

WRITTEN

AT STEEPHILL,
IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT,

AUGUST, MDCCXC.

WHAT joy, escaping from the restless throng
Who in Augusta* waste their trifling day,
To wander, Vecta†, thy wild rocks among,
Or careless o'er thy airy summits stray!

Or musing loiter in thy waving groves,
Or mark thy limpid streamlets as they flow;
Or view thy hamlets, where mild Patience loves
To shade with olive Labour's sun-burnt brow!

Where the calm villagers content abide,
Blest in the sweets of Liberty and Peace,
Crop the luxuriant harvest's golden pride,
Or spread their nets to catch the finny race.

* A name for London.

† The ancient name of the Isle of Wight.

No wild ambition damps the genuine joys
 Which bounteous Nature to her sons affords ;
 No keen remorse their quiet rest annoys,
 Or sick disgust attends their frugal boards.

Ah! why should Fortune, with deceitful smile,
 Lure free-born Britons from the rural plain,
 In courts deprav'd for sordid wealth to toil,
 And meanly drag a golden idiot's chain ?

What numbers, Vesta, on thy sea-girt shore,
 Unpractis'd in the world's pernicious strife,
 Rich in simplicity, ne'er sought for more,
 And clos'd where they receiv'd their blameless life!

Yet tho' thy hills no costly metals yield,
 To draw oppressive Avarice from afar,
 Even here the rustic in his native field
 Has sunk beneath the iron hand of war.

When banish'd Harold* with destructive rage
 Against thine Isle his vengeful fury turn'd,
 What crowds, unnoted in the historic page,
 Here o'er their murder'd friends in anguish mourn'd!

* Harold, with his father Earl Goodwin, and brother Tosti, invaded this
 Island when banished the kingdom.

The dreadful scene, methinks, even now I see!

O Harold, be this cruelty abhor'd!
Spare the low cot of helpless Poverty,

And 'gainst the powerful turn thy conquering sword.

Here amid sanguine heaps Earl Goodwin stands;

Relentless Tosti hears the suppliants cry;

Those cries restrain not the fierce victor's hands,

And the pale Islanders unpitied die.

Unhappy victims, who with fruitless prayers

To savage conquerors have sued in vain!

To avenge your wrongs, impending Fate prepares

For your unfeeling foes an equal pain.

Soon civil discord, and fraternal hate,

Shall destine Tosti to an early tomb;

While madly proud, usurping regal state,

Harold on Hastings' plains shall meet his doom.

Where the insignia now of kingly pride,

The dazzling sceptre and imperial throne?

For him each vain distinction's laid aside!

Unhappy Harold! only marks the stone.

Thus shall the monarch mingle with the slave;

Thus shall the noble and ignoble meet:

Death, all-subduing, opens in the grave

To wealth and wretchedness a like retreat.

But turn, my mind, from ages long past o'er,

Far brighter prospects to thy view remain;

Vesta can dread a hostile force no more,

While England's navy triumphs o'er the main*.

Behold the warlike fleet in proud array,

Majestic moving o'er the liquid plain:

Loose to the wind their flags and streamers play,

And menace ruin to insulting Spain.

Thrice happy land, where the directing care

Of a wise Statesman† in each step we trace;

Whose active vigilance prepares for war,

Even when reclining in the lap of Peace!

* At this time the English fleet lay off the Isle of Wight, commanded by Lord Howe.

† Our present Minister.

Long may he, Albion, near thy throne preside,
And ne'er inconstant Fortune's falsehood prove,
Humble the Spanish and the Gallic pride,
And be rewarded by his country's love !

Here pause, my Muse ! no more the theme pursue,
Fix on the present thine enraptur'd eye :
A brighter scene can ne'er attract thy view ;
O, may its cheering lustre never die !
