

John Clare
(1793-1864)

The Mores

Far spread the moorey ground a level scene
Bespread with rush and one eternal green
That never felt the rage of blundering plough
Though centuries wreathed spring's blossoms on its brow
Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
In uncheckt shadows of green brown, and grey
Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky
One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree
Spread its faint shadow of immensity
And lost itself, which seemed to eke its bounds
In the blue mist the horizon's edge surrounds
Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers
Is faded all - a hope that blossomed free,
And hath been once, no more shall ever be
Inclosure came and trampled on the grave
Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave
And memory's pride ere want to wealth did bow
Is both the shadow and the substance now
The sheep and cows were free to range as then
Where change might prompt nor felt the bonds of men
Cows went and came, with evening morn and night,
To the wild pasture as their common right
And sheep, unfolded with the rising sun
Heard the swains shout and felt their freedom won
Tracked the red fallow field and heath and plain
Then met the brook and drank and roamed again
The brook that dribbled on as clear as glass
Beneath the roots they hid among the grass
While the glad shepherd traced their tracks along
Free as the lark and happy as her song
But now all's fled and flats of many a dye
That seemed to lengthen with the following eye
Moors, loosing from the sight, far, smooth, and blea
Where swopt the plover in its pleasure free
Are vanished now with commons wild and gay
As poet's visions of life's early day
Mulberry-bushes where the boy would run
To fill his hands with fruit are grubbed and done
And hedgrow-briars - flower-lovers overjoyed
Came and got flower-pots - these are all destroyed
And sky-bound mores in mangled garbs are left
Like mighty giants of their limbs bereft

Fence now meets fence in owners' little bounds
 Of field and meadow large as garden grounds
 In little parcels little minds to please
 With men and flocks imprisoned ill at ease
 Each little path that led its pleasant way
 As sweet as morning leading night astray
 Where little flowers bloomed round a varied host
 That travel felt delighted to be lost
 Nor grudged the steps that he had ta-en as vain
 When right roads traced his journeys and again -
 Nay, on a broken tree he'd sit awhile
 To see the mores and fields and meadows smile
 Sometimes with cowslaps smothered - then all white
 With daisies - then the summer's splendid sight
 Of cornfields crimson o'er the headache bloomd
 Like splendid armies for the battle plumed
 He gazed upon them with wild fancy's eye
 As fallen landscapes from an evening sky
 These paths are stopt - the rude philistine's thrall
 Is laid upon them and destroyed them all
 Each little tyrant with his little sign
 Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine
 But paths to freedom and to childhood dear
 A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'
 And on the tree with ivy overhung
 The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung
 As tho' the very birds should learn to know
 When they go there they must no further go
 Thus, with the poor, scared freedom bade goodbye
 And much they feel it in the smothered sigh
 And birds and trees and flowers without a name
 All sighed when lawless law's enclosure came
 And dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes
 Have found too truly that they were but dreams

Remembrances

Summer pleasures they are gone like to visions every one
 And the cloudy days of autumn and of winter cometh on
 I tried to call them back but unbidden they are gone
 Far away from heart and eye and for ever far away
 Dear heart and can it be that such raptures meet decay
 I thought them all eternal when by Langley Bush I lay
 I thought them joys eternal when I used to shout and play
 On its bank at 'clink and bandy' 'chock' and 'taw' and
 ducking stone
 Where silence sitteth now on the wild heath as her own
 Like a ruin of the past all alone
 When I used to lie and sing by old eastwells boiling spring
 When I used to tie the willow boughs together for a 'swing'
 And fish with crooked pins and thread and never catch a
 thing
 With heart just like a feather- now as heavy as a stone
 When beneath old lea close oak I the bottom branches broke
 To make our harvest cart like so many working folk
 And then to cut a straw at the brook to have a soak

