

Inebriety and the Candidate eBook

Inebriety and the Candidate by George Crabbe

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Page 1

AN INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS OF THE AUTHOR TO HIS POEMS.

Multa quidem nobis facimus mala saepe poetae,
(Ut vineta egomet caedam mea) cum tibi librum
Sollicito damus, aut fesso, &c.

Horace, Epistle 1.

Ye idler things, that soothed my hours of care,
Where would ye wander, triflers, tell me where?
As maids neglected, do ye fondly dote,
On the tair type, or the embroider'd coat;
Detest my modest shelf, and long to fly
Where princely Popes and mighty Miltons lie?
Taught but to sing, and that in simple style,
Of Lycia's lip, and Musidora's smile; —
Go then! and taste a yet unfelt distress,
The fear that guards the captivating press;
Whose maddening region should ye once explore,
No refuge yields my tongueless mansion more.
But thus ye'll grieve, Ambition's plumage stript,
"Ah, would to Heaven, we'd died in manuscript!"
Your unsoil'd page each yawning wit shall flee,
- For few will read, and none admire like me. —
Its place, where spiders silent bards enrobe,
Squeezed betwixt Cibber's Odes and Blackmore's Job;
Where froth and mud, that varnish and deform,
Feed the lean critic and the fattening worm;
Then sent disgraced—the unpaid printer's bane —
To mad Moorfields, or sober Chancery Lane,
On dirty stalls I see your hopes expire,
Vex'd by the grin of your unheeded sire,
Who half reluctant has his care resign'd,
Like a teased parent, and is rashly kind.

Yet rush not all, but let some scout go forth,
View the strange land, and tell us of its worth;
And should he there barbarian usage meet,
The patriot scrap shall warn us to retreat.

And thou, the first of thy eccentric race,
A forward imp, go, search the dangerous place,
Where Fame's eternal blossoms tempt each bard,
Though dragon-wits there keep eternal guard;



Hope not unhurt the golden spoil to seize,
The Muses yield, as the Hesperides;
Who bribes the guardian, all his labour's done,
For every maid is willing to be won.

Before the lords of verse a suppliant stand,
And beg our passage through the fairy land:
Beg more—to search for sweets each blooming field,
And crop the blossoms woods and valleys yield,
To snatch the tints that beam on Fancy's bow;
And feel the fires on Genius' wings that glow;
Praise without meanness, without flattery stoop,
Soothe without fear, and without trembling, hope.

TO THE READER.

The following Poem being itself of an introductory nature, its author supposes it can require but little preface.

It is published with a view of obtaining the opinion of the candid and judicious reader on the merits of the writer as a poet; very few, he apprehends, being in such cases sufficiently impartial to decide for themselves.



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It is addressed to the Authors of the Monthly Review, as to critics of acknowledged merit; an acquaintance with whose labours has afforded the writer of this Epistle a reason for directing it to them in particular, and, he presumes, will yield to others a just and sufficient plea for the preference.

Familiar with disappointment, he shall not be much surprised to find he has mistaken his talent.

However, if not egregiously the dupe of his vanity, he promises to his readers some entertainment, and is assured that however little in the ensuing Poem is worthy of applause, there is yet less that merits contempt.

TO THE AUTHORS OF THE MONTHLY REVIEW.

The pious pilot, whom the gods provide,
Through the rough seas the shatter'd bark to guide,
Trusts not alone his knowledge of the deep,
Its rocks that threaten, and its sands that sleep;
But whilst with nicest skill he steers his way,
The guardian Tritons hear their favourite pray.
Hence borne his vows to Neptune's coral dome,
The god relents, and shuts each gulfy tomb.

