

THE
BACKSLIDER,
A DESCRIPTIVE MORAL
POEM,
IN FOUR BOOKS.

BY JOSHUA MARSDEN. I

*Late Missionary to Nova-Scotia, New Brunswick
and Bermuda.*

Where is the blessedness ye spake of. PAUL.

PLYMOUTH-DOCK;

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PREFACE.

*I*N committing this little poem to the press, I have neither the ignorance to suppose it without faults, nor the vanity of wishing it to be admired without excellencies; should it possess but little poetical merit, the subject, to those who fear God, must nevertheless be interesting. Every Christian Minister and good man must feel pained, that so many deluded by sin, should leave the fold of God, and wander from the path of piety: and more so, as it is to be feared, that many wander, who never more return to the Shepherd, and Bishop of their souls: Indeed there is no Christian who does not, more or less, mourn his deviations from the right path: none are above the necessity of caution, or beyond the reach of danger. "Take heed to thy ways," is as necessary to the good man, as to the sinner. Hence, a poem that contains cautions to deter, and counsels to guide, cannot be without its uses, even to those who have not wickedly departed from the Lord; to those who have in any degree forsaken the right way, I flatter myself, that it will be found a useful little manual. Some poor wanderer may perhaps, wish to know, what the BACKSLIDER has to say; and tho' he has forsaken sermons, may be allured by a verse, and profited by a poem: especially, when he finds that it symbolizes with his own state,

and encourages a return to his heavenly Father. Had the subject fallen into abler hands, the work might have been more worthy of the title: however, if I have not gold and silver to offer to the Lord's Tabernacle, I may be allowed to bring wool, and goat's hair. This trifle, was not more a labour of piety for the good of others, than it was a charm, to amuse my own mind. It was the link that sometimes connected two seasons of moderate weather, the interval of which, was either a snow storm, or a season of intense cold: when deep snow prevented my travelling, and the want of books afforded no refuge from idleness, but such alternatives as the PIPE: then, the pleasure of composing this, or some other little fragment, filled up my scraps of time, I hope at least, in an innocent, if not useful manner. My Tusculum, if I may call little things by great names, was sometimes the cottage of a fisherman, or the log house of a colonist; in a word, the Backslider was the child of a cold and severe climate, and was reared amidst the intense frost, deep snow, wild woods, and frozen lakes and rivers of Nova-Scotia. So that my subject, (a wandering from the ever delightful sun of righteousness,) was in some degree of fellowship with my situation; hence, should my verses not possess the SPHODRON KAI ENTHOUSTASTICON PATHOS, so necessary to good poetry, the above circumstances will plead some little in their favour. I know it may be objected, but why publish them without

revising? to this I answer, that at present, preaching seven times a week and other duties, allow me but little time: but a much stronger reason is, I have no inclination. The reader is welcome to the work in its present state, and with regard to the critic, he will hardly deign to look upon a book, the very title of which, as it must appear foolish, will at once consign both the author and his piece to contempt and oblivion. If any reader is still dissatisfied, I have only to observe in the words of a French author I have somewhere read, that “composing it was my heaven, (I speak after the manner of poets) transcribing it was my purgatory, and shall I say, that correcting it would be my hell. Seriously, I fear I cannot make it much better, and I should be sorry to make it worse: I hope it was written in the fear of God, and in this disposition I send it into the world; should it teach any wanderer the way to his God and Saviour, I shall bless the day when I wrote, with cold fingers, and my inkstand upon the stove to prevent it from freezing. Gain is not my object; the reader will have no reason to think that I write at his pockets,—had that been the case, I might have published this trifle in a five shilling quarto instead of a two shilling pamphlet. If there be any loss, it will fall upon the author, if much gain, the reader will have the greatest share. Go then my little poem, followed by thy author’s prayers, and carry

instruction to the hearts of those who prefer truth to criticism, and who esteem suitable counsels more than all the beauties of wit and eloquence.

But all is in his hand whose praise I seek.
In vain the poet sings, and the world hears,
If he regard not, though divine the theme.
'Tis not in artful measures, in the chime
And idle tinkling of a minstrel's lyre,
To charm his ear, whose eyes is on the heart,
Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,
Whose approbation—prosper even mine.

COWPER.

PLYMOUTH-DOCK, October, 1815.

TO

THE REV. JOSEPH BENSON,

THIS POEM

Is most respectfully inscribed,

BY HIS MUCH OBLIGED,

AND VERY AFFECTIONATE SERVANT.

THE AUTHOR.

THE BACKSLIDER,

A POEM.

CANTO FIRST.

Will ye also go away! John vi. 67.

ETERNAL Spirit! source of life divine!
Balm of the contrite heart, and bliss of mine!
Thy aid I ask, thy holy aid infuse,
Thro' all my theme, and sanctify the Muse.
In this cold climate,* where rough Boreas blows,
Pours his fierce hail, and spreads his dazzling snows,
Disrobes the green-wood, chills the solar beam,
And shakes his icy-sceptre o'er the stream.
Let me beguile stern winter's frigid ire,
With books divine a friend, and maple fire;
Or cheat the night-storm terrible and fierce!
With purest sweets of fancy-pleasing verse.
BENSON attend! tho' mighty oceans part,
Oceans divide the body, not the heart,

* Nova Scotia.

To thee, I know the moral muse is dear,
And no immoral thought shall blossom here :
Away ! ye strains, that pain the moral sense,
And flush the snowy cheek of innocence ;
Thou wilt not deem the sacred verse a crime,
A waste of talent, or a loss of time ;
A nobler work, my daily care employs,
A nobler work, and worthy of the skies :
But holy Writ has taught me to esteem,
Time more than gold, and moments to redeem ;
Hence while the stars roll down the silent night,
Ere blithe Aurora wake the infant light ;
I visit Siloa's ever hallowed stream,
And cull the flowers that beautify my theme.

With those who fall away my theme begins,
Who quit bright virtue to renew their sins,
The snowy whiteness of their raiment stain,
Like luna brighten, and like luna wane.
Long as the christian on the Lamb depends,
And ardent prayer with grateful praises blends ;
Fix'd on the prize his thoughts, his heart unstain'd,
His hope substantial, and his faith unfeign'd ;
Long as his filial love and zeal are pure,
His walk is steady, and his standing sure ;
Bright comforts too, maintain an equal pace,
Woe never blooms beneath the sun of grace :
Perennial joys, extatic views are his,
And rich supplies of undissembled bliss,

The bliss-right reason, thought, and faith dispense ;
Not blossoms ravish'd from the plant of sense,
Not those that bloom on honour's laurel'd-head ;
Not those dull joys, by ease and riches fed,
Nor those that wit, and beauty can bestow,
Or in the walks of fame, and learning grow :
But wishes peaceful, and a soul within,
Mild as the morn, as summer skies serene ;
Each day, devotion sweetens to delight,
While heaven's bright visions occupy the night ;
The toys of time are all esteemed as dross,
Fast grows his bliss beneath the bleeding cross ;
And should a trial pierce, or pain his feet,
The throne of smiling grace is doubly sweet,
Thence like a stream the purest comforts flow,
Thence on the soul the gales of Zion blow ;
In that sweet ante-chamber to the sky,
When man is absent—and Jehovah nigh ;
The happy soul can every care dismiss,
And in devotion feel an angel's bliss.
Do sorrows sting ? afflictive thoughts oppress ?
(For genuine piety may feel distress ;)
A brightening hope of speedy succour cheers,
And peace serenely glistens through his tears ;
Or, if a night of darkness should invade,
The star of promise glimmers through the shade :
Faith eyes the welcome light, and steers by this,
Through waves, and clouds, to never-fading bliss ;

Sorrow, the circle of a night may run,
And clouds a moment rob him of the Sun ;
But soon the rosy morn, in splendours drest
Beams, with celestial radiance thro' his breast
The clouds of sorrow, brighten into joy
The soul is succour'd, and the tear is dry.

Such is a christian's bliss ; but if he fall,
The beauties wither ; and he forfeits all :
Eden is Eden now, no more to him,
His wine is water, and his silver dim ;
As chilling liquids quench the gentle flame,
As envy blasts the fairest buds of fame.
As solar beams the glistening dew-drops dry,
As clouds dim all the lustre of the sky,
Sin will the finest bloom of grace destroy.

What deep afflictions date their rise from this !
The loss of Jesus is the loss of bliss !
From his sweet presence, if a soul depart,
Who is the centre—anguish cleaves the heart.
His smile is Eden ; but if vanish'd thence,
Ten thousand hells His awful frowns dispense.
Who flies his Maker, stamps a curse on all
The sweet enjoyments of this nether ball :
The more he wanders, still the more undone ;
No solid comfort blooms beneath the sun !

Earth's glittering toys, that bear the name of this,
Are only seeming, not substantial bliss ;
All are not pearls that grace a Lady's neck,
Or gold that glitters, on that flashy rake.

