Rev. John Langhorne, The Tears of Music. A Poem, to the Memory of Mr. Handel

Description

REV. JOHN LANGHORNE

The Tears of Music. A Poem, to the Memory of Mr. Handel

SPIRITS of Music, and ye Powers of Song,
That wakâ??d to painful Melody the Lyre
Of young JESSIDES, when, on GILBOAâ??s Mount,
He wept oâ??er bleeding Friendship; ye that mournâ??d,
While Freedom drooping oâ??er EUPHRATESâ?? Stream
Her pensive Harp on the pale Osier hung,
Begin once more the Sorrow-soothing Lay.
Ah! where shall now the Muse fit Numbers find?
What Accents pure to greet thy tuneful Shade?
Sweet Harmonist! â??Twas thine, the tender Fall
Of Pityâ??s plaintive Lay; for thee the Stream
Of silver-winding Music sweeter playâ??d,
And purer flowâ??d for Thee, â??all silent now
Those Airs that, breathing oâ??er the Breast of THAMES,
Led amorous ECHO down the long, long Vale,
Delighted; studious from thy sweeter Strain
To melodize her own; when the sad Hour
She mourns in Anguish oâ??er the golden Breast
Of young NARCISSUS. From their Amber Urns,
Parting their green Locks streaming in the Sun,
The NAIADS rose and smilâ??d: Nor since the Day,
When first by Music, and by Freedom led
From Grecian ACIDALE; nor since the Day,
When last from ARNOâ??s weeping Fount they came,
To smooth the Ringlets of SABRINAâ??s Hair,
Heard They like Minstrelsyâ??Fountains and Shades
Of TWITâ??NAM, and of WINDSOR famâ??d in Song!
Ye Mounts of CLERMONT, and ye Bowers of HAM!
That heard the fine Strain vibrate throâ?? your Groves,
Ah! where were then your long-lovâ??d Muses fled,
When HANDEL breathâ??d no more?â??and Thou, sweet Queen,
That nightly wrapt thy MILTONâ??s hallowâ??d Ear
In the soft Ecstasies of LYDIAN Airs,
And since attunâ??d to HANDELâ??s high-wound Lyre
The Lay by Thee suggested; couldâ??st not Thou

Soothe with thy sweet Song the grim Furyâ??s Breast?
Ah! no: from Thee too, heavâ??d the helpless Sigh,
Thy fair Eyes floating in a mournful Tear,
When MILTON died, and HANDEL breathâ??d no more.
COLD-HEARTED Death! his wanly-glaring Eye
Nor Virtueâ??s Smile attracts, nor Fameâ??s loud Trump
Can pierce his Iron Ear, for ever barrâ??d
To gentle Sounds: the golden Voice of Song,
That charms the gloomy Partner of his Birth,
That soothes Despair and Pain, He hears no more,
Than rude Winds, blustâ??ring from the CAMBRIAN Cliffs,
The Travellerâ??s feeble Lay. To court fair Fame,
To toil with slow Steps up the Star-crownâ??d Hill,
Where Science, leaning on her sculpturâ??d Urn,
Looks conscious on the secret-working Hand
Of Nature; on the Wings of Genius borne,
To soar above the beaten Walks of Life,
Is, like the Paintings of an Evening Cloud,
Thâ?? Amusement of an Hour. Night, gloomy Night
Spreads her black Wings, and all the Vision dies.
ERE long, the Heart, that heaves this Sigh to Thee,
Shall beat no more! ere long, on this fond Lay
Which mourns at HANDELâ??s Tomb, insulting Time
Shall strew his cankering Rust. Thy Strain, perchance,
Thy sacred Strain shall the hoar Warrior spare;
For Sounds like thine, at Natureâ??s early Birth,
Arousâ??d Him slumbering on the dead Profound
Of dusky Chaos; by the golden Harps
Of choral Angels summonâ??d to his Race:
And Sounds like thine, when Nature is no more,
Shall call him weary from the lengthenâ??d Toils
Of twice Ten Thousand Years.â??O would his Hand
Yet spare some Portion of this vital Flame,
The trembling Muse that now faint Effort makes
On young and artless Wing, should bear thy Praise
Sublime, above the mortal Bounds of Earth,
With heavenly Fires relume her feeble Ray,
And learn of Seraphs how to sing to Thee.

