

LINES
ON
CONTEMPLATION,

BY
GEORGE W. STOW.

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CONTEMPLATION

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Lines to Contemplation

A POEM,

DEDICATED WITH FEELINGS OF MUCH RESPECT,

TO

JOHN STOW, ESQ., OF CROOM'S HILL,

THE OLD AND TRIED FRIEND OF HIS FATHER,

BY THE AUTHOR.

Lines on Contemplation.

YE swelling hills ;—ye gently sloping vales ;
Ye steepy rocks ; and over-hanging woods ;
How can I e'er forget the pleasing charms,
That ye have spread, around my careworn path ;
Sweet solacers, amid the mental storms ;
The rack of fortune ;—and in my darkest hours ;
When the world frowned, upon my lonely way,
Ye still looked kindly on.—Methought ye shared my cares
Infusing hope into my jaded soul ;
Alleviating woes ; and adding joys
Unknown to sordid minds ; the friends of solitude
And Contemplation mild.

Oft have I climbed
Your verdant sides, at early peep of dawn,
When laughing morn first raised her lovely head ;
And from her azure bed, deep blushing came :—
When from her safron robes, she shed around

Ambrosial dews, that loaded every bough
 With glittering drops ; and spangled o'er
 The bending—grassy fields.

There have I watched the hastening sun
 Shoot up his beams, amid the dappled clouds,
 Refulgent all, with gold and crimson hues ;
 Till bursting from the glorious east ;
 He sent aslant his rays, and shadows o'er
 The beauteous scene.—Ye moments of delight !
 Seasons, when my soul filled with rapturous awe :—
 When as I gazed the boundless earth,
 Around me, seemed to smile, with joys immense.
 The kindly influence cheered my troubled heart :
 The prospect gave new lustre to my eye :—
 I trod, with lighter step ; and viewed with pleasing thoughts
 The happiness around.

Ye hills and vales !

Oft, in my wayward course, my vagrant foot
 Dislodged the loosened stone : that rattling down,
 From bank to ledge, a moment 'woke,
 The slumbering echoes of your peaceful glens ;—
 They started ;—lived ;—and in a moment died.

Oh sweet impression left ! The pleasant loneliness
 Crept gently o'er each sense :—when the strange din
 Of crashing boughs, and crackling woods had ceased ;
 And silence came, again, to claim her own ;
 Ye seemed to rest more calmly than before.

Oft, in my rambling walk,
 Have I disturbed, from her accustomed nook,
 The moping owl, that from my rude intrusion flew,
 With heavy pinions down the glen, to seek
 Seclusion there, amid your lonely wilds.
 There at my sight, the startled dove took flight,
 On whistling wing ;—or perched, on topmost bough,
 With out-stretched neck, and peering head, she viewed
 My wandering steps, with curious eye.—How oft,
 Among your spreading glades, have I aroused
 The sprightly fawn, that conscious of my presence sought
 The braky hill :—yet stopping, in her course,
 Turned round to take a momentary gaze ;
 Then dived, into your deep sequestered shades ;
 And left me there, with solitude, alone.

'T was when the vernal sun, whose genial warmth,
 With oft repeated showers, unlocked the prisoned buds ;
 And brought the blossoms forth :—when nature looked
 Benignant round ; and clad, with freshness, all

The varied hills ;—then would I stray to muse,
 In pensive thought, and meditate alone.
 My favourite haunt was by a little stream ;
 That, sometimes, narrowed, in its gentle course,
 Till almost lost ;—then swelling out it formed
 A placid pool. Oft, in its current, would
 It filter through the slender reeds,—now seen,
 Now hid, among their rising stems ; that shook
 And trembled with the passing tide. Here, near
 The marshy side, where with more vigorous shoots,
 They raised their tapering heads, the golden finches built
 Their woven nests ; or from the outmost tip
 Of over-hanging branch, these, pendent, hung ;
 And, by a tiny cord of fragile grass,
 Swung in mid-air.
 The busy people, to the spreading town,
 Still adding ; and to their little mansions clung,
 That waved, pendulous, at various height
 Above the pool. The increasing numbers bent
 The laden boughs :—while round, from nest to nest,
 Some sportive flew, with pleasure infinite ;
 And raised a constant song of praise.
 Here have I stopt to watch their various ways,
 That I, delighted, viewed :—then wandered on

To ponder how all living things, save man,
 Untutored and instinctive, offer up
 Their thanks to Heaven.

