



Portrait attributed to John Watson, c. 1730.

## **“PHILOSOPHIC SOLITUDE” (1747)** **by WILLIAM LIVINGSTON.**

“The ancient and distinguished Scottish family of Livingstone, or, as the name is now written, Livingston,” writes Theodore Sedgwick, Jr. in his *A Memoir of the Life of William Livingston* (1833), p. 19, “is said to derive its origin from an Hungarian gentleman of the name of Livingius (vid. Anderson’s Genealogies), who accompanied Margaret, the sister of Edgar Atheling, and wife of King Malcolm Canmore, from his native country to Scotland, about the period of the Norman conquest.” Of ironic interest is it also to learn that the sire of the founder of that later famed and stupendously affluent New York dynasty was a parish Parson in Teviot in Roxburgshire, Scotland. His son, Robert Livingston, “the elder” (1654-1728), settled in New York from thence in 1672. Of the elder’s own three sons, Philip (1686-1749) was in turn the father of two of the American Revolution’s most illustrious political figures: Philip (1716-1778), a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, and William (born in Albany, 1723-1790).

The life of William Livingston was one of vigorous and unbounded activity. His public career began very early when as a lad he spent a year among the Mohawk Indians assisting a missionary. He subsequently attended Yale and where he graduated at the head of his class in 1741. From there, he went on to study law in New York City, and in 1752 was one of those appointed by the colony legislature to organize and frame a digest of New York’s statutes. Around the same time, he took up publishing and occupied himself composing numerous articles and editorials, adding his voice to church and state controversies; including becoming opposition to the church party of the Delancey’s who favored rule by an Anglican episcopacy in New York;<sup>1</sup> with concomitant say in secular affairs. To Livingston’s way of thinking, God’s true anointed were not monarchs (and these, in practice, included bishops), but rather the people. As well, Livingston found time to address local manners and morals in writings that harkened to Addison’s

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<sup>1</sup> Livingston, for example, objected to the predominating influence of church hierarchy on the Board of Trustess of King’s College (later to become Columbia University.)

*Spectator*. Furthermore, as we shall presently see, he composed poetry in no slight or unambitious vein.

In 1772, he settled in (then) Elizabethtown, New Jersey where he built Liberty Hall, and which he remained with his family to the end of his life. By 1774, he was one of the New Jersey delegates sent to the First Continental Congress. The following year he again was voted to resume his seat in the Second. But on June 5, 1775, he left Congress after being elected to take command of the Brigade of New Jersey militia. By 1776 he had become Governor of New Jersey; which office he held continually till his death in 1790. During the war, he was an ardent supporter and, when possible, supplier of Washington's army, and on several occasions the British made attempts to catch him. In one instance, on Feb. 25, 1779, he and his family, by timely notice, evaded capture when a contingent of soldiers from the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiments ransacked and looted Liberty Hall. Notwithstanding, he returned shortly after to re-take up residence.

Despite being busy as governor, he continued to write and published regularly in the *New-Jersey Gazette*; often under pennames such as "Hortentius" and "Scipio;" and speaking out to raise American morale and criticize the British war effort.<sup>2</sup> In these he oft displayed a flair for light satire and ridicule; rather unusual for a person of his standing and sometimes moral gravity. Like Francis Hopkinson, he was a statesman and legal mind first, but who otherwise had it in him to become a much more famous author than he is normally given credit to be. Indeed, his verve for writing, while Governor, incurred the disapproval of some; such that he was finally persuaded to put it aside as undignified for his office.

Among his last offices, Livingston was sent as a delegate to the Federal convention in 1787. Although he signed the Constitution, he was noticeably reticent in the great debates.<sup>3</sup>

Sedgwick's *Memoir* provides a list of his writings and literary works as follows:

- \* "The Art of Pleasing."
- \* "Philosophic Solitude," 1747.
- \* *The Independent Reflector* (essays and articles), 1752-53.
- \* *The Watch Tower* (essays and articles), 1754-55.
- \* Digest of N. Y. Laws, 1752-62.
- \* *Review of the Military Operations in North America, from the commencement of French hostilities on the Frontiers of Virginia in 1753, to the surrender of Oswego on the 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1756, in a Letter to a Nobleman* (1756) pub. in London.

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<sup>2</sup> Some samples of his Hortentius writings are contained in Frank Moore's *Diary of the American Revolution* (n 2 volumes, 1860.) In one editorial on Saratoga, Livingston makes a point of singling out Morgan's rifles for praise, and yet makes mention of neither Gates nor Arnold (*New-Jersey Gazette*, 24 Dec. 1777).

<sup>3</sup> Duyckinck includes an informative and general survey of his career and writings in vol. 1 of the *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, pp. 161-163.

