



## THE CONFINED DEBTOR.

A FRAGMENT FROM A PRISON.

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*“ Sick and in prison,  
And ye visited me.”*

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This Poem hath been published, and the profits arising from the sale were appropriated towards the release of the debtors confined in the county gaol at Ilchester for small sums. The benevolent intentions of the author were fully rewarded by the success of the sale, and a list of the debtors discharged in consequence thereof was published in the daily papers.

*Note by the Editor.*



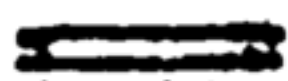


*The following Lines are offered to the Public, not as a Poem, but as a true, though faint, description of the miseries of a prison!—Should they have the effect wished for of calling forth the attention of the charitable towards the release, or relief, of a number of most wretched debtors now confined in Ilchester gaol, the donations for them will be received and acknowledged in the papers by Mr. Gye and the Proprietors of the Circulating Libraries.*

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## THE CONFINED DEBTOR,



FROM these drear cells, where cheerless horror reigns,  
 Midst the dread sound of groans and clank of chains,  
 Where life is death, and day perpetual night,  
 Say ! Shall a wretch like me presume to write ?  
 A wretch cut off from ev'ry social tie,  
 Expell'd from life, yet not allow'd to die,  
 At once, from wife, from children torn away  
 By those, who make calamity their prey ;  
 Who dart with more than tygers' savage rage  
 On pining sickness, or decrepid age :  
 Can such a wretch with trembling hand assay  
 His mansion and companions to portray,  
 And griefs proclaim which ne'er have met the day ?  
 Griefs, which no tongue can speak, or pencil paint,  
 Which mock all sorrow, and make language faint,  
}  
Bring



Bring scenes to light as Erebus profound,  
 Where murderers dire lie shackled to the ground,  
 And innocence and guilt alike are bound !  
 Yet could I to my sad companions gain  
 One ray of hope, 'twould mitigate my pain !

Oh were my lines in Heaven's own language drest,  
 Then would they pierce and rend each human breast,  
 Expand each heart, and make each eye o'erflow,  
 At these dread scenes of wretchedness and woe.

Yet tho' no poet's fire inspires my pen,  
 I write to *Christians* and I write to *Men*,  
 I write to those (if Heav'n direct it so)  
 Whose hearts dilate at every human woe,  
 To those whose charity with healing hand  
 Diffuses health and blessings o'er the land,  
 Who condescend to search the hidden cells,  
 Where pining want in silent anguish dwells,

There

There, in obedience to their Lord divine,  
They bind the wound, and pour in oil and wine !

What joys they feel, who follow such a guide !  
Joys ! which exceed all human worldly pride,  
Joys ! which e'en death itself cannot destroy,  
For then they " enter on their Master's joy !"  
Oh did the proud and selfish but believe  
How far more blest to *give*, than to *receive* !  
Did but the slaves of pomp and grandeur know  
What streams of comfort from their wealth might flow !  
Waters ! as pure as morning dews, which rise  
From lofty mountains till they reach the skies,  
Descending thence, as tender drops of rain,  
They cheer each valley, and each thirsty plain ;  
So when in gratitude the widow's pray'r,  
The pris'ner's sighs reliev'd, the orphan's tear  
To Heav'n ascend, an offering pure and neat,  
A blest memorial and an odour sweet,

Recorded stands, from thence they ten-fold pour  
 Their precious ointment, as the grateful show'r !

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Ah me ! what means that shriek, that horrid yell,  
 Those bitter oaths, which sink the soul to hell ?  
 Say, lost companions, in this dread abode  
 Do ye ne'er think of an offended God ?  
 Ne'er seek by pray'r, by penitence and sighs,  
 T' obtain that pardon, which the world denies ?  
 Ah ! sue for mercy with your latest breath,  
 And trembling ask for pardon after death.

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No, No, I'll curse not e'en that fatal morn,  
 Which saw me to this loathsome prison borne;  
 Snatch'd from my homely bed, where long I'd lain  
 Struggling with sickness, poverty and pain,  
 Yet still kind hope, (the wretch's latest friend)  
 Did frequent comfort with my sorrows blend;  
 For near my couch the partner of my care  
 Would anxious watch, and bid me not despair,  
 Whilst she with life and strength, by Heav'n supply'd,  
 Could yield that help, sickness to me deny'd,  
 Could by her distaff earn that homely bread,  
 By which our helpless children long were fed:  
 She bade me hope by industry set free,  
 No griping landlord need we dread to see,  
 She taught me to suppress the rising sigh,  
 And check'd the tear when starting from mine eye;

She o'er my limbs her thread-worn garment spread,  
 And with her infants clothes sustain'd my head,  
 Whilst at my feet those infants playful smil'd,  
 And by their prattle oft my pains beguil'd!—  
 Ah! helpless babes, ah! wretched, dearest wife!  
 More lov'd by me than liberty, or life,  
 No more thy soothing voice now charms mine ear,  
 And gently whispers that no danger's near,  
 No more my playful infants cheer my fight,  
 Here all is horror and perpetual night!  
 Hope can no longer now suppress my sighs,  
 Or check the tears when streaming from mine eyes.  
 Still, still I feel that pang, which rent my heart,  
 Still do I hear thy screams when forc'd apart,  
 Still view thy pallid face, all bath'd in tears,  
 My children's cries still vibrate in mine ears,  
 Still feel them cling around my trembling knees,  
 While on their helpless parent bailiffs seize,  
 Still, still I hear my wife, my children call—  
 “Have patience, patience, and we'll pay thee all!”

Remorseless



Remorseless creditor, thou'st done the deed !  
 Nor tears, nor prayers, nor innocence could plead !  
 Oh ! had thine heart one spark of pity known,  
 To griefs like ours it had compassion shewn !  
 Come ! see thy captive ! view his wretched state,  
 And shew some mercy ere it be too late ;  
 Think ! will this noisome air, and clay-cold floor,  
 His feeble frame to strength and health restore ?  
 Oh could he liberty and strength regain,  
 To pay thy debt he ev'ry nerve would strain !  
 Will grief and anguish aid the wretched wife  
 In earning food to save each infant's life ?  
 Ah ! rather will not frenzy and despair  
 Deprive those infants of a mother's care ?  
 Methinks e'en now, within this dungeon foul,  
 I hear her vent her agony of soul.

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Yet let not thoughts like these distract my brain,  
 Thoughts, which heap woe on woe, and pain on pain;  
 No ! rather let me, with imploring eye,  
 Look up to Him, who hears the pris'ner's sigh ;  
 To Him, who calls the weary and oppress'd,  
 To come to Him for succour and for rest !  
 Who, tho' forlorn and helpless here I lie,  
 Without one pitying friend or comfort nigh,  
 May cause some tender sympathizing heart  
 To soothe our sorrows, and relief impart,  
 Some heart, replete with love, to whom 'tis giv'n  
 Those *bounties* to dispense, which flow *from Heaven!*

*Wm*