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POETICAL WORKS.

77

Away then, Health ! thy frowns are vain,  
Thou canst not touch my soul with pain !



THE NUN'S RETURN TO THE WORLD,

BY THE DECREE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF FRANCE,

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at

FEBRUARY, 1790.

FAREWELL ye walls where solitude has thrown  
Her long dark shadow on each silent stone,  
Where the slow pulse but feebly dares to creep,  
Or give the wretched the sad leave to weep ;  
Where struggling sighs break forth from every breast,  
And wasting sorrow wears a holy vest ;  
Where pure religion seldom ventures nigh,  
Or owns the tear that hangs within the eye,  
Which trembling long, at last in secret falls,  
The heart-wrought offering to relentless walls.  
But nought avails the heart-wrought offering here,  
Nor aught avails the earth-unhallow'd prayer ;  
Sighs, that so oft for worldly cares are given,  
No listening seraph fondly bears to heaven,  
But through the cloister's corridors are borne,  
Heard oft at eve and at return of morn.  
Some sisters may revere the cloister's gloom,  
And, warm with life, yet hover o'er the tomb ;  
May wing their souls to the supreme abode,  
And, quitting earth, place every thought with God.

Thrice happy they who taste this early heaven,  
And feel while here their every fault forgiven.  
When the slow organ swells the lengthen'd note,  
And heaven-born music pours from every throat ;  
When warm devotion breathes the fervent prayer,  
And holy saints the pious rapture share ;  
When watchful slumbers stated minutes know,  
And, waking, teach the ready knee to bow ;  
When Faith and Hope both animate the breast,  
And habit's only made Religion's vest ;  
When strong conviction holds a steady light,  
And clearly shows the vestal life is right ;  
When Conscience dictates the prompt will obeys,  
And makes responses both to prayer and praise ;  
Is't then we taste the promis'd joys of heaven,  
And trust, and feel, our every fault forgiven ?  
Not so !—my years o'er many a sand has run,  
And still my sighs have counted one by one.  
Still self-will'd thought would bear my soul away,  
And quick transport me to some blissful day,  
When social intercourse her sweets would lend,  
Mixing the lover with the tender friend ;  
When father's, mother's, sister's, voice was heard,  
With every name that sense of life endear'd ;  
When future plans of dear domestic ease  
Were fondly suffer'd every wish to seize ;  
When useful life was held a female part,  
And 'twas no sin to feel I had a heart,  
Or link the soft affections in my chain,  
And hope to please—nor strive to please in vain ;

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POETICAL WORKS.

79

To see the wish before it takes a form,  
To mark the cloud or break the coming storm,  
To shield the heart from every sense of pain,  
And tell my own it did not beat in vain !  
This ! this was life ! the life my faith approv'd,  
A useful current to some friend belov'd ;  
If not a friend belov'd, at least to those  
Whose length of suffering call'd for sweet repose ;  
And sought the soothings of the gentle breast,  
In every form that pity can be drest.

Once through a vale of tempting wiles I stray'd,  
Till dusky evening drew her silent shade,  
And night approach'd before I guess'd the hour,  
Wrapp'd in a cloud, and usher'd by a shower.  
A cottage, shelter'd by a fringing wood,  
On a green carpet sweet and lonely stood ;  
The rising hill on either side would show  
Where the wild rose uncropped might safely blow,  
Where the soft murmurs of a low cascade  
Might join the stream that gurgl'd through the glade ;  
Along the pasture nibbling sheep were seen,  
Whose new-wash'd fleeces brighter made the green ;  
Two lambs ran frisking to avoid the shower,  
And knock'd their little heads against the door ;  
The opening door a willing shelter lends,  
For here sweet Innocence and Man were friends ;  
Two little cherubs, rosy as the morn,  
The sweetest wild flowers wreath'd around each horn,  
The little playmates knew the gentle hand,  
And patted softly, took a patient stand ;