O I never dreamed of parting or that trouble had a sting
 Or that pleasures like a flock of birds would ever take to
 wing
 Leaving nothing but a little naked spring
 When jumping time away on old cross berry way
 And eating awes like sugar plumbs ere they had lost the may
 And skipping like a leveret before the peep of day
 On the roly polly up and downs of pleasant swordy well
 When in round oaks narrow lane as the south got black again
 We sought the hollow ash that was shelter from the rain
 With our pockets full of peas we had stolen from the grain
 How delicious was the dinner time on such a showry day
 O words are poor receipts for what time hath stole away
 The ancient pulpit trees and the play
 When for school oer 'little field' with its brook and wooden
 brig
 Where I swaggered like a man though I was not half so big
 While I held my little plough though twas but a willow twig
 And drove my team along made of nothing but a name
 'Gee hep' and 'hoit' and 'woi'- O I never call to mind
 These pleasant names of places but I leave a sigh behind
 While I see the little mouldywharps hang sweeing to the wind
 On the only aged willow that in all the field remains
 And nature hides her face where theyre sweeing in their
 chains
 And in a silent murmuring complains
 Here was commons for the hills where they seek for
 freedom still
 Though every commons gone and though traps are set to kill
 The little homeless miners- O it turns my bosom chill
 When I think of old 'sneap green' puddocks nook and hilly
 snow
 Where bramble bushes grew and the daisy gemmed in dew
 And the hills of silken grass like to cushions to the view
 When we threw the pissmire crumbs when we's nothing
 else to do
 All leveled like a desert by the never weary plough
 All vanished like the sun where that cloud is passing now
 All settled here for ever on its brow
 I never thought that joys would run away from boys
 Or that boys would change their minds and forsake such
 summer joys
 But alack I never dreamed that the world had other toys
 To petrify first feelings like the fable into stone
 Till I found the pleasure past and a winter come at last
 Then the fields were sudden bare and the sky got overcast
 And boyhoods pleasing haunts like a blossom in the blast
 Was shrivelled to a withered weed and trampled down and
 done
 Till vanished was the morning spring and set that summer
 sun
 And winter fought her battle strife and won
 By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill
 On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange and chill
 And spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will
 To the axe of the spoiler and self interest fell a prey

And cross berry way and old round oaks narrow lane
 With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again
 Inclosure like a Buonapar te let not a thing remain
 It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
 And hung the moles for traitors - though the brook is
 running still

It runs a naked brook cold and chill
 O had I known as then joy had left the paths of men
 I had watched her night and day besure and never slept agen
 And when she turned to go O I'd caught her mantle then
 And wooed her like a lover by my lonely side to stay
 Aye knelt and worshipped on as love in beautys bower
 And clung upon her smiles as a bee upon her flower
 And gave her heart my poesys all cropt in a sunny hour
 As keepsakes and pledges to fade away
 But love never heeded to treasure up the may
 So it went the comon road with decay
Composed c. 1832 First published 1908

mouldywharps - moles

To a Fallen Elm

Old Elm that murmured in our chimney top
 The sweetest anthem autumn ever made
 And into mellow whispering calms would drop
 When showers fell on thy many coloured shade
 And when dark tempests mimic thunder made
 While darkness came as it would strangle light
 With the black tempest of a winter night
 That rocked thee like a cradle to thy root
 How did I love to hear the winds upbraid
 Thy strength without while all within was mute
 It seasoned comfort to our hearts desire
 We felt thy kind protection like a friend
 And pitched our chairs up closer to the fire
 Enjoying comforts that was was never penned
 Old favourite tree thoust seen times changes lower
 But change till now did never come to thee
 For time beheld thee as his sacred dower
 And nature claimed thee her domestic tree
 Storms came and shook thee with aliving power
 Yet stedfast to thy home thy roots hath been
 Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower
 Till earth grew iron - still thy leaves was green
 The children sought thee in thy summer shade
 And made their play house rings of sticks and stone
 The mavis sang and felt himself alone
 While in they leaves his early nest was made
 And I did feel his happiness mine own
 Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed
 Friend not inanimate- tho stocks and stones
 There are and many cloathed in flesh and bones
 Thou ownd a lnague by which hearts are stirred
 Deeper than by the attribute of words
 Thine spoke a feeling known in every tongue

