

Second Epistle To Robert Graham, ESQ., Of Fintry

Late crippl'd of an arm, and now a leg,
 About to beg a pass for leave to beg;
 Dull, listless, teas'd, dejected, and deprest
 (Nature is adverse to a cripple's rest);
 Will generous Graham list to his Poet's wail?
 (It soothes poor Misery, hearkening to her tale)
 And hear him curse the light he first survey'd,
 And doubly curse the luckless rhyming trade?

Thou, Nature! partial Nature, I arraign;
 Of thy caprice maternal I complain;
 The lion and the bull thy care have found,
 One shakes the forests, and one spurns the ground;
 Thou giv'st the ass his hide, the snail his shell;
 Th' envenom'd wasp, victorious, guards his cell;
 Thy minions kings defend, control, devour,
 In all th' omnipotence of rule and power;
 Foxes and statesmen subtle wiles ensure;
 The cit and polecat stink, and are secure;
 Toads with their poison, doctors with their drug,
 The priest and hedgehog in their robes, are snug;
 Ev'n silly woman has her warlike arts,
 Her tongue and eyes-her dreaded spear and darts.

But Oh! thou bitter step-mother and hard,
 To thy poor, fenceless, naked child-the Bard!
 A thing unteachable in world's skill,
 And half an idiot too, more helpless still:
 No heels to bear him from the op'ning dun;
 No claws to dig, his hated sight to shun;
 No horns, but those by luckless Hymen worn,
 And those, alas! not, Amalthea's horn:
 No nerves olfact'ry, Mammon's trusty cur,
 Clad in rich Dulness' comfortable fur;
 In naked feeling, and in aching pride,
 He bears th' unbroken blast from ev'ry side:
 Vampyre booksellers drain him to the heart,
 And scorpion critics cureless venom dart.

Critics-appall'd, I venture on the name;
 Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame:
 Bloody dissectors, worse than ten Monroes;
 He hacks to teach, they mangle to expose:

His heart by causeless wanton malice wrung,
 By blockheads' daring into madness stung;
 His well-won bays, than life itself more dear,
 By miscreants torn, who ne'er one sprig must wear;
 Foil'd, bleeding, tortur'd in th' unequal strife,
 The hapless Poet flounders on thro' life:
 Till, fled each hope that once his bosom fir'd,
 And fled each muse that glorious once inspir'd,
 Low sunk in squalid, unprotected age,
 Dead even resentment for his injur'd page,
 He heeds or feels no more the ruthless critic's rage!

So, by some hedge, the gen'rous steed deceas'd,
 For half-starv'd snarling curs a dainty feast;
 By toil and famine wore to skin and bone,
 Lies, senseless of each tugging bitch's son.

O Dulness! portion of the truly blest!
 Calm shelter'd haven of eternal rest!
 Thy sons ne'er madden in the fierce extremes
 Of Fortune's polar frost, or torrid beams.

If mantling high she fills the golden cup,
With sober selfish ease they sip it up;
Conscious the bounteous meed they well deserve,
They only wonder "some folks" do not starve.
The grave sage hern thus easy picks his frog,
And thinks the mallard a sad worthless dog.
When disappointments snaps the clue of hope,
And thro' disastrous night they darkling grope,
With deaf endurance sluggishly they bear,
And just conclude that "fools are fortune's care."
So, heavy, passive to the tempest's shocks,
Strong on the sign-post stands the stupid ox.

Not so the idle Muses' mad-cap train,
Not such the workings of their moon-struck brain;
In equanimity they never dwell,
By turns in soaring heav'n, or vaulted hell.

I dread thee, Fate, relentless and severe,
With all a poet's, husband's, father's fear!
Already one strong hold of hope is lost-
Glencairn, the truly noble, lies in dust
(Fled, like the sun eclips'd as noon appears,
And left us darkling in a world of tears);
O! hear my ardent, grateful, selfish pray'r!
Fintry, my other stay, long bless and spare!
Thro' a long life his hopes and wishes crown,
And bright in cloudless skies his sun go down!
May bliss domestic smooth his private path;
Give energy to life; and soothe his latest breath,
With many a filial tear circling the bed of death!