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The Poems

VOLUME ONE

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Then here contented will I lie!
 20 Alone, I cannot fear to die.

III

Alas! ye might have dragged me on
 Another day, a single one!
 Too soon I yielded to despair;
 Why did ye listen to my prayer?
 When ye were gone my limbs were stronger;
 And oh, how grievously I rue,
 That, afterwards, a little longer,
 My friends, I did not follow you!
 For strong and without pain I lay,
 30 Dear friends, when ye were gone away.

IV

My Child! they gave thee to another,
 A woman who was not thy mother.
 When from my arms my Babe they took,
 On me how strangely did he look!
 Through his whole body something ran,
 A most strange working did I see;
 - As if he strove to be a man,
 That he might pull the sledge for me:
 And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
 40 Oh mercy! like a helpless child.

V

My little joy! my little pride!
 In two days more I must have died.
 Then do not weep and grieve for me;
 I feel I must have died with thee.
 O wind, that o'er my head art flying
 The way my friends their course did bend,
 I should not feel the pain of dying,
 Could I with thee a message send;
 Too soon, my friends, ye went away;
 50 For I had many things to say.

VI

I'll follow you across the snow;
 Ye travel heavily and slow;
 In spite of all my weary pain
 I'll look upon your tents again.
 - My fire is dead, and snowy white
 The water which beside it stood:
 The wolf has come to me tonight,
 And he has stolen away my food.
 For ever left alone am I;
 60 Then wherefore should I fear to die?

VII

Young as I am, my course is run,
 I shall not see another sun;
 I cannot lift my limbs to know
 If they have any life or no.
 My poor forsaken Child, if I
 For once could have thee close to me,
 With happy heart I then would die,
 And my last thought would happy be;
 But thou, dear Babe, art far away,
 70 Nor shall I see another day.

Her Eyes Are Wild

I

Her eyes are wild, her head is bare,
 The sun has burnt her coal-black hair;
 Her eyebrows have a rusty stain,
 And she came far from over the main.
 She has a baby on her arm,
 Or else she were alone:
 And underneath the hay-stack warm,
 And on the greenwood stone,
 She talked and sung the woods among,
 10 And it was in the English tongue.

II

'Sweet babe! they say that I am mad,
 But nay, my heart is far too glad;
 And I am happy when I sing
 Full many a sad and doleful thing:
 Then, lovely baby, do not fear!
 I pray thee have no fear of me;
 But safe as in a cradle, here
 My lovely baby! thou shalt be:
 To thee I know too much I owe;
 20 I cannot work thee any woe.

III

'A fire was once within my brain;
 And in my head a dull, dull pain;
 And fiendish faces, one, two, three,
 Hung at my breast, and pulled at me;
 But then there came a sight of joy;
 It came at once to do me good;
 I waked, and saw my little boy,
 My little boy of flesh and blood;
 Oh joy for me that sight to see!
 30 For he was here, and only he.

IV

'Suck, little babe, oh suck again!
 It cools my blood; it cools my brain;
 Thy lips I feel them, baby! they
 Draw from my heart the pain away.
 Oh! press me with thy little hand;
 It loosens something at my chest;
 About that tight and deadly band
 I feel thy little fingers prest.
 The breeze I see is in the tree:
 40 It comes to cool my babe and me.

V

'Oh! love me, love me, little boy!
 Thou art thy mother's only joy;
 And do not dread the waves below,
 When o'er the sea-rock's edge we go;
 The high crag cannot work me harm,
 Nor leaping torrents when they howl;
 The babe I carry on my arm,
 He saves for me my precious soul;
 Then happy lie; for blest am I;
 50 Without me my sweet babe would die.

VI

'Then do not fear, my boy! for thee
 Bold as a lion will I be;
 And I will always be thy guide,
 Through hollow snows and rivers wide.
 I'll build an Indian bower; I know
 The leaves that make the softest bed:
 And, if from me thou wilt not go,
 But still be true till I am dead,
 My pretty thing! then thou shalt sing
 60 As merry as the birds in spring.