I FEEL, I feel the sacred Impulseâ??hark!
Wakâ??d from according Lyres the sweet Strains flow
In Symphony divine; from Air to Air
The trembling Numbers fly: swift bursts away
The Flow of Joy; now swells the Flight of Praise.
Springs the shrill Trump aloft; the toiling Chords
Melodious labour throâ?? the flying Maze;
And the deep Base his strong Sounds rolls away,
Majestically sweetâ??Yet, HANDEL, raise,

Yet wake to higher Strains thy sacred Lyre:
The Name of Ages, the Supreme of Things,
The great MESSIAH asks it; He whose Hand
Led into Form yon everlasting Orbs,
The Harmony of Natureâ??He whose Hand
Stretchâ??d oâ??er the wilds of Space this beauteous Ball,
Whose Spirit breathes throâ?? all his smiling Works
Music and Loveâ??yet HANDEL raise the Strain.
Hark! what angelic Sounds, what Voice divine
Breathes throâ?? the ravisht Air! My rapt Ear feels
The Harmony of Heaven. Hail sacred Choir!
Immortal Spirits, hail! If haply those
That erst in favourâ??d PALESTINE proclaimâ??d
Glory and Peace: her Angel-haunted Groves,
Her piny Mountain, and her golden Vales
Re-echoâ??d Peaceâ??But, Oh! Suspend the Strainâ??
The swelling Joyâ??s too much for mortal Bounds!
â??Tis Transport even to Pain. Oh, lead me then,
Convey me to the sad, the mournful Scene,
Where trembling Nature saw her GOD expire.
Flow, stupid Tears! and veil the conscious Eye
That yet presumes to gazeâ??
Flow, stupid Tears! in vainâ??ye too confess
That HE alone unequalâ??d Sorrow bore.

BUT, hark! what pleasing Sounds invite mine Ear,
So venerably sweet? â??Tis SIONâ??s Lute.
Behold her Hero! from his valiant Brow
Looks JUDAHâ??s Lyon, on his Thigh the Sword
Of vanquished APOLLONIUSâ??The shrill Trump
Throâ?? BETHORON proclaims thâ?? approaching Fight.
I see the brave Youth lead his little Band,
With Toil and Hunger faint; yet from his Arm
The rapid SYRIAN flies. Thus HENRY once,
The British HENRY, with his way-worn Troop,
Subdued the Pride of Franceâ??now louder blows
The martial Clangor, lo NICANORâ??s Host!
With threatâ??ning Turrets crownâ??d, slowly advance
The ponderous Elephants.â??
The blazing Sun, from many a golden Shield
Reflected, gleams afar. Judean Chief!
How shall thy Force, thy little Force sustain
The dreadful Shock!
The Hero comesâ?? â??Tis boundless Mirth and Song
And Dance and Triumph, every laboring String,
And Voice, and breathing Shell in Concert strain
To swell the Raptures of tumultuous Joy.
O Master of the Passions and the Soul,

Seraphic HANDEL! how shall Words describe
Thy Musicâ??s countless Graces, nameless Powers!

When He of GAZA, blind, and sunk in Chains,
On female Treachery looks greatly down,
How the breast burns indignant! In thy strain,
When sweet-voicâ??d Piety resigns to Heaven,
Glows not each Bosom with the Flame of Virtue?
Oâ??ER JEPTHAâ??s votive Maid when the soft Lute
Sounds the slow Symphony of Funeral Grief,
What youthful Breast but melts with tender Pity!
What Parent bleeds not with a Parents woe!

O, longer than this worthless Lay can live!
While Fame and Music sooth the human Ear;
Be this thy Praise: to lead the polishâ??d Mind
To Virtueâ??s noblest Heights; to light the Flame
Of British Freedom, rouse the generous Thought,
Refine the Passions, and exalt the Soul
To love, to Heaven, to Harmony and Thee.

