

# ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

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## **The Poem**

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- 1 The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
- 2 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
- 3 The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
- 4 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
  
- 5 Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
- 6 And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
- 7 Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
- 8 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;
  
- 9 Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
- 10 The moping owl does to the moon complain
- 11 Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,
- 12 Molest her ancient solitary reign.
  
- 13 Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
- 14 Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
- 15 Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
- 16 The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.
  
- 17 The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
- 18 The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
- 19 The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
- 20 No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

21 For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,

22 Or busy housewife ply her evening care:

23 No children run to lisp their sire's return,

24 Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

25 Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,

26 Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;

27 How jocund did they drive their team afield!

28 How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

29 Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,

30 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;

31 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile,

32 The short and simple annals of the poor.

33 The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,

34 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,

35 Awaits alike the inevitable hour.

36 The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

37 Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault,

38 If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,

39 Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault

40 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

41 Can storied urn or animated bust

42 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

43 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,

44 Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

45 Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid

46 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;

47 Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,

48 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

49 But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page

50 Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;

51 Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,

52 And froze the genial current of the soul.

53 Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

54 The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:

55 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,

56 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

57 Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast

58 The little tyrant of his fields withstood;

59 Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,

60 Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

61 The applause of listening senates to command,

62 The threats of pain and ruin to despise,

63 To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,

64 And read their history in a nation's eyes,

65 Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone

66 Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;

67 Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,

68 And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

69 The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,

70 To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,

71 Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride

72 With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

73 Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,

74 Their sober wishes never learned to stray;

75 Along the cool sequestered vale of life

76 They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

77 Yet even these bones from insult to protect

78 Some frail memorial still erected nigh,

79 With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,

80 Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

81 Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered muse,

82 The place of fame and elegy supply:

83 And many a holy text around she strews,

84 That teach the rustic moralist to die.

85 For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,

86 This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,

87 Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,

88 Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

89 On some fond breast the parting soul relies,

90 Some pious drops the closing eye requires;

91 Ev'n from the tomb the voice of nature cries,

92 Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

93 For thee, who mindful of the unhonoured dead

94 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;

95 If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,

96 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

97 Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,

98 'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn

99 'Brushing with hasty steps the dews away

100 'To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

101 'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech

102 'That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,

103 'His listless length at noontide would he stretch,

104 'And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

105 'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,

106 'Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,

107 'Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,

108 'Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

109 'One morn I missed him on the custom'd hill,

110 'Along the heath and near his favourite tree;

111 'Another came; nor yet beside the rill,

112 'Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

113 'The next with dirges due in sad array

114 'Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.

115 'Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay,

116 'Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'

117 Here rests his head upon the lap of earth

118 A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.

119 Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,

120 And Melancholy marked him for her own.

121 Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,

122 Heaven did a recompense as largely send:

123 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,

124 He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend.

125 No farther seek his merits to disclose,

126 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,

127 (There they alike in trembling hope repose)

128 The bosom of his Father and his God.