

THE VILLAGE MINSTREL.

WHILE learned poets rush to bold extremes,
And sunbeams snatch to light the muse's fires,
An humble rustic hums his lowly dreams,
Far in the shade where poverty retires,
And sings what nature and what truth inspires;
The charms that rise from rural scenery,
Which he in pastures and in woods admires;
The sports, the feelings of his infancy,
And such like artless things how mean soe'er they
be.

Though far from what the learned's toils requite,
He unambitious looks at no renown,
Yet little hopes break his oblivious night,
To cheer the bosom of a luckless clown,
Where black neglect spreads one continual frown,
And threats her constant winter cold and chill;
Where toil and slavery bear each fancy down,
That fain would soar and sing "albeit ill,"
And force him to submit to fate's controlling will.

Young Lubin was a peasant from his birth;
His sire a hind born to the flail and plough,
To thump the corn out and to till the earth,
The coarsest chance which nature's laws allow,
To earn his living by a sweating brow;
Thus labour's early days did rugged roll,
Mixt with untimely toil-but e'en as now,
Ambitions prospects fired his little soul,
And fancy soared and sung, 'bove poverty's control.

Small joy to him were childhood's tempting tricks,
Which school-boys look for in their vacant hours;
With other boys he little cared to mix;
Joy left him lonely in his hawthorn bowers,
As haply binding up his knots of flowers,
Or list'ning unseen birds to hear them sing;
Or gazing downward where the runnel pours,
Through the moss'd bridge, in many a whirling ring;
How would he muse o'er all on pleasure's fairy wing.

The "I spy," "halloo," and the marble-ring,
And many a game that infancy employs,
The spinning-top whirl'd from the twitching string,
The boastful jump of strong exulting boys,
Their sports, their pastimes, all their pleasing toys
We leave unsung-though much such rural play
Would suit the theme-yet they're not Lubin's joys:

Truth breathes the song in Lubin's steps to stray,
Through woods, and fields, and plains, his solitary
way;

And tell how vales and shades did please his sight,
And how the wind breath'd music thro' each bough,
And how in rural charms he did delight,-
To mark the shepherd's folds, and swains at plough,
And pasture speck'd with sheep, and horse, and cow,
With many a beauty that does intervene;
And steeple peeping o'er the wood's dark brow:
While young hope's fancy popt its smile between,
And wish'd man's days to spend in some such
peaceful scene.

Each opening season, and each opening scene,
On his wild view still teem'd with fresh delight;
E'en winter's storms to him have welcome been,
That brought him comfort in its long dark night,
As joyful list'ning, while the fire burnt bright,
Some neighbouring labourer's superstitious tale,
How "Jack-a-lantern," with his wisp alight,
To drown a 'nighted traveller once did fail,
He knowing well the brook that whimper'd down the
vale.

And tales of fairy-land he lov'd to hear,
Those mites of human forms, like skimming bees,
That fly and flirt about but every-where;
The mystic tribes of night's unnerving breeze,
That through a lock-hole even creep with ease:
The freaks and stories of this elfin crew,
Ah, Lubin gloried in such things as these;
How they rewarded industry he knew,
And how the restless slut was pinched black and blue.

How ancient dames a fairy's anger fear'd,
From gossip's stories Lubin often heard;
How they on every night the hearth-stone clear'd,
And 'gainst their visits all things neat prepar'd,
As fays nought more than cleanliness regard;
When in the morn they never fail'd to share
Or gold or silver as their meet reward,
Dropt in the water superstition's care
To make the charm succeed had cautious placed there.

And thousands such the village keeps alive;
Beings that people superstitious earth,
That e'er in rural manners will survive,
As long a wild rusticity has birth
To spread their wonders round the cottage-hearth.

On Lubin's mind these deeply were imprest;
Oft fear forbade to share his neighbour's mirth:
And long each tale, by fancy newly drest,
Brought fairies in his dreams, and broke his infant
rest.