- \* “Eulogium on Rev. Aaron Burr,” 1757.
- \* *The Sentinel* (essays and articles), 1765.
- \* Letter to Bishop of Llandaff, 1767.
- \* “The American Whig” (essays and articles), 1768-69.
- \* “A Soliloquy” (on Gov. Colden), 1770.
- \* “America, Or, a Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies,” New Haven 1770.
- \* Essays under the signatures of *Hortentius*, *Scipio*, and the title of *Primitive Whig*, in the *New-Jersey Gazette*, 1777-86.
- \* “Observations on Government, Including Some Animadversions on Mr. Adam’s Defence of the Constitutions of government of the United States of America” (1787)
- \* Essays in Mathew Carey’s *The American Museum*, 1788-90.

To these we can also add “Observations on Government, Including Some Animadversions on Mr. Adams’s Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America: and on Mr. De Lolme’s Constitution of England. By a Farmer” (1787), “A Morning Hymn;” found on page 343 of Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s *Gazette Publications* (1806). In addition it is believed Livingston, rather than Francis Hopkinson, authored “The Proclamation” (1777), a lampoon in verse deriding Burgoyne’s formal statement to all Americans announcing his invasion.

Yet of all his compositions, probably the most impressive is his “Philosophic Solitude” penned in 1747; at a juncture in our history when John Adams was a mere 12 and Thomas Jefferson 4 years old. Upon initially approaching the work, I was somewhat apprehensive as to quite what to expect of its merit. American poets then were notorious for thoughtlessly imitating, when not dully mimicking, British authors. While Livingston, infused with Miltonian aspirations, is not quite an exception to this; he nonetheless breathes a vibrant, reawakening American spirit into his overall vision, and at times the poem sparkles in a scintillating way; while, at others, also managing to be moving and uplifting. He takes the old models and standards, and combines and weaves them into a new form with sometimes a fresh perspective; for example, in his synthesizing an overflowing exuberance for Nature with a sincere and equally aroused adoration of the Divinity. Moreover, the work’s didactic character lend it a utility that clearly was and is of pragmatic value, and reflective of an American sense of priorities. In sum, “Philosophic Solitude” is nothing less than a small treasure; and without doubt stands among the best, if not itself strictly *the* best, American poetry of its pre-revolutionary day.

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**PHILOSOPHIC SOLITUDE,  
or the Choice of a Rural Life.**  
*A POEM.*

THE ARGUMENT.

*The subject proposed. Situation of the author's house. His frugality in his furniture. The beauties of the country. His love of retirement, and choice of his friends. A description of the morning. Hymn to the sun. Contemplation of the Heavens. The existence of God inferred from a view of the beauty and harmony of the creation. Morning and evening devotion. The vanity of riches and grandeur. The choice of his books. Praise of the marriage state. A knot of modern ladies described. The author's exit.*

Let ardent heroes seek renown in arms,  
Pant after fame, and rush to war's alarms;  
To shining palaces let fools resort,  
And dunces cringe to be esteem'd at court:  
Mine be the pleasure of a *rural* life,  
From noise remote, and ignorant of strife;  
Far from the painted belle, and white-gloved beau,  
The lawless masquerade, and midnight show,  
From ladies, lap-dogs, courtiers, garters, stars,  
Fops, fiddlers, tyrants, emperors, and czars.

Full in the centre of some shady grove,  
By nature form'd for solitude and love;  
On banks array'd with ever blooming flowers,  
Near beauteous landscapes, or by roseate bowers;  
My neat, but simple mansion I would raise,  
Unlike the sumptuous domes of modern days;  
Devoid of pomp, with rural plainness form'd,  
With savage game, and glossy shells adorn'd.

No costly furniture should grace my hall;  
But curling vines ascend against the wall,  
Whose pliant branches should luxuriant twine,  
While purple clusters swell'd with future wine:  
To slake my thirst a liquid lapse distil  
From craggy rocks, and spread a limpid rill.  
Along my mansion spiry firs should grow,  
And gloomy yews extend the shady row;  
The cedars flourish, and the poplars rise  
Sublimely tall, and shoot into the skies;  
Among the leaves refreshing zephyrs play,  
And crowding trees exclude the noon-tide ray;  
Whereon the birds their downy nests should form,  
Securely shelter'd from the battering storm;  
And to melodious notes their choir apply,  
Soon as Aurora blush'd along the sky;  
While all along the enchanting music rings,  
And every vocal grove responsive sings.

Me to sequester'd scenes, ye muses, guide,  
Where nature wantons in her virgin pride;  
To mossy banks edged round with opening flowers,  
Elysian fields, and amaranthine bowers,  
T' ambrosial founts, and sleep-inspiring rills,  
To herbage vales, gay lawns, and sunny hills.

Welcome, ye shades! all hail, ye vernal blooms!  
Ye bowery thickets, and prophetic glooms!  
Ye forests, hail! ye solitary woods!  
Love-whispering groves, and silver-streaming floods!  
Ye meads, that aromatic sweets exhale!  
Ye birds, and all ye sylvan beauties, hail!  
Oh how I long with you to spend my days,  
Invoke the muse, and try the rural lays!