The sweets of earth, may shine in his esteem,
Who never tasted Zion's hallowed stream ;
But can a soul, by better knowledge taught
Find, in the sty of sense, a bliss of thought ?
Shall he, whose taste is form'd to things divine,
Burrow on earth, and mingle with the swine ?
He may effect such revolution strange ;
But O ! how much he suffers by the change !
Who, but a brainless madman or a fool,
Would leave a fountain, for a turbid pool ?
Part with the purest gold, that in its stead,
He might receive, an equal weight of lead :
Or who that cares an atom for his ease,
Would quit a quiet port, for stormy seas ?
Forsake Ausonia's fields, and fragrant bowers,
For Zembla's rocks, or Patagonia's shores ?
Yet he, who from his Saviour's presence flies,
Gives bliss for woe, for dross, immortal joys ;
A crown in purchase, for a pleasing lust,
And for a dream, a seat among the just.
Ah foolish souls ! can earth supply the place,
Of the rich blessings of redeeming grace ?

Who seeks a God, in aught that blooms below,
Gains a large share of self-created woe ;
Awhile the cloud-built good, may charm his view,
Till hope deceived, will sting his spirit through ;
Too mean to comfort, and too weak to save,
He grasps a bubble, dancing on the wave.
But grant the world, could happiness bestow ;
How short the date, of every bliss below !
A moment ends the rainbow's gaudy ray ;
And roses bloom, and wither in a day.
Can the wide world, blue sky, expansive seas,
Cheer the sad heart, the wounded spirit ease ?
Did all their variegated bliss unite,
To please the touch, the taste, the ear, the sight ;
Were sparkling diamonds, from "the flaming mine"
Peruvia's gold, and snowy silver thine ;
They cannot soothe a grief, repress a sigh,
Or fill thy breast with unembitter'd joy :
Put title, learning, wisdom, in the scale ;
Will title, learning, wisdom, aught avail ?
If Christ, and glory, sway the adverse beam,
The world is chaff, the universe a dream !

When the pure bliss of grace, is rightly known,
(A gem that seldom glitters on a throne)
Down with the world—its fairest glories fade,
Its brightest lustres, darken into shade.

So rich a flavour, and so fine a bloom,
The joys of hope, the sweets of faith, assume :
Beauty, and splendour, pay their court in vain ;
Honour, and gold, are treated with disdain ;
Sink, disappear, if grace her charms unfold ;
As stars, before the sun's refulgent gold :
But if the saint, from this high state decline,
If faith decay, and zeal become supine ;
Should he, unfaithful to Emmanuel prove,
Forget each vow, and slight redeeming love ;
Like Demas, cast his easy yoke aside,
And down the stream of ease, and riches glide ;
Can he uncheck'd, the sweets of sense enjoy,
Whose high-born relish, centre'd in the sky ?
Can he, whose soul was ravish'd with the cross,
Quit this high-flavour'd bliss, for sensual dross
And yet be happy !—tis impossible !
As well might Damien, on his bed of steel :
For when the sweets, of sacred things decrease,
And faith, and love, and joy, and meekness cease ;
The world can ne'er assume its former dress ;
It may beguile the soul ; but cannot bless ;
How sweet soe'er its guileful syrens sing,
Each moment brings a message on its wing,
That tells the wretch, he may the next expire ;
And sink unpardon'd, to eternal fire.
The soul is on a restless ocean toss'd,
No peace, no comfort, all his heaven is lost ;

A weary waste appears, on every hand,
Rough rocks, night brooding sky, and barren land ;
He tastes the bitter cup, of haggard Cain ;
And finds that guilt is still the heaviest chain :
At every point, the tortur'd soul is sore
With keener pangs, than any felt before ;
A thousand faded sweets, illusive rise ;
A thousand visions, of departed joys :
Thrice happy days ! when prayer aspiring flew,
To the blue sky, on every breath he drew ;
When every moment, in its rapid flight,
Dropp'd from its wings, the balm of new delight !
Then all his raptur'd soul was full of bliss,
And life, and death, and earth, and heaven, were his ;
To him the sacred house of prayer how sweet ;
When God is present, and his people meet ;
With vital extacy of soul he fed,
On the pure sacramental wine and bread ;
'Twas Eden to his soul, when Sabbath came ;
And each new means renew'd the holy flame ;
From the Priest's lips, he holy knowledge drew,
The word was manna, always sweet and new ;
While love, and praise, his hallow'd breast inspir'd,
With grace enraptur'd, and with glory fir'd.

Now busy thought alone, the past retains,
Embitters loss, and aggravates his pains ;

His peace, and vigour, life, and pardon past ;
So blossoms lose their beauty by a blast :
Where opening tints of fair devotion shed,
Their living bloom, and fragrance round his head :
Spring the rank weeds, of levity and vice,
And choke the glowing sweets of paradise.
Grace, like the lovely lily, or the rose,
Supreme of flowers ! a vivid lustre shows :
But every fatal sin, becomes a worm,
The rose to fade, the lily to deform ;
Now in his breast, corrosive anger burns,
Pale care revives, and feverish lust returns ;
From reason's hand, mad passion takes the reins,
And o'er the soul, despotic sway maintains ;
Tears up each sweet affection grace had sown ;
And hurls fair meekness from her placid throne.
The moral sense, diffus'd through every part,
The soul's fine nerve, and dial of the heart,
The delegate of heaven, this God within,
No longer trembles, at the approach of sin ;
Each holy confidence, is cast aside ;
Save, what delusion lends, to erring pride ;
Lukewarm, and heedless now of others weal,
Dim burns the fire of pure, seraphic zeal ;
Nor can the noblest cause on earth command,
The prompt exertion, or the liberal hand ;
The frost of sin is fallen on his head,
And every plant of paradise is dead

Or if a solemn thought, his mind engross,
It stings him, with his misery and loss ;
Sharp pangs of guilty dread attend his sin,
And recent falls inflame the hell within,
Fierce o'er his head, the waves of anguish roll,
And starless glooms enwrap the guilty soul ;
Mercy's mild throne, admits of no access,
And poignant grief, solicits no redress,
The earth is iron, to the languid prayer,
And heaven, as brass, forbids an entrance there.
But could he gain access, the roving mind
Shifts like the vane, that veers with every wind ;
The fire of love, extinguish'd in the breast,
The wish is faint, and formal the request.
Jehovah's ear is never gain'd by those,
Whose minds wide wander, or whose wishes doze ;
To mercy's seat, if we aright aspire,
Our thoughts must wish, our wishes be on fire ;
The steps are painful, and the passage steep ;
Tears must implore, and words in anguish weep ;
For life and pardon, every breath should rise,
And every nerve, for mercy agonize.

The soul, that once like fruitful Eden smil'd,
Is now a desert, desolate and wild ;
Where the mild sweets of paradise arose,
The thorny brier, or noxious night-shade grows ;

Beauty is chang'd for ashes ; and the dress
Of comely praise, for sullen heaviness.
Once, lucid truth an opening path display'd ;
Now, solemn sadness wraps the mind in shade ;
Hope, like a rising bird, is on the wing,
And death in terror clad, presents his sting ;
Perpetual fears his harrass'd mind annoy,
Perpetual sins, those guilty fears supply ;
While daily tempted by some dreadful gust,
Of anger, wrath, pride, bitterness, or lust,
He cannot conquer, or avoid the snare,
He cannot conquer, who is dead to pray'r.
Weak as a child, and as a leaf decay'd,
Of every touch, of every wind afraid ;
His native energies, that promise much,
Are, if he try them, like a broken crutch ;
Vows, promise, purpose, resolutions are,
Untried, the mighty thunderbolts of war ;
But let a trial enter on the list,
All break, and vanish, like a morning mist ;
Nothing, in feeble man the shock can bear,
Of conflict fierce ; but soul supporting prayer ;
Nothing, oppressive sorrow can sustain,
Keen trials, and excruciating pain ;
But comfort drawn, from smiling mercies throne,
By simple faith, and fervent prayer alone :
Sweet to the soul, are simple faith and prayer,
When Deity is felt, and worship'd there ;

Within his hidden temple, God reveals,
That mystic life, the true believers feel ;
Hence to your father, little children go,
Nor rest, till you his vital fullness know ;
By frequent acts, the habitude acquire,
Sparks, when united form a sacred fire :
A thousand times, the unestablished heart,
May waver, vibrate, from the centre start ;
Yet still essay to call the rover back,
Nor till 'tis fix'd on God, thy efforts slack ;
That point attain'd, thy soul will then aspire,
With eagles' wings, and mount as flames of fire ;
Free from corroding thought, and anxious care ;
Repose in God ; by vital faith and prayer,
Gliding along, for duty now is sweet ;
The soul's pure acts, in central Jesus meet.
But if the thought, by many things employ'd,
Should for a moment, rove or start aside ;
The recollected mind, the error sees ;
And quick recalls, the fugitive with ease :
Back to it's centre flies the steady soul,
As the touch'd needle, trembles to the pole.
Hence the sweet commerce, of a soul above,
Hence meekness, zeal, serenity, and love ;
Hence the pure streams, of vital comfort rise,
As springs derive their waters, from the skies.
But if this pure, delightful commerce drop ;
This vital spring—the whole machine will stop :