He had his dreads and fears, and scarce could pass
A church-yard's dreary mounds at silent night,
But footsteps trampled through the rustling grass,
And ghosts 'hind grave-stones stood in sheets of
white;
Dread monsters fancy moulded on his sight:
Soft would he step lest they his tread should hear,
And creep and creep till past his wild affright;
Then on wind's wings would rally as it were,
So swift the wild retreat of childhood's fancied fear.

And when fear left him, on his corner-seat,
Much would he chatter o'er each dreadful tale;
Tell how he heard the sound of 'proaching feet,
And warriors jingling in their coats of mail;
And lumping knocks as one would thump a flail;
Of spirits conjur'd in the charnel floor;
And many a mournful shriek and hapless wail,
Where maids self-murder'd their false loves deplore;
And from that time would vow to tramp on nights
no more.

O who can speak his joys when spring's young morn
From wood and pasture open'd on his view,
When tender green buds blush upon the thorn,
And the first primrose dips its leaves in dew:
Each varied charm how joy'd would he pursue,
Tempted to trace their beauties through the day;
Grey-girdled eve, and morn of rosy hue
Have both beheld him on his lonely way,
Far, far remote from boys, and their unpleasing
play.

Sequester'd nature was his heart's delight;
Him would she lead thro' wood and lonely plain,
Searching the pooty from the rushy dyke;
And while the thrush sang her long-silenc'd strain,
He thought it sweet, and mock'd it o'er again:
And while he pluck'd the primrose in its pride,
He ponder'd o'er its bloom 'tween joy and pain;
And a rude sonnet in its praise he tried,
Where nature's simple way the aid of art supplied.

The freshen'd landscapes round his routs unfurl'd,
The fin-ting'd clouds above, the woods below,
Each met his eye a new-revealing world,
Delighting more as more he learn'd to know;

Each journey sweeter, musing to and fro.
Surrounded thus, not paradise more sweet,
Enthusiasm made his soul to glow;
His heart with wild sensations used to beat;
As nature seemly sang his mutterings would repeat.

Upon a molehill oft he dropt him down,
To take a prospect of the circling scene,
Marking how much the cottage roof's-thatch brown
Did add its beauty to the budding green
Of sheltering trees it humbly peep'd between-
The stone-rock'd waggon with its rumbling sound;
The windmill's sweeping sails at distance seen;
And every form that crowds the circling round,
Where the sky stooping seems to kiss the meeting
ground.

And dear to him the rural sports of May,
When each cot-threshold mounts its hailing bough,
And ruddy milkmaids weave their garlands gay,
Upon the green to crown the earliest cow;
When mirth and pleasure wear a joyful brow;
And join the tumult with unbounded glee
The humble tenants of the pail and plough:
He lov'd "old sports," by them reviv'd, to see,
But never car'd to join in their rude revelry.

O'er brook-banks stretching, on the pasture-sward,
He gaz'd, far distant from the jocund crew;
'Twas but their feats that claim'd a slight regard;
'Twas his, his pastimes lonely to pursue-
Wild blossoms creeping in the grass to view,
Scarce peeping up the tiny bent as high,
Beting'd with glossy yellow, red, or blue,
Unnam'd, unnotic'd but by Lubin's eye,
That like low genius sprang to bloom their day and
die.

O who can tell the sweets of May-day's morn,
To waken rapture in a feeling mind,
When the gilt east unveils her dappled dawn,
And the gay woodlark has its nest resign'd,
As slow the sun creeps up the hill behind;
Morn redd'ning round, and daylight's spotless hue,
As seemingly with rose and lily lin'd;
While all the prospect round beams fair to view,
Like a sweet opening flower with its unsullied dew.

Ah, often brushing through the dripping grass,
Has he been seen to catch this early charm,
List'ning the "love song" of the healthy lass
Passing with milk-pail on her well-turn'd arm;
Or meeting objects from the rousing farm;
The jingling plough-teams driving down the steep,
Waggon and cart-and shepherd-dogs' alarm,
Raising the bleatings of unfolding sheep,

As o'er the mountain top the red sun 'gins to peep.

