

[William Mason], “The Plow-Boy’s Dream”

Description

[WILLIAM MASON]

“The Plow-Boy’s Dream”

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, 5

I’ve got it put in rhyme;

That other boys may read and sing

My dream, when they have time.

Methought I drove my master’s team,

With Dobbin, Ball, and

Star; 10

Before a stiff and handy plough,

As all my master’s are:

But found the ground was bak’d so hard,

And more like brick than clay,

I could not cut my furrow clean, 15

Nor would my beasts obey.

The more I whipt, and lash’d, and swore

The less my cattle stirr’d;

Dobbin laid down, and Ball, and Star

They kick’d and snorted hard: 20

When lo! above me a bright youth

Did seem to hang in air,

With purple wings and golden wand,

As Angels painted are.

“Give over, cruel wretch,” he cry’d, 25

“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 30

What all thy oaths and curses meant,
Or better for them go.

But tho'™ they know not, there is One,

Who knows thy sins full well,
And what shall be thy after doom, Â 35
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. Â 40

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€œSoon shall I call thee mine,â€• it cryâ€™d, Â 45

With voice so dread and deep,
That quivâ€™ring like an aspin leaf
I wakenâ€™d from my sleep.

And tho'™ I found it but a dream,

It left upon my mind Â 50

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, Â 55
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,
'Tis worth its weight in
gold;Â 60

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€œM.â€•, was one of two by William Mason (1724-1797) that Hannah More (1745-1833) accepted for publication in her Cheap Repository Tract scheme.Â 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€œtwo, 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 (Cheap Repository Tracts: Hazard and Marshall Edition, *The Library*, 4th series, 20:3 [1939], p. 320).

6 *rhyme* Corrected from æryhme, a printer's error.

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

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

60 *its* Corrected from eit, a printer's error.

62 *not one pin* Very little.

Source: *The Plow-Boy's Dream*, single sheet, (London and Bath, [1795]). [ESTC]

Edited by Bill Christmas