Faith, hearing, reading, watching, all decline ;
As plants unwater'd languish, droop, and pine.
Attest the solemn, painful truth I tell ;
Ye lost to balmy peace, who once ran well !
Whence did the fatal direful bane arise,
That blasted, faded, wither'd all your joys ?
How did you lose, the pearl of innocence,
How slide from grace, to ruinous offence ?
How sell your title, to a crown above ?
How shipwreck faith and quench seraphic love ?
Turn the bright page, of past experience o'er ;
The time recall the circumstance explore ;
Say, was it riches, poverty, or pride,
Your inward peace, and purity destroy'd !
Did wrath, or blasting envy, banish hence,
The fine emotions of the moral sense ?
Did pain (relentless fury) rob your peace,
Did snake-tongued slander, make your vigour cease ?
Ah no ! your hearts are witness these did not
Steal the bright gem, and fix the moral blot ;
You grew, and flourish'd long, in spite of these ;
So coral blooms, beneath tempestuous seas,
So vivid stars, on chilling nights are seen ;
And spruce in winter, wears a lively green.
Should we consult, that Oracle Saint Paul,
To find the fatal secret, of your fall ;
The faithful oracle, would quick declare,
Your ruin sprung, from intermitted prayer :

While closet opportunities were sweet,
And fervent prayer, enlivened each retreat ;
When stated hours renew'd, the precious toil,
The lamp of duty blazed, with holy oil ;
While man was lov'd, and Deity ador'd,
On fervent wing, your happy spirit soar'd ;
“ No tedious, irksome, melancholy void,
No vacant moment linger'd, unemploy'd ;”
For grace and nature mutually impart
A thousand sweet sensations to the heart :
How smooth the deep, how blue the vaulted sky !
How green the grass, how cool the zephyrs fly !
A sweeter fragrance, issues from the meads,
A brighter prospect opens thro' the glades ;
New beauties deck, th'aspiring mountains side,
Serener far, the river seems to glide ;
The ripening fruits, a richer tint disclose ;
A softer crimson, blushes on the rose ;
The mind within, a blooming Eden sees,
And all around, has privilege to please,
Till sky, earth, ocean, hill, and dale agree,
To aid the soul's internal melody ;
Higher, and higher, as your souls aspir'd,
On raptures wing! attracted, dazzl'd, fir'd !
Each sacred duty, more delightful grew ;
For ever pleasant, and for ever new.

And when you finish'd prayer, to mix with man,
A holy sweetness, through your converse ran ;

Like Moses, from the sacred *mount* you came,
Your face all splendour, and your hearts all flame ;
Prone to betray, your commerce with the sky,
The tear of glory, glistening in your eye.
Thro' the still, solemn seasons, of the night,
Before the sparkling East, was fring'd with light,
Silent and swift, your souls to God arose,
While every eye was seal'd, with deep repose ;
Happy to circumscribe the time of sleep,
And steal a peaceful hour to wake and weep ;
Or, with the voice of melody adorn
The infant light, and beautify the morn.
From busy life, and social visits then,
The scenes of folly, or the noise of men,
Eager to snatch a moment would ye fly,
And lose yourselves, in commerce with the sky ;
No time so prized, as that ye spent alone ;
No hours so sweet, as those before the throne ;
Where no officious step, or gazer rude,
Disturb'd your sweetly pleasing solitude.
To each new place, a moment reconcil'd,
'Twas all a *Bethel*, if Emmanuel smil'd.
The closet, meadow, dingle, greenwood shade,
The tang'ling thicket, or the lonely glade,
The sweet recess, alcove, or dripping grot,
The silent garden, or retired spot,
The dell, barn, hedge-row, or as mean a place,
As he was born in who redeem'd our race ;

Alike were welcome, if no eye could see,
But the all-seeing eye of Deity .
Thus ye aspir'd, till pure devotion dies,
And no warm hopes, no fervent wishes rise ;
For soon alas ! as ye decline in this,
And stated hours of pure devotion miss ;
The light of piety is wrapt in shades,
Her vigour dies, her blooming beauty fades.
The sweet recess, the solitary gloom,
The calm retirement, or the private room,
The lonely grotto, and the forest's shade,
Where raptur'd angels listen'd while you pray'd ;
Where all neglected ! and forsaken quite,
Save an unwilling form, at morn and night ;
That little form in time, became a toil,
Lamps cannot burn without replenish'd oil,
And every spring, of energy destroy'd,
You reason'd, paus'd, and laid the whole aside.
But does our ruin, all depend on this,
Is there no other moth, to fret our bliss ?
No other path, to lead the soul astray,
No other *lion* in the narrow way ?
Is this alone, the only rock that lies,
Across our passage to serener skies ?
Shall we not meet, on life's vexatious seas,
Keen storms of passion, and dead calms of ease ?
Deceitful quicksands of presumptuous trust,
Gulfs of despair and hurricanes of lust ?

Eddies, to draw us from our destin'd track,
Lights to decoy, and waves to beat us back ?
Ah yes ! a thousand enemies conspire,
To kill the life, and quench the holy fire ;
To choke the seed of virtue ere it grow,
Or make the growth, immeasurably slow ;
Round the saints' path, a thousand dangers meet,
Goads for his sides, and prickles for his feet :
Innate depravity will never rest,
Till that, or grace, be rooted from the breast,
Till all renew'd, the tainted heart will err,
And lies to truth, and sin to grace prefer ;
'Tis full of evil, and perfidious grown,
A den of thieves, where satan has his throne :
For still where saving grace, triumphant reigns,
This furious lion, struggles with his chains.
Though the mind's eye, by faith and love is fix'd
On God, and hope with purity is mix'd,
Still the *deceitful heart*, has some pretext,
To grasp at this world, and refuse the next ;
To fascinate the soul by some false show,
Of ease, respect, wealth, happiness below ;
By these deceitful shadows to destroy,
The pure intention, and the single eye ;
And lead the soul, from watchfulness and prayer,
To levity, concupiscence, and care :
Hence, many a pilgrim, by her secret wiles,
The cunning, cruel sorceress beguiles.

To make the soul an alien from the skies,
From satan's wiles, what oppositions rise.
In Eden first, his hellish arts began,
To circumvent, seduce, and ruin man.
He rules this lower world, without controul,
But most opposes, every gracious soul.
To wake desire, and make the passions blaze,
He'll importune the saint a thousand ways.
By him, each subtle artifice is tried,
The baits of pleasure, and the pomp of pride.
In every place, his snares in secret lurk,
On every tack, the subtle fiend can work.
But if the soul has one peculiar part
Expos'd, unarm'd, there satan hurls his dart.
He plies our hopes, our appetites, our fears,
And now a *seraph*, or a *snake* appears.
Lays all his plans, with diabolic skill,
To cheat the conscience, vitiate the will:
For avarice prepares his golden baits,
For softness opens pleasure's charming gates;
Fills Balaam's bosom with the love of gain,
And gnaws with jealousy, unhappy Cain.
Bids envy in the breast of Corah burn,
And churlish Nabal, holy counsel spurn.
To David's eye a Bath-sheba displays,
Gives Demas riches, Diotrephus praise,
Draws Tamer's heart, from virtue's path away,
And Judas prompts his master to betray :

But, if a weeping penitent appear,
Abash'd with guilt, and paralyzed with fear,
He hides the *promise*, tempts to unbelief;
And wraps his soul in darkness, doubt, and grief :
Yet prompts the daring sinner to rebel,
Nor mind those fables, judgment, wrath, and hell.

The world around with meretricious smile,
Has many lures, th' unwary to beguile.
Infectious vanities around us crowd,
Thick as the rain-drops, from an April cloud ;
These, if the soul one moment take her eye,
Of faith, and love, from everlasting joy,
Blot out each sweet idea, grace impress'd,
And fill with trifles, the devoted breast.
To some, vain riches spread their glittering snares,
This mounts to honour, that descends to cares ;
Books, wit, and talents, are a bane to these,
To those the love of company, or ease.
The lures of softness not a few trepan,
The love of fashion, or the fear of man ;
And some forego, their piety for life,
To please a husband, or to win a wife.
So fine a web the enemy can spin,
They please the sense, but overlook the sin :
So lawful, pure, and sanctified a state,
And then so lovely, so belov'd a mate,
Withal so yielding, pliable, and kind,
And much (they think) to piety inclin'd ;

Thus love and fancy, hope and passion plead,
And truth is warp'd to justify the deed ;
A deed, that writes, the history of all
Their future lives, in happiness or gall :
The rosy path becomes, a dismal bog,
The tie a galling chain the mate a clog ;
The bed of blooming violets so sweet,
A thorny brake to lacerate the feet.
These,—busy men, and busy life invade,
Bills, crosses, debts, embarrassments, and trade ;
They cannot go to church, they cannot pray,
The world has stolen all their time away.
The world—they did not apprehend the snare,
Has sold them care for peace, and gain for prayer.
Ah foolish souls ! to part with grace for trash,
And sell a future crown, for present cash.
Too many lose the pearl they should caress,
By boding fears, and blind unwatchfulness ;
And some whose hearts religion took deep root in,
Kill the sweet plant, by jangling and disputing :
These first grow cold, and wanting a pretence,
At ministers, or people take offence ;
While those, to mend their fortune, change their place,
Lose first the *means*, and then the power of grace.
Can he do less who hunting after pelf,
First gains his object, and next damns himself?
Some thousands fall by that accursed vice,
Close, grippen-fisted, dirt-sprung avarice ;

Their love of lucre rises to a pitch,
That, damn or save, they will, they must be rich ;
Nor Demas' fate, nor Balaam's can deter,
The myriads who against conviction err.
A many err by prejudice and spleen,
But more by anger irritably keen ;
Their touchy, squally spirits cannot brook,
A trivial error, or unpleasant look ;
Not arm'd with recollected prayer within,
They flame and fulminate, they rave and sin ;
Each little cross, or innocent mistake,
Acts like the squall that agitates the lake ;
" Hence in their intercourse those frequent breaks,
" That humour interposed, so often makes ;"
A dismal stormy latitude they sail,
And thousands have been shipwrecked in the gale.
These make their table a continual snare,
And lose in luxury their love for prayer ;
Or tippie at the fascinating bowl,
Till grace desert, and stupor seize the soul.
Some grow remiss enquiring after news,
But more by tatling all religion lose,
Watch o'er a brother's ways, with jealous heed,
Their own, they never look into, or weed,
Busy alike, with stranger, friend, or foe,
They kindle strife, and bitter discord sow.
Many, thy conduct, Solomon pursuing
By lovely woman meet their certain ruin.