Nor could the day's decline escape his gaze;
He lov'd the closing as the rising day,
And oft would stand to catch the setting rays,
Whose last beams stole not unperceiv'd away;
When, hesitating like a stag at bay,
The bright unwearied sun seem'd loth to drop,
Till chaos' night-hounds hurried him away,
And drove him headlong from the mountain-top,
And shut the lovely scene, and bade all nature stop.

With contemplation's stores his mind to fill,
O doubly happy would he roam as then,
When the blue eve crept deeper round the hill
While the coy rabbit ventur'd from his den,
And weary labour sought his rest agen;
Lone wanderings led him haply by the stream
Where unperceiv'd he 'joy'd his hours at will,
Musing the cricket twittering o'er its dream,
Or watching o'er the brook the moon-light's dancing
beam.

And here the rural muse might aptly say,
As sober evening sweetly siles along,
How she has chas'd black ignorance away,
And warm'd his artless soul with feelings strong

To teach his reed to warble forth a song:
And how it echoed on the even-gale,
All by the brook the pasture-flowers among;
But, ah, such trifles are of no avail:
There's few to notice him, or hear his simple tale.

As most of nature's children prove to be,
His little soul was easy made to smart,
His tear was quickly born to sympathy,
And soon were rous'd the feelings of his heart
In others' woes and wants to bear a part.
Yon parish-huts, where want is shov'd to die,
He never view'd them but his tear would start;
He past not by the doors without a sigh,
And felt for every woe of workhouse-misery.

O Poverty! thy frowns were early dealt
O'er him who mourn'd thee, not by fancy led
To whine and wail o'er woes he never felt,
Staining his rhymes with tears he never shed,
And heaving sighs a mock song only bred:
Alas! he knew too much of every pain
That shower'd full thick on his unshelter'd head;
And as his tears and sighs did erst complain,
His numbers took it up, and wept it o'er again.

Full well might he his early days recal,

When he a thresher with his sire had been;
When he a ploughboy in the fields did maul,
And drudg'd with toil through almost every scene;
How pinch'd with winter's frownings he has been;
And tell of all that modesty conceals,
Of what his friends and he have felt and seen:
But, useless naming what distress reveals,
As every child of want feels all that Lubin feels.

It might be curious here to hint the lad,
How in his earliest days he did appear;
Mean was the dress in which the boy was clad,
His friends so poor, and clothes excessive dear,
They oft were foil'd to rig him once a year;
And housewife's care in many a patch was seen;
Much industry 'gainst want did persevere:
His friends tried all to keep him neat and clean,
Though care has often fail'd and shatter'd he has
been.

Yet oft fair prospects cheer'd his parent's dreams,
Who had on Lubin founded many a joy;
But pinching want soon baffled all their schemes,
And dragg'd him from the school a hopeless boy,
To shrink unheeded under hard employ;
When struggling efforts warm'd him up the while,
To keep the little toil could not destroy;
And oft with books spare hours he would beguile,

And blunder oft with joy round Crusoe's lonely isle.

Folks much may wonder how the thing may be,
That Lubin's taste should seek refined joys,
And court th'enchanting smiles of poesy;
Bred in a village full of strife and noise,
Old senseless gossips, and blackguarding boys,
Ploughmen and threshers; whose discourses led
To nothing more than labour's rude employs,
'Bout work being slack, and rise and fall of bread,
And who were like to die, and who were like to wed:

Housewives discoursing 'bout their hens and cocks,
Spinning long stories, wearing half the day;
Sad deeds bewailing of the prowling fox;
How in the roost the thief had knav'd his way,
And made their market-profits all a prey.
And other losses too the dames recite,
Of chick, and duck, and gosling gone astray;
All falling prizes to the swopping kite:
And so the story runs both morning, noon, and
night.

