

Epistle From Esopus To Maria

From those drear solitudes and frowsy cells,
 Where Infamy with sad Repentance dwells;
 Where turnkeys make the jealous portal fast,
 And deal from iron hands the spare repast;
 Where truant 'prentices, yet young in sin,
 Blush at the curious stranger peeping in;
 Where strumpets, relics of the drunken roar,
 Resolve to drink, nay, half, to whore, no more;
 Where tiny thieves not destin'd yet to swing,
 Beat hemp for others, riper for the string:
 From these dire scenes my wretched lines I date,
 To tell Maria her Esopus' fate.

"Alas! I feel I am no actor here!"
 'Tis real hangmen real scourges bear!
 Prepare Maria, for a horrid tale
 Will turn thy very rouge to deadly pale;
 Will make thy hair, tho' erst from gipsy poll'd,
 By barber woven, and by barber sold,
 Though twisted smooth with Harry's nicest care,
 Like hoary bristles to erect and stare.
 The hero of the mimic scene, no more
 I start in Hamlet, in Othello roar;
 Or, haughty Chieftain, 'mid the din of arms
 In Highland Bonnet, woo Malvina's charms;
 While sans-culottes stoop up the mountain high,
 And steal from me Maria's prying eye.
 Blest Highland bonnet! once my proudest dress,
 Now prouder still, Maria's temples press;
 I see her wave thy towering plumes afar,
 And call each coxcomb to the wordy war:
 I see her face the first of Ireland's sons,
 And even out-Irish his Hibernian bronze;
 The crafty Colonel leaves the tartan'd lines,
 For other wars, where he a hero shines:
 The hopeful youth, in Scottish senate bred,
 Who owns a Bushby's heart without the head,
 Comes 'mid a string of coxcombs, to display
 That veni, vidi, vici, is his way:
 The shrinking Bard adown the alley skulks,
 And dreads a meeting worse than Woolwich hulks:
 Though there, his heresies in Church and State
 Might well award him Muir and Palmer's fate:
 Still she undaunted reels and rattles on,
 And dares the public like a noontide sun.
 What scandal called Maria's jaunty stagger
 The ricket reeling of a crooked swagger?
 Whose spleen (e'en worse than Burns' venom, when
 He dips in gall unmix'd his eager pen,
 And pours his vengeance in the burning line,)-
 Who christen'd thus Maria's lyre-divine
 The idiot strum of Vanity bemus'd,
 And even the abuse of Poesy abus'd?-
 Who called her verse a Parish Workhouse, made
 For motley foundling Fancies, stolen or strayed?

A Workhouse! ah, that sound awakes my woes,
 And pillows on the thorn my rack'd repose!
 In durance vile here must I wake and weep,
 And all my frowsy couch in sorrow steep;
 That straw where many a rogue has lain of yore,
 And vermin'd gipsies litter'd heretofore.

Why, Lonsdale, thus thy wrath on vagrants pour?
 Must earth no rascal save thyself endure?

Must thou alone in guilt immortal swell,
And make a vast monopoly of hell?
Thou know'st the Virtues cannot hate thee worse;
The Vices also, must they club their curse?
Or must no tiny sin to others fall,
Because thy guilt's supreme enough for all?

Maria, send me too thy griefs and cares;
In all of thee sure thy Esopus shares.
As thou at all mankind the flag unfurls,
Who on my fair one Satire's vengeance hurls-
Who calls thee, pert, affected, vain coquette,
A wit in folly, and a fool in wit!
Who says that fool alone is not thy due,
And quotes thy treacheries to prove it true!

Our force united on thy foes we'll turn,
And dare the war with all of woman born:
For who can write and speak as thou and I?
My periods that deciphering defy,
And thy still matchless tongue that conquers all reply!