No trumpets there with martial clangor sound,  
No prostrate heroes strew the crimson'd ground;  
No groves of lances glitter in the air,  
Nor thundering drums provoke the sanguine war:  
But white-robed peace, and universal love,  
Smile in the field, and brighten every grove.  
There all the beauties of the circling year,  
In native ornamental pride appear.  
Gay, rosy-bosom'd SPRING, and *April* showers  
Wake from the womb of earth the rising flowers:  
In deeper verdure SUMMER clothes the plain,  
And AUTUMN bends beneath the golden grain;  
The trees weep amber, and the whispering gales  
Breeze o'er the lawn, or murmur through the vales.  
The flowery tribes in gay confusion bloom,  
Profuse of sweets, and fragrant with perfume.  
On blossoms blossoms, fruits on fruits arise,  
And varied prospects glad the wand'ring eyes.  
In these fair seats I'd pass the joyous day,  
Where meadows flourish and where fields look gay;  
From bliss to bliss with endless pleasure rove,  
Seek crystal streams, or haunt the vernal grove,  
Woods, fountains, lakes, the fertile fields, or shades,  
Aerial mountains, or subjacent glades.

There from the polish'd fetters of the great,  
Triumphal piles, and gilded rooms of state;  
Prime ministers, and sycophantic knaves;  
Illustrious villains, and illustrious slaves;  
From all the vain formality of fools,

And odious task of arbitrary rules;  
The ruffling carts which the vex'd soul annoys  
The wealth the rich possess, but not enjoy,  
The visionary bliss the world can lend,  
Th' insidious foe, and false designing friend,  
The sevenfold fury of *Xantippe's* soul,  
And *S---*'s rage that burns without controul;  
I'd live retir'd, contented, and serene,  
Forgot, unknown, unenvied and unseen.

Yet not a real hermitage I'd choose,  
Nor wish to live from all the world recluse;  
But with a friend sometimes unbend the soul  
In social converse, o'er the sprightly bowl.  
With cheerful *W----*, serene and wisely gay,  
I'd often pass the dancing hours away:  
He skill'd alike to profit and to please,  
Politely talks with unaffected ease;  
Sage in debate, and faithful to his trust,  
Mature in science, and severely just;  
Of soul diffusive, vast and unconfined,  
Breathing benevolence to all mankind;  
Cautious to censure, ready to commend,  
A firm, unshaken, uncorrupted friend:  
In early youth fair wisdom's paths he trod,  
In early youth a minister of God:  
Each pulpit lov'd him when at *Yale* he shone,  
And ev'ry bleeding bosom weeps him gone.  
Dear *A----*, too, should grace my rural seat,  
For ever welcome to the green retreat:  
Heaven for the cause or righteousness design'd,  
His florid genius, and capacious mind;  
Oft have I heard, amidst the adorning throng,  
Celestial truths devolving from his tongue:  
High o'er the list'ning audience seen him stand,  
Divinely speak and graceful stretch his hand:  
With such becoming grace and pompous sound,  
With long rob'd senators encircled round,  
Before the Roman bar, while *Rome* was free,  
Nor bow'd to *Caesar's* throne the servile knee,  
Immortal *Tully* [Cicero] plead the patriot cause,  
While ev'ry tongue resounded his applause.  
Next round my board should candid *S----* appear,  
Of manners gentle, and a friend sincere,  
Averse to discord, party-rage and strife,  
He sails serenely down the stream of life,

With the *three friends*, beneath a spreading shade  
Where silver fountains murmur thro' the glade;  
Or in cool grotts, perfum'd with native flow'rs,  
In harmless mirth I'd spend the circling hours;  
Or gravely talk, or innocently sing,  
Or, in harmonious concert, strike the trembling string.

Amid sequester'd bowers, near gliding streams,  
*Druids* and *Bards* enjoy'd serenest dreams.  
Such was the seat where courtly *Horace* sung,  
And his bold harp immortal *Maro* strung:  
Where tuneful *Orpheus*' unresisted lay,  
Made rapid tygers bear their rage away;  
While groves attentive to th' extatic sound  
Burst from their roots, and raptur'd danc'd around.  
Such seats the venerable Seers of old  
(When blissful years in golden circles roll'd)  
Chose and admir'd: e'en Goddesses and Gods  
(As poets feign) were fond of such abodes:  
The impartial consort of fictitious *Jove*,  
For fount full *Ida* forsook the realms above.  
Oft to *Idalia* on a golden cloud,  
Veil'd in a mist of fragrance *Venus* rode,  
There num'rous altars to the queen were rear'd,  
And love-sick youths their am'rous vows prefer'd,  
While fair-hair'd damsels (a lascivious train)  
With wanton rites ador'd her gentle reign.  
The silver-shafted *Huntress* of the woods,  
Sought pendant shades, and bath'd in cooling floods.  
In palmy *Delos*, by *Scamander*'s side,  
Or where *Cajister* roll'd his silver tide,  
Melodious *Phoebus* sang: the *Muses* round  
Alternate warbling to the heavenly sound,  
E'en the feign'd MONARCH of heaven's bright abode,  
High thron'd in gold, of gods the sovereign God,  
Oft time prefer'd the shade of *Ida*'s grove  
To all the ambrosial feasts and nectar'd cups above.