Nor sabbath-days much better thoughts instil;
The true-going churchman hears the signal ring,
And takes his book his homage to fulfil,
And joins the clerk his amen-task to sing,

And rarely home forgets the text to bring:
But soon as service ends, he 'gins again
'Bout signs in weather, late or forward spring,
Of prospects good or bad in growing grain;
And if the sermon's long he waits the end with pain.

A more uncouthly lout was hardly seen
Beneath the shroud of ignorance than he;
The sport of all the village he has been,
Who with his simple looks oft jested free;
And gossips, gabbling o'er their cake and tea,
Time after time did prophecies repeat,
How half a ninny he was like to be,
To go so soodling up and down the street,
And shun the playing boys whene'er they chanc'd to
meet.

Nature look'd on him with a 'witching eye,
Her pleasing scenes were his delightful book,
Where he, while other louts roam'd heedless by,
With wild enthusiasm us'd to look.
The kingcup vale, the gravel-paved brook,
Were paradise with him to muse among;
And haply sheltering in some lonely nook,
He often sat to see it purl along,
And, fir'd with what he saw, humm'd o'er his simple
song.

When summer came how eager has he sped
Where silence reign'd, and the old crowned tree
Bent with its sheltering ivy o'er his head;
And summer-breezes, breathing placidly,
Encroach'd upon the stockdove's privacy,
Parting the leaves that screen'd her russet breast:
"Peace!" would he whisper, "dread no thief in me,"
And never rose to rob her careless nest;
Compassion's softness reign'd, and warm'd his gentle
breast.

And he would trace the stagnant pond or lake,
Where flags sprang up or water-lilies smil'd;
And wipe the boughs aside of bush and brake,
And creep the woods with sweetest scenes beguil'd ;
Tracking some channel on its journey wild,
Where dripping blue-bells on the bank did weep:
O what a lovely scene to nature's child,
Through roots and o'er dead leaves to see it creep,
Watching on some moss'd stump in contemplation
deep.

And he would mark in July's rosy prime,
Crossing the meadows, how a nameless fly
Of scarlet plumage, punctual to its time,
Perch'd on a flower would always meet his eye;

And plain-drest butterfly of russet dye,
As if awaken'd by the scythe's shrill sound,
Soon as the bent with ripeness 'gan to dye,
Was constant with him in each meadow-ground,
Flirting the withering swath and unmown blossom
round.

No insect 'scap'd him, from the gaudy plume
Of dazzling butterflies so fine to view,
To the small midges that at evening come,
Like dust spots, dancing o'er the water's blue;
Or, where the spreading oak above-head grew,
Tormenting maidens 'neath their kicking cow;
Who often murmur'd at the elfin crew,
And from th'endanger'd pail, with angry vow
Oft rose, their sport to spoil with switch of
murdering bough.

And he has mark'd the curious stained rings,
Though seemly nothing in another's eye,
And bending o'er them thought them wondrous
things,
Where nurses' night-fays circling dances hie,
And set the cock to watch the morning's eye;
Light soon betrays 'em where their routs have been,
Their printing foot-marks leave a magic dye,
The grass grows gloomy in a darker green,

And look for years to come, and still the place is
seen.

And as declining day his stalking shade
A giant monster stretch'd, in fancy's view,
What bustle to his cottage has he made,
Ere sliving night around his journey threw
Her circling curtains of a grizly hue;
Then of the rings the fairy routs display'd
From gossip's wisdom much he glean'd, who knew
How they were haunts for ghosts as well as fays,
And told what things were seen in granny's younger
days.

The verse might tremble with the "haunted pond,"
and tell of terrors which his heart has found;
How he, to 'scape, shool'd many a pace beyond
Each dreaded, dangerous spot of haunted ground:
Here as he pass'd where Amy's woes were drown'd,
If late at night, his fears would turn him chill;
If nought was seen, he heard a squish-squash sound,
As when one's shoes the drenching waters fill,
And wet and dripping oft he saw her climb the hill.