VII

'Thy father cares not for my breast,
 'Tis thine, sweet baby, there to rest;
 'Tis all thine own! – and, if its hue
 Be changed, that was so fair to view,
 'Tis fair enough for thee, my dove!
 My beauty, little child, is flown,
 But thou wilt live with me in love;
 And what if my poor cheek be brown?
 'Tis well for me, thou canst not see
 70 How pale and wan it else would be.

VIII

'Dread not their taunts, my little Life;
 I am thy father's wedded wife;
 And underneath the spreading tree
 We two will live in honesty.
 If his sweet boy he could forsake,
 With me he never would have stayed:
 From him no harm my babe can take;
 But he, poor man! is wretched made;
 And every day we two will pray
 80 For him that's gone and far away.

IX

'I'll teach my boy the sweetest things:
 I'll teach him how the owlet sings.
 My little babe! thy lips are still,
 And thou hast almost sucked thy fill.
 - Where art thou gone, my own dear child?
 What wicked looks are those I see?
 Alas! alas! that look so wild,
 It never, never came from me:
 If thou art mad, my pretty lad,
 90 Then I must be for ever sad.

X

'Oh! smile on me, my little lamb!
 For I thy own dear mother am:
 My love for thee has well been tried:
 I've sought thy father far and wide.
 I know the poisons of the shade;
 I know the earth-nuts fit for food:
 Then, pretty dear, be not afraid:
 We'll find thy father in the wood.
 Now laugh and be gay, to the woods away!
 100 And there, my babe, we'll live for aye.'

The Idiot Boy

'Tis eight o'clock, - a clear March night,
 The moon is up, - the sky is blue,
 The owlet, in the moonlight air,
 Shouts from nobody knows where;
 He lengthens out his lonely shout,
 Halloo! halloo! a long halloo!

- Why bustle thus about your door,
 What means this bustle, Betty Foy?
 Why are you in this mighty fret?
 10 And why on horseback have you set
 Him whom you love, your Idiot Boy?

Scarcely a soul is out of bed;
 Good Betty, put him down again;
 His lips with joy they burr at you;
 But, Betty! what has he to do
 With stirrup, saddle, or with rein?

But Betty's bent on her intent;
 For her good neighbour, Susan Gale,
 Old Susan, she who dwells alone,
 20 Is sick, and makes a piteous moan,
 As if her very life would fail.

There's not a house within a mile,
 No hand to help them in distress;
 Old Susan lies a-bed in pain,
 And sorely puzzled are the twain,
 For what she ails they cannot guess.

And Betty's husband's at the wood,
 Where by the week he doth abide,
 A woodman in the distant vale;

For a description of the new changes in the Poor Laws, see T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkehead* (1970), pp. 276-81. 183 *free of* allowed the use or enjoyment of.

[FRAGMENTS FROM THE ALFOXDEN NOTE-BOOK (i)]

Composed probably between 25 January and 19 March 1798; first published in 1949.

Possibly intended for *The Ruined Cottage*, the first version of Book I of *The Excursion*.

TO MY SISTER

Composed probably between 1 and 9 (most probably 6, 8, or 9) March 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); from 1815 included among 'Poems of Sentiment and Reflection'. The original title of the poem was 'Lines Written at a Small Distance from My House, and Sent, by My Little Boy to the Person to Whom They Are Addressed'.

I. F. note: 'Composed in front of Alfoxden House. My little boy-messenger on this occasion was the son of Basil Montagu. The larch mentioned in the first stanza was standing when I revisited the place in May, 1841, more than forty years after.'

5-9 Compare *The Prelude* (1805) I, 1-4: 'O there is blessing in this gentle breeze / That blows from the green fields and from the clouds / And from the sky: it beats against my cheek, / And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives'.

33-4 Compare *Lines Written . . . above Tintern Abbey* 100-102: 'A motion and a spirit, that . . . rolls through all things'.

GOODY BLAKE AND HARRY GILL

Composed probably between 7 March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); in 1815 included among 'Poems of the Imagination' because, although it and *The Horn of Egremont Castle* (as Wordsworth pointed out in a footnote to the latter poem in the edition of 1815) 'rather refer to the imagination than are produced by it', he wished 'to avoid a needless multiplication of the Classes'. In 1845, the poem was finally moved to 'Miscellaneous Poems'.