Behold, the rosy-finger'd morning down,  
In saffron, rob'd and blushing o'er the lawn!  
Reflected from the clouds, a radiant stream,  
Tips with ethereal dew the mountain's brim.  
The unfolding roses, and the opening flowers  
Imbibe the dew, and strew the varied bowers;  
Diffuse nectarious sweets around, and glow  
With all the colours of the showery bow

The industrious bees their balmy toil renew,  
Buzz o'er the field, and sip the rosy dew.  
But yonder comes the illustrious God of day,  
Invests the east, and gilds the ethereal way;  
The groves rejoice, the feather'd nations sing,  
Echo the mountains and the vallies ring.

Hail Orb! array'd with majesty, and fire,  
That bids each sable shade of night retire!  
Fountain of light, with burning glory crown'd,  
Darting a deluge of effulgence round!  
Wak'd by thy genial and prolific ray,  
Nature resumes her verdure, and looks gay:  
Fresh blooms the rose, the drooping plants revive,  
The groves reflowerish, and the forests live.  
Deep in the teeming earth, the ripening ore  
Confesses thy consolidating power;  
Hence labour draws her tools, and artists mould  
The fusile silver and the ductile gold:  
Hence war is furnished, and the regal shield  
Like lightning flashes o'er illum'd field.  
If thou so fair with delegated light,  
That all heaven's splendors vanish at thy sight;  
With what effulgence must the ocean glow!  
From which thy borrow'd beams incessant flow!  
The exhaustless source, whose single smile supplies,  
The unnumber'd orbs that gild the spangled skies!

Oft would I view, in admiration lost,  
Heaven's sumptuous canopy, and starry host;  
With level'd tube, and astronomic eye,  
Pursue the planets whirling through the sky;  
Immeasurable vault! where thunders roll,  
And forked light[n]ings flash from pole to pole.  
Say, railing infidel! canst thou survey  
Yon globe of fire, that gives the golden day,  
The harmonious structure of this vast machine,  
And not confess its Architect divine?  
Then go, vain wretch; tho' deathless be thy soul,  
Go, swell the riot, and exhaust the bowl:  
Plunge into vice, humility resign,  
Go, fill the stie, and bristle into swine!

None but a power omnipotent and wise  
Could frame this earth, or spread the boundless skies:  
He made the whole: at his omnific call



From formless chaos rose this spacious ball,  
And one ALMIGHTY GOD is seen in all.  
By him our cup is crown'd, our table spread  
With luscious wine, said life sustaining bread.  
What countless wonders doth the earth contain:  
What countless wonders the unfathom'd main?  
Bedrop'd with gold, there scaly nations shine,  
Haunt coral groves, or lash the foaming brine,  
JEHOVAH's glories blaze all nature round,  
In heaven, on earth, and in the deeps profound;  
Ambitious of his name, the warblers sing,  
And praise their Maker while they hail the spring  
The zephyrs breathe it, and the thunders roar,  
While surge to surge, and shore resounds to shore,  
But Man, endow'd with an immortal mind  
His maker's image, and for heaven design'd  
To loftier notes his raptur'd voice should raise,  
And chant sublimer hymns to his Creator's praise.

When rising *Phoebus* ushers in the morn,  
And golden beams the impurpled skies adorn;  
Waked by the gentle murmur of the floods;  
Or the soft music of the waving woods,  
Rising from sleep with the melodious choir,  
To solemn sounds I'd tune the hallow'd lyre.  
Thy name, O GOD! should tremble on my tongue,  
Till every grove proved vocal to my song:  
(Delightful task! with dawning light to sing  
Triumphant hymns to heaven's eternal King.)  
Some courteous angel should my breast inspire,  
Attune my lips, and guide the warbled wire,  
While sportive echoes catch the sacred sound,  
Swell every note, and bear the music round;  
While mazy streams meandering to the main,  
Hang in suspense to hear the heavenly strain,  
And hush'd to silence all the feather'd throng,  
Attentive listen to the tuneful song.

Father of *Light!* exhaustless source of good!  
Supreme, eternal, self-existent God!  
Before the beamy sun dispensed a ray,  
Flamed in the azure vault, and gave the day;  
Before the glimmering moon with borrow'd light  
Shone queen amid the silver host of night,  
High in the heavens, thou reign'dst superior Lord,  
By suppliant angels worshipp'd and adored.