Language of pity and the force of wrong
 What cant assumes what hypocrites may dare
 Speaks home to truth and shows it what they are
 I see a picture that thy fate displays
 And learn a lesson from thy destiny
 Self interest saw thee stand in freedoms ways
 So thy old shadow must a tyrant be
 Thoust heard the knave abusing those in power
 Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free
 Thoust sheltered hypocrites in many an hour
 That when in power would never shelter thee
 Thoust heard the knave supply his canting powers
 With wrongs illusions when he wanted friends
 That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers
 And when clouds vanished made thy shade ammends
 With axe at root he felled thee to the ground
 And barked of freedom - O I hate that sound
 It grows the cant terms of enslaving tools
 To wrong another by the name of right
 It grows a liscence with oer bearing fools
 To cheat plain honesty by force of might
 Thus came enclosure- ruin was her guide
 But freedoms clapping hands enjoyed the sight
 Tho comforts cottage soon was thrust aside
 And workhouse prisons raised upon the scite
 Een natures dwelling far away from men
 The common heath became the spoilers prey
 The rabbit had not where to make his den
 And labours only cow was drove away
 No matter- wrong was right and right was wrong
 And freedoms brawl was sanction to the song
 Such was thy ruin music making Elm
 The rights of freedom was to injure thine
 As thou wert served so would they overwhelm
 In freedoms name the little so would they over whelm
 And these are knaves that brawl for better laws
 And cant of tyranny in stronger powers
 Who glut their vile unsatiated maws
 And freedoms birthright from the weak devours
 Composed c. 1821 First published 1920

The Lament of Swordy Well

Pe[ti]tioners are full of prayers
 To fall in pitys way
 But if her hand the gift forebears
 Theyll sooner swear than pray
 They're not the worst to want who lurch
 On plenty with complaints
 No more then those who go to church
 Are eer the better saints

I hold no hat to beg a mite
 Nor pick it up when thrown
 Nor limping leg I hold in sight
 But pray to keep my own

Where profit gets his clutches in
Theres little he will leave
Gain stooping for a single pin
Will stick it on his sleeve

For passers bye I never pin
No troubles to my breast
Nor carry round some names
More money from the rest
Im swordy well a piece of land
Thats fell upon the town
Who worked me till I couldnt stand
And crush me now Im down

In parish bonds I well may wail
Reduced to every shift
Pity may grieve at troubles tale
But cunning shares the gift
Harvests with plenty on his brow
Leaves losses taunt with me
Yet gain comes yearly with the plough
And will not let me be

Alas dependance thou'rt a brute
Want only understands
His feelings wither branch and root
That falls in parish hands
The much that clouts the ploughmans shoe
The moss that hides the stone
Now Im become the parish due
Is more then I can own

Though Im no man yet any wrong
Some sort of right may seek
And I am glad if een a song
Gives me the room to speak
Ive got among such grubbing geer
And such a hungry pack
If I brought harvest twice a year
They'd bring me nothing back

When war their tyrant prices got
I trembled with alarms
they fell and saved my little spot
Or towns had turned to farms
Let profit keep an humble place
That gentry may be known
Let pedigrees their honours trace
And toil enjoy its own
The silver springs grown naked dykes
Scarce own a buch of rushes
When grain got high the tasteless tykes
Grubbed up trees bank and bushes
And me they turned inside out
For sand and grit and stones
And turned my old green hills about

And pickt my very bones

These things that claim my own as theirs
 Where born but yesterday
 But ere I fell to town affairs
 I were as proud as they
 I kept my horses cows and sheep
 And built the town below
 Ere they had cat or dog to keep
 And then to use me so