This fascinating spell will oft surprise
The youth; that makes no covenant with his eyes,
Till plung'd within the pit of sin, he tell,
Illicit pleasure is the porch of hell;
Whence only deep repentance can reclaim,
And snatch the burning brand from out the flame:
Then fly the snare, nor touch it, or be lost,
Whoever parley's, parleys to his cost.

Not half so fatal rocky Scylla's shores,
Nor where Chyribdes whirls, and foams, and roars;
As the world's smile to some, O Syren coast!
Where all who anchor are for ever lost.
For many that endure each adverse test,
With brows of brass and adamant breast,
When tides of smiling reputation flow,
When sunny gales of fickle fortune blow,
When soft recumbent ease, and plenty shine,
When polish'd friends, and sparkling grandeur join;
Desert the rugged cross—and road to bliss,
And grow supine effeminate remiss:
Relax'd with pleasure's enervating ray,
They cast the cloak of piety away.
If lovely righteousness an eclipse feels,
And truth has persecution at her heels;
If thick the shafts of opposition fly,
If bigot men, and bigot devils try,
Their penal arts of malice, jail, and loss,
How many soft disciples stain the cross!

Fly from the camp, and lay their glory down,
They risk hell fire to calm the world's dread frown.
Thus thousands abdicate the holy cross,
For present blessings risk immortal loss ;
Leave the pure fountain of celestial joy,
To drink at broken cisterns always dry.
My soul ! avoid each fascinating snare,
And guard thy steps by discipline and prayer.

END OF CANTO I.

THE BACKSLIDER.



CANTO SECOND.

Keep thy heart with all diligence. Prov. iv. 23.

TO keep each grace alive we first possess,
And guard with holy care the tempted breast,
Demands incessant watching, toil, and care,
Incessant self-denial, faith, and prayer.
If we remit—the enemy's at hand ;
Shall the guard sleep—where all is hostile land ?
Christian ! 'tis but a moment---watch and pray,
Not like a coward cast thy shield away ;
The prize is certain---pilgrim, linger not,
Tho' rough thy journey, and severe thy lot ;
Tho' sharp the conflict ! terrible the blast !
'Tis but a moment, and the warfare's past :

Let gloomy unbelief no more cast down---
Thy crown is great---let no man steal thy crown,
Let this at least alleviate thy woes,
The saints of old had passions, they had foes,
Like thee, they oft a gloomy desert past,
Like thine, their sky was often overcast,
Their path thro' darkest dispensations lay,
And many a fiery trial cross'd their way :
They had their chilling doubts, and gloomy fears,
Their days of conflict, and their nights of tears ;
Fighting without, and fears within oppress'd,
And many a thorn was planted in their breast.
But they had consolation rich and rare,
Drawn down by mighty faith and fervent prayer ;
And hence with giant hearts and strength renew'd,
The thorny, steep ascent, they still pursu'd.
Let tempest rage, and furious billows whirl,
They ne'er forsook the ship nor left the helm
Till they arriv'd on the delightful shore,
" Where billows never beat, nor tempests roar."
Like them press on---thy recompense is sure,
For every evil, patience is a cure ;
Tis but a moment, and the strife is o'er,
Another blast may waft thee to the shore.
If sorely tempted, bear it---nor complain,
For Satan has a limit to his chain :
Let prayer be all thy solace and resource,
Thou canst not take a more judicious course ;

The winds may howl, waves dash, and night be dark,
Courage my brother!---Christ is in the bark!
Storms may arise, and billows round thee rave,
Thou still art safe while Christ is strong to save.

Then O! belov'd of God and greatly blest,
To wear his royal image on your breast!
Would you the bright immortal tract pursue?
The muse presents you with a sacred clue;---
First mark the bounds where sin and duty meet,
And ponder well the path-way of your feet;
Nor dare to step aside in thought or deed
Tho' custom, friendship, honour, interest plead:
Each heart-emotion guard with constant care,
And bend your souls to discipline and prayer;
With caution stir, and keep this truth
Till ye are dead to sin it lives in you.
Still onward to the great salvation press,
He loses all his love who aims at less;
Your secret enemy is deep within,
Your secret enemy---your bosom sin;
Remote from view the fatal traitor lies,
And only seen by penetrating eyes;
So wily adders lurk beneath the grass,
And bite th' unwary trav'lers as they pass;
So little clouds that scarcely speck the air
When the mild day is beautiful and fair,
Contain the storm that shakes the mighty seas;
And desolates the land, and strips the trees.

Look deep within---tear of each latent mask,
The lamp of truth will guide you in the task.
“*Man know thyself.*” Self knowledge is a part
Of holy science, and the christian art ;
For want of this, a thousand sad mistakes,
The mimic saint and mock disciple makes.
Hence the green novice deems the tempest past,
Because he felt a solitary blast ;
Or having borne, unhurt, a trifling shock,
Believes his virtues moveless as a rock :
A show of zeal usurps religion’s place,
And warm ideas pass for real grace ;
A scrap of knowledge, and th’ exterior paint
Of pseudo christians, form the finish’d saint ;
Big swelling words of vanity are spoken,
Ere self is humbled, or the spirit broken :
And some profess fair purity within,
Clean hearts---but still an Ethiopian skin.
These are so careful of a brother grown
Spy all his faults but overlook their own.
The self-conceited fancy heaven is sure,
The self-sufficient need no gracious cure ;
A rotten, threadbare, homespun righteousness,
Is deem’d a rich inimitable dress :
Part is reform’d, some sins are laid aside ;
But what is lost in vice is gain’d in pride.
Thus Satan gains his tribute not the less,
And owns his servant in another dress :

“Man know thyself,” thy safety centres here ;
Nor buy this knowledge, as the most, too dear.

These, and a train of ills the muse could glance
Spring from the root of mole-eyed ignorance.
Hence, let the christian prove himself, and try
With steady balance, and impartial eye ;
Be every secret fold of nature seen,
And not a foe to faith or morals screen ;
Not a minute offence or latent stain,
Or thought that dying would inflict a pain.
Still on your guard, still on your watch-tower stand,
Tho' all are friends within, 'tis hostile land ;
Hence, lest temptation take you by surprise ;
Like the cherubic flames, be full of eyes :
All circumspective fear, all cautious grace,
All living zeal, all active watchfulness ;
Instinct with eyes, let each idea roll,
And turn them inward, full upon the soul.
Fix on thy God an eye of filial fear ;
On Jesus fix an eye of faith sincere :
Fix on the fiend a wary jealous ken,
And guard thy spirit from the ways of men.
The soul that grows in wisdom, love, and power,
Looks to the Lamb for help each fleeting hour :
He looks to Jesus and to him alone,
For grace to help, and mercy to atone :
He looks to Jesus in his deepest grief,
For present comfort, succour, and relief.

In fierce temptation, and corroding care,
He looks to Jesus who dispels the snare.
When glooms surround and thicken o'er his head,
And rough and thorny is the path to tread ;
He looks to Jesus, and the morning light,
Succeeds the horrors of a dismal night.
If worldly friends, and worldly comforts fall,
And envy bite, and calumny assail,
He looks to Jesus in the time of need,
And finds the rock a refuge from the reed.
By wealth exalted, or by want depress'd,
By friends forsaken or by friends caress'd,
He looks to him his comfort hope and guide,
And all is sweeten'd bless'd and sanctified.

Let those who fall away thy steps deter,
Thou too art weak and liable to err ;
If mighty saints from lofty summits fall,
Like ruin'd castles, or a batter'd wall ;
If Salem's Prince, the man of holy fame,
Distinguish'd zeal, and memorable name,
Whose manners charm'd, whose morals brightly shone,
Whose actions were illustrious as his throne,
Whose sacred harp could soothing peace infuse,
Whose melodies were equal'd by his muse :
If David from his lofty state declin'd,
If he debas'd his noble, upright mind,
From virtue's holy path-way step'd aside,
And lost his comfort as he left his guide ;

Then frailer mortals need to weep and fear,
With trembling venture, and with caution steer.