With the celestial choir then let me join  
 In cheerful praises to the power divine.  
 To sing thy praise, do thou, *O GOD!* inspire  
 A mortal breast with more than mortal fire.  
 In dreadful majesty thou sitt'st enthroned,  
 With light encircled, and with glory crown'd;  
 Through all infinitude extends thy reign,  
 For thee, nor heaven, nor heaven of heavens contain;  
 But though thy throne is *fix'd* above the sky  
 Thy *Omnipresence* fills immensity.  
 Saints robed in white, to thee their anthems bring,  
 And radiant martyrs hallelujahs sing:  
 Heaven's universal host their voices raise  
 In one *eternal chorus* to thy praise;  
 And round thy awful throne with one accord  
 Sing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord.  
 At thy creative voice, from ancient night  
 Sprang smiling beauty, and yon worlds of light:  
 Thou spak'st -- the planetary chorus rolled,  
 And all the expanse was starr'd with beamy gold;  
*Let there be light*, said GOD, -- light instant shone,  
 And from the orient burst the golden sun;  
 Heaven's gazing hierarchies with glad surprise  
 Saw the first morn invest the recent skies,  
 And straight the exulting troops thy throne surround  
 With thousand, thousand harps of heavenly sound;  
 Thrones, powers, dominions, (ever-shining trains!)  
 Shouted thy praises in triumphant strains:  
*Great are thy works*, they sing, and all around  
*Great are thy works*, the echoing heavens resound.  
 The effulgent sun, insufferably bright,  
 Is but a beam of thy o'erflowing light;  
 The tempest is thy breath: the thunder hurl'd,  
 Tremendous roars thy vengeance o'er the world;  
 Thou bow'st the heavens; the smoking mountains nod,  
 Rocks fall to dust, and nature owns her God;  
 Pale tyrants shrink, the atheist stands aghast,  
 And impious kings in horror breathe their last.  
 To this great God, alternately I'd pay  
 The evening anthem, and the morning lay.

For sovereign *Gold* I never would repine,  
 Nor wish the glittering dust of monarchs mine.  
 What though high columns heave into the skies,  
 Gay ceilings shine, and vaulted arches rise,  
 Though fretted gold the sculptured roof adorn,

The rubbies redden, and the jaspers burn!  
Or what, alas! avails the gay attire  
To wretched man, who breathes but to expire!  
Oft on the vilest riches are bestow'd,  
To show their meanness in the sight of God.  
High from a dunghill, see a *Dives* rise,  
And *Titan*-like insult the avenging skies:  
The crowd in adulation calls him lord,  
By thousands courted, flatter'd, and adored:  
In riot plunged, and drunk with earthly joys,  
No higher thought his grov'ling soul employs;  
The poor he scourges with an iron rod,  
And from his bosom banishes his God.  
But oft in height of wealth and beauty's bloom,  
Deluded man is fated to the tomb!  
For, lo, he sickens, swift his color flies,  
And rising mists obscure his swimming eyes:  
Around his bed his weeping friends bemoan,  
Extort the unwilling tear, and wish him gone;  
His sorrowing heir augments the tender shower,  
Deplores his death -- yet hails the dying hour.  
Ah, bitter comfort! sad relief to die!  
Though sunk in down, beneath a canopy!  
His eyes no more shall see the cheerful light,  
Weigh'd down by death in everlasting night:  
And now the great, the rich, the proud, the gay,  
Lies breathless, cold -- unanimated clay!  
He that just now was flatter'd by the crowd  
With high applause, and acclamation loud;  
That steel'd his bosom to the orphan's cries,  
And drew down torrents from the widow's eyes;  
Whom, like a God, the rabble did adore --  
Regard him now -- and lo! he is no more.

My eyes no dazzling vestments should behold,  
With gems instarr'd, and stiff with woven gold!  
But the tall ram his downy fleece afford,  
To clothe in modest garb his frugal lord.  
Thus the great father of mankind was dress'd,  
When shaggy hides composed his flowing vest;  
Doom'd to the cumbrous load for his offence,  
When clothes supplied the want of innocence;  
But now his sons (forgetful whence they came,)  
Glitter in gems, and glory in their shame.

Oft would I wander through the dewy field,

Where clustering roses balmy fragrance yield;  
 Or in lone, grots for contemplation made,  
 Converse with angels, and the mighty dead:  
 For all around unnumber'd spirits fly,  
 Waft on the breeze, or walk the liquid sky,  
 Inspire the poet with repeated dreams,  
 Who gives his hallow'd muse to sacred themes,  
 Protect the just, serene their gloomy hours,  
 Becalm their slumbers, and refresh their powers.  
 Methinks I see the immortal beings fly,  
 And swiftly shoot athwart the streaming sky:  
 Hark! a melodious voice I seem to hear,  
 And heavenly sounds invade my listening ear.  
 "Be not afraid of us, innoxious band,  
 Thy cell surrounding by divine command;  
 Erewhile like thee we led our lives below,  
 (Sad lives of pain, of misery, and woe!)  
 Long by affliction's boisterous tempests tost,  
 We reach'd at length the ever-blissful coast:  
 Now in the embowering groves and lawns above,  
 We taste the raptures of immortal love,  
 Attune the golden harp in roseate bowers,  
 Or bind our temples with unfading flowers.  
 Oft on kind errands bent, we cut the air  
 To guard the righteous, heaven's peculiar care!  
 Avert impending harms, their minds compose,  
 Inspire gay dreams, and prompt their soft repose.  
 When from thy tongue divine hosannas roll,  
 And sacred raptures swell thy rising soul,  
 To heaven we bear thy prayers like rich perfumes,  
 Where, by the throne, the golden censer fumes.  
 And when with age thy head is silver'd o'er,  
 And cold in death, thy bosom beats no more,  
 Thy soul exulting shall desert its clay,  
 And mount triumphant to eternal day."