Thus as on fatal floods to fame I steer,
I dread the storm that ever rattles here,
Nor think enough, that long my yielding soul
Has felt the Muse's soft but strong control,
Nor think enough, that manly strength and ease,
Such as have pleased a friend, will strangers please;
But, suppliant, to the critic's throne I bow,
Here burn my incense, and here pay my vow;
That censure hush'd, may every blast give o'er,
And the lash'd coxcomb hiss contempt no more.
And ye, whom authors dread or dare in vain,
Affecting modest hopes, or poor disdain,
Receive a bard, who neither mad nor mean,
Despises each extreme, and sails between;
Who fears; but has, amid his fears confess'd,
The conscious virtue of a Muse oppress'd;
A muse in changing times and stations nursed,
By nature honour'd, and by fortune curs'd.

No servile strain of abject hope she brings,
Nor soars presumptuous, with unwearied wings,
But, pruned for flight—the future all her care —



Would know her strength, and, if not strong, forbear.

The supple slave to regal pomp bows down,
Prostrate to power, and cringing to a crown;
The bolder villain spurns a decent awe,
Tramples on rule, and breaks through every law;
But he whose soul on honest truth relies,
Nor meanly flatters power, nor madly flies.
Thus timid authors bear an abject mind,
And plead for mercy they but seldom find.
Some, as the desperate, to the halter run,
Boldly deride the fate they cannot shun;
But such there are, whose minds, not taught to stoop,
Yet hope for fame, and dare avow their hope,
Who neither brave the judges of their cause,
Nor beg in soothing strains a brief applause.
And such I'd be;—and ere my fate is past,
Ere clear'd with honour, or with culprits cast,



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Humbly at Learning's bar I'll state my case,
And welcome then distinction or disgrace!
When in the man the flights of fancy reign,
Rule in the heart or revel in the brain,
As busy Thought her wild creation apes,
And hangs delighted o'er her varying shapes,
It asks a judgment, weighty and discreet,
To know where wisdom prompts, and where conceit.
Alike their draughts to every scribbler's mind
(Blind to their faults as to their danger blind); —
We write enraptured, and we write in haste,
Dream idle dreams, and call them things of taste,
Improvement trace in every paltry line,
And see, transported, every dull design;
Are seldom cautious, all advice detest,
And ever think our own opinions best;
Nor shows my Muse a muse-like spirit here,
Who bids me pause, before I persevere.

But she—who shrinks while meditating flight
In the wide way, whose bounds delude her sight,
Yet tired in her own mazes still to roam,
And cull poor banquets for the soul at home,
Would, ere she ventures, ponder on the way,
Lest dangers yet unthought of, flight betray;
Lest her Icarian wing, by wits unplumed,
Be robb'd of all the honours she assumed;
And Dulness swell,—a black and dismal sea,
Gaping her grave; while censures madden me.

Such was his fate, who flew too near the sun,
Shot far beyond his strength, and was undone;
Such is his fate, who creeping at the shore
The billow sweeps him, and he's found no more.
Oh! for some god, to bear my fortunes fair
Midway betwixt presumption and despair!

“Has then some friendly critic's former blow
Taught thee a prudence authors seldom know?”

Not so! their anger and their love untried,
A woe-taught prudence deigns to tend my side:
Life's hopes ill-spiced, the Muse's hopes grow poor,
And though they flatter, yet they charm no more;



Experience points where lurking dangers lay,
And as I run, throws caution in my way.

There was a night, when wintry winds did rage,
Hard by a ruin'd pile, I meet a sage;
Resembling him the time-struck place appear'd,
Hollow its voice, and moss its spreading beard;
Whose fate-lopp'd brow, the bat's and beetle's dome,
Shook, as the hunted owl flew hooting home.
His breast was bronzed by many an eastern blast,
And fourscore winters seem'd he to have past;
His thread-bare coat the supple osier bound,
And with slow feet he press'd the sodden ground,
Where, as he heard the wild-wing'd Eurus blow,
He shook, from locks as white, December's snow;
Inured to storm, his soul ne'er bid it cease,
But lock'd within him meditated peace.