Pilgrim repel the sparks of inbred sin,
A foe is fatal that has strength within ;
Easy each infant-thought we may controul,
But not the time-form'd habit of the soul.
Happy the man who each idea spies,
And marks emotions how, and whence they rise,
Fosters the good, but curbs the viper race,
By strength, deriv'd from all-sufficient grace :
He shall from strength to strength delightful rise,
More clear his light, more pure and sweet his joys.
But those who from the sacred task decline,
In fearful barrenness are left to pine.
God never gives to man the precious loan
Of grace and help, to sink him to a drone :
High on the scale of excellence we rise,
When, what the Lord dispenses man employs ;
Pleas'd to receive, assiduous to improve,
And make heaven's gift the spring of faith and love.
Shall sky-born goodness make us more remiss ?
Will squalled sloth augment celestial bliss ?
Omissions are a bane to peace, tho' less
Abhor'd than crime or actual wickedness :
Who hides his talent shall as surely die,
As he who durst his Maker's laws defy.
Not rub'd—the brightest, purest steel will rust,
Not sweep'd—the cleanest room is soil'd with dust :

Still waters soon corrupt and stagnant grow,
And those alone are pure that ceaseless flow ;
So is the human soul, without due care,
Unceasing vigilance, and active prayer ;
A field of noxious weeds, a stagnant lake,
A barren desert, or a thorny brake.

Grace is more tender than the plant of sense ;
Too soon, frail mortals lose its influence,
Too soon we put JEHOVAH'S candle out,
By cold neglect; or unbelieving doubt :
Each moment misapplied, each oversight,
May dim the lustre of supernal light,
A bolder act of sin, may spurn, controul,
And cancel half the vigour of the soul,
Rob us of all our purity and grace,
And fix the stigma, time cannot erase :
So the bleak east winds un auspicious blast,
Lays all the garden's pride, and beauty waste.
A thousand foes, the scandal may proclaim,
A thousand upright friends unite to blame,
Malice all eager, to divulge the fall,
Writes every failing, with a pen of gall ;
Flies thro' the land ; and with an eagle's speed,
Resounds the crime, from Dover to the Tweed ;
And then, ah then ! what feelings must ensue,
To make the guilty bosom bleed anew !
Without 'tis scandal, and within regret ;
And if another step is wanting yet,

To give the mournful picture deeper gloom,
It is a broken heart, and early tomb !
“ But can a solitary sin controul,
“ The holy bias of a sky bent soul ?
“ Can one omission make devotion cease,
“ Distract the mind, and spoil supernal peace ?
“ Shall one improper action, word, or thought,
“ On the white robe of virtue, fix a blot ?
“ A single act of sin—impossible !
“ Habits alone must pave the way to hell !”

Stay friend, your moral questions shall receive,
As clear an answer, as the muse can give ;
First let this solemn truth be studied well,
A single sin is half a miracle ;
As sure as sun-rise is the cause of light,
Each sin has its attendant sattelite ;
A conscience tender, delicate, and nice,
Feels the minutest touch of mental vice ;
The smallest sius, a sacred sorrow dart ;
Repentance follows, and a contrite heart ;
The pleading tear, the supplicating sigh,
Th’ uplifted hands, the interceding eye,
Join’d to a distant glimmer of the cross,
Relieve the conscience and repair the loss ;
A solemn peace, o’er all the bosom steals,
And he; who feels it heaven, and pardon, feels
Again the flames of pure devotion blaze,
The heart is warm’d with gladness, love, and praise,

Hope smiles, the mind is easy and serene,
And brightest prospects, gladden all the scene.
But if a new relapse should soon succeed,
And this another, and another breed,
Till every filial fear is laid aside,
And care, and caution, yield to sloth and pride ;
Till levity and trash, the mind engross,
Staining the glory of the bleeding cross ;
Till hateful lust a charming aspect wear,
Vice please, and foul obliquity seem fair ;
The moral sense abused, and stunn'd all o'er
Will slightly plead, and quickly plead no more :
Each inward admonition now grown less,
And smother'd every feeling of distress,
Returning tides of vicious passions prove,
The death of duty, and the grave of love.
Each pure intention, sweetly filial fear,
Each blooming hope, each rapture-speaking tear,
Meekness, soft transcript of Emmanuel's breast,
Sky soaring pray'r, and truth with lucid vest,
Mild mercy, chastity, with snowy weeds,
And Lynx-ey'd prudence, queen of comely deeds,
Content, and lily-modest lowliness,
Firm faith, and flame-bright zeal in reason's dress,
With quiet resignation, all serene,
And patience, suff'ring, blooming ever-green.
All all rich free exhaustless grace bestows,
That faintly glimmers or refulgent glows,

Where sin is lov'd—waste, wither, disappear,
So winter spoils the bloom of half the year ;
So pain and grief, the fairest forms consume,
So death huris all our glories in the tomb.

The soul less conscious, of unhallow'd deeds,
From weak to wicked, bad, to worse proceeds ;
Vice, in its progress, gains a ten-fold strength,
As rivers widen by their growing length.
Each act of sin, impels the soul to more,
So waves behind, impel the waves before.
Both vice and virtue move, by due degrees,
As twigs in time grow up to mighty trees.
None are all virtuous in a moment's space,
Nor will an instant stablish us in grace ;
Progressive virtue, forms the christian tone,
And vice repeated, turns the heart to stone.
A few indeed, have rapidly declin'd,
Or wore the mask of piety to blind ;
Then in a trice, away the wizard threw,
Claim'd their old shape, and shew'd their blackmoor
Or if the piety they long profess'd, [hue.
Was the true index of an upright breast,
A mystic something had decay'd the root,
Eve fell before she eat the fatal fruit ;
Iscariot e'er his final damning vice,
Had sold himself to sordid avarice ;
And Demas, some unhallowed view possest,
Ere this vile world claim'd empire o'er his breast.

Man mounts the scale to heaven or sinks to hell,
As virtues flourish, or as vices swell ;
Yet in their speed, a striking difference lies,
The good move slowly, but the sinner flies ;
So on the earth, since the first curse impress'd,
The seal of barren, on its florid breast,
Thistles grow rapidly, and noxious weed,
But slow and gradual rise the cornful seed.
A human heart is sin's congenial soil,
Where vices bloom without the tiller's toil ;
Yet is averse to raise, at any price,
The righteous tree, the plant of paradise ;
In every human breast, as sin prevails,
The holy fire, the sacred vigour fails ;
Each virtue lost, unceasing vices spring,
And add new feathers to corruption's wing,
Till spite of all the barriers of the creed,
Truth virtue conscience faith and goodness bleed.
The soul can ne'er two equal master's own,
If virtue fills, then sin resigns the throne ;
If hateful vice regain the whole command,
Then lovely grace, is banish'd from the land ;
Hence, lawless passions rule with tyrant power,
And gain new strength, and root from hour to hour ;
Hence fair religion, once the queen within,
Is led in triumph by the tyrant sin.

THE BACKSLIDER.



CANTO THIRD.

Thine own backslidings shall reprove thee. Jer. ii. 19.

USEBEUS, bright in grace, and virtue shone,
Thro every church his love and zeal were known,
And many an hardy blast, he firmly stood,
His life a lovely thread of moral good ;
Were any sick, 'twas his continual care,
Beside the sick man's bed, to bend in pray'r ;
Whate'er for God his truth-taught judgment plan'd,
A generous soul, warm heart, and ready hand
Were swift to execute,—his ardent zeal
Was prompt at duties call, or woes appeal ;
To hateful strife, and blasting envy dead,
Peace o'er his breast, her gentle banner spread ;

A man of love,—for all his kindness shar'd ;
A man whom e'en his enemies rever'd ;
Calm, upright, zealous, active, sweetly kind,
Foe to his own, to others failings blind ;
Soft as a lamb,—'twas his unguarded side ;
And there the tempter his devices plied,
Turning from Christ his single eye aside
To other objects, lawful in pretence ;
But baneful, poisonous in their consequence ;
Till from its centre warp'd, th' unguarded mind,
In each repeated act of faith declin'd,
And in a fatal, inauspicious hour,
He fell a victim to the tempter's power :
He fell, but did not quickly rise again,
Abase himself, and wash away the stain.
At first, he wist not that his strength was fled,
Nor thought himself by sin a captive led,
Subtle and fine, the tempter wove the snare,
A greater shock, had rous'd him into pray'r :
Yet sweet delights in duty soon decrease,
The holy flames of pure devotion cease,
Omissions multiply the moral sense,
Starts not with horror at a small offence :
And now a wider latitude ensues,
In fancy, conscience, conversation, views,
Unlawful images the fancy please,
Tho' stain'd---the conscience feels an awful ease,

Th' unbridled tongue, at silly random moves,
And the warp'd judgment, scarcely disapproves.
Unchaste desires, and base emotions rise,
Burn in his heart, and sparkle in his eyes.
False hopes, or gay deceit, his bosom shares,
Pride elevates, or rapid anger tears.
Around him, waves of guilty passions roll,
And form a tempest in his fallen soul :
Or lost in carnal ease, as bad, or worse,
He feels no horror, and he dreads no curse :
Yet moments in the soothing calm appear,
When thund'ring conscience stuns his frightened ear.
Hark ! from his lips, what keen reproaches dart,
When rous'd to feel the baseness of his heart :
O faithless faithless heart ! I know thee now,
Of all my foes, the worst, the vilest ; thou
Art cause of all my sorrow, guilt and strife,
Source of my sin, and torment of my life !
To harm me all the powers of darkness strove,
The world spread every lure to tempt my love,
Satan and sin, their gay seducements spread,
But I resisted, and the Devil fled ;
Tempted, but still I bore Emmanuel's yoke,
Till my weak heart its firm allegiance broke.
Why did I listen to thy lying creed !
Why trust a rotten prop ! a broken reed !
A faithless bow, a cavern of deceit,
A painted harlot, an insidious cheat :