And round his fields lay many a spot to dread;
'Twould note a history down to mark them all:

Oft monsters have been seen without a head;
And market-men oft got a dangerous fall,
When startled horses saw the sweeping pall
On the cross-roads where "love-lorn Luce" was lain;
At other spots, like offsprings of "Old Ball,"
Or ploughman's senses often were mista'en,
A shagged foal would fright the early-rising swain.

In autumn-time he often stood to mark
What tumults 'tween the hogs and geese arose,
Down the corn-litter'd street; and the rude bark
Of jealous watch-dog on his master's clothes,
E'en rous'd by quawking of the flopping crows;
And every tinkle in that busy toil,
In sultry field and dusty lane that flows:
He glean'd his corn, and lov'd to list the while,
For Lubin mingled there to share of autumn's spoil.

And when old women, overpower'd by heat,
Tuck'd up their clothes and sicken'd at the toil,
Seeking beneath the thorn the mole-hill seat,
To tell their tales and catch their breath awhile,
Their gabbling talk did Lubin's cares beguile;
And some would tell their tales, and some would
sing,
And many a dame, to make the children smile,
Would tell of many a funny laughing thing,

While merrily the snuff went pinching round the ring.

Here Lubin listen'd with awe-struck surprise,
When "Hickathrift's" great strength has met his ear,
How he kill'd giants as they were but flies,
And lifted trees as one would lift a spear,
Though not much bigger than his fellows were;
He knew no troubles waggoners have known,
Of getting stall'd, and such disasters drear;
Up he'd chuck sacks as one would hurl a stone,
And draw whole loads of grain unaided and alone.

And Goody's sympathy would fetch the tear
From each young list'ner seated by her side,
When "cruel Barbara Allen" they did hear,
The haughty stubbornness of female pride
To that fond youth who broke his heart and died:
And "Jack the giant-killer's" tales she'd say,
Which still the same enchanting power supplied;
The stagnant tear amazement wip'd away,
And Jack's exploits were felt for many an after-day.

These were such tales as Lubin did delight;
But should the muse narrate in Goody's strain,
And tell of all she told from morn till night,
Fays, ghosts, and giants would her songs detain
To be at day's return resumed again:

With "Cinderella" she has charm'd awhile,
Then "Thumb's" disasters gave a moment's pain;
Thus true-thought legends would each soul beguile,
As superstition will'd, to raise the tear or smile.

And as the load jogg'd homeward down the lane,
When welcome night shut out the toiling day,
Following he mark'd the simple-hearted swain;
Joying to listen, on his homeward way,
While rest's warm rapture rous'd the rustic's lay,
The thread-bare ballad from each quavering tongue,
As "Peggy Band," or the "sweet month of May:"
Oh how he joy'd to hear each "good old song,"
That on night's pausing ear did echo loud and long.

The muse might sing too, for he well did know,
The freaks and play that harvest-labour end,
How the last load is crown'd with boughs, and how
The swains and maids with fork and rake attend,
With floating ribbons 'dizen'd at the end;
And how the children on the load delight
With shouts of "Harvest home!" their throats to
rend;
And how the dames peep out to mark the sight;
And all the feats that crown the harvest-supper
night.

He knew all well, a young familiar there,
And often look'd on all; for he himsen
Join'd with the sun-tann'd group the feast to share,
As years roll'd round him with the change agen,
And brought the masters level with the men,
Who push'd the beer about, and smok'd and drank
With freedom's plenty, never shewn till then;
Nor labourers dar'd, but now, so free and frank
To laugh, and joke, and play so many a harmless
prank.

Much has he laugh'd each rude, rude act to see;
The long-neck'd sheet-clad "crane" to poke about,
Spoiling each smoker's pipe, and cunningly,
Though blind-fold, seen to pick each bald-head out,
And put each bashful maiden to the rout;
The "fiery parrot" too, a laughing scene,
Where two maids on a sheet invite the lout,
Thrown o'er a water-tub, to sit between,
And as he drops they rise, and let him swearing in.

