Anonymous, â??On Solitudeâ?•

Description

ANONYMOUS

â??On Solitudeâ?•

Hail, modest *Solitude*, instructive maid,
Still to thy votâ??ry, still vouchsafe thine aid
Still imp my soul with meditationâ??s wings,
And lead me far from modern trifling things.
Before my view bid ages past unfold,
And let me mingle with the great of old.
With kings and heroes, saints and sages stray,
And let their converse cheat the devious way.
Behold, already to my joyful eyes,
From various realms the mighty shades arise;
Who once the bulwark of their country stood,
And, to be great, determinâ??d to be good.
Great too in crimes another race I view,
For all was great that former ages knew.
In *Aristides* just see *Athensâ??* pride;
See the brave *Theban*, who at *Leuctra* dyâ??d.
With him thâ?? unwearyâ??d partner of his wars,
Looks up elate and glories in his fears.
There moves the father of the *Grecian* state,
Whose name *Thermopylae* hath snatchâ??d from fate;
And yet an endless train to these succeeds,
The chief who conquers and the sage who bleeds,
Romeâ??s awful names now crowd upon my mind,
Her first great *Brutus*, glory of mankind,
The voice of nature dying in his ear,
The voice of *Rome* alone he knew to hear;
There leans *Horatius* on his darling boy,
And smiles superior with a *Roman* joy,
The *Fabii*, *Decii*, see, and oâ??er the rest,
Great *Cato* towâ??rs, the wisest and the best,
Cato, the last of *Romans*, and the pride,
Cato, who never errâ??d, but when he dyâ??d.
Behind the sons of glorious mischief press,
Whose deeds can plead no merit but success;
Young *Ammon*, *Caesar*, there with gesture proud,
Drink the mad plaudit of the ruinâ??d crowd.
But who are these of later times, I ween,

Of equal worth that crowd the shifting scene?
My soul presaging knows the kindred line,
Ye *Henrys*, *Edwards*, yes, I call ye mine.
Each look, each smile, some pleasing thought conveys,
Of tyrants humbled on victorious days,
When *Edward*, *Henry*, and his son appears,
I start to *Cressy*, *Agincourt*, *Poictiers*,
And later yet, behold a virgin sway
Fair *Albionâ??s* sceptre, and the world obey,
Yet, yet, one more, a mother, wife, and queen,
Oâ??er vanquishâ??d nations looks with placid mien,
Imperial *Anna*; yes, thy name shall stand,
The grace, the pride, the glory of our land,
Not *Rome*, nor *Greece*, nor antient times disdain,
To mix their honours with great *Annaâ??s* reign.
Thrice happy, *Britain*! if thy favourâ??d throne,
Still in a monarch had a parent known,
No wretch, who bold perverse and haughty still
Made his will law, and not our laws his will.
Yet let no murmurs rise, since heavâ??n presides,
Since all our fortunes boundless wisdom guides:
As guilt uncheckâ??d would call for burning rain,
Or bid some deluge drown the world again,
Tyrantâ??s must rise, the nationâ??s iron rod,
The scourge of vengeance in the hand of God.
Thus good and bad by turns appear to view,
The bad how many, and the good how few:
But tyrants soon in penal chains shall groan,
And injurâ??d kings possess a lasting throne.

NOTES:

2 *votâ??ry* Votary, â??a devoted or zealous worshipperâ?• (*OED*); *vouchsafe* â??Confer or bestowâ?• (*OED*).

15 *Aristides just* Aristides the Just (*fl.* 5th century BC), an Athenian statesman, general, and founder of the Delian Leagueâ?• (*Britannica*).

16 *the brave Theban, who at Leuctra dyâ??d* Probably a reference to Epaminondas, a â??Theban statesmanâ?• who defeated Sparta at the Battle of Leuctra â??and made Thebes the most powerful state in Greece.â?• However, Epaminondas did not die at Leuctra, but at Mantineia years later (*Britannica*).

19 *the father of the Grecian state* Probably a reference to Leonidas I (d. 480 BC), a Spartan king who led a â??stand against the Persian army at the pass of Thermopylaeâ?• (*Britannica*).

24 *Brutus* Lucius Junius Brutus (*fl.* 600-551 BC) was a â??semilegendary figureâ?• believed â??to have founded the Roman Republicâ?• (*Britannica*).

27 *Horatius* Horatius Cocles (6th century or legendary hero) who â??defended the Sublician bridge (in Rome) against â?¦ the entire Etruscan armyâ?• (*Britannica*).

29 *Fabii, Decii* Ancient Roman patrician and plebeian families, famous for their patriotic courage and sacrifice (*Britannica*).

30 *Great Cato* Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 BC), a Roman senator â??who tried to preserve the Roman republic against power seekers, in particular Julius Caesarâ?• (*Britannica*).

35 *Ammon* â??Egyptian deity who was revered as king of the godsâ?• (*Britannica*); *Caesar* Possible reference to Roman dictator Caius Julius Caesar, though the word can also refer to all Roman emperors â??down to the fall of Constantinopleâ?• (*OED*).

36 *plaudit* â??Applause,â?• or â??any emphatic expression of approvalâ?• (*OED*).

37 *ween* â??To think, surmise, supposeâ?• (*OED*).

39 *presaging* â??To foretell; to predict, forecastâ?• (*OED*).

40 *Henrys, Edwards* Likely a general reference to the past kings of England. At the time of this poemâ??s publication, fourteen English monarchs had borne the name Henry or Edward (*Historic UK*).

43 *Edward* Edward III (1312-1377, reigned from 1327, began the Hundred Yearsâ?? War and oversaw English victories at Crecy and Poitiers; *Henry, and his son appears* Most likely references Henry IV (1367-1413), reigned from 1399, and Henry V (1386-1422), reigned from 1413, defeated the French at Agincourt and would have succeeded to the French throne had he not died prematurely of dysentery (*Historic UK*).

44 *Cressy, Agincourt, Poictiers* Battles between English and French forces during the Hundred Yearsâ?? War that resulted in English victories (*Britannica*).

45 *behold a virgin sway* Reference to Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), reigned from 1558, known as the â??Virgin Queenâ?• (*Britannica*).

46 *Albionâ??s* â??Originally: the island of Britain. Later: the nation of Britain or England, often with reference to past times, or to a romanticized concept of the nationâ?• (*OED*).

49 *Imperial Anna* Queen Anne (1665-1714), reigned from 1702; she was â??the last Stuart Monarchâ?• (*Britannica*).

59 *burning rain* Biblical reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah from the Book of Genesis: â??Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heavenâ?• (*King James Bible, Genesis 19:24*).

60 *some deluge drown the world again* Reference to â??the biblical account of the Delugeâ?• from the Book of Genesis, in which God destroys the world with a catastrophic flood (*Britannica*).

SOURCE: *The Gentlemanâ??s Magazine*, vol. 24 (March 1754), pp. 135-136. [Google Books]

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