NOTES:

Title *George Frederick Handel* (1685-1759), Baroque composer; he died in London, England.

3 *GILBOAâ??s Mount* Mountain in Northern Israel. In â??The Book of Samuelâ?• of the Bible, Mount Gilboa is the location where the Philistines killed Saul and his son Jonathon. Handel composed *Saul, an English Libretto,* in 1738 (Charles Cudworth, *Handel* [1972], p. 28.).

5 *EUPHRATES* This river appears in Handelâ??s Opera Belshazzar (opera.stanford.edu).

6 *Osier* â??A small Eurasian willowâ?• (*OED*).

14 *Those Airsâ?¦THAMES* The Water-Music (Authorâ??s note). â??Handelâ??s matchless delicacy as an orchestratorâ?¦makes him alert to the beauties of varied sonority and echo effects in the resonant clarity of a summer evening on the river [Thames]â?• (Jonathan Keates, *Handel: The Man and his Music* [1985], p. 77).

15-19 *ECHOâ?¦NARCISSUS* From Ovidâ??s *Metamorphosis*.

21 *NAIADS* Water nymphs.

22 *Grecian ACIDALE* A fountain in Greece, referred to in Spenserâ??s *The Faerie Queene* (AC Hamilton, *The Spenser Encyclopedia* [1990], p. 4.).

24-25 *ARNOâ??s weeping Fountâ?¦SABRINAâ??s Hair* An allusion to John Miltonâ??s *Comus*. Arno is a river, and Sabrina, a nymph. In 1737, Handel â??reworked Miltonâ??s Comus for an opera, Sabrinaâ?• (Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* [1966], p. 317).

27 *TWITâ??NAMâ?¦WINDSOR* Alexander Popeâ??s house and his poem â??Windsor Forest.â?•

28 *CLERMONT* A mansion built in the eighteenth century in Surrey, England.

28 *HAM* A suburb of London, on the banks of the Thames.

33 *LYDIAN* A musical scale.

34 *And since attunâ??dâ?¦* â??Lâ??Allegro and Il Penseroso, set to Music by Mr. HANDEL [Authorâ??s note].

36 *sweet Songâ?¦* â??See MILTONâ??s Lycidasâ?• [Authorâ??s note].

41 *Trump* â??Trumpetâ?• (*OED*).

46 *CAMBRIAN* Welsh.

73 *Relume* â??To relight, rekindleâ?• (*OED*).

85 *MESSIAH* Handelâ??s English oratorio, composed in 1741.

108 *Sionâ??s* Zion.

109 *her Hero* â??Judas Maccabeusâ?• [Authorâ??s note]. Handel composed an oratorio by the same name in 1746 (Keates, p. 160).

110-112 *JUDAHâ??sâ?¦BETHORAN* â??The governor of Samaria, Apollonius, now assembled a large number of Gentiles into an armyâ?¦to attack the people of Israel. When Judah learned of Apolloniusâ??s movements, he went out to meet this army and defeated them, killing Apolloniusâ?¦Among the spoils, Judah found Apolloniusâ??s own sword, which he took and used in battle for the rest of his lifeâ?• (*The Inclusive Bible* [2007], p. 571.) This battle took place in Bethoran.

115 *HENRY* Henry V (1386-1422), King of England from 1413-1422, famously defeated the French in the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

118 *NICANOR* A governor of Judea.

125 *The Hero comesâ?¦* â??Chorus of Youths, in Judas Maccabeusâ?• [Authorâ??s note].

132 *When He of Gazaâ?¦* â??See the Oratorio of Samsonâ?• [Authorâ??s note].

137 *JEPTHA* From Bible Judges 11. Handel composed his last oratorio, Jephtha, in 1751 (Cudworth, p. 49).

Source: *The Tears of Music. A Poem, to the Memory of Mr. Handel. With an Ode to the River Eden* (London, 1760). [Sutro Library of the California State University Library, San Francisco]

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