirs:"
The lady stayed not for all he said,
But went weeping up the stairs.

Robin and she went hand in hand,
Weeping all the way,
Until they came where the lord of that land
Dumb in his cold bed lay.

His hand she took, and saw his dead look,
With the lids over each eye-ball;
And Robin and she wept as plenteously,
As though he had left them all.

"I will return, Sir Abbot of Vere,
I will return as is meet,
And see my honoured brother dear
Laid in his winding sheet.

And I will stay, for to go were a sin,
For all a woman's tears,
And see the noble Gamelyn

Laid low with the De Veres."

The lady went with a sick heart out
Into the kind fresh air,
And told her Robin all about
The abbot whom he saw there:

And how his uncle must have been
Disturbed in his failing sense,
To leave his wealth to these artful men,
At her's and Robin's expense.

Sad was the stately day for all
But the Vere Abbey friars,
When the coffin was stript of its hiding pall,
Amidst the hushing choirs.

Sad was the earth-dropping "dust to dust,"
And "our brother here departed;"
The lady shook at them, as shake we must,
And Robin he felt strange-hearted.

That self-same evening, nevertheless,
They returned to Locksley town,
The lady in a dumb distress,
And Robin looking down.

They went, and went, and Robin took
Long steps by his mother's side,
Till she asked him with a sad sweet look
What made him so thoughtful-eyed.

"I was thinking, mother," said little Robin,
And with his own voice so true
He spoke right out, "That if I was a king,
I'd see what those friars do."

His mother stooped with a tear of joy,
And she kissed him again and again,
And said, "My own little Robin boy,
Thou wilt be a King of Men!"

Robin Hood, An Outlaw.

Robin Hood is an outlaw bold
  Under the greenwood tree;
Bird, nor stag, nor morning air
  Is more at large than he.

They sent against him twenty men,
  Who joined him laughing-eyed;
They sent against him thirty more,
  And they remained beside.

All the stoutest of the train,
  That grew in Gamelyn wood,
Whether they came with these or not,
  Are now with Robin Hood.

And not a soul in Locksley town
  Would speak him an ill word;
The friars raged; but no man's tongue,
  Nor even feature stirred;

Except among a very few
  Who dined in the Abbey halls;
And then with a sigh bold Robin knew
  His true friends from his false.

There was Roger the monk, that used to make
  All monkery his glee;
And Midge, on whom Robin had never turned
  His face but tenderly;

With one or two, they say, besides,
  Lord! that in this life's dream
Men should abandon one true thing,
  That would abide with them.

We cannot bid our strength remain,
  Our cheeks continue round;
We cannot say to an aged back,
  Stoop not towards the ground;

We cannot bid our dim eyes see
  Things as bright as ever;
Nor tell our friends, though friends from youth,
  That they'll forsake us never:

But we can say, I never will,
  Friendship, fall off from thee;
And, oh sound truth and old regard,
  Nothing shall part us three.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Robin Hood's Flight

Robin Hood's mother, these twelve years now,
  Has been gone from her earthly home;
And Robin has paid, he scarce knew how,
  A sum for a noble tomb.

The church-yard lies on a woody hill,
  But open to sun and air:
It seems as if the heaven still
  Were looking and smiling there.

Often when Robin looked that way,
  He looked through a sweet thin tear;
But he looked in a different manner, they say,
  Towards the Abbey of Vere.

He cared not for its ill-got wealth,
  He felt not for his pride;
He had youth, and strength, and health,
  And enough for one beside.

But he thought of his gentle mother's cheek
  How it sunk away,
And how she used to grow more weak
  And weary every day;

And how, when trying a hymn, her voice
  At evening would expire,
How unlike it was the arrogant noise
  Of the hard throats in the quire:

And Robin thought too of the poor,
  How they toiled without their share,
And how the alms at the abbey-door
  But kept them as they were:

And he thought him then of the friars again,
  Who rode jingling up and down
With their trappings and things as fine as the king's,
  Though they wore but a shaven crown.

And then bold Robin he thought of the king,
  How he got all his forests and deer,
And how he made the hungry swing
  If they killed but one in a year.

And thinking thus, as Robin stood,
  Digging his bow in the ground,
He was aware in Gamelyn Wood,
  Of one who looked around.

"And what is Will doing," said Robin then,
  "That he looks so fearful and wan?"
"Oh my dear master that should have been,
  I am a weary man."

