

Christopher Smart, "A Morning Piece, or, An Hymn for the Hay-Makers"

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CHRISTOPHER SMART

“A Morning Piece, or, An Hymn for the Hay-Makers”

ODE I.

Quinetiam Gallum noctem explaudentibus alis
Auroram clara consuetum voce vocare. LUCRET[IUS].

Brisk chaunticleer his mattins had begun,
And broke the silence of the night,
And thrice he call'd aloud the tardy sun,
And thrice he hail'd the dawn's ambiguous light;
Back to their graves the fear-begotten phantoms run. 5

Strong Labour got up with his pipe in his mouth,
And stoutly strode over the dale,
He lent new perfumes to breath of the south,
On his back hung his wallet and flail.
Behind him came Health from her cottage of thatch, 10
Where never physician had lifted the latch.

First of the village Colin was awake,
And thus he sung, reclining on his rake.
Now the rural graces three
Dance beneath yon maple tree; 15
First the vestal Virtue, known
By her adamantine zone;
Next to her in rosy pride,
Sweet Society, the bride;
Last Honesty, full seemly drest 20
In her cleanly home-spun vest.
The abby bells in wak'ning rounds
The warning peal have giv'n;
And pious Gratitude resounds
Her morning hymn to heav'n. 25

All nature wakes---the birds unlock their throats,
And mock the shepherd's rustic notes.
All alive o'er the lawn,
Full glad of the dawn,
The little lambkins play, 30
Sylvia and Sol arise,---and all is day---

Come, my mates, let us work,
And all hands to the fork,
While the Sun shines, our Hay-cocks to make,
So fine is the Day, 35
And so fragrant the Hay,
That the Meadow's as blithe as the Wake.

Our voices let's raise
In Phoebus's praise,
Inspir'd by so glorious a theme, 40
Our musical words
Shall be join'd by the birds,
And we'll dance to the tune of the stream.

NOTES:

Epigraph *Quinetiam Gallum noctem explaudentibus alis/Auroram clara consuetum voce vocare* From Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Book IV, ll. 714-715. "For the Cock, that claps his Wings and drives away the Darkness, and by his clear Notes calls forth the Morning Light" (Guernier, and others, *T. Lucretius Carus Of the Nature of Things, in Six Books* [London, 1743], vol. 2, p. 63).

1 *chaunticleer* Proverbial name for a rooster; *mattins* "The service of morning prayer, especially in the Anglican Church compare evensong, vespers" (*OED*).

9 *flail* "A tool that has a long handle with a stick swinging from it, used especially in the past to separate grains of wheat from their dry outer covering, by beating the wheat" (*OED*).

17 *adamantine* "Rigidly firm: unyielding adamantine discipline" (*OED*).

23 *peal* "A loud ringing of a bell or bells" (*OED*).

30 *lambkins* "Young lambs" (*OED*).

33 *fork* Pitchfork.

37 *blithe* "Cheerful" (*OED*); *Wake* "Rows of green damp grass" (James Orchard Halliwell, *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*, vol. 2 [London, 1872], p. 913)

39 *Phoebus* "God identified with the sun" (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1752), pp. 7-9. [Google Books]

Edited by Mark Novak

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