The "dusty miller" playing many a rig;
And the "Scotch pedlars," with their jokes and fun,
The "booted hogs drove over Lunnon brig,"
Boys, who had mischief in the harvest done,
As loads o'erturn'd, and foul on posts had run;

And brandy-burning ghosts most deadly blue,
That each old woman did with terror shun;
These with the rest did Lubin yearly view,
And join'd his mirth and fears with the low vulgar
crew.

To close the ranting nigh, the master's health
Went round in bumping horns to every swain,
Who wish'd him best of crops t'increase his wealth,
And's merry sport when harvest came again;
And all in chorus rallied out amain:
The harvest-song (a tugging pull) begun,
Each ere its end the brimming horn must drain,
Or have it fill'd again-there lay the fun,
Till Hodge went drunk to bed, and morts of things
were done.

Oh, dear to Lubin autumn's changing cloud,
Where shade and sunshine every minute sees;
And each rude-risen tempest, beetling loud,
Own'd every murmur his wild ear to please,
Suging its vengeance through The yellow trees,
Pattering the acorns from their cups adown,
Fanning the sere leaf far upon the leas;
And picturesque to him each scrambling clown,
Tearing the woods among to search the nut-bunch
brown.

How would he wander round the woods, the plains,
When every flower from nature's wreath had fled;
Tracing the shower-bedimpled sandy lanes,
And winding fountains to their infant bed,
With many a flag and rushy bunch bespread;
Marking each curdle boil and boil away,
And bubbles guggling born, that swell'd and fled
Like changing scenes in life's ephemeron-day:
Thus Lubin paus'd o'er all, and cheer'd his lonely
way.

A solitaire through autumn's wan decay,
He heard the tootling robin sound her knell,
Observ'd the sun more coy to slink away,
And lingering oak-shade how it brown'd and fell;
And many a way of nature he could tell,
That secrets are to undiscerning eyes,
As how the bee most careful clos'd her cell,
The mouse with far-fetch'd ear his hole supplies,
And moles root deeper down, from winter's frowning
skies.

And he could tell how the shy squirrel far'd,
Who often stood its busy toils to see;
How against winter it was well prepar'd
With many a store in hollow root or tree,
As if being told what winter's wants would be:

Its nuts and acorns he would often find,
And hips and haws too, heaped plenteously
In snug warm corner that broke off the wind;
With leafy nest made nigh, that warm green mosses
lin'd.

'Twas thus his fond inquiry us'd to trace
Through nature's secret with unwearied eye,
And watch the shifting seasons' changing grace;
Spring's first wild flower, and summer's painted sky,
The insect creeping, and the birds that fly;
The autumn's dying breeze; the winter-wind,
That bellow'd round his hut most mournfully:
And as his years increas'd his taste refin'd,
And fancy with new charms enlighten'd up his mind.

Beauty 'gan look too witching on his eye;
The sweetest image seen in nature's glass:
A swelling bosom 'neath its lily dye,
Without admiring, Lubin could not pass;
And downcast eye, and blush of shanny lass,
Had every power his heart to hold in thrall.
O beauteous woman! still thy charms surpass:
In spite of all thy failings and thy fall,
Thou art the comfort still that cheers this earthly
ball.

Sure 'twas an oversight in nature's plan,
Such loveliness, that claims the tenderest care,
To leave defenceless with ungrateful man,
Such harden'd brutes as but too many are.
O pleasing flowers! as frail as ye are fair;
Sure some that live have souls to feel and sigh,
When, shrinking 'neath the storms ye cannot bear,
Your beauteous buds bow down to fade and die,
While not one pitying tear melts your seducer's eye.

Full oft, to see their witcheries divine,
He'd mix in circles which their charms did grace,
And merry groups he now began to join;
And though his heart denied to own its case,
It oft was smitten with a beauty's face,
And throbb'd with thrilling aggravating pain:
And many a long, long day has taken place,
Ere he forgot, and met his peace again,
While oft in beauty's praise he humm'd his amorous
strain.