"A weary man," said Will Scarlet, "am I;
  For unless I pilfer this wood
To sell to the fletchers, for want I shall die
  Here in this forest so good.

"Here in this forest where I have been
  So happy and so stout,
And like a palfrey on the green
  Have carried you about."

"And why, Will Scarlet, not come to me?
  Why not to Robin, Will?
For I remember thy love and thy glee,
  And the scar that marks thee still;

"And not a soul of my uncle's men
  To such a pass should come,
While Robin can find in his pocket or bin
  A penny or a crumb.

"Stay thee, Will Scarlet, man, stay awhile;
  And kindle a fire for me."
And into the wood for half a mile,
  He has vanished instantly.

Robin Hood, with his cheek on fire,

Has drawn his bow so stern,
And a leaping deer, with one leap higher,
Lies motionless in the fern.

Robin, like a proper knight
As he should have been,
Carved a part of the shoulder right,
And bore off a portion clean.

"Oh, what hast thou done, dear master mine!
What hast thou done for me?"
"Roast it, Will, for excepting wine,
Thou shalt feast thee royally."

And Scarlet took and half roasted it,
Blubbering with blinding tears,
And ere he had eaten a second bit,
A trampling came to their ears.

They heard the tramp of a horse's feet,
And they listened and kept still,
For Will was feeble and knelt by the meat;
And Robin he stood by Will.

"Seize him, seize him!" the Abbot cried
With his fat voice through the trees;
Robin a smooth arrow felt and eyed,
And Will jumped stout with his knees.

"Seize him, seize him!" and now they appear
The Abbot and foresters three.
"'Twas I," cried Will Scarlet, "that killed the deer."
Says Robin, "Now let not a man come near,
Or he's dead as dead can be."

But on they came, and with an embrace
The first one the arrow met;
And he came pitching forward and fell on his face,
Like a stumbler in the street.

The others turned to that Abbot vain,
But "seize him!" still he cried,

And as the second turned again,
  An arrow was in his side.

"Seize him, seize him still, I say,"
  Cried the Abbot in furious chafe,
"Or these dogs will grow so bold some day,
  Even priests will not be safe."

A fatal word! for as he sat
  Urging the sword to cut,
An arrow stuck in his paunch so fat,
  As in a leathern butt,

As in a leathern butt of wine;
  Or dough, a household lump;
Or a pumpkin; or a good beef chine,
  Stuck that arrow with a dump.

"Truly," said Robin without fear,
  Smiling there as he stood,
"Never was slain so fat a deer
  In good old Gamelyn wood."

"Pardon, pardon, Sir Robin stout,"
  Said he that stood apart,
"As soon as I knew thee, I wished thee out,
  Of the forest with all my heart.

"And I pray thee let me follow thee
  Any where under the sky,
For thou wilt never stay here with me,
  Nor without thee can I."

Robin smiled, and suddenly fell
  Into a little thought;
And then into a leafy dell,
  The three slain men they brought.

Ancle deep in leaves so red,
  Which autumn there had cast,
When going to her winter-bed
  She had undrest her last.

And there in a hollow, side by side,
  They buried them under the treen;
The Abbot's belly, for all it's pride,
  Made not the grave be seen.

Robin Hood, and the forester,
  And Scarlet the good Will,
Struck off among the green trees there
  Up a pathless hill;

And Robin caught a sudden sight,
  Of merry sweet Locksley town,
Reddening in the sun-set bright;
  And the gentle tears came down.

Robin looked at the town and land
  And the church-yard where it lay;
And poor Will Scarlet kissed his hand,
  And turned his head away.

Then Robin turned with a grasp of Will's,
  And clapped him on the shoulder,
And said with one of his pleasant smiles,
  "Now shew us three men bolder."

And so they took their march away
  As firm as if to fiddle,
To journey that night and all next day
  With Robin Hood in the middle.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Rondeau

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,
 Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
 Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
 Say that health and welth have miss'd me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
   Jenny kiss'd me.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Song Of Fairies Robbing An Orchard

We, the Fairies, blithe and antic,
Of dimensions not gigantic,
Though the moonshine mostly keep us,
Oft in orchards frisk and peep us.

Stolen sweets are always sweeter,
Stolen kisses much completer,
Stolen looks are nice in chapels,
Stolen, stolen, be your apples.