Parish allowance gaunt and dread
 Had it the earth to keep
 Would even pine the bees to dead
 To save an extra keep
 Prides workhouse is a place that yields
 From poverty its gains
 And mines a workhouse for the fields
 A starving the remains

The bees flye round in feeble rings
 And find no blossom bye
 Then thrum their almost weary wings
 Upon the moss and die
 Rabbits that find my hills turned oer
 Forsake my poor abode
 They dread a workhouse like the poor
 And nibble on the road

If with a clover bottle now
 Spring dares to lift her head
 The next day brings the hasty plough
 And makes me miserys bed
 The butterflyes may wir to come
 I cannot keep em now
 Nor can they bear my parish home
 That withers on my brow

No now not een a stone can lie
 Im just what eer they like
 My hedges like the winter flye
 And leave me but the dyke
 My gates are thrown from off the hooks
 The parish thoroughfare
 Lord he thats in the parish books
 Has little wealth to spare

I couldnt keep a dust of grit
 Nor scarce a grain of sand
 But bags and carts claimed every bit
 And now theyve got the land
 I used to bring the summer life
 To many a butterflye
 But in oppressions iron strife
 Dead tussocks bow and sigh

Ive scarce a nook to call my own
For things that creep or flye
The beetle hiding neath a stone
Does well to hurry bye
Stock eats my struggles every day
As bare as any road
He's sure to be in somethings way
If eer he stirs abroad

I am no man to whine and beg
But fond of freedom still
I hing no lies on pitys peg
To bring a gris to mill
On pitys back I neednt jump
My looks speak loud alone
My only tree the've left a stump
And nought remains my own

My mossy hills gains greedy hand
And more then greedy mind
Levels into a russet land
Nor leaves a bend behind
In summers gone I bloomed in pride
Folks came for miles to prize
My flowers that bloomed no where beside
And scarce believed their eyes

Yet worried with a greedy pack
They rend and delve and tear
The very grass from off my back
Ive scarce a rag to wear
Gain takes my freedom all away
Since its dull suit I wore
And yet scorn vows I never pay
And hurts me more and more

And should the price of grain get high
Lord help and keep it low
I shant posses a single flye
Or get a weed to grow
I shant possess a yard of ground
To bid a mouse to thrive
For gain has put me in a pound
I scarce can keep alive

I own Im poor like many more
But then the poor mun live
And many came for miles before
For what I had to give
But since I fell upon the town
They pass me with a sigh
Ive scarce the room to say sit down
And so they wander bye

Though now I seem so full of clack
Yet when yer' riding bye

The very birds upon my back
Are not more fain to flye
I feel so lorn in this disgrace
God send the grain to fall
I am the oldest in the place
And the worst sereved of all

Lord bless ye I was kind to all
And poverty in me
Could always find a humble stall
A rest and lodging free
Poor bodyes with a hungry ass
I welcomed many a day
And gave him tether room to grass
And never said him nay

There was a time my bit of ground
Made freemen of the slave
The ass no pinard dare to pound
When I his supper gave
The gipseys camp was not afraid
I made his dwelling free
Till vile enclousure came and made
A parish slave of me

The gipseys further on sojourn
No parish bounds they like
No sticks I own and would earth burn
I shouldnt own a dyke
I am no friend to lawless work
Nor would a rebel be
And why I call a christian turk
Is they are turks to me

And if I could find a friend
With no deciet to sham
Who'd send me some few sheep to tend
And leave me as I am
To keep my hills from cart and plough
And strife and mongerel men
And as spring found me find em now
I should look up agen

And save his Lordships woods that past
The day of danger dwell
Of all the fields I am the last
That my own face can tell
Yet what with stone pits delving holes
And strife to buy and sell
My name will quickly be the whole
Thats left of wordy well

(from various web sources)