But to improve the intellectual mind,  
 Reading should be to contemplation join'd.  
 First I'd collect from the Parnassian spring,  
 What muses dictate, and what poets sing. --  
*Virgil*, as Prince, should wear the laurel'd crown,  
 And other bards pay homage to his throne;  
 The blood of heroes now effus'd so long,  
 Will run forever purple through his song.  
 See! how he mounts toward the blest abodes  
 On planets rides, and talks with demi-gods!

How do our ravish'd spirits melt away,  
 When in his song *Sicilian* shepherds play!  
 But what a splendor strikes the dazzled eye,  
 When *Dido* shines in awful majesty!  
 Embroider'd purple clad the *Tyrian* queen.  
 Her motion graceful, and august her mein;  
 A golden zone her royal limbs embrac'd,  
 A golden quiver rattled by her waist.  
 See her proud steed majestically prance,  
 Contemn the trumpet, and deride the lance.  
 In crimson trappings, glorious to behold,  
 Confusedly gay with interwoven gold!  
 He champs the bit, and throws the foam around,  
 Impatient paws, and tears the solid ground.  
 How stern *Aeneas* thunders through the field!  
 With tow'ring helmet, and refulgent shield  
 Coursers o'erturn'd, and mighty warriors slain,  
 Deform'd with gore, lie welt'ring on the plain.  
 Struck through with wounds, ill-fated chieftains lie.  
 Frown e'en in death, and threaten as they die.  
 Through the thick squadrons see the Hero bound,  
 (His helmet flashes, and his arms resound!)  
 All grim with rage, he frowns over *Turnus*' head,  
 (Re-kindled ire! for blooming *Pallas* dead)  
 Then, in his bosom plung'd the shining blade --  
 The soul indignant sought the Stygian shade!

The far-fam'd bards that graced *Britannia*'s isle,  
 Should next compose the venerable pile.  
 Great *Milton* first, for towering thought renown'd,  
 Parent of song, and fam'd the world around!  
 His plowing breast divine *Urania* fired,  
 Or God himself the immortal Bard inspired.  
 Borne on triumphant wings he takes his flight,  
 Explores all heaven, and treads the realms of light:  
 In martial pomp he clothes th' angelic train,  
 While warring myriads shake th' ethereal plain.  
 First *Michael* stalks high towering ov'er the rest.  
 With heavenly plumage nodding on this crest:  
 Impenetrable arms his limbs unfold,  
 Eternal adamant and burning gold!  
 Sparkling in fiery mail, with dire delight,  
 Rebellious Satan animates the fight:  
 Armipotent they sink in rolling smoke,  
 All heaven resounding, to its centre shook.  
 To crush his foes and quell the dire alarms,

*Messiah* sparkled in refulgent arms;  
In radiant panoply divinely bright,  
His limbs incas'd, he flash'd devouring light.  
On burning wheels, o'er heaven's crystalline road  
Thundered the chariot of the *Filial* God;  
The burning wheels on golden axles turn'd,  
With flaming gems the golden axels burn'd.  
Lo! the apostate host, with terror struck.  
Roll back by millions! Th' Empyrean shook I  
Sceptres, and orbid shields, and crowns of gold,  
Cherubs and Seraphs in confusion roll'd:  
Till, from his hand the triple thunder hurl'd,  
Compell'd them headlong to the infernal world.

Then tuneful *Pope*, whom all the nine inspire,  
With *sapphic* sweetness, and *pindaric* fire.  
Father of verse! melodious and divine!  
Next peerless *Milton* should distinguish shine.  
Smooth flow his numbers when he paints the grove  
Th' enraptur'd virgins listening into love.  
But when the night and hoarse resounding storm,  
Rush on the deep, and *Neptune's* face deform,  
Rough runs the verse, the son'rous numbers roar,  
Like the hoarse surge that thunders on the shore.  
But when he sings th' exhilarated swains,  
The embowering groves and *Windsor's* blissful plains,  
Our eyes are ravishtd with the sylvan scene,  
Embroidered fields, and groves in living green:  
His lays the verdure of the meads prolong,  
And withered forests blossom in his song;  
*Thames'* silver streams his flowing verse admire,  
And cease to murmur while he turns his lyre,

Next should appear great *Dryden's* lofty muse,  
For who would *Dryden's* polish'd verse refuse?  
His lips were moistened in *Parnassus'* spring,  
And *Phoebus* taught his *laureat* son to sing,  
How long did Virgil untranslated moan,  
His beauties fading, and his flights unknown;  
Till *Dryden* rose, and in exalted strain,  
Re-sang the fortune of the god-like man?  
Again the *Trojan* prince with dire delight,  
Dreadful in arms demands the lingering fight:  
Again *Camilla* glows with martial fire,  
Drives armies back, and makes all Troy retire.  
With more than native lustre *Virgil* shines,

And gains sublimer heights in *Dryden's* lines.

