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T O

J O S E P H H I L L, E s q.

DEAR JOSEPH—five and twenty years ago—

Alas! how time escapes—'tis even so—

With frequent intercourse and always sweet

And always friendly, we were won't to cheat

A tedious hour—and now we never meet.

As some grave gentleman in Terence says,

('Twas therefore much the same in ancient days)

Good lack, we know not what to-morrow brings—

Strange fluctuation of all human things!

True: Changes will befall, and friends may part,

But distance only cannot change the heart:

And

And were I call'd to prove th' assertion true,
One proof should serve, a reference to you.

Whence comes it then, that in the wane of life,
Though nothing have occur'd to kindle strife,
We find the friends we fancied we had won,
Though num'rous once, reduced to few or none?
Can gold grow worthless that has stood the touch?
No: Gold they seem'd, but they were never such,
Horatio's servant once, with bow and cringe
Swinging the parlour door upon its hinge,
Dreading a negative, and overawed
Lest he should trespass, begg'd to go abroad.
Go fellow!—whither?—turning short about—
Nay. Stay at home;—you're always going out.
'Tis but a step, sir, just at the street's end—
For what?—An please you sir, to see a friend:
A friend? Horatio cried, and seem'd to start—
Yea marry shalt thou, and with all my heart—

And

And fetch my cloak, for though the night be raw
 I'll see him too—the first I ever saw.
 I knew the man, and knew his nature mild,
 And was his play-thing often when a child,
 But somewhat at that moment pinch'd him close,
 Else he was seldom bitter or morose:
 Perhaps his confidence just then betray'd,
 His grief might prompt him with the speech he made,
 Perhaps 'twas mere good-humour gave it birth,
 The harmless play of pleasantry and mirth.
 Howe'er it was, his language in my mind
 Bespoke at least a man that knew mankind:
 But not to moralize too much, and strain
 To prove an evil of which all complain,
 (I hate long arguments, verbosely spun)
 One story more, dear Hill, and I have done:
 Once on a time, an Emp'ror, a wise man,
 No matter where, in China or Japan,
 Decreed that whosoever should offend
 Against the well known duties of a friend,

Convicted

Convicted once, should ever after wear
 But half a coat, and show his bosom bare.
 The punishment importing this, no doubt,
 That all was naught within, and all found out.
 Oh happy Britain ! we have not to fear
 Such hard and arbitrary measure here.
 Else could a law like that which I relate,
 Once have the sanction of our triple state,
 Some few that I have known in days of old
 Would run most dreadful risk of catching cold.
 While you, my friend, whatever wind should blow,
 Might traverse England safely to and fro,
 An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
 Broad-cloth without, and a warm heart within.

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