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Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
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**The Minstrel, or the Progress of
Genius with some other poems**

James Beattie

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THE
MINSTREL,
WITH
SOME OTHER POEMS.



James Beattie L.L.D.

THE
MINSTREL;
OR,
THE PROGRESS OF GENIUS.
WITH
SOME OTHER POEMS.

By JAMES BEATTIE, LL. D.

EDINBURGH:

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1805.

TO
SIR WILLIAM FORBES,
OF PITSLIGO, BARONET,

AS A MARK OF RESPECT FOR HIS CHARACTER,
AND AS AN APPROPRIATE TRIBUTE TO ONE OF
THE MOST
VALUED FRIENDS OF THE AUTHOR,

THIS EDITION
OF THE
POETICAL WORKS OF DR BEATTIE,
IS INSCRIBED
BY
THE PUBLISHERS.

PREFACE [ix]
TO
THE MINSTREL.

The design was, to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician;—a character, which, according to the notions of our fore-fathers, was not only respectable, but sacred. [x]

I have endeavoured to imitate Spenser in the measure of his verse, and in the harmony, simplicity, and variety, of his composition. Antique expressions I have avoided; admitting, however, some old words, where they seemed to suit the subject; but I hope none will be found that are now obsolete, or in any degree unintelligible to a reader of English poetry.

To those, who may be disposed to ask, what could induce me to write in so difficult a measure, I can only answer, that it pleases my ear, and seems, from its Gothic structure and original, to bear some relation to the subject and spirit of the Poem. It admits both of simplicity and magnificence of sound and of language, beyond any other stanza that I am acquainted with. It allows [xi] the sententiousness of the couplet, as well as the more complex modulation of blank verse. What some critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the poetry is faulty in other respects.

[1] **THE**

MINSTREL;

IN TWO BOOKS.

[2]

*Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ,
Quarum sacra fero, ingenti percussus amore,
Accipiant. — —*

Virgil.

THE [3]

MINSTREL;

OR,

THE PROGRESS OF GENIUS.

BOOK FIRST.

I.

Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep, where Fame's proud temple shines afar!
Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war!
Checked by the scoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote has pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown!

II. [4]

And yet, the languor of inglorious days
Not equally oppressive is to all.
Him, who ne'er listened to the voice of praise,
The silence of neglect can ne'er appal.
There are, who, deaf to mad Ambition's call,
Would shrink to hear th' obstreperous trump of Fame;
Supremely blest, if to their portion fall
Health, competence, and peace. Nor higher aim
Had He, whose simple tale these artless lines proclaim.

III.

This sapient age disclaims all classic lore;
Else I should here, in cunning phrase, display,
How forth The Minstrel fared in days of yore,
Right glad of heart, though homely in array;
His waving locks and beard all hoary grey:
And, from his bending shoulder, decent hung
His harp, the sole companion of his way,
Which to the whistling wind responsive rung:
And ever as he went some merry lay he sung.

IV. [5]

Fret not yourselves, ye silken sons of pride,
That a poor Wanderer should inspire my strain.
The Muses fortune's fickle smile deride,
Nor ever bow the knee in Mammon's fane;
For their delights are with the village-train,
Whom Nature's laws engage, and Nature's charms:
They hate the sensual, and scorn the vain;
The parasite their influence never warms,
Nor him whose sordid soul the love of wealth alarms.

V.

Though richest hues the peacock's plumes adorn,
Yet horror screams from his discordant throat.
Rise, sons of harmony, and hail the morn,
While warbling larks on russet pinions float;
Or seek, at noon, the woodland scene remote,
Where the grey linnets carol from the hill.
O let them ne'er, with artificial note,
To please a tyrant, strain the little bill!
But sing what heaven inspires, and wander where they will.

VI. [6]

Liberal, not lavish, is kind Nature's hand;
Nor was perfection made for man below.
Yet all her schemes with nicest art are planned,
Good counteracting ill, and gladness woe.
With gold and gems if Chilian mountains glow,
If bleak and barren Scotia's hills arise;
There, plague and poison, lust and rapine grow;
Here, peaceful are the vales, and pure the skies,
And freedom fires the soul, and sparkles in the eyes.

VII.

Then grieve not, thou, to whom the indulgent Muse
Vouchsafes a portion of celestial fire;
Nor blame the partial fates, if they refuse
The imperial banquet, and the rich attire.
Know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre.
Wilt thou debase the heart which God refined?
No; let thy heaven-taught soul to heaven aspire,
To fancy, freedom, harmony, resigned;
Ambition's grovelling crew for ever left behind.

VIII. [7]

Canst thou forego the pure ethereal soul
In each fine sense so exquisitely keen,
On the dull couch of Luxury to loll,
Stung with disease, and stupified with spleen;
Fain to implore the aid of Flattery's screen,
Even from thyself thy loathsome heart to hide,
(The mansion, then, no more of joy serene)
Where fear, distrust, malevolence, abide,
And impotent desire, and disappointed pride?

IX.

O, how canst thou renounce the boundless store
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
O how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!