The gentle *Watts*, who strings his silver lyre  
To sacred odes, and heavens all-ruling fire;  
Who scorns th' applause of the licentious stage,  
And mounts yon sparkling world with hallow'd rage,  
Compels my thoughts to wing the heavenly road,  
And wafts my soul, exulting, to my God;  
No fabled *Nine*, harmonious bard! inspire  
Thy raptured breast with such seraphic fire;  
But prompting *Angels* warm thy boundless rage,  
Direct thy thoughts, and imitate thy page.  
Blest man; for spotless sanctity rever'd,  
Lov'd by the good, and by the guilty fear'd;  
Blest man! from gay delusive scenes remov'd,  
Thy Maker loving, by thy Maker lov'd;  
To God thou tunest thy consecrated lays,  
Nor meanly blush'd to sing *Jehovah's* praise.  
Oh! did, like thee, each laurel'd bard delight,  
To paint *Religion* in her native light,  
Not then with *Plays* the lab'ring press would groan,  
Not *Vice* defy the *Pulpit* and the *Throne*;  
No impious rhymer charm a vicious age,  
No prostrate *Virtue* groan beneath their rage;  
But themes divine in lofty numbers rise,  
Fill the wide earth, and echo through the skies.

These for *Delight*; -- for *Profit* I would read:  
The labour'd volumes of the learned dead:  
Sagacious *Locke*, by Providence design'd.  
T' exalt, instruct, and rectify the mind,  
Th' unconquerable *Sage*,<sup>4</sup> whom virtue fir'd,  
And from the tyrant's lawless rage retired,  
When victor *Caesar* freed unhappy *Rome*,  
From *Pompey's* chains, to substitute his own.  
*Longinus*, *Livy*, fam'd *Thucydides*,  
*Quintillian*, *Plato*, and *Demosthenes*,  
Persuasive *Tully*, and *Corduba's Sage*,<sup>5</sup>  
Who fell by *Nero's* unrelenting rage;  
*Him*<sup>6</sup> whom ungrateful *Athens* doom'd to bleed,  
Despis'd when living, and deplored when dead.  
*Raleigh* I'd read with ever fresh delight,  
While ages past rise present to my sight:

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<sup>4</sup> [Footnote in original] Cato.

<sup>5</sup> [Footnote in original] Seneca.

<sup>6</sup> [Footnote in original] Socrates.

Ah man unblest! he foreign realms explored,  
Then fell a victim to his country's sword!  
Nor should great *Derham* pass neglected by,  
Observant sage! to whose deep piercing eye  
Nature's stupendous works expanded lie.  
Nor he, *Britannia*, thy unmatched renown!  
(Adjudg'd to wear the philosophic crown)  
Who on the solar orb uplifted rode,  
And scan'd th' unfathomable works of God!  
Who bound the silver planets to their spheres,  
And trac'd th' elliptic curve of blazing stars  
*Immortal Newton*; whose illustrious name  
Will shine on records of eternal fame:

By love directed, I would choose a wife,  
To improve my bliss and ease the load of life.  
Hail *Wedlock*! hail, inviolable tie!  
Perpetual fountain of domestic joy!  
Love, friendship, honor, truth and pure delight,  
Harmonious mingle in the nuptial rite,  
In *Eden* first the holy state began,  
When perfect innocence distinguish'd man;  
The human pair, th' Almighty Pontiff led,  
Gay as the morning to the bridal bed;  
A dread solemnity the espousals grac'd,  
Angela the *Witnesses*, and GOD the Priest!  
All earth exulted on the nuptial hour.  
And voluntary roses deck'd the bow'r!  
The joyous birds on every blossom'd spray,  
Sung *Hymenians* to the important day,  
While *Philomela* swell'd the sponsal song,  
And Paradise with gratulations rung.