Whoe'er with wily flesh, and blood confers,
Like me alas ! that awful moment errs,
Who listens here, will pay, with many a sigh,
And knowledge rare by sad experience buy.
Beauty is a bewitching, syren snare,
Riches, and flattering friends, deceitful are ;
A honey'd tongue may hide a world of gall,
But a deceitful heart out-vies them all.
Fool that I was, to tempt the faithless brake !
He's sure to smart who trifles with a snake.
Why did I, for the short delights of sin,
Sell peace and joy, and purity within !
His anger risk, whose mandate can destroy,
Our creature comforts ere we taste the joy ;
Make each lov'd idol, bitterly chastise,
And plague us in the measures we devise.
Me long his pity sav'd, his love caress'd,
His smile delighted, and his presence bless'd ;
But ah ! those blessings, are for ever lost !
The sick man's refuge, and the good man's boast.
And now alas ! I wander to and fro,
My guilty bosom is the throne of woe ;
Without a hope that pardon will relume,
The moral darkness of my mental gloom,
Or lift my feet up, from this miry pit,
In light and love with Christ once more to sit !
For if abused mercy would restore
The real bliss which absent I deplore,

And I retrieve my forfeit peace, as swift
As thro' neglect, I lost the precious gift ;
The blessed loan, I might abuse again,
Plunge into sin, and feel a deeper stain.
Sore tempted, falling, lost, betray'd, undone,
Too weak to conquer, and too fond to shun :
I know that sin is bane, and virtue bliss,
Yet strange ! I follow that, abandon this.
This moment lo I fall, the next repent,
Curse my base heart, and in the dust lament ;
Sincerely weep, condemn, abhor and pray,
Yield the next hour, relapse and fall away.
See the big tear just starting from my eye,
Mark the deep anguish of that inward sigh ;
But all are lost, nor sighs nor tears can win,
The mighty bias of my soul from sin :
Condemn'd a thousand times without avail,
My bosom pleads, I listen to the tale ;
The tempter lays the bane and gilds the cup,
And I unguarded drink the poison up.

A thousand flaws my resolution mar ;
And like a passing cloud or shooting star,
Each holy thought is now a transient guest,
That flits, but does not settle in my breast.
Some glimmering vestiges I often trace,
The mournful remnants of my former grace ;
But these alas ! are languishing and few,
Like quivering leaves just dropping from the bough,

Or the morn's blue mist and Ephemeral dew.
For me no comforts from the Spirit flow,
It's gentle gales on me no longer blow ;
No cheering smiles Emmanuel's face adorn,
My gloomy night has no reviving morn :
No blooming sweets of paradise I taste,
No springs of living pleasure glad the waste,
Summer is gone, and copious harvest past,
And I unsav'd must brave the winter blast.
For not alone my comforts are decay'd,
A dismal cloud has wrap'd my soul in shade,
All inward power, all inward life is lost,
Each heav'n-born vigour the devout man's boast ;
Gay lucid hope, fair daughter of the sky,
No longer lifts my rapture-speaking eye ;
Celestial love, bright jewel of the breast,
Of all our bliss the richest and the best
Glow in my heart no more, no more inspires,
Serenest joy, and consecrated fires :
Love's fairest daughters, prayer and praise decline,
So grapes decay when sap forsakes the vine.
And faith's bright vision of a world unseen,
Where trees of pleasure bloom for ever green,
Is past—a cloud of darkness guilt and sin,
Has dim'd the brightness of that light within.
In this dilemma all bereft of aid,
By God forsaken, and by fiends betray'd,

Whither for peace and refuge shall I turn !
My heart that sickens and my eyes that mourn !
Had I in this sad school of deep distress,
A soothing friend to comfort and to bless,
To counsel, warn, encourage, and reprove,
To bear my load, fulfil the law of love :
It might assuage my grief, it might repress
The pangs I feel, and make distraction less.
The voice of love a lenient balm affords,
Of sweetest counsel and consoling words,
Dear to the suffering soul when much oppress'd,
Is the soft pillow of affection's breast ;
Grief pours her sorrow in the list'ning ear,
Sigh follows sigh, and tear descends for tear,
Mild words and soft expressions well applied,
Like beds of roses scatter fragrance wide,
And as the oil Samaria's son convey'd,
Heal the torn heart, relieve the throbbing head :
Friendship, divinest bond of sweet delight,
Is bliss unrival'd when the just unite,
The pure in heart foretaste the joys above,
In the mild sweets of undissembled love.

But me depriv'd of this divine relief,
Must feel the pangs of solitary grief !
Brother and friend, my hated path forsake,
And shun my converse as they shun a snake.

Hence doom'd to bear the reprimanding look,
And blotted from affection's holy book,
I wander desolate, forlorn, alone,
Sigh to the winds, and to the desert moan.

Thus full of silent grief and real woe,
Where shall the cross'd desponding sinner go !
To God he does not lift his aching eye,
Or raise his languid wishes to the sky ;
Lost in the greatness of his moral stain,
He deems the best expedient prayer, in vain :
And like a broken vessel on the wave,
Without a helm to guide or port to save,
His harrass'd soul is sorely toss'd about,
The sport of sorrow, sadness, fear, and doubt.
On this hand gulfs of hideous ruin glare,
There yawns the roaring whirlpool of despair :
But no mild Saviour walks upon the tide,
To bid the winds be still, the waves subside.
Sometimes he sees a peaceful port at hand,
He gains a glimmer of the promis'd land,
But sin and nature with resistless sway,
Bear him in spite of all the other way.
Ask him to read the word of life, and there
Obtain a peaceful haven from despair ;
Fix'd unbelief starts up the common plea,
Such boundless goodness cannot reach to me ;
For me no portion in the gospel shines,
For me no blessings fill the sacred lines,

The page of promise is a rich repast,
Sweeter than purest honey to the taste ;
Yet I no peace in all the scriptures feel,
I cannot loose the promise hiding seal,
Of wrath, and death, and penal woe I read,
And meet a curse where I a comfort need,
But not a text to animate my breast,
Or set these vexing weary doubts at rest.
How rash, how wild, how sore a thing it is,
To quit the source of never-failing bliss,
And for a moment's pleasing sin forego
Months of sweet peace, and risk eternal woe :
How easy God in righteous judgment may,
Tear every idol from our hearts away,
Turn the delights that issued in our fall,
To teasing cares, and rivulets of gall.
Who leaves his Maker for the lure of gold,
Who for a friend forsakes Emmanuel's fold,
Who to procure a reputable name,
Puts out the vital spark of holy flame,
May find the glitt'ring gold a shining curse,
The friend belov'd a broken reed or worse ;
The smiling reputation not exempt
From sad reverse, may issue in contempt :
Or God in pity to effect his cure,
May blast his property, and leave him poor :
And by a penal stroke, his soul to save,
Consign the friend he doats on to a grave :

Permit a Shimei's malice to asperse
His name, and all his weakness to rehearse ;
Till every hope of creature comfort flies,
And every flower of consolation dies,
Each cistern drain'd, each darling Joseph lost,
Each gourd consumed, and each prospect cross'd,
He feels his error, owns the dreadful rod,
And trembling sinks upon the arm of God.

But if these means of rigid mercy fail,
Restraining mercy may recall his bail :
And if the wretch is madly bent on ill,
God may give up the sinner to his will :
May grant him all his wicked heart requires,
His thought encircles or his eye desires ;
Till prospects smile, and summer friends abound,
Till riches flow, and oil and wine surround,
Till curs'd with every blessing nature leads,
Health, honour, gold, ease, luxury, and friends,
No hand to stop him, and no rein to check,
The loos'ned bridle laid upon the neck,
He scours the lawn, or courses o'er the plain,
Or with favonian breezes skims the main,
Nor marks the dismal shoals beneath his lee,
Nor heeds the gulf of deep eternity,
Till on the gloomy coast his bark is tost,
He strikes, and sinks, and is for ever lost.

Heavens! shall we linger, trifle, and expect;
God and our hearts will wink at each neglect:
Shall we the line of lawful things extend,
And rashly venture to its farthest end?
O blind to danger! and a point so nice,
Virtue's last limit is the verge of vice:
Fine are the lines that good and ill divide,
Virtue on this, vice on the other side;
A thought, a wish, a warm desire may stroll
Across the bounds, and desecrate the soul,
So easy past—but with unceasing pain
And tears of woe, we find our peace again:
Or if perchance we should regain the bliss,
Which more than three to one that wander miss,
Will our eternal crown as brightly shine,
As if we ne'er had left the path divine?
The saints might long suspect us insincere,
Our friends would tremble, and our pastor's fear:
The sacred cause thro' every vein might bleed,
And foes in triumph blaze abroad the deed;
While many a painful thought would pierce the breast,
And many a bitter hour disturb the rest.
How needful 'tis, to pray and watch and weep,
And steer with care---we sail a faithless deep;
When all is peaceful as a summer's lake,
Ere zephyrs blow or little billows break;
When not a motion, not a cloud is seen,
Or breath of wind to trouble the serene;

Be on thy guard, the fatal storm is nigh,
Still moves the tempest that shakes all the sky.
Who would a moment lay him down and doze,
With death before him and eternal woes!
And is he less the dupe of folly? say
Who dare be trifling, jocular, and gay,
While life, and death, and wrath, and glory strive,
To keep his solemn thought and just concern alive.
See the Messiah in our vale and trace,
A smile of mirth on that mild sorrowing face,
No he was thoughtful---'Twas a solemn deed
For sin to suffer, and for man to bleed.