X. [8]

These charms shall work thy soul's eternal health,
And love, and gentleness, and joy, impart.
But these thou must renounce, if lust of wealth
E'er win its way to thy corrupted heart;
For ah! it poisons like a scorpion's dart;
Prompting the ungenerous wish, the selfish scheme,
The stern resolve, unmoved by pity's smart,
The troublous day, and long distressful dream.
Return, my roving Muse! resume thy purposed theme.

XI.

There lived, in Gothic days, as legends tell,
A shepherd-swain, a man of low degree;
Whose sires, perchance, in Fairyland might dwell,
Sicilian groves, or vales of Arcady;
But he, I ween, was of the North Countrie:
A nation famed for song, and beauty's charms;
Zealous, yet modest; innocent, though free;
Patient of toil; serene amidst alarms;
Inflexible in faith; invincible in arms.

XII. [9]

The shepherd-swain, of whom I mention made,
On Scotia's mountains fed his little flock;
The sickle, scythe, or plough, he never swayed;
An honest heart was almost all his stock;
His drink the living water from the rock:
The milky dams supplied his board, and lent
Their kindly fleece to baffle winter's shock;
And he, though oft with dust and sweat besprent,
Did guide and guard their wanderings, wheresoe'er they
went.

XIII.

From labour health, from health contentment springs.
Contentment opes the source of every joy.
He envied not, he never thought of kings;
Nor from those appetites sustained annoy,
Which chance may frustrate, or indulgence cloy:
Nor fate his calm and humble hopes beguiled;
He mourned no recreant friend, nor mistress coy,
For on his vows the blameless Phœbe smiled,
And her alone he loved, and loved her from a child.

XIV. [10]

No jealousy their dawn of love o'er cast,
Nor blasted were their wedded days with strife;
Each season looked delightful, as it past,
To the fond husband, and the faithful wife.
Beyond the lowly vale of shepherd life
They never roamed; secure beneath the storm
Which in Ambition's lofty land is rife,
Where peace and love are cankered by the worm

Of pride, each bud of joy industrious to deform.

XV.

The wight, whose tale these artless lines unfold,
Was all the offspring of this simple pair.
His birth no oracle or seer foretold:
No prodigy appeared in earth or air,
Nor aught that might a strange event declare.
You guess each circumstance of Edwin's birth;
The parent's transport, and the parent's care;
The gossip's prayer for wealth, and wit, and worth;
And one long summer-day of indolence and mirth.

XVI. [11]

And yet poor Edwin was no vulgar boy;
Deep thought oft seemed to fix his infant eye.
Dainties he heeded not, nor gaude, nor toy,
Save one short pipe of rudest minstrelsy.
Silent when glad; affectionate, though shy;
And now his look was most demurely sad,
And now he laughed aloud, yet none knew why.
The neighbours stared and sighed, yet blessed the lad:
Some deemed him wondrous wise, and some believed him
mad.

XVII.

But why should I his childish feats display?
Concourse, and noise, and toil, he ever fled;
Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray
Of squabbling imps; but to the forest sped,
Or roamed at large the lonely mountain's head;

Or, where the maze of some bewildered stream
To deep untrodden groves his footsteps led,
There would he wander wild, 'till Phœbus' beam,
Shot from the western cliff, released the weary team.

XVIII. [12]

The exploit of strength, dexterity, or speed,
To him nor vanity nor joy could bring.
His heart, from cruel sport estranged, would bleed
To work the woe of any living thing,
By trap, or net; by arrow, or by sling;
These he detested, those he scorned to wield:
He wished to be the guardian, not the king,
Tyrant, far less, or traitor, of the field.
And sure the sylvan reign unbloody joy might yield.

XIX.

Lo! where the stripling, wrapt in wonder, roves
Beneath the precipice o'erhung with pine;
And sees, on high, amidst the encircling groves,
From cliff to cliff the foaming torrents shine:
While waters, woods, and winds, in concert join,
And Echo swells the chorus to the skies.
Would Edwin this majestic scene resign
For aught the huntsman's puny craft supplies?
Ah! no: he better knows great Nature's charms to prize.

XX. [13]

And oft he traced the uplands, to survey,
When o'er the sky advanced the kindling dawn,
The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain grey,

And lake, dim-gleaming on the smoky lawn;
Far to the west the long, long vale withdrawn,
Where twilight loves to linger for a while;
And now he faintly kens the bounding fawn,
And villager abroad at early toil.
But, lo! the sun appears! and heaven, earth, ocean, smile.

XXI.

And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
When all in mist the world below was lost.
What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast,
And view the enormous waste of vapour, tost
In billows, lengthening to the horizon round,
Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed!
And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound!

XXII. [14]

In truth he was a strange and wayward wight,
Fond of each gentle, and each dreadful scene.
In darkness, and in storm, he found delight:
Nor less, than when on ocean-wave serene
The southern sun diffused his dazzling shene.
Even sad vicissitude amused his soul:
And if a sigh would sometimes intervene,
And down his cheek a tear of pity roll,
A sigh, a tear, so sweet, he wished not to controul.

XXIII.