Father, I said—for silver hairs inspire,
And oft I call the bending peasant Sire —
Tell me, as here beneath this ivy bower,
That works fantastic round its trembling tower,
We hear Heaven's guilt-alarming thunders roar,
Tell me the pains and pleasures of the poor;

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For Hope, just spent, requires a sad adieu,
And Fear acquaints me I shall live with you.

There was a time when, by Delusion led,
A scene of sacred bliss around me spread,
On Hope's, as Pisgah's lofty top, I stood,
And saw my Canaan there, my promised good;
A thousand scenes of joy the clime bestow'd,
And wine and oil through vision's valleys flow'd;
As Moses his, I call'd my prospect bless'd,
And gazed upon the good I ne'er possess'd:
On this side Jordan doom'd by fate to stand,
Whilst happier Joshuas win the promised land.
"Son," said the Sage—"be this thy care suppress'd;
The state the gods shall chose thee is the best:
Rich if thou art, they ask thy praises more,
And would thy patience when they make thee poor;
But other thoughts within thy bosom reign,
And other subjects vex thy busy brain,
Poetic wreaths thy vainer dreams excite,
And thy sad stars have destined thee to write.
Then since that task the ruthless fates decree,
Take a few precepts from the gods and me!

"Be not too eager in the arduous chase;
Who pants for triumph seldom wins the race:
Venture not all, but wisely hoard thy worth,
And let thy labours one by one go forth:
Some happier scrap capricious wits may find
On a fair day, and be profusely kind;
Which, buried in the rubbish of a throng,
Had pleased as little as a new-year's song,
Or lover's verse, that cloy'd with nauseous sweet,
Or birth-day ode, that ran on ill-pair'd feet.
Merit not always—Fortune feeds the bard,
And as the whim inclines bestows reward:
None without wit, nor with it numbers gain;
To please is hard, but none shall please in vain:
As a coy mistress is the humour'd town,
Loth every lover with success to crown;
He who would win must every effort try,
Sail in the mode, and to the fashion fly;



Must gay or grave to every humour dress,
And watch the lucky Moment of Success;
That caught, no more his eager hopes are crost;
But vain are Wit and Love, when that is lost.”

Thus said the god; for now a god he grew
His white locks changing to a golden hue,
And from his shoulders hung a mantle azure-blue.
His softening eyes the winning charm disclosed
Of dove-like Delia when her doubts reposed;
Mira's alone a softer lustre bear,
When woe beguiles them of an angel's tear;
Beauteous and young the smiling phantom stood,
Then sought on airy wing his blest abode.

Ah! truth, distasteful in poetic theme,
Why is the Muse compell'd to own her dream?
Whilst forward wits had sworn to every line,
I only wish to make its moral mine.

Say then, O ye who tell how authors speed,
May Hope indulge her flight, and I succeed?
Say, shall my name, to future song prefixed,
Be with the meanest of the tuneful mix'd?
Shall my soft strains the modest maid engage,
My graver numbers move the silver “d sage,



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My tender themes delight the lover's heart,
And comfort to the poor my solemn songs impart?

For Oh! thou Hope's, thou Thought's eternal King,
Who gav'st them power to charm, and me to sing —
Chief to thy praise my willing numbers soar,
And in my happier transports I adore;
Mercy! thy softest attribute proclaim,
Thyself in abstract, thy more lovely name;
That flings o'er all my grief a cheering ray,
As the full moon-beam gilds the watery way.
And then too, Love, my soul's resistless lord,
Shall many a gentle, generous strain afford,
To all the soil of sooty passion blind,
Pure as embracing angels and as kind;
Our Mira's name in future times shall shine,
And—though the harshest—Shepherds envy mine.

Then let me (pleasing task!) however hard,
Join, as of old, the prophet and the bard;
If not, ah! shield me from the dire disgrace,
That haunts our wild and visionary race;
Let me not draw my lengthen'd lines along,
And tire in untamed infamy of song,
Lest, in some dismal Dunciad's future page,
I stand the *cibber* of this tuneless age;
Lest, in another *Pope* th' indulgent skies
Should give inspired by all their deities,
My luckless name, in his immortal strain,
Should, blasted, brand me as a second Cain;
Doom'd in that song to live against my will,
Whom all must scorn, and yet whom none could kill.