Frequent, retiring, from the mid-day sun,
 Beside the stream, have I reclined, beneath
 An old mimosa's shade, that rose abrupt,
 And, from its tufted blossoms, spread
 Its fragrance round. Here, in the early summer's noon,
 I rested, in repose :—nor sound, disturbed
 The bright serenity of the hour :
 Save, when, in a far and more secluded grove
 The cooing turtle to his meek-eyed mate,
 In soft responses, told his ardour o'er.
 All nature seemed at rest :—my very soul
 Took her full mete of pleasurable thoughts.
 Oh, thou delightful calm :—elysium of the mind !
 The faint and softened sounds, that sometimes stole,
 On the luxuriant stillness of the scene ;
 But more enhanced thy fascinating charm :
 When, ever and anon, from distant homestead, heard
 The crowing chanticleer raised his mellowed din,
 That scarcely reached the sense :—soft zephyrs came,
 Like bashful nymphs, who, sleeping, were aroused

By amorous swains ; and, by the Satyrs chased,
 Fled, with light feet, from wood to wood : so these ;
 That, for a moment, rustled through the leaves ;
 An instant fanning, with their cooling wings, my cheek ;
 Then left the spot, again, to silence, and to me.
 From this sequestered shade, I saw
 The scaly tenant of the stream shoot up
 To seize its tiny prey ; displacing, then,
 The clear smooth surface of the glassy plane,
 With rings of gentle ripples spreading o'er
 The liquid space. Thence could I watch
 The shepherds' fleecy charge ; where, wandering down
 The various paths of distant hill, they sought,
 Parched with the sun, the cool pelucid stream ;
 To quench their thirst ; where rocky basins formed
 Succeeding pools ; and spreading over-head
 The graceful palmiets waved, and shading trees.

These soothing sounds that broke at intervals
 Upon the ear :—what charms did they not add ?
 These !—these—were joys, oh Muse ; when in my leisure hours,
 With thee, I sought the blissful shade,
 Deep in rapturous thought ;—when every nerve
 Thrilled with exquisite tenderness. It is,

In moments such as these ; when all the soul
 Revels to her full ; that I could end my days,
 With thee, and Meditation as my friend.
 At such a time I little heed the noisy world ;
 Its frowns ; or smiles, and all its tempting snares,
 Whose unsubstantial joys, but flatter to deceive.

'Twas thou Adversity, thou dark-eyed maid,
 That taught me, first, deeply to meditate ;—
 When my thoughts rolled backward on my soul,
 With painful pressure ;—and, in the world, I felt
 A stranger 'mid a multitude ;—friendless and unknown.
 Before my pensive eyes, pale Melancholy sat ;
 And filled my moody thought, till my aching brain
 Throbbled with unutterable woe. 'Twas then I sought
 Retirement in the shades of woods and groves :
 And shunned the path of men. This was my wont :
 Here, abstracted, would I wander, with a downcast eye,
 And languid pace :—sudden, with fevered cheek,
 I hurried on a prey to disappointed hope :
 The mental ferment urged my speed ; as if my step
 Would e'en out-strip the excitement of my mind.
 But, 'mid the tempest of my thoughts, a sudden thrill

Subdued my heart, and gentler feelings stole
 O'er all my agitated frame : then first
 I raised my head, and gazed, and saw
 All nature beaming, brightly round, with hope :
 That I alone was sad : while every thing,
 To the tiny insect, that, in the air,
 A moment fluttered, were animated, all,
 With indescribable and ceaseless joy.

Then did I pause and contemplate. I viewed the earth ;
 Its various crust ; the untold products there
 Spread out before my eyes : I viewed them all ;
 Till every opening bud ; and tree ; and flower ;
 Each lifeless stone, and broken rock, to me,
 Became a volume ; wherein I read
 The boundless wisdom of the great Supreme.
 This poured a soothing balm into the wound
 That rankled in my breast. The calm reproof
 Displayed the folly thus to grieve : and stilled
 The storm that raged within.

'Twas then, oh Muse,
 That thou didst teach me, with impassioned words,
 To vent the fulness of my heart : then first

Impelled, by unknown power, I sought thy aid ;
 And gave utterance to my extatic thoughts ;
 Would that I could recount the magic power,
 That made each hill, or vale, or forest wild,
 Speak with touching eloquence to my soul.
 Oh Contemplation, come ! return again ;
 Return, wrapt in thy high and lofty mood ;
 And let me view the boundless universe.
 Adoring let me raise my eyes : nor cease
 The heavenly theme, that stirs my breast ; but give
 Me strength ; that I may sing—of Nature ; and her God.

Oh Earth, when did thy incandescent orb
 And all thy fellow-planets break,
 From the mighty sun, with centrifugal force ;
 And whirl obedient, to divine command,
 In your allotted spheres ?

What centuries,
 On centuries ! Unnumbered thousands must
 Have passed away, since, in thy deeps, profound,
 The germ of life burst from its bonds ; and clothed
 The hidden rocks, and silent waves :
 Since first, thy fierce and unrestrained fires,

That from a thousand craters, upwards forced
 Hills, cliffs, and promontories, and mountains high ;
 When from the bosom of the surrounding deep
 The towering Alps and Andes rose, sublime ;
 And sought the cooler skies to hide their heads.