Shall man be trifling at the vast expense
Of prayer reflection time and penitence?
When death with all his solemn train is near,
The grave, shroud, coffin, mattock, pall and bier!
The land unknown, th' irrevocable doom,
Th' eternal world of terror and of gloom?
Go trifler to the dying sinner's bed!
Or when the vital spark of life has fled,
Ask the lost spirit, ask the lifeless clod,
If levity and trifling lead to God!
Who greedily imbibes a mortal pest,
Who puts a deadly scorpion to his breast;
Acts not so rashly mad, and desperate,
As he who trifles on the brink of fate.

Who owns a thought, would sure his footsteps guard,
If near a Tiger's den or raging Pard ;
And have we not a roaring lion near,
To wake our caution, stimulate our fear ?
A thousand fiends surround us in disguise,
Of every horrid name and giant size ;
Foes to his peace, the good man's path they track,
Allure the simple, turn the unsteady back ;
And ply their arts at that peculiar place,
By nature weak, till fortified by grace :
'They look thro' man, his inmost essence spy,
Form the wild wish, and feed th' unhallowed joy ;
'The tender buds of infant grace deform,
And raise the blasts of anger to a storm.
To give the timid sinner wider scope,
To cheat the conscience with a lying hope ;
'They hold a magic glass before the sight,
That shows each object in a different light :
Hence thirst of money, avarice of praise,
The love of fashion, and the love of ease,
Appear as lawful innocent and good,
As sprightly health, and life sustaining food :
Soft, needless self indulgence steals the name
Of balm for health to wash away the blame ;
When duty calls, 'tis silenc'd with a plea
'Tis damp, I'm sick, or have not been to tea :
Here O ye faithful danger chiefly lies ;
These are the wiles the cunning tempter tries ;

An angel's beatific form he wears,
While truth perverted baits his hellish suares ;
Beneath the veil of unforbidden things,
As bees in buds he hides his poison'd stings ;
We taste, we dally with th' ensnaring bait,
And often find our danger when too late.

END OF CANTO VII.

THE BACKSLIDER.



CANTO FOURTH.

I will heal their Backslidings. Hos. xiv. 4.

THE first emotions of the human will,
Are like descending from a lofty hill ;
We go a little, but as we proceed,
Towards the bottom, feel a quicker speed ;
Swifter and swifter, lo we run we fly,
Till choice is chang'd to sad necessity.
If roving fancy eye th' ensnaring bane,
Thought may admit and court the moral stain ;
Nature is tinder and will easy catch,
If we or Satan but apply the match ;
From warm to warmer quick the flame proceeds,
From thoughts to wishes,--from desires to deeds ;

Till the soul start as from a dream and miss,
All but the memory of her former bliss.
Stern justice quick demands her full arrears,
Of death and hell, but pitying mercy spares,
And grants the ruin'd rebel longer space,
To bend repentent at the throne of grace ;
In deep abasement to confess the deed,
Or that, or vengeance, makes the sinner bleed :
Weeks, months of pain succeed the vile offence,
Keen sorrow, burning shame, and penitence ;
So dear the short-liv'd sweets of sin we buy,
Risk endless glory for a guilty toy,
That toy a plague and torment when possess't,
Stings like an adder and corrodes the breast.

But some who fall are soon restor'd again,
To all they lost with unexpected gain.
Ere the soft heart be harden'd into stone,
Ere virtue be subverted from her throne,
Ere the last check of conscience die away,
Ere evil habits gain despotic sway,
They weep their fall, pray, supplicate, and groan,
Deep in the dust at the all-gracious throne ;
Till mercy heal their woes, their sins forgive,
And bid the weeper shine, arise and live.

Some often fall and still as oft repent,
Unstable as the wat'ry element ;

Not firmly grounded on the mighty rock,
Not like the beaten anvil to the shock ;
'Twixt good and ill they vibrate too and fro,
Like tender osiers when the breezes blow ;
So weak the rapid tide they cannot stem,
Nor bear the fiery foes that harrass them ;
Yet so *sincere*, that in some happy hour,
The Lord redeems them from the tempter's power,
Confirms and fortifies, with grace and zeal,
And makes them steady as a wall of steel.
Some, all the power of fair religion lost,
A lifeless form, an empty shadow boast ;
Faith, love, and zeal are blotted from the breast,
Yet conscience sleeps serene in carnal rest ;
Knowledge, and barren duties still supply,
The place of holy love and holy joy ;
Fill'd with a false Laodicean ease,
Serene, tho' cold, and settled on their lees,
They jog along without a care to gain,
The solid bliss they lost without a pain.

But some who deviate and deeply err,
Shut the bright gates of bliss and woo despair,
The night and day in misery are past ;
Each more acutely painful than the last.
The body's ill we may awhile sustain,
Smile on the rack, and triumph over pain ;
But who can bear the spirits keen distress,
What mind conceive it, or what words express ;

The war-made widow may forget her grief,
Tears sooth her woe, and hope afford relief.
A mother's sorrow like a torrent wild,
When death has rob'd her of an only child,
Yields to the hope of meeting in the sky,
Where roses never fade nor children die.
Pain feels a respite of severest woe,
When opiates lull and cheering cordials glow ;
And still amidst excruciating smart,
Hope soothes the pang that tears the throbbing heart,
Beguiles the ills that weeping mortals feel,
And greatly lessens what she cannot heal.
Amidst the furious storm that round him pours,
The wind that whistles and the sea that roars ;
The hardy tar upon some foreign shore,
Helm-broke card wash'd away and canvas tore,
His mast o'erboard, his vessel a mere wreck,
And surging billows rolling o'er the deck ;
Feels hope support his anxious mind, and hark !
He cheers his shipmates, tries to save his bark.
Thus every ill with which frail mortals cope,
Is mix'd with drops of life-inspiring hope.
But who can sooth the spirit's keen disease,
What balm can heal it or what gifts appease ?
Woe is the *motto* of our mortal state,
And ills on ills for ever round us wait.
Thick as the leaves of autumn on the plain,
And fierce as storm-lash'd billows of the main.

But all the evils erring mortals feel,
The lifted axe, the dislocating wheel,
The fever's rage, the stone's exquisite smart,
Are nothing to this demon of the heart.

In terror clad the Deity is seen,
But no mild intercessor stands between
The guilty soul, and sin avenging God,
To calm his fury and arrest his rod ;
With terms of peace fierce wrath to reconcile,
And bid red burning justice wear a smile.
On guilt alone this deadly night-shade grows,
Guilt, fruitful mother of our many woes.
Fears spring from guilt, and unbelief from fear,
That deems all lost, this reads no mercy near.
To hapless souls endued with passions strong,
These hateful mental maladies belong.
Sin swells immense, the mountain magnifies,
And blots the star of mercy from the skies.
Each fault the stamp of aggravation bears,
Each stain a tint of deepest crimson wears ;
Each slip in fancy, action, thought, or word,
Stings like an asp, or pierces like a sword,
While dread without and terror from within,
Annex a direful curse to every sin.
Now Satan every hellish art essays,
To increase the storm and swell the angry seas,
And shifts his fatal tack from side to side,
To raise the wretch's fear or swell his pride.

God might a little fault or two pass by,
But yours, (observe the wily tempter's lie)
Exceed the limits of almighty grace,
Christ's blood can't cleanse them, nor thy tears efface :
So dire th' offence, the stain as deep as hell,
And pardon is a thing impossible.
The promise shines, but still new doubts suggest,
Grace never will relume the sinner's breast :
And here's the dreadful worm that gnaws within,
The doubtful, dismal, deadly, *damm'g sin*.
Doubts rise on doubts, and fear to fear succeeds,
Distress'd, appal'd, he trembles while he reads :
Beholds an angry curse on every leaf,
While every scripture aggravates his grief.
Sin after grace!—and after pardon falls !
The fatal fearful blasphemy he calls ;
And many a text the wily fiend will cite,
To justify the lie and prove it right.
All comfort from the sacred volume fled,
'Tis cast aside and seldom ever read ;
Or only read to aggravate his case,
And drive the exile from the realms of grace.
Silent and sad the live-long day he sits,
Absorb'd in thought like one bereft of wits :
Lost in a maze of dark intricate doubt,
No star to cheer, no path to lead him out ;
Embarrass'd, craz'd, bewilder'd, and perplex'd,
Peace bleeds, hope dies, and wild despair comes next.

With frightful thoughts his fear-struck fancy teems,
And images of woe perplex his dreams.
Prayer is abandon'd, can the mind aspire
When hope no longer feeds the sacred fire?
No friends, no consolation can beguile,
Or gild his gloomy features with a smile.
Lost to the useful world and all its cares,
Lost to his honour, profit, and affairs;
Lost to the sinless sweets of tranquil life;
Lost to his parents, children, home, and wife.
His hollow eyes with wild expression stare,
His haggard looks bespeak corroding care:
His soul is on a restless ocean tost,
His heart congeal'd with everlasting frost.
Without an anchor, pilot, star, or helm,
Tremendous billows threaten to o'erwhelm:
The scene is dismal and the sky o'ercast,
Loud roars the wave, and fiercely howls the blast.
Blue guilt quick flashes thro' the tortur'd soul,
And deep the peals of angry vengeance roll:
Like swelling seas blasphemous thoughts arise,
And dash their impious billows 'gainst the skies.
No hand to help, no peaceful haven near,
Fear chills, and sullen hate succeeds to fear.
Mercy is past, the wretched sinner cries,
Mercy is past, the wily fiend replies;
Mercy is past, my rebel soul is curs'd,
Justice strike home, and vengeance do thy worst.

Infernal demons round their victim wait,
Pursue and vex him with unceasing hate.
He feels the earnest of an awful doom,
Solicits death, but dreads the wrath to come.
Pride, horror, rage, sit hateful on his face,
His words express a fix'd disdain of grace ;
Hence, scorning mercy with his latest breath,
He sinks blaspheming to the shades of death.
So Spira died, so died unhappy *Pope*,*
Rejecting mercy and renouncing hope,
Rushing unpardon'd, thro' the dismal gloom
Of restless death, to a more dreaded doom.
While those alas, in hideous gulphs are lost,
On rocks of bold presumption these are tost ;
O'erleap a fence, the work of many years,
Resign their scruples; and repress their fears.
'Tis true, an inward falling must precede,
The heart's emotions form the outward deed ;
Conscience affrighted at the awful brink,
Of guilt and ruin, will a moment shrink,
But lull the wakeful monitor asleep,
The sinner fearless takes the horrid leap,
Down the deep direful gulph without remorse,
So to the battle springs the head-strong horse.
Now sins conceal'd, extinguish'd, or suppress'd,
Rise, swell, encrease, and deluge all the breast ;

* William Pope, of Bolton, in Lancashire.—See Methodist Magazine.

The passions own the change, and now a gust
Of hellish rage impels or foaming lust.
Foul demons quench the glimmering sparks of grace,
And vices bloom in each vacated place :
Till finally, the last restraint thrown off,
Religion meets his ridicule and scoff :
Wiser than what is written, now he needs
No stupid parsons, or fanatic creeds,
But hopes,—for conscience is not quite at rest ;
Hell, and the bible, are a sacred jest.
To infidelity he flies for ease,
And gulps its fatal, dire absurdities.
Shame, guilt, remorse, bright hope, or filial fear,
The pious sigh, the sin-relentng tear,
Alike are foreign to his soul, and now
Tho' stain'd with guilt, no blushes die his brow :
Or if a little qualm should intervene,
Or on a hazy day the gloomy spleen
So call it, give his breast a sudden bite,
Infuse a doubt, and whisper he's not right,
Sly conscience twinge him, or new fears disturb,
And vicious passions feel a partial curb,
Indignant nature spurns the feeble yoke ;
And dashes all to pieces with a stroke.
So a swoln flood with agitated force,
Bursts every bound, that checks its rapid course,
Roars, dashes, foams, and pours thro' every vent,
More fiercely for the short impediment.

Callous, unfeeling, and without a fear,
Hell in the front, and justice in the rear,
He rolls in sin till vengeance with a frown,
Draws the red sword, and cuts the rebel down.

Thus many leave the path, but few return,
To mercy's feet and past offences mourn.
A prodigal may here and there be met,
Who sighs for home and names it with regret ;
And tost about, the sport of many a blast,
Enters the haven of repose at last.
'Twas thus Usebeus, after many a squall,
On life's tempestuous sea retriev'd his fall ;
But e'er his wand'ring soul from guilt was freed,
A thousand conflicts made his bosom bleed
With racking doubts and keen, exquisite smart,
Fear bodeing glooms, and heaviness of heart.
All the sweet love and peace that once he knew,
Long lost, now rise afresh before his view,
And sting him with his misery and fall,
Reproach his guilt, and dash his cup with gall.
To him no charms from taste or vision flow,
All things receive the colour of his woe ;
So the fair beauties of this florid ball,
Are lost, when gloomy night envelopes all.
The setting sun, mild walk, inviting glade,
Cool crystal stream, and honey-suckle shade,
The op'ning morn, fair minister of light,
The blue serene of star bespangled night,

Possess no more the happy power to please,
He has no pleasure now in things like these.
Not all the joys vain worldly minds possess,
Wit, beauty, riches, company or dress,
Can to his mind sweet balmy peace impart,
Or calm the sad disquiets of his heart.
For now deep roused from his awful state,
And brought to tremble on the brink of fate ;
He feels a thousand fears the die is cast,
He views a thousand calls for ever past,
He mourns a thousand pure emotions dead,
A thousand, thousand, golden seasons fled ;
These pierce the soul, and on the conscience frown,
Like hostile bands before a rebel town,
Whose waving bannerets and flashing arms,
Fill every breast with horror and alarms.

While Satan all his goods in safety kept,
He gaily chatted and he sweetly slept,
Nor saw the awful gulph that roll'd beneath,
Nor fear'd the terrors of eternal death.
But now affliction lifts his iron mace,
And death and judgment stare him in the face ;
No hopes on earth, nor treasure in the sky,
His life uncertain, but alarm'd to die :
All dark within, his heart a very stone,
Nor can he lift a wish to heaven's throne.
Woes croud on woes, and fears on fears rush in,
And peace lies bleeding at the feet of sin.

So one awaking from serene repose,
Where sleep has drawn oblivion o'er his woes,
Display'd a richer state, and sweeter lot,
Where many a lovely garden grove and grót
Rise to the raptur'd eye, in prospect gay,
Till the scene fades, evanishes away ;
And starting up, he views around his room,
A deeper darkness and a wilder gloom.

A glimpse of light, a ray of hope may dart,
Across the dark, dark dungeon of his heart,
Till guilty fears and keen reflections rise,
Hence every new-born hope within him dies ;
For short the glimmering star of grace is seen,
And long and sad, the intervals between.
Grace still allures him, and designs to bless,
But leads him thro' a thorny wilderness,
Gives him the wormwood and the gall to drink,
And brings him to, and shakes him o'er the brink
Of the dark gulf, but holds him in her hand,
Then plucks him from perdition like a brand :
Hence the soft buds of tear wet penitence,
Spring from the knowledge of his past offence ;
But from that knowledge too, reflections flow,
Which give the deepest colour to his woe.
Who keeps his eye on the bright star of grace,
May peace and hope, and consolation trace ;

But who to gloomy unbelief gives scope,
May perish exil'd from the realms of hope.
Tho life's fair tree allure him to draw near,
He makes a flaming cherub of his fear,
Afraid to venture, yet afraid to wait,
Tho' truth invite, and grace expand the gate ;
Tho' richest promises his pathway strew,
Thro' the deep valley of severest woe,
Tho' sweet melodious strains of goodness sound,
Tho' pardon court him, and tho' peace surround,
Tho' writ on all Jehovah's works appears,
Sweet consolation to beguile his tears,
Yet still Usebens shivers on the shore,
Afraid to launch away and God adore.

A strong emotion oft impels him on,
But ah ! how soon th' auspicious gale is gone !
Ready he is to snatch the blissful prize,
Ready, when some new obstacles arise :
So the long absent, eager mariner,
From climes of commerce or the walks of war,
Returning to his native shores again,
A thirst for peace and weary of the main,
Sees thro' the peering glass his port at last,
And deems his stormy toils for ever past,
Anticipates with joy his future lot,
His wife, babes, parents, friends, and little cot ;
But soon the vision flies, the bliss is o'er,
A gale sets in and blows him from the shore,

Thick mists descend, the port he seeks in vain,
Drove devious on the wide wave swelling main.

See mercy point to the atoning blood;
But Satan rolls upon him as a flood ;
A roaring lion on his path he steals,
Or as a furious adder bites his heels,
Now like a wily fox his art he plies,
With fraudulent speeches and with glozing lies,
Next in the creeping snake he acts his part,
Winding his sophistry around the heart,
Then artful to deceive, by seeming right,
He wears angelic robes of spotless light.
But should the soul repel his subtle snares,
A dragon fierce, the lying monster glares,
And threatens horribly to swallow up,
All who reject his soul-bewitching cup.
But all his wiles are ineffectual, where
The soul is screen'd by agonizing prayer ;
Each moment sees the wily fiend subdu'd,
And now Usebeus feels his strength renew'd ;
Firm confidence returns, and hopes arise
Which warm his heart, and lift it to the skies ;
The brooding horrors of his conscience cease,
And all within is sweetness, love and peace ;
The Saviour's voice has calm'd the raging tide,
And bid the winds be still, the waves subside ;
Pride, wrath, concupisence, each moral pest,
Resign their empire, abdicate his breast.

There stands a limit,—now sin cannot pass,
The wall of faith is mightier far than brass ;
Faith can the moral turpitude repel,
That fills the city, palace, cottage, cell,
The power of faith, sins empire can controul,
The power of faith, the bulwark of the soul.

THE END.

