

**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 daiseys - 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 lnaguage 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 bodys 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)

