John Bennet, â??The Fortune-Tellerâ?•

Description

JOHN BENNET

â??The Fortune-Tellerâ?•

One Whitsuntide, when merry glee
Proclaimâ??d each blooming rustic free;
When nymphs and swains, in circling bands,
At sound of tabor joinâ??d their hands
In nimble dance, with sprightly mien,
Beneath the bower on the green:
Methought the golden age revivâ??d,
So harmless were the sports contrivâ??d.

But ah! how soon the scene was changâ??d,
When from these rural joys they rangâ??d.
For at the place thâ?? Egyptian crew
Came for lucrative interview;
Among the tribe a buxom lass,
Who daily wonders brought to pass.
Yet pedling first was their pretence,
To learn if any had the sense
Their hocus pocus to elude,
If not to tell the multitude;
One of their tribe, both deaf and dumb,
Revealâ??d past, present, and to come.

The scheme succeeds; such numbers flock,
Made Christian-Faith a laughing stock!
Made it appear that Satan hath
His eye fixâ??d on implicit faith.
Now to his oracle they press,
And hope in vain for happiness.

The Sybil seated in grimace,
Her votâ??ries come with anxious-face;
They write the sum of their demand,
And wishing at her alter stand.
One for a husband gives her fee,
Whoâ??s soon to be the happy she;
Not so another can be blest,

Till two long years have broke her rest;
But still a second fee retains,
And years to months a change regains:
She threatens some and some collogues,
And proves too many wâ??s and râ??s.

She to the matrimonial slate
In order reads their certain fate;
Bids the dull husband straight provide
For thâ?? issue of his teeming bride:
Assures the barren of success,
That children shall their ages bless.

A brother seeks a brother lost,
In prison strong confinâ??d and crost;
But thoâ?? he roams on foreign strand,
He soon shall see his native land.

Another offers at her shrine,
Whoâ??s promisâ??d treasures from the mine:
Could but his partner have such bliss,
Her pilferâ??d goods she would not miss.

A mother ardently requires
An answer kind to her desires:
A long-lost daughter was the theme,
And she receives a golden dream.

Good God! that mortals eâ??er should strive
In hidden secrets thus to dive:
Would they regard thy sacred text,
Impostors could not have pretext
Unwary people to delude,
Or on thy attributes intrude.

They still kept on their impious trade,
And evâ??ry day fresh votâ??ries made;
Till vengeance bid Astrea rise:
Despair then seizâ??d their baleful eyes.
Their utmost skill now at the stake,
The deaf and dumb could hear and speak,
And from her shrine in haste withdrew;
Shame and confusion with her flew.

Demetrius found his gains were gone;
Diana fled; her witchcrafts done.
He then betrayâ??d one of the crew,
The darling pelf yet still his view.
Virtue rejoicâ??d to see the stroke,

That vice itself the charm had broke:
Astreaâ??s orders were obeyâ??d,
And thâ?? hag to prison was conveyâ??d.

Thâ?? infernal tribe now sad distrest,
Detractorâ??s council was a jest;
Who finding that fair virtueâ??s cause
Was well defended by just laws;
To give such vile adherents play,
His cankerâ??d heart no more could say;
Thus added to lost reason, loss of pay.

NOTES:

1 *Whitsuntide* â??The church season of Pentecost,â?• a festival occurring on the seventh Sunday after Easter in the Christian tradition (*OED*).

2 *rustic* â??A person living in the countryside; a peasantâ?• (*OED*).

3 *nymph* â??A beautiful young womanâ?• (*OED*); *swain* â??A country gallant or loverâ?• (*OED*).

4 *tabor* A drum (*OED*).

5 *mien* â??The look â?¦ manner, or conduct of a person, as showing character, mood, etc.â?• (*OED*).

6 *bower* â??A place closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants (*OED*).

11 *place â??*Woodstockâ?• [Authorâ??s Note].

27 *Sybil* â??A prophetess; a fortune-teller, a witchâ?• (*OED*).

28 *votâ??ries* â??A devout worshipperâ?• (*OED*).

37 *collogues* â??To prevail upon or influence â?¦ to coaxâ?• (*OED*).

38 *wâ??s and râ??s* Likely to be understood as â??whores and rogues.â?•

42 *teeming* â??Child-bearingâ?• (*OED*).

46 *crost* â??Thwartedâ?• (*OED*).

52 *pilferâ??d* â??Stolenâ?• (*OED*).

65 *Astrea* Astraea, Greek goddess of justice (Dixon-Kennedy, *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology*, 52).

66 *baleful* â??Unhappy â?¦ miserableâ?• (*OED*).

71 *Demetrius* A biblical figure who falsely worshipped the Roman goddess Diana, causing him to incite a riot against the Apostle Paul (*OCB*).

72 *Diana* Roman goddess of hunting, wilderness, and animals (Dixon-Kennedy, *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman* Mythology, 52).

74 *pelf â??*Stolen good[s]â?• (*OED*).

84 *cankerâ??d* â??Infected with evil; corrupt, depraved (*OED*).

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1774), pp. 17-22. [*Google Books*]

Edited by Alex Pittel