William Whitehead, â??The Enthusiast. An Odeâ?•

Description

William Whitehead

â??The Enthusiast. An Odeâ?•

Once, I remember well the day,
â??Twas ere the blooming sweets of May
Had lost their freshest hues,
When every flower on every hill,
In every vale, had drank its fill
Of sun-shine, and of dews.

In short, â??twas that sweet seasonâ??s prime
When Spring gives up the reins of time
To Summerâ??s glowing hand,
And doubting mortals hardly know
By whose command the breezes blow
Which fan the smiling land.

â??Twas then beside a green-wood shade
Which cloathâ??d a lawnâ??s aspiring head
I urgâ??d my devious way,
With loitering steps regardless where,
So soft, so genial was the air,
So wondâ??rous bright the day.

And now my eyes with transport rove
Oâ??er all the blue expanse above,
Unbroken by a cloud!
And now beneath delighted pass,
Where winding through the deep-green grass
A full-brimâ??d river flowâ??d.

I stop, I gaze; in accents rude
To thee, serenest Solitude,
Bursts forth thâ?? unbidden lay;
Begone, vile world; the learnâ??d, the wise,
The great, the busy I despise,
And pity evâ??n the gay.

These, these are joys alone, I cry;
â??Tis here, divine Philosophy,
Thou deignâ??st to fix thy throne!
Here Contemplation points the road
Throâ?? Natureâ??s charms to Natureâ??s God!
These, these are joys alone!

Adieu, ye vain low-thoughted cares,
Ye human hopes, and human fears,
Ye pleasures, and ye pains! â??-
While thus I spake oâ??er all my soul
A philosophic calmness stole,
A Stoic stillness reigns.

The tyrant passions all subside,
Fear, anger, pity, shame and pride
No more my bosom move;
Yet still I felt, or seemâ??d to feel
A kind of visionary zeal
Of universal love.

When lo! a voice! a voice I hear!
â??Twas Reason whisperâ??d in my ear
These monitory strains:
What meanâ??st thou, man? wouldâ??st thou unbind
The ties which constitute thy kind,
The pleasures and the pains?

The same Almighty Power unseen,
Who spreads the gay or solemn scene
To Contemplationâ??s eye,
Fixâ??d every movement of the soul,
Taught every wish its destinâ??d goal,
And quickenâ??d every joy.

He bids the tyrant passions rage,
He bids them war eternal wage,
And combat each his foe:
Till from dissentions concords rise,
And beauties from deformities,
And happiness from woe.

Art thou not man, and darâ??st thou find
A bliss which leans not to mankind?
Presumptuous thought, and vain!
Each bliss unsharâ??d is unenjoyâ??d,
Each power is weak, unless employâ??d
Some social good to gain.

Shall light, and shade, and warmth, and air,
With those exalted joys compare
Which active virtue feels,
When on she drags, as lawful prize,
Contempt, and Indolence, and Vice,
At her triumphant wheels.

As rest to labour still succeeds,
To man, while Virtueâ??s glorious deeds
Employ his toilsome day,
This fair variety of things
Are merely lifeâ??s refreshing springs
To sooth him on his way.

Enthusiast go, unstring thy lyre,
In vain thou singâ??st if none admire,
How sweet soeâ??er the strain.
And is not thy oâ??erflowing mind,
Unless thou mixest with thy kind,
Benevolent in vain?

Enthusiast go; try every sense,
If not thy bliss, thy excellence
Thou yet hast learnâ??d to scan;
And least thy wants, thy weakness know;
And see them all uniting show
That man was made for man.

NOTES:

Title *Enthusiast* â??One who vainly imagines a private revelation; one of a hot imagination, or violent passionsâ?• (Johnson).

15 *devious* â??Following a winding or erratic course; rambling, rovingâ?• (*OED*).

25 *accents* â??The way in which anything is said or sung; a modulation or modification of voice expressing feelingâ?• (*OED*); *rude* â??Artless; inelegantâ?• (Johnson).

37 *low-thoughted* Thought lowly of; pointless or worthless.

40 *spake* Archaic past tense of â??speak.â?•

42 *Stoic* â??Greek school of philosophy; one who practices repression of emotion, indifference to pleasure or pain, and patient enduranceâ?• (*OED*).

51 *monitory* â??Conveying a warningâ?• (*OED*).

Source: ***Poems on Several Occasions, with the Roman Father, A Tragedy*** **(London, 1754) pp. 87-91. [Google Books]**

Edited by Elyot Cotter