Then skipp'd and frolic'd, fond to lead the way,  
And show the world how Innocence should play.  
In a warm corner sat the aged sire,  
His cushion spread, and plac'd beside the fire ;  
Respect from all unask'd he seem'd to draw,—  
Respect from love, and not from silent awe.  
He thankful look'd, and seem'd to bless his race,  
Hope lit his eye, and Piety his face ;  
Few men more blest, more fortunate had been,  
Or sweeter, better children's children seen ;  
His daughter's cheek had not yet ceas'd to glow,  
The rose could yet upon occasion blow ;  
When the dear partner of her useful life  
Would fondly call her his beloved wife,  
The sweetest feelings all her heart would charm,  
Beam in her eyes, and on her cheek grow warm !  
Close to her heart a younger cherub press'd,  
Smil'd in her face, and sunk upon her breast ;  
The happy father at his homely board  
Ne'er thought the world could greater wealth afford ;  
While the lov'd Prattlers many a trick would play,  
Tug at his coat, and, peeping, run away ;  
While nods and whispers, loud enough to hear,  
Gave certain notice when the foe drew near ;  
While his sly hands pretend the rogues to seize,  
The wond'rous 'scapes the daring pilferers please ;  
And watching, when his eye was turn'd aside,  
Beneath the mother's apron seek to hide ;  
Neatness and comfort wore a shining face,  
And every thing seem'd well to know its place.

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## POETICAL WORKS.

81

Gay peacock feathers wav'd o'er pewter rows,  
And many a tint the painted rainbow throws ;  
The white scour'd chair e'en seem'd a tempting seat,  
But all's inviting where all things are neat ;  
The sun look'd in, and saw each corner clean,  
And brighter shone as he surveyed the scene.  
Blest through long life, may every pair like these  
Feel the full comfort of the wish to please !  
No lot like this attended on my doom,  
Destin'd to live, but live within the tomb.  
False zeal ! false pride ! but let me hide their shame,  
Nor blot the parents with a barbarous name.  
Back to the world I now may safely go,  
And kindly foster every child of woe ;  
Soft Pity's handmaid still I yet may be,  
And every mourner may claim kin with me ;  
For keen afflictions make the strongest ties,  
And fellow-sufferers are the best allies.  
But how shall I the world retrace once more !  
How chang'd that world from what I knew before !  
No more I know to form the quick reply,  
Or smooth my manners to th' expecting eye ;  
No longer know the various turns of mind,  
Which now deceive, and now inform mankind ;  
The favourite topics which refinement taught,  
And grac'd with every happy turn of thought ;  
The sentimental strain that softly flows  
Has but been taught me by instructing woes ;  
The wiles of Fashion (that with eager haste  
Arrest the eye, and call her whimsies taste),

s place.

Around this form no mystic wreath unfold,  
Nor captive Fancy in their mazes hold,  
Which long keep Sense uncertain what to say,  
What part to praise, or what to vote away :  
These arts unknowing, how shall I appear  
Wrapp'd in the garb Simplicity would wear,  
And, as a being of a world unknown,  
Live much a wonder, or live much alone !  
Of friends I left, alas ! how few remain,  
How few to greet my welcome back again !  
A change of manners makes a change of thought,  
And I may seem but little what I ought.  
Stern Bigotry may rail, and blame my choice,  
And Superstition raise her hollow voice,  
And Priests and Prelates may my actions scan,  
And scorn with all the powers of reasoning man ;  
But let them scorn—for ever may it be,  
That human reason and her acts are free !  
One soft regret yet softens o'er my mind,  
One other self I yet must leave behind ;  
In leaving her, I leave my better part,  
With half the fairest virtues of my heart.  
In scenes of sorrow long our loves were tried,  
Oft has she wept, and sigh'd as I have sigh'd ;  
The sister Fates for both alike had wove  
A tale of sorrow in a veil of love ;  
The blinding lights and shades of other's woe  
Mix in a way none but the wretched know ;  
None but the wretched see by what fine thread  
Those hearts are tied which with one wound have bled !

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POETICAL WORKS.

83

Forbidding friends the happy union cross'd,  
And sweet Cecilia to the world was lost ;  
The gentl'st lily not more sweet appears  
When seen through all the morning's softening tears ;  
The melting Graces mould her winning form,  
Pliant as osiers bend before the storm ;  
Tall as the cedar on yon mountain's brow,  
That stoops to shade the murmuring stream below ;  
Meek as when Patience checks the rebel tear,  
And makes Submission a bless'd saint appear,  
While plaintive accents swell the softest chord,  
And breathe full harmony on every word ;  
In every word the fullest sense you hear  
Exactly suited to the listening ear,  
While tender interest every heart inspires,  
And every eye both pities and admires.  
When to the world I urg'd her to return ;  
“ What is the world,” said she, “ to those who mourn,  
To those who've lost their dearest interest there,  
The only thing that makes life worth a care !  
O ! had my friends but been content to see  
This closing grate fold all its bars on me ;  
Nor, as the veil was hovering o'er my head,  
With impious hand the sacred vestment shred ;—  
Had but the monks the frantic rage forgiven,  
Nor sent his pure and ardent soul to heaven,  
Then to the world I might again have flown,  
And not, as now, ‘ forget myself to stone !’  
But why should I withdraw from this retreat ?  
What friend have I in all the world to meet ?