When to bed the world are bobbing,
Then's the time for orchard-robbing;
Yet the fruit were scarce worth peeling,
Were it not for stealing, stealing.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Sudden Fine Weather

Reader! what soul that laoves a verse can see
The spring return, nor glow like you and me?
Hear the quick birds, and see the landscape fill,
Nor long to utter his melodious will?

This more than ever leaps into the veins,
When spring has been delay'd by winds and rains,
And coming with a burst, comes like a show,
Blue all above, and basking green below,
And all the people culling the sweet prime:
Then issues forth the bee to clutch the thyme,
And the bee poet rushes into rhyme.

For lo! no sooner has the cold withdrawn,
Than the bright elm is tufted on the lawn;
The merry sap has run up in the bowers,
And bursts the windows of the buds in flowers;
With song the bosoms of the birds run o'er,
The cuckoo calls, the swallow's at the door,
And apple-tree at noon with bees alive
Burn with the golden chorus of the hive.
Now all these sweets, these sounds, this vernal blaze,
Is but one joy, express'd a thousand ways:
And honey from the flowers and song from birds
Are from the poet's pen his oeverflowing words.

Ah friends! methinks it were a pleasant sphere,
If, like the trees, we blossom'd every year;
If locks grew thick again, and rosy dyes
Return'd in cheeks, and raciness in eyes,
And all around us, vital to the tips,
The human orchard laugh'd with cherry lips!
Lord! what a burst of merriment and play,
Fair dames, were that! and what a first of May!
So natural is the wish, that bards gone by
Have left it, all, in some immortal sigh!

And yet the winter months were not so well:
Who would like changing, as the seasons fell?

Fade every year, and stare, midst ghastly friends,
With falling hairs, and stuck-out fingers' ends?
Besides, this tale of youth that comes again
Is no more true of apple-trees than men.
The Swedish sage, the Newton of the flow'rs,
Who first found out those worlds of paramours,
Tells us, that every blossom that we see
Boasts in its walls a separate family;
So that a tree is but a sort of stand
That holds those afilial fairies in its hand;
Just as Swift's giant might have held a bevy
Of Lilliputian ladies, or a levee.
It is not her that blooms: it is his race,
Who honour his old arms, and hide his rugged face.

Ye wits and bards, then, pray discern your duty,
And learn the lastingness of human beauty.
Your finest fruit to some two months may reach:
I've known a cheek at forth like a peach.

But see! the weather calls me. Here's a bee
Comes bounding in my room imperiously,
And talking to himself, hastily burns
About mine ear, and so in heat returns.
O little brethren of the fervid soul,
Kissers of flowers, lords of the golden bowl,
I follow to your fields and tusted brooks:
Winter's the time to which the poet looks
For hiving his sweet thoughts, and making honied books.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Field Of Battle

The Deed of Blood is o'er!
And, hark, the Trumpet's mournful breath
Low murmurs round it a Note of Death—
The Mighty are no more!

How solemn slow that distant Groan!—
O, could AMBITION, wild with fear,
The deep prophetic Warning hear,
And, looking, listning vain around
For one soul-soothing, softer sound,
While near, unseen, the Fiends of Hell
Toll round the wretch his fancied Knell,
Rave all alone!

But, hark, soft Plaints arise!—
Friendship, adieu; farewel, soft Love!
I go to smiling Peace above:—
The Friend, the Lover dies!

Yet, happy Soul to Freedom giv'n,
Go where no proud tyrannic Lord
Drives Man upon his Brother's sword;
Where Angels from thine arms shall tear
The Chains AMBITION bade thee wear;
Where, on the once pale Cheek of Woe,
In Smiles immortal, Roses blow—
The Bloom of Heav'n!

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Glove And The Lions

King Francis was a hearty king, and loved a royal sport,
And one day as his lions fought, sat looking on the court;
The nobles filled the benches, and the ladies in their pride,
And 'mongst them sat the Count de Lorge, with one for whom he sighed:
And truly 'twas a gallant thing to see that crowning show,
Valour and love, and a king above, and the royal beasts below.

Ramped and roared the lions, with horrid laughing jaws;
They bit, they glared, gave blows like beams, a wind went with their paws;
With wallowing might and stifled roar they rolled on one another;
Till all the pit with sand and mane was in a thunderous smother;
The bloody foam above the bars came whisking through the air;
Said Francis then, "Faith, gentlemen, we're better here than there."

De Lorge's love o'erheard the King, a beauteous lively dame
With smiling lips and sharp bright eyes, which always seemed the same;
She thought, the Count my lover is brave as brave can be;
He surely would do wondrous things to show his love of me;
King, ladies, lovers, all look on; the occasion is divine;
I'll drop my glove, to prove his love; great glory will be mine.

She dropped her glove, to prove his love, then looked at him and smiled;
He bowed, and in a moment leaped among the lions wild:
The leap was quick, return was quick, he has regained his place,
Then threw the glove, but not with love, right in the lady's face.
"By God!" said Francis, "rightly done!" and he rose from where he sat:
"No love," quoth he, "but vanity, sets love a task like that."

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Negro Boy

Paupertas onus visa est grave.

Cold blows the wind, and while the tear
  Bursts trembling from my swollen eyes,
The rain's big drop, quick meets it there,
  And on my naked bosom flies!
                O pity, all ye sons of Joy,
                The little wand'ring Negro-boy.

These tatter'd clothes, this ice-cold breast
  By Winter harden'd into steel,
These eyes, that know not soothing rest,
  But speak the half of what I feel!
                Long, long, I never new one joy,
                The little wand'ring Negro-boy!

Cannot the sigh of early grief
  Move but one charitable mind?
Cannot one hand afford relief?
  One Christian pity, and be kind?
                Weep, weep, for thine was never joy,
                O little wand'ring Negro-boy!

Is there a good which men call Pleasure?
  O Ozmyn, would that it were thine!
Give me this only precious treasure;
  How it would soften grief like mine!
                Then Ozmyn might be call'd, with joy,
                The little wand'ring Negro-boy!

My limbs these twelve long years have borne
  The rage of ev'ry angry wind:
Yet still does Ozmyn weep and mourn,
  Yet still no ease, no rest can find!
                Then death, alas, must soon destroy
                The little wand'ring Negro-boy!

No sorrow e'er disturbs the rest,

That dwells within the lonely grave;
Thou best resource, the wo-wrung breast
E'er ask'd of Heav'n, or Heav'n e'er gave!
Ah then, farewell, vain world, with joy
I die the happy Negro-boy!

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Nile

It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,
And times and things, as in that vision, seem
Keeping along it their eternal stands,--
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands
That roamed through the young world, the glory extreme
Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,
The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.
Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,
As of a world left empty of its throng,
And the void weighs on us; and then we wake,
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along
'Twixt villages, and think how we shall take
Our own calm journey on for human sake.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Olive Of Peace

Now sheath'd is the Sword that was wild as the blast:
The Tempest of Slaughter and Terror is past;
Old ALBION her Neighbour all smilingly hails—
For the OLIVE of PEACE blooms again in our Vales!
Beam on the day,
Thou Olive gay:
'Matchless is he
Who planted thee;
And mayst thou like him immortal be!'

Divinest of Olives, O, never was seen
A bloom so enchanting, a verdure so green!
Sweet, sweet do thy Beauties entwiningly smile
In the Vine-tree of France and the Oak of our Isle!
Beam on the day,
Thou Olive gay, &c.

Long, long did thy envied Exotic delay,
'Till the voice of HUMANITY charm'd thee away;
And here, ever here mayst thou bloom in repose,
As firm as our Oak-tree, and gay as the Rose!
Bloom on the day,
Thou Olive gay, &c.

Let ALCIDES his Poplar of Majesty prize,
And VENUS her Myrtle exalt to the skies:
FRANCE and ALBION excell all the Gods of old Greece—
For they crown their wise heads with the OLIVE of PEACE!
Bloom on the day,
Thou Olive gay, &c.

The delicate Lily may gracefully mount,
And the Pink all her charms with the Rainbow recount;
Green, green is the Olive on ALBION'S brow,
And the Lily and Pink to the Olive must bow!
Bloom on the day,
Thou Olive gay, &c.

Thou Olive divine, may Eternity's Sun

Beam warm where thy roots thro' the ages shall run;
The Dew of Affection 'light soft where they twine,
And the Love of an Universe stamp thee divine!
Bloom on the day,
Thou Olive gay:
'Matchless was he
Who planted thee;
And mayst thou like him immortal be!'