What strange inhabitants ! All thy calid shores ;
 Streams, gulphs, and seas ; teamed with a race unknown.
 Nature was lavish, with exuberant growth ;
 For ever altering, with unceasing change.
 Amid the age of thy primeval floods,
 When sea and land, for the dominion, strove
 Oft were thy mountain tops, amid the waves,
 That raged, and chafed, and thundered on,
 Like dotted isles, surrounded by the maddened foam ;
 Till hills dissolved ; and plains were torn away ;
 And lofty summits tottered o'er ; and rolled
 Their scattered fragments, far and wide.

But though these changed ;—still thou, oh Earth remained
 Always the same, on thy untiring path :
 And in thy calmer years ;—the sun gave light :—

The showers fell :—winds, rains, and flowing tides
 Were then, as now, subservient to the bounteous ends
 For which they first were made. Reflection full of awe !
 Although no human voice was heard : still then,
 From unknown time, the waves, along the shores,
 Had curled in gentleness, or raged in foam :
 The gathered storm broke up :—its darkness fled,
 Beneath the influence of the genial sun :—
 And Nature smiled again.

Thou great Eterne !

Wonderful and mysterious are all thy ways.
 When from thy Omnipotent hand were launched
 The countless worlds, into eternal space,
 Pregnant with life :—sublimely moving all :
 Each, in its appointed course, rolled along,
 For untold ages, through the etherial void,
 Unwearied still :—till the revolving earth
 Fulfilled, at last, her predetermined way ;
 And change succeeding change, was full prepared ;
 Man burst upon the eventful scene ; and lived.

Vain mortal ! to presume, in his proud hours,
 That all the stars, that twinkle in the vault of heaven,

Were made to please the eye of him alone :—
 That we, alone, can think and meditate
 Upon the works of Heaven :—that this small world ;
 That in the vast infinitude of space,
 Is scarce an atom ;—that this world alone,
 Is filled with sentient beings and with life :—
 That all the suns that shine, amid the firmament,
 Emit a useless splendor, o'er an empty space.
 Oh foolish thought, that could but emanate,
 Alone, from man, puffed up, with little pride,
 Who would restrict, to his own thoughts, the power
 Of One, who is his Maker ! What ;—dar'st thou say
 That He who makes a single drop, an ocean, seem :—
 A grain of sand, a mountain :—and a leaf
 A spreading world ; to the tiny tribes
 That live, invisible, to human eye ;
 That He would leave a million worlds, untrod ;
 Without inhabitants :—and place them there
 Amid a boundless void, for naught ;—except
 For thee to gaze at,—in bewilderment ?

Drive off such mad presumptuous thoughts, and raise
 Thy mind to heaven ;—behold them dotted o'er
 Yon blue expanse ;—behold them, suns and worlds :

Intently watch their wide-spread orbs :
 And view how fast they increase on the sight.
 Nor those, alone ; when Science gives her aid—
 Though tens of thousands rise before her, then ;
 Yet in the search, she leaves her task undone ;
 There is a something, in the distance, seen
 That faintly glimmers ;—but she knows not what.
 Even, then, the power of Contemplation fails ;
 For though, she presses to the outmost verge
 Of human lore ;—still full before her eyes
 Extend ;—nor end ;—nor source ;—the dread abyss
 Of space, unfathomable :—still suns, on suns ;
 And shining spheres, on spheres, incessant rise ;
 Retiring far and farther, from her ken ;
 Till all the heavens appear one radiant light.
 Sight can no more :—the glorious lustre
 Dazzles all ; bewildering every sense.

Not myriad worlds alone, with life redundant, all,
 Roll on refulgent :—but untold myriads
 Of clustering systems, of extending worlds,
 Harmoniously move.—Beyond all thought ;
 Beyond conception great ;—to think of all

Time is too short ;—too short to contemplate
 Upon the vast eternity of space.
 The rushing thought bursts o'er my ardent soul ;
 And strikes it mute :—confused ; abashed, it sinks,
 Humbled to dust ; and faints beneath the load.

— — — — —
 Oh Thou, who ever dwel'st supremely, calm,
 In awful grandeur, 'mid the countless orbs,
 Directing all ;—shall man, shall puny man,
 Who lost in wonder ;—by thy works appalled ;—
 Shall he ascribe to Thee, such feelings as
 Oft sway the human breast ; and circumscribe thy path ?
 He who shrinks to nothingness, 'mid the blaze
 Of thy eternal majesty :—shall he
 Set bounds to Thee ?—Away the impious thought !
 Away such dreams of folly :—hence, away !
 I feel, myself a worm ; and downward bend.