In the *Advertisement* to the 1798 edition, Wordsworth claimed the poem was 'founded on a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire', and in the *I. F. note* we learn the source: 'Written at Alfoxden. The incident from Dr Darwin's "Zoonomia" [1794-6].' Wordsworth's version of the story differs very little from his source. In the Preface to the 1802 edition, Wordsworth made further comments on the poem (see Appendix A, p. 887).

9 *July* rhymes in North-country dialect with *truly* (line 11).

39 *canty* cheerful (North-country dialect).

THE COMPLAINT OF A FORSAKEN INDIAN WOMAN

Composed probably between early March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); from 1815 included among 'Poems Founded on the Affections'.

I. F. note: 'Written at Alfoxden in 1798, where I read Hearne's Journey with deep interest. It was composed for the volume of *Lyrical Ballads*. From Samuel Hearne's *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson Bay to the Northern Ocean* (London 1795), Wordsworth got the information and even some of the wording for the note he prefixed to the poem.

Wordsworth refers to the poem in the Preface of 1802 (see Appendix A, p. 871).

HER EYES ARE WILD

Composed probably between early March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); from 1815 to 1820 included among 'Poems Founded on the Affections', then transferred to 'Poems of the Imagination' from 1827 to 1832, and finally returned to 'Poems Founded on the Affections' in subsequent editions. Originally entitled *The Mad Mother* (1798-1805).

I. F. note: 'Alfoxden, 1798. The subject was reported to me by a Lady of Bristol who had seen the poor creature.' There are, nevertheless, some sources for the poem in Bishop Percy's *Reliques* [1765], as indicated in the notes below. Much the most considerable of the sources was *Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament*, also a monologue, which has a similar theme and stanza form, as well as verbal echoes.

Wordsworth refers to the poem in the Preface of 1802 (see Appendix A, p. 871).

10 *English tongue* Wordsworth explained this detail in a letter to John Kenyon (late autumn, 1836):

. . . Though she came from far, English was her native tongue - which shows her either to be of these Islands, or a North American. On the latter supposition, while the distance removes her from us, the fact of her speaking our language brings us at once into close sympathy with her.

21 Compare the opening line of *The Frantic Lady*: 'I burn, my brain consumes to ashes'. See also *The Thorn* 120-21.

39-40 Coleridge in his *Notebooks*, ed. K. Coburn (1962) II, 2112, selected these lines as demonstrating imagination, and in his *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter XXII) he praised them as

so expressive of that deranged state, in which from the increased sensibility the sufferer's attention is abruptly drawn off by every trifle, and in the same instant plucked back again by the one despotic thought, and bringing home with it, by the blending, *fusing* power of Imagination and Passion, the alien object to which it had been so abruptly diverted, no longer an alien but an ally and an inmate.

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41-2 Compare *Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament* 5: 'Balow, my boy, thy mother's joy.'

54 *hollow* empty, vacant.

61 Compare *Lament* 13-14: 'But now I see, most cruel he / Cares neither for my babe nor me'.

100 Compare *Lament* 35: 'My babe and I'll together live'.

THE IDIOT BOY

Composed probably between early March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); from 1815 included among 'Poems Founded on the Affections'.

I. F. note:

Alfoxden 1798. The last stanza - 'The Cocks did crow to-who, to-who, And the sun did shine so cold' - was the foundation of the whole. The words were reported to me by my dear friend, Thomas Poole; but I have since heard the same repeated of other Idiots. Let me add that this long poem was composed in the groves of Alfoxden, almost extempore; not a word, I believe, being corrected, though one stanza was omitted. I mention this in gratitude to those happy moments, for, in truth, I never wrote anything with so much glee.

This poem was the subject of a long defence by Wordsworth in a letter to John Wilson (7 June 1802). Wordsworth always had a very high opinion of this poem. He refers to the poem in the Preface of 1802 (see Appendix A, p. 821).

104 *curr* make a low murmuring sound.

115-16 Compare Cowper's *John Gilpin* (1782), xxiv: 'His horse . . . / What thