Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College.

By Gray, Thomas .

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,

That crown the watery glade,

Where grateful Science still adores

Her Henry's holy shade;

And ye, that from the stately brow

Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below

Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,

Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among

Wanders the hoary Thames along

His silver-winding way.

Ah happy hills, ah pleasing shade,

Ah fields beloved in vain,

Where once my careless childhood strayed,

A stranger yet to pain!

I feel the gales, that from ye blow,

A momentary bliss bestow,

As waving fresh their gladsome wing

My weary soul they seem to soothe,

And, redolent of joy and youth,

To breathe a second spring.

Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen

Full many a sprightly race

Disporting on thy margent green

The paths of pleasure trace,

Who foremost now delight to cleave

With pliant arm thy glassy wave?

The captive linnet which enthral?

What idle progeny succeed

To chase the rolling circle's speed,

Or urge the flying ball?

While some on earnest business bent

Their murm'ring labours ply

'Gainst graver hours, that bring constraint

To sweeten liberty:

Some bold adventurers disdain

The limits of their little reign,

And unknown regions dare descry:

Still as they run they look behind,

They hear a voice in every wind,

And snatch a fearful joy.

Gay hope is theirs by fancy fed,

Less pleasing when possest;

The tear forgot as soon as shed,

The sunshine of the breast:

Theirs buxom health of rosy hue,

Wild wit, invention ever-new,

And lively cheer of vigour born;

The thoughtless day, the easy night,

The spirits pure, the slumbers light,

That fly th' approach of morn.

Alas! regardless of their doom

The little victims play!

No sense have they of ills to come,

Nor care beyond today:

Yet see how all around 'em wait

The Ministers of human fate,

And black Misfortune's baleful train!

Ah, show them where in ambush stand,

To seize their prey, the murd'rous band!

Ah, tell them they are men!

These shall the fury Passions tear,

The vultures of the mind,

Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,

And Shame that skulks behind;

Or pining Love shall waste their youth,

Or Jealousy with rankling tooth,

That inly gnaws the secret heart,

And Envy wan, and faded Care,

Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,

And Sorrow's piercing dart.

Ambition this shall tempt to rise,

Then whirl the wretch from high,

To bitter Scorn a sacrifice,

And grinning Infamy.

The stings of Falsehood those shall try,

And hard Unkindness' altered eye,

That mocks the tear it forced to flow;

And keen Remorse with blood defiled,

And moody Madness laughing wild

Amid severest woe.

Lo, in the vale of years beneath

A grisly troop are seen,

The painful family of Death,

More hideous than their Queen:

This racks the joints, this fires the veins,

That every labouring sinew strains,

Those in the deeper vitals rage:

Lo, Poverty, to fill the band,

That numbs the soul with icy hand,

And slow-consuming Age.

To each his suff'rings: all are men,

Condemned alike to groan;

The tender for another's pain,

Th' unfeeling for his own.

Yet ah! why should they know their fate?

Since sorrow never comes too late,

And happiness too swiftly flies.

Thought would destroy their paradise.

No more; -where ignorance is bliss,

'Tis folly to be wise.