Dead in the breast of every kindred tie,  
For long ere dead to all the world we die ;  
Indifference heeds not where the wretched sleep,  
Nor heaves one soothing sigh though they should wake  
and weep !

“ No ; my Saint Agnes, let me here remain,  
These walls are old companions of my pain !  
And to each deep and agonizing sigh  
In hollow murmurs groan a sad reply ;  
These sad replies have bound me to my cell,  
Nor, than its gloom, few things I love so well ;  
Oft have I mourn'd—oft told my story here,  
And now the place, like a tried friend, grows dear.  
The mind, in all its habitudes of woe,  
Clings to the spot that seems its griefs to know ;  
Where fond Remembrance peoples all the scene,  
And friends appear where friends have never been ;  
Her tear-dipped pencil stronger likeness shows  
In that lov'd spot where the idea rose ;  
There the bless'd shade for ever haunts the ground,  
And wanders with us all the groves around.  
Oft have you met me in yon cloister'd aisle,  
The half-tear starting through the troubl'd smile ;  
'Twas there, at evening hour, just as the sun  
Hung o'er yon marble, and with languor shone,  
That first of home I dar'd indulge the thought,  
And with warm Fancy many an image wrought ;  
Worshipp'd the reliques with a love divine,  
And built to Memory the forbidden shrine.

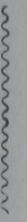
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POETICAL WORKS.

85

Forbidden, ah ! yet Nature will be found,  
Though walls of adamant enclose her round ;  
Though vows, and veils, and cloisters, bind her fast,  
The free-born spirit breaks her bars at last ;  
Finds the sick heart devoted to her sway,  
And all her dictates waiting to obey ;  
Wonder not, then, this place becomes so dear !  
Have I not brought my heart's devotions here ?  
Unfit abroad to take an active part,  
With all this load of misery at my heart,  
I only hope to wing my soul to heaven,  
And, for my countless tears and sighs, to be forgiven.  
“ You I shall miss ! through every lengthening aisle  
Your heavenly presence sacred made the pile ;  
The long perspective found an opening ray  
Whene'er your image cross'd my wandering way,  
Light sudden gleams of joy my breast would seize,  
And the cold blood forget awhile to freeze.  
But go, St Agnes, bear along with thee  
The many a tale of cloister'd misery ;  
Bless that sage Council where fair Freedom dwells,  
And bid her henceforth close these gloomy cells ;  
The smooth chicane of monkish wiles unfold,  
And say what wretches half the convents hold ;  
Drag forth Delusion to their wondering sight,  
And let them see their bless'd decree was right !  
How soon shall Freedom cheer the drooping swain,  
How soon shall Plenty spread along the plain,  
How soon shall Labour make a sport of toil,  
And Health blow round him as he tills the soil ;

The grateful soil her freest gifts shall lend,  
To prove herself bless'd Freedom's steady friend.  
As o'er the earth she bends her flowery way,  
The swains exult as at return of day;  
The towering woods more towering seem to grow,  
And free-born rivers freer seem to flow ;  
The barren rocks their little part will bear,  
And tufts of grass grow, nourish'd here and there ;  
All Nature sees, and hails the hour with me,  
That gives to man the Mountain-Liberty ;  
Dear Liberty ! the source of heartfelt ease,  
Which still must please whilst earthly good can please."



#### ON IMAGINED HAPPINESS

##### IN HUMBLE STATIONS.

YE Bards who have polish'd your lays,  
And sung of the charms of the grove,  
That Truth's not the language of Praise,  
You leave Disappointment to prove.  
'Tis true that the meadows are fine,  
Through which the rill tinkles along ;  
And the trees, which the woodbines entwine,  
Regale the sweet thrush for his song :  
At morn, when the sunbeams unveil  
The beauties that hide with the night,  
And the primrose and lily so pale  
The soft eye of Feeling delight :