LYCIDAS
Lycidas

BY

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In this Monody, the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637; and by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height.
YET once more, Q ye laurels
and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for Lycidas?
He knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn,

12
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.
For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock by fountain, shade, and rill.
Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
We drove a field, and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the star that rose, at evening, bright,
Toward heav’n’s descent had slop’d his west’ring wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,
Tempered to the oaten flute,
Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old Damœtas loved to hear our song.
But Oh, the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o’ergrown,

14
And all their echoes mourn.
The willows, and the hazel copses green,
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flow’rs, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd’s ear.
Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o’er the head of your loved Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on
the steep,
Where your old Bards, the famous
Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona
high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her
wizard stream:
Ay me! I fondly dream!
Had ye been there, for what could
that have done?
What could the Muse herself that
Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself for her enchanting son,
Whom universal nature did
lament,
When by the rout that made the
hideous roar,
16
His gory visage down the stream
was sent,

Down the swift Hebrus to the
Lesbian shore?

Alas! what boots it with in-
cessant care

To tend the homely slighted
shepherd's trade,

And strictly meditate the thank-
less Muse?

Were it not better done, as others
use,

To sport with Amaryllis in the
shade,

Or with the tangles of Næra's
hair?

Fame is the spur that the clear
spirit doth raise

17
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live labo-
rious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life.—But not the praise,
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears;
Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glis'tring foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies;
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heav'n expect thy meed.

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood:

But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the herald of the sea

That came in Neptune's plea;
He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain?
And questioned every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked promontory:
They knew not of his story,
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed,
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in th' eclipse, and rigged
with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head
of thine.

Next Camus, reverend sire,
went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet
sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and
and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flow'r in-
scribed with woe.

Ah! who hath _rest_ (quoth he) _Λοιμος_.

my dearest pledge?

Last came, and last did go,
The pilot of the Galilean lake;
Two massy keys he bore of metals
twain,
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain)

He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake,

How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,

Enow of such as for their bellies' sake

Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold?

Of other care they little reckoning make,

Than how to scramble at the shearer's feast,

And shove away the worthy bidden guest;

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned "aught else the least"
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scranneel pipes of wretched straw;
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw

23
Daily devours apace, and nothing said;
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells, and flow'rets of a thousand hues.

Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks:
Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine.
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strow the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide

26
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth:
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.
Weep no more, woeful Shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,

27
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky;

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Thro' the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,

28
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good

29
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and rills,
While the still morn went out with sandals gray,
He touched the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay;
And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
And now was dropt into the western bay;
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:

To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

30
1. Done lay.
2.
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