James Henry Leigh Hunt

The Plate Of Gold

One day there fell in great Benares' temple-court
A wondrous plate of gold, whereon these words were writ;
'To him who loveth best, a gift from Heaven.'
Thereat.
The priests made proclamation: 'At the midday hour,
Each day, let those assemble who for virtue deem
their right to Heaven's gift the best; and we will hear
the deeds of mercy done, and so adjudge.'
The news
ran swift as light, and soon from every quarter came
nobles and munshis, hermits, scholars, holy men,
and all renowned for gracious or for splendid deeds,
meanwhile the priests in solemn council sat and heard
what each had done to merit best the gift of Heaven.
So for a year the claimants came and went.
At last,
after a patient weighing of the worth of all,
the priests bestowed the plate of gold on one who seemed,
the largest lover of the race - whose whole estate,
within the year had been parted among the poor.
This man, all trembling with his joy, advanced to take
the golden plate-when lo! at his finger's first touch
it changed to basest lead! All stood aghast; but when
the hapless claimant dropt it clanging on the floor,
Heaven's guerdon was again transformed to shining gold.
So for another twelve month sat he priests and judged.
Thrice they awarded-thrice did Heaven refuse the gift.
Meanwhile a host of poor, maimed beggars in the street
lay all about the temple gate, in hope to move
that love whereby each claimant hoped to win the gift
and well for them it was (if gold be charity),
for every pilgrim to the temple gate praised God.
that love might thus approve itself before the test,
and so coins rained freely in the outstretched hands;
but none of those who gave, so much as turned to look
into the poor sad eyes of them that begged.
And now
The second year had almost passed, but still the plate
of gold, by whomsoever touched was turned to lead.

At length there came a simple peasant-not aware
of that strange contest for the gift of God-to pay
a vow within the temple. As he passed along
the line of shrivelled beggars, all his soul was moved
within him to sweet pity, and the tears well up
and trembled in his eyes.
Now by the temple gate
there lay a poor, sore creature, blind, and shunned by all;
but when the peasant came, and saw the sightless face
and trembling, maimed hands he could not pass, but knelt,
and took both palms in his, and softly said: 'O thou,
my brother! bear the trouble bravely. God is good.'
The he arose and walked straightway across the court,
and entered where they wrangled of their deeds of love
before the priests.
A while he listened sadly; then
had turned away; but something moved the priest who held
the plate of gold to beckon to the peasant. So
he came, not understanding and obeyed, and stretched
his hand and took the sacred vessel. Lo! it shone
with thrice its former lustre, and amazed them all!
'Son', cried the priest, 'rejoice, the gift of God is thine.
Thou lovest best!' And all made answer, 'It is well.'
And, one by one, departed. But the peasant knelt
and prayed, bowing his head above the golden plate;
while o'er his soul like morning streamed the love of God.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

To A Child During Sickness

SLEEP breathes at last from out thee,☐
My little patient boy;☐
And balmy rest about thee☐
Smooths off the day's annoy.☐
I sit me down, and think☐
Of all thy winning ways;
Yet almost wish, with sudden shrink,☐
That I had less to praise.☐

Thy sidelong pillowed meekness;☐
Thy thanks to all that aid;☐
Thy heart, in pain and weakness,☐
Of fancied faults afraid;☐
The little trembling hand☐
That wipes thy quiet tears,—☐
These, these are things that may demand☐
Dread memories for years.☐

Sorrows I 've had, severe ones,☐
I will not think of now;☐
And calmly, midst my dear ones,☐
Have wasted with dry brow;☐
But when thy fingers press☐
And pat my stooping head,☐
I cannot bear the gentleness,—☐
The tears are in their bed.☐

Ah, first-born of thy mother,☐
When life and hope were new;☐
Kind playmate of thy brother,☐
Thy sister, father too;☐
My light, where'er I go;☐
My bird, when prison-bound;☐
My hand-in-hand companion—No,☐
My prayers shall hold thee round.☐

To say, "He has departed"—☐
"His voice"—"his face"—is gone,☐
To feel impatient-hearted,☐

Yet feel we must bear on,—□
Ah, I could not endure□
To whisper of such woe,□
Unless I felt this sleep insure□
That it will not be so.□

Yes, still he 's fixed, and sleeping!□
This silence too the while,—□
Its very hush and creeping□
Seem whispering us a smile;□
Something divine and dim□
Seems going by one's ear,□
Like parting wings of cherubim,□
Who say, "We 've finished here."□

James Henry Leigh Hunt

To A Fish

You strange, astonished-looking, angle-faced,
Dreary-mouthed, gaping wretches of the sea,
Gulping salt-water everlastingly,
Cold-blooded, though with red your blood be graced,
And mute, though dwellers in the roaring waste;
And you, all shapes beside, that fishy be,--
Some round, some flat, some long, all devilry,
Legless, unloving, infamously chaste:--

O scaly, slippery, wet, swift, staring wights,
What is't ye do? What life lead? eh, dull goggles?
How do ye vary your vile days and nights?
How pass your Sundays? Are ye still but joggles
In ceaseless wash? Still nought but gapes, and bites,
And drinks, and stares, diversified with boggles?

