[William Mason], â??The Plow-Boyâ??s Dreamâ?•

Description

[WILLIAM MASON]

â??The Plow-Boyâ??s Dreamâ?•

I am a Plow-boy stout and strong,
As ever drove a team;
And three years since asleep in bed
I had a dreadful dream:
And, as that dream has done me good,
Iâ??ve got it put in rhyme;
That other boys may read and sing
My dream, when they have time.

Methought I drove my masterâ??s team,
With Dobbin, Ball, and Star;
Before a stiff and handy plough,
As all my masterâ??s are:
But found the ground was bakâ??d so hard,
And more like brick than clay,
I could not cut my furrow clean,
Nor would my beasts obey.

The more I whipt, and lashâ??d, and swore
The less my cattle stirrâ??d;
Dobbin laid down, and Ball, and Star
They kickâ??d and snorted hard:
When lo! above me a bright youth
Did seem to hang in air,
With purple wings and golden wand,
As Angels painted are.

â??Give over, cruel wretch,â?• he cryâ??d,
â??Nor thus thy beasts abuse;
Think, if the ground was not too hard,
Would they their work refuse?
Besides I heard thee curse and swear
As if dumb beasts could know
What all thy oaths and curses meant,
Or better for them go.

But thoâ?? they know not, there is One,
Who knows thy sins full well,
And what shall be thy after doom,
Another shall thee tell.â?•
No more he said, but light as air
He vanishâ??d from my sight;
And with him went the sunâ??s bright beams,
And all was dark midnight.

The thunder roarâ??d from under ground,
The earth it seemâ??d to gape;
Blue flames broke forth, and in those flames
A dire gigantic shape.
â??Soon shall I call thee mine,â?• it cryâ??d,
With voice so dread and deep,
That quivâ??ring like an aspin leaf
I wakenâ??d from my sleep.

And thoâ?? I found it but a dream,
It left upon my mind
That dread of sin, that fear of GOD,
Which all should wish to find;
For since that hour Iâ??ve never darâ??d
To use my cattle ill,
And ever fearâ??d to curse and swear,
And hope to do so still.

Now ponder well ye Plow-boys all
The dream that I have told;
And if it works such change in you,
â??Tis worth its weight in gold;
For should you think it false or true,
It matters not one pin,
If you but deeds of mercy shew,
And keep your souls from sin.

NOTES:

Title This poem, signed â??*M.*â?•, was one of two by William Mason (1724-1797) that Hannah More (1745-1833) accepted for publication in her Cheap Repository Tract scheme. Masonâ??s authorship is confirmed in a letter More wrote to her sister in which she explains why she rejected four of the six poems Mason submitted before noting that â??two, one of which was called the â??Ploughboyâ??s Dream,â?? will do very wellâ?• (William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, third edition [1835], vol. 2, p. 430). G. H. Spinney dates publication of this tract in August, 1795 (â??Cheap Repository Tracts: Hazard and Marshall Edition,â?• *The Library*, 4th series, 20:3 [1939], p. 320).

6 *rhyme* Corrected from â??ryhme,â?• a printerâ??s error.

10 *Dobbin, Ball, and Star* Common names for draft or farm horses.

18 *cattle* â??A collective term for live animals held as property,â?• often applied to horses in this period (*OED*).

60 *its* Corrected from â??itâ??s,â?• a printerâ??s error.

62 *not one pin* Very little.

Source: â??The Plow-Boyâ??s Dream,â?• single sheet, (London and Bath, [1795]). [ESTC]

Edited by Bill Christmas