'O ye wild groves, O where is now your bloom!
(The Muse interprets thus his tender thought.)
'Your flowers, your verdure, and your balmy gloom,
'Of late so grateful in the hour of drought!
'Why do the birds, that song and rapture brought
'To all your bowers, their mansions now forsake?
'Ah! why has fickle chance this ruin wrought!
'For now the storm howls mournful through the brake,
'And the dead foliage flies in many a shapeless flake.

XXIV. [15]

'Where now the rill, melodious, pure, and cool,
'And meads, with life, and mirth, and beauty, crowned!
'Ah! see, the unsightly slime, and sluggish pool,
'Have all the solitary vale imbrowned;
'Fled each fair form, and mute each melting sound.
'The raven croaks forlorn on naked spray:
'And, hark! the river, bursting every mound,
'Down the vale thunders; and, with wasteful sway,
'Uproots the grove, and rolls the shattered rocks away.

XXV.

'Yet such the destiny of all on earth:
'So flourishes and fades majestic man.
'Fair is the bud his vernal morn brings forth,
'And fostering gales awhile the nursling fan.
'O smile, ye heavens, serene; ye mildews wan,
'Ye blighting whirlwinds, spare his balmy prime,
'Nor lessen of his life the little span.
'Borne on the swift, though silent, wings of Time,
'Old-age comes on apace to ravage all the clime.

XXVI. [16]

'And be it so. Let those deplore their doom,
'Whose hope still grovels in this dark sojourn.
'But lofty souls, who look beyond the tomb,
'Can smile at Fate, and wonder how they mourn.
'Shall spring to these sad scenes no more return?
'Is yonder wave the sun's eternal bed?
'Soon shall the orient with new lustre burn,
'And spring shall soon her vital influence shed,
'Again attune the grove, again adorn the mead.

XXVII.

'Shall I be left abandoned in the dust,
'When Fate, relenting, lets the flower revive?
'Shall Nature's voice, to man alone unjust,
'Bid him, though doomed to perish, hope to live?
'Is it for this fair Virtue oft must strive
'With disappointment, penury, and pain?
'No: Heaven's immortal spring shall yet arrive;
'And man's majestic beauty bloom again,
'Bright through the eternal year of Love's triumphant reign.'

XXVIII. [17]

This truth sublime his simple sire had taught.
In sooth, 'twas almost all the shepherd knew.
No subtle nor superfluous lore he sought,
Nor ever wished his Edwin to pursue.
'Let man's own sphere (quoth he) confine his view,
'Be man's peculiar work his sole delight.'
And much, and oft, he warned him, to eschew
Falsehood and guile, and aye maintain the right,
By pleasure unseduced, unawed by lawless might.

XXIX.

'And, from the prayer of Want, and plaint of Woe,
'O never, never turn away thine ear.
'Forlorn, in this bleak wilderness below,
'Ah! what were man, should Heaven refuse to hear!
'To others do (the law is not severe)
'What to thyself thou wishest to be done.
'Forgive thy foes; and love thy parents dear,
'And friends, and native land; nor those alone;
'All human weal and woe learn thou to make thine own.'

XXX. [18]

See, in the rear of the warm sunny shower,
The visionary boy from shelter fly!
For now the storm of summer-rain is o'er,
And cool, and fresh, and fragrant is the sky.
And, lo! in the dark east, expanded high,
The rainbow brightens to the setting sun!
Fond fool, that deem'st the streaming glory nigh,
How vain the chace thine ardour has begun!
'Tis fled afar, ere half thy purposed race be run.

XXXI.

Yet couldst thou learn, that thus it fares with age,
When pleasure, wealth, or power, the bosom warm,
This baffled hope might tame thy manhood's rage,
And Disappointment of her sting disarm. — —
But why should foresight thy fond heart alarm?
Perish the lore that deadens young desire!
Pursue, poor imp, the imaginary charm,
Indulge gay hope, and fancy's pleasing fire:
Fancy and Hope too soon shall of themselves expire.

XXXII. [19]

When the long-sounding curfew, from afar,
Loaded with loud lament the lonely gale,
Young Edwin, lighted by the evening star,
Lingering and listening, wandered down the vale.
There would he dream of graves, and corses pale;
And ghosts, that to the charnel-dungeon throng,
And drag a length of clanking chain, and wail,
Till silenced by the owl's terrific song,
Or blast that shrieks by fits the shuddering aisles along.

XXXIII.

Or, when the setting moon, in crimson dyed,
Hung o'er the dark and melancholy deep,
To haunted stream, remote from man, he hied,
Where fays, of yore, their revels wont to keep;
And there let Fancy roam at large, till sleep
A vision brought to his entranced sight.
And first, a wildly murmuring wind 'gan creep
Shrill to his ringing ear; then tapers bright,
With instantaneous gleam, illumed the vault of night.

XXXIV. [20]

Anon in view a portal's blazoned arch
Arose; the trumpet bids the valves unfold;
And forth an host of little warriors march,
Grasping the diamond lance, and targe of gold.
Their look was gentle, their demeanour bold,
And green their helms, and green their silk attire;
And here and there, right venerably old,
The long-robed minstrels wake the warbling wire,
And some with mellow breath the martial pipe inspire.