James Henry Leigh Hunt

To John Keats

'Tis well you think me truly one of those,
Whose sense discerns the loveliness of things;
For surely as I feel the bird that sings
Behind the leaves, or dawn as it up grows,
Or the rich bee rejoicing as he goes,
Or the glad issue of emerging springs,
Or overhead the glide of a dove's wings,
Or turf, or trees, or, midst of all, repose.
And surely as I feel things lovelier still,
The human look, and the harmonious form
Containing woman, and the smile in ill,
And such a heart as Charles's, wise and warm,--
As surely as all this, I see, ev'n now,
Young Keats, a flowering laurel on your brow.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

To Robert Batty, M.D., On His Giving Me A Lock Of Milton's Hair

It lies before me there, and my own breath
Stirs its thin outer threads, as though beside
The living head I stood in honoured pride,
Talking of lovely things that conquer death.
Perhaps he pressed it once, or underneath
Ran his fine fingers when he leant, blank-eyed,
And saw in fancy Adam and his bride
With their heaped locks, or his own Delphic wreath.

There seems a love in hair, though it be dead.
It is the gentlest, yet the strongest thread
Of our frail plant,--a blossom from the tree
Surviving the proud trunk; as if it said,
Patience and gentleness in power. In me
Behold affectionate eternity.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

To The Grasshopper And The Cricket

Green little vaulter in the sunny grass,
Catching your heart up at the feel of June,
Sole voice that's heard amidst the lazy noon,
When even the bees lag at the summoning brass;
And you, warm little housekeeper, who class
With those who think the candles come too soon,
Loving the fire, and with your tricksome tune
Nick the glad silent moments as they pass;
Oh sweet and tiny cousins, that belong
One to the fields, the other to the hearth,
Both have your sunshine; both, though small, are strong
At your clear hearts; and both were sent on earth
To sing in thoughtful ears this natural song:
Indoors and out, summer and winter,--Mirth.

James Henry Leigh Hunt

Walcheren Expedition

Ye brave, enduring Englishmen,
Who dash through fire and flood,
And spend with equal thoughtlessness
Your money and your blood,
I sing of that black season,
Which all true hearts deplore,
When ye lay,
Night and day,
Upon Walcheren's swampy shore.

'Twas in the summer's sunshine
Your mighty host set sail,
With valour in each longing heart
And vigour in the gale;
The Frenchman dropp'd his laughter,
The Fleming's thoughts grew sore,
As ye came
In your fame
To the dark and swampy shore.

But foul delays encompass'd ye
More dang'rous than the foe,
As Antwerp's town and its guarded fleet
Too well for Britons know;
One spot alone ye conquer'd
With hosts unknown of yore;
And your might
Day and night,
Lay still on the swampy shore.

In vain your dauntless mariners
Mourn'd ev'ry moment lost,
In vain your soldiers threw their eyes
In flame to the hostile coast;
The fire of gallant aspects
Was doom'd to be no more,

And your fame
Sunk with shame
In the dark and the swampy shore.

Ye died not in the triumphing
Of the battle-shaken flood,
Ye died not on the charging field
In the mingle of brave blood;
But 'twas in wasting fevers
Full three months and more,
Britons born,
Pierc'd with scorn,
Lay at rot on the swampy shore.

No ship came o'er to bring relief,
No orders came to save;
But DEATH stood there and never stirr'd,
Still counting for the grave.
They lay down, and they linger'd,
And died with feelings sore,
And the waves
Pierc'd their graves
Thro' the dark and the swampy shore.

Oh England! Oh my Countrymen!
Ye ne'er shall thrive again,
Till freed from Councils obstinate
Of mercenary men.
So toll for the six thousand
Whose miseries are o'er,
Where the deep,
To their sleep,
Bemoans on the swampy shore.

James Henry Leigh Hunt