

Elegy - Written in a Country Churchyard

Rick Wakeman

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lee
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way
And leaves the world to darkness
And to me
Now fades the glimmering landscape on the site
And all the air a solemn stillness holds
Save where the beetle wheels his drowsing flight
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds
Save that from yonder islely mantle tower
The moping owl doest to the moon complain
Of such as, wondering near her secret bower
Molest her ancient solitary reign
Beneath those rugged elms that yew tree shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap
Each in his narrow cell forever laid
The rude forefathers of the hamlets
The breezy call of incense breathing morn
The swallow twittering from the strawdirt church
The cock's shrill clarion of the echoing hoard
No more to arouse them from their noble death
For them no more the blazing hearths will burn
Or busy housewives ply their evening care
No children run to list their sires return
Or climb his knees, the envied kiss to share
Oft' did the harvest to their sick weald
Their furrow oft' a stubborn glebe was broke
How jockeyed did they drive their team afield
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke
Let not ambition rock their useful toil
Their homely joys and destiny obscure
Nor grandeur here with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor
The boast of heraldry
The pomp of power
And all that beauty
All that wealth 'er-gave
Awakes alike the inevitable hour
The paths of glory lead but to the grave
Nor you 'ere prow
Impute to these the fault of memory
Or their tool no trophies raise
Where through the long drawn aisle
Of threaded vault
The peeling anthem swells a note of praise
The stored urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath
Can honour's voice provoke the silent dust
Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death
Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid some heart
Once pregnant with celestial fire
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed
Or wake to ecstasy
The living liar
The knowledge to their eyes
Her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time

Did n'er unroll
'Til penury repressed their noble rage
And froze the genial current of the soul
For many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear
For many a flower is born to blush unseen
And wasted sweetness on the desert air
Some village hamlet
But with dauntless breast the little tyrant of his fields
Withstood some mute and glorious pilgrim
Here may rest
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood
The applause of listening senates to command
The threats of pain and ruin to despise
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land
And weave their history in a nation's eyes
Their lot forbade
Nor circumscribed alone their growing virtues
But their crimes confide
The mad to wade through slaughter to a throne
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind
The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide
To quench the blushes of ingenious shame
Or heat the shrine of luxury and pride
With incense kindled at the muses' flame
Far from the madding crowds
In noble strife
Their sober wishes never learned to stray
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way
Yet in these bones, from insult
To protect some frail memorial
Still erected high
With uncouth rhymes
And shapeless sculptured debt
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh
Their name
Their years
Spelt by the unlettered muse
The place of fame and elegy supply
And many a holy text around she strews
That teach the rustic moralist to die
For who, to dumb forgetfulness at pray
This pleasing anxious being 'er resigned
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day
Or cast one longing, lingering look behind
On some fond breast the parting soul relies
Some pious drops the closing eye requires
E'en from the tomb
The voice of nature cries
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires
To thee, who mindful of the un-honoured dead
Doest in these lines their artless tale relate
If chance, by lonely contemplation led
To some kindred spirit, should enquire thy fate
Happily some hoary headed swain may say
Oft' we've seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon the aplen lawn
There at the foot of yonder nodding beach
That weaves its old fantastic route so high
Its listless length at moontide
Would he stretch

And pour upon the brook that babbles by
Hard by yon wood
Now smiling at him scorn
Muttering his wayward fancys he would roam
Now drooping
Would for one
Like one forlorn
Or crazed with care
Or crossed in hopeless love
One morn' I missed him on the 'customed hill
Along the heath
And near his favourite tree
Another came
Nor yet beside the rill
Nor up the lawn
Nor at the wood was he
The next
Its dirges due in sad array
Slow through the churchway path
We saw him borne
Approach and read
For thou canst read
The ley graved on the stone
Beneath yon aged thorn
Here rests his head
Upon the lap of earth
The youth to fortune and to fame unknown
Fair science frowned not on his humble birth
And melancholy marked him for her own
Large was his bounty
And his soul sincere
Heaven did a recompense as largely send
He gave to misery all he had
A tear, he gained from heaven
T'was all he wished
A friend
No father seek his merits to disclose
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
There they alike in trembling hope repose
The bosom of his father and his god