The youth, resisted by the maiden's art,
Persists, and time subdues her kindling heart;
To strong entreaty yields the widow's vow,
As mighty walls to bold beseigers bow;
Repeated prayers draw bounty from the sky,
And heaven is won by importunity;
Ours, a projecting tribe, pursue in vain,
In tedious trials, an uncertain gain;
Madly plunge on through every hope's defeat,
And with our ruin only find the cheat.



“And why then seek that luckless doom to share?”
Who, I?—To shun it is my only care.
I grant it true, that others better tell
Of mighty *Wolfe*, who conquer’d as he fell;
Of heroes born, their threaten’d realms to save,
Whom Fame anoints, and Envy tends whose grave;
Of crimson’d fields, where Fate, in dire array,
Gives to the breathless the short-breathing clay;
Ours, a young train, by humbler fountains dream,
Nor taste presumptuous the Pierian stream;
When Rodney’s triumph comes on eagle-wing,
We hail the victor whom we fear to sing;
Nor tell we how each hostile chief goes on,
The luckless Lee, or wary Washington;
How Spanish bombast blusters—they were beat,
And French politeness dulcifies—defeat.
My modest Muse forbears to speak of kings,
Lest fainting stanzas blast the name she sings;
For who—the tenant of the beechen shade,
Dares the big thought in regal breasts pervade?
Or search his soul, whom each too-favouring god
Gives to delight in plunder, pomp, and blood?
No; let me free from Cupid’s frolic round,



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Rejoice, or more rejoice by Cupid bound;
Of laughing girls in smiling couplets tell,
And paint the dark-brow'd grove, where wood-nymphs dwell;
Who bid invading youths their vengeance feel,
And pierce the votive hearts they mean to heal.
Such were the themes I knew in school-day ease,
When first the moral magic learn'd to please,
Ere Judgment told how transports warm'd the breast,
Transported Fancy there her stores imprest;
The soul in varied raptures learn'd to fly,
Felt all their force, and never question'd why;
No idle doubts could then her peace molest,
She found delight, and left to heaven the rest;
Soft joys in Evening's placid shades were born;
And where sweet fragrance wing'd the balmy morn,
When the wild thought roved vision's circuit o'er,
And caught the raptures, caught, alas! no more:
No care did then a dull attention ask,
For study pleased, and that was every task;
No guilty dreams stalk'd that heaven-favour'd round,
Heaven-guarded, too, no Envy entrance found;
Nor numerous wants, that vex advancing age,
Nor Flattery's silver tale, nor Sorrow's sage;
Frugal Affliction kept each growing dart,
To o'erwhelm in future days the bleeding heart.
No sceptic art veil'd Pride in Truth's disguise,
But prayer unsoil'd of doubt besieged the skies;
Ambition, avarice, care, to man retired,
Nor came desires more quick than joys desired.

A summer morn there was, and passing fair,
Still was the breeze, and health perfumed the air;
The glowing east in crimson'd splendour shone,
What time the eye just marks the pallid moon,
Vi'let-wing'd Zephyr fann'd each opening flower,
And brush'd from fragrant cups the limpid shower;
A distant huntsman fill'd his cheerful horn,
The vivid dew hung trembling on the thorn,
And mists, like creeping rocks, arose to meet the morn.
Huge giant shadows spread along the plain,
Or shot from towering rocks o'er half the main,



There to the slumbering bark the gentle tide
Stole soft, and faintly beat against its side;
Such is that sound, which fond designs convey,
When, true to love, the damsel speeds away;
The sails unshaken, hung aloft unfurl'd,
And simpering nigh, the languid current curl'd;
A crumbling ruin, once a city's pride,
The well-pleased eye through withering oaks descried,
Where Sadness, gazing on time's ravage, hung,
And Silence to Destruction's trophy clung —
Save that as morning songsters swell'd their lays,
Awaken'd Echo humm'd repeated praise:
The lark on quavering pinion woo'd the day,
Less towering linnets fill'd the vocal spray,
And song-invited pilgrims rose to pray.
Here at a pine-press'd hill's embroider'd base
I stood, and hail'd the Genius of the place.