Relate, inspiring muse: where shall I find  
blooming virgin with an angel mind,  
Unblemish'd as the white-rob'd virgin quire  
That fed, O *Rome*! thy consecrated fire;  
By reason aw'd, ambitious to be good,  
Averse to vice, and zealous for her God?  
Relate, in what blest region can I find  
Such bright perfections in a female mind?  
What *Phoenix*-woman breathes the vital air,  
So greatly good, and so divinely fair?  
Sure, not the gay and fashionable train,  
Licentious, proud, immortal and prophane:  
Who spend their golden hours in antic dress,



Malicious whispers, and inglorious ease. --

Lo! round the board a shining train appears  
In rosy beauty, and in prime of years.  
*This* hates a flounce, and *this* a flounce approves,  
*This* shews the trophies of her former loves;  
*Polly* avers that *Sylvia* drest in green,  
When last at church the gaudy Nymph was seen;  
*Chloe* condemns her optics, and will lay  
'Twas azure sattin, interstreak'd with grey;  
*Lucy* invested with judicial pow'r,  
Awards 'twas neither -- and the strife is o'er.  
Then parrots, lap-dogs, monkeys, squirrels, beaus,  
Fans, ribbands, tuckers, patches, furbeloes,  
In quick succession, thro' their fancies run,  
And dance incessant on the flippant tongue.  
And when fatigu'd with ev'ry other sport,  
The belles prepare to grace the sacred court,  
They marshal all their forces in array,  
To kill with glances and destroy in play.  
Two skilful *maids*, with reverential fear  
In wanton wreaths collect their silken hair;  
Two paint their cheeks, and round their temples pour  
The fragrant unguent, and the ambrosial shower;  
One pulls the shape-creating stays, and one  
Encircles round her waist the golden zone;  
Not with more toil to improve immortal charms,  
Strove *Juno*, *Venus*, and the *Queen of Arms*,  
When *Priam's Son* adjudg'd the golden prize,  
To the resistless beauty of the skies.  
At length equip'd in love's enticing arms,  
With all that glitters and with all that charms,  
Th' ideal goddesses to church repair,  
Peep through the fan and mutter o'er a pray'r,  
Or listen to the organ's pompous sound,  
Or eye the gilded images around;  
Or, deeply studied in coquettish rules,  
Aim wily glances at unthinking fools;  
Or shew the lily hand with graceful air,  
Or wound the fopling with a lock of hair:  
And when the hated discipline is o'er,  
And *Misses* tortur'd will *Repent* no more,  
They mount the pictur'd coach, and to the play,  
The celebrated idols hie away

Not so the *Lass* that should my joy improve,  
 With solid friendship and connubial love:  
 A native bloom, with intermingled white,  
 Should set her features in a pleasing light;  
 Like *Helen* flushing with unrival'd charms,  
 When raptur'd *Paris* darted in her arms.  
 But what, alas! avails a ruby cheek,  
 A downy bosom, or a snowy neck?  
 Charms ill supply the want of innocence,  
 Nor beauty forms intrinsic excellence:  
 But in her breast let moral beauties shine.  
 Supernal grace and purity divine:  
 Sublime her reason, and her native wit  
 Unstrain'd with pedantry and low conceit:  
 Her fancy lively and her judgment free,  
 From female prejudice and bigotry;  
 Averse to idle pomp, and outward show,  
 The flattering coxcomb, and fantastic beau.  
 The fop's impertinence she should despise,  
 Tho' *sorely wounded by her radiant eyes*;  
 But pay due reverence to th' exalted mind  
 By learning polish'd and by wit refin'd,  
 Who all her virtues, without guile, commands,  
 And all her faults as freely reprehends.  
 Soft *Hymen's* rites her passion should approve,  
 And in her bosom glow the flames of love:  
 To me her soul, by sacred friendship turn,  
 And I for her with equal friendship burn:  
 In every stage of life afford relief,  
 Partake my joys and sympathize my grief;  
 Unshaken, walk in virtues peaceful road,  
 Nor bribe her reason to pursue the mode:  
 Mild as the saint whose errors are forgiven,  
 Calm as a vestal, and compos'd as heaven.  
 This be the partner this the lovely wife,  
 That should embellish and prolong my life;  
 A nymph! who might a second fall inspire,  
 And fill a glowing *Cherub* with desire!  
 With her I'd spend the pleasurable day,  
 While fleeting minutes gaily danc'd away:  
 With her I'd walk delighted, o'er the green,  
 Through ev'ry blooming mead, and rural scene,  
 Or sit in open fields damask'd with flowers,  
 Go where cool shades imbrown the noon-tide bowers,  
 Imparadis'd within my eager arms,  
 I'd reign the happy monarch of her charms;

Oft on her panting bosom would I lay,  
And, in dissolving raptures, melt away;  
Then lull'd, by nightingales, to balmy rest,  
My blooming fair should slumber at my breast.

And when decrepid age (frail mortals doom!)  
Should bend my wither'd body to the tomb,  
No warbling *Syrens* should retard my flight,  
To heavenly mansions of unclouded light;  
Though death with his imperial horrors crown'd,  
Terrific grinn'd, and formidably frown'd,  
Offences pardon'd, and remitted sin,  
Should form a calm serenity within;  
Blessing my *natal* and my *mortal* hour,  
(My soul committed to the eternal power)  
Inexorable death should smile, for I,  
Who *knew* to Live, would never fear to Die.

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