

L. E. L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon) (1802-1838)
[from *The Vow of the Peacock* (1835)]

THE FACTORY.

'Tis an accursed thing!---

1 There rests a shade above yon town,
2 A dark funereal shroud:
3 'Tis not the tempest hurrying down,
4 'Tis not a summer cloud.

5 The smoke that rises on the air
6 Is as a type and sign;
7 A shadow flung by the despair
8 Within those streets of thine.

9 That smoke shuts out the cheerful day,
10 The sunset's purple hues,
11 The moonlight's pure and tranquil ray,
12 The morning's pearly dews.

13 Such is the moral atmosphere
14 Around thy daily life;
15 Heavy with care, and pale with fear,
16 With future tumult rife.

17 There rises on the morning wind
18 A low appealing cry,
19 A thousand children are resigned
20 To sicken and to die!

21 We read of Moloch's sacrifice,
22 We sicken at the name,
23 And seem to hear the infant cries---
24 And yet we do the same;---

25 And worse---'twas but a moment's pain
26 The heathen altar gave,
27 But we give years,---our idol, Gain,

28 Demands a living grave!

29 How precious is the little one,
30 Before his mother's sight,
31 With bright hair dancing in the sun,
32 And eyes of azure light!

33 He sleeps as rosy as the south,
34 For summer days are long;
35 A prayer upon the little mouth,
36 Lull'd by his nurse's song.

37 Love is around him, and his hours
38 Are innocent and free;
39 His mind essays its early powers
40 Beside his mother's knee.

41 When after-years of trouble come,
42 Such as await man's prime,
43 How will he think of that dear home,
44 And childhood's lovely time!

45 And such should childhood ever be,
46 The fairy well; to bring
47 To life's worn, weary memory
48 The freshness of its spring.

49 But here the order is reversed,
50 And infancy, like age,
51 Knows of existence but its worst,
52 One dull and darkened page;---

53 Written with tears, and stamp'd with toil,
54 Crushed from the earliest hour,
55 Weeds darkening on the bitter soil
56 That never knew a flower.

57 Look on yon child, it droops the head,
58 Its knees are bow'd with pain;
59 It mutters from its wretched bed,
60 "Oh, let me sleep again!"

61 Alas! 'tis time, the mother's eyes
62 Turn mournfully away;
63 Alas! 'tis time, the child must rise,
64 And yet it is not day.

65 The lantern's lit---she hurries forth,
66 The spare cloak's scanty fold
67 Scarce screens her from the snowy north,
68 The child is pale and cold.

69 And wearily the little hands
70 Their task accustom'd ply;
71 While daily, some mid those pale bands,
72 Droop, sicken, pine, and die.

73 Good God! to think upon a child
74 That has no childish days,
75 No careless play, no frolics wild,
76 No words of prayer and praise!

77 Man from the cradle---'tis too soon
78 To earn their daily bread,
79 And heap the heat and toil of noon
80 Upon an infant's head.

81 To labour ere their strength be come,
82 Or starve,---is such the doom
83 That makes of many an English home
84 One long and living tomb?

85 Is there no pity from above,---
86 No mercy in those skies;
87 Hath then the heart of man no love,
88 To spare such sacrifice?

89 Oh, England! though thy tribute waves
90 Proclaim thee great and free,
91 While those small children pine like slaves,
92 There is a curse on thee!