Then was it doom'd by fate, my idle heart,
Softened by Nature, gave access to Art;
The Muse approach'd, her syren-song I heard,



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Her magic felt, and all her charms revered:
E'er since she rules in absolute control,
And Mira only dearer to my soul.
Ah! tell me not these empty joys to fly,
If they deceive, I would deluded die;
To the fond themes my heart so early wed,
So soon in life to blooming visions led,
So prone to run the vague uncertain course,
'Tis more than death to think of a divorce.

What wills the poet of the favouring gods,
Led to their shrine, and blest in their abodes?
What when he fills the glass, and to each youth
Names his loved maid, and glories in his truth?
Not India's spoils, the splended nabob's pride,
Not the full trade of Hermes' own Cheapside,
Nor gold itself, nor all the Ganges laves,
Or shrouds, well shrouded in his sacred waves;
Nor gorgeous vessels deck'd in trim array,
Which the more noble Thames bears far away;
Let those whose nod makes sooty subjects flee?
Hack with blunt steel the savory callipee;
Let those whose ill-used wealth their country fly,
Virtue-scorn'd wines from hostile France to buy;
Favour'd by Fate, let such in joy appear,
Their smuggled cargoes landed thrice a year;
Disdaining these, for simpler food I'll look,
And crop my beverage at the mantled brook.

O Virtue! brighter than the noon-tide ray,
My humble prayers with sacred joys repay!
Health to my limbs may the kind gods impart,
And thy fair form delight my yielding heart!
Grant me to shun each vile inglorious road,
To see thy way, and trace each moral good:
If more—let Wisdom's sons my page peruse,
And decent credit deck my modest Muse.

Nor deem it pride that prophesies my song
Shall please the sons of taste, and please them long.
Say ye! to whom my Muse submissive brings
Her first-fruit offering, and on trembling wings,
May she not hope in future days to soar,



Where fancy's sons have led the way before?
Where genius strives in each ambrosial bower
To snatch with agile hand the opening flower?
To cull what sweets adorn the mountain's brow,
What humbler blossoms crown the vales below?
To blend with these the stores by art refined,
And give the moral Flora to the mind?

Far other scenes my timid hour admits,
Relentless critics and avenging wits;
E'en coxcombs take a licence from their pen,
And to each "Let him perish," cry Amen!
And thus, with wits or fools my heart shall cry,
For if they please not, let the trifles die:
Die, and be lost in dark oblivion's shore,
And never rise to vex their author more.

I would not dream o'er some soft liquid line,
Amid a thousand blunders form'd to shine;
Yet rather this, than that dull scribbler be,
From every fault and every beauty free,
Curst with tame thoughts and mediocrity.
Some have I found so thick beset with spots,
'Twas hard to trace their beauties through their



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blots;

And these, as tapers round a sick man's room
Or passing chimes, but warn'd me of the tomb!

O! if you blast, at once consume my bays,
And damn me not with mutilated praise.
With candour judge; and, a young bard in view,
Allow for that, and judge with kindness too;
Faults he must own, though hard for him to find,
Not to some happier merits quite so blind;
These if mistaken Fancy only sees,
Or Hope, that takes Deformity for these:
If Dunce, the crowd-befitting title falls
His lot, and Dulness her new subject calls,
To the poor bard alone your censures give —
Let his fame die, but let his honour live;
Laugh if you must—be candid as you can,
And when you lash the Poet, spare the Man.

Footnotes:

{1} First published in Ipswich, 1775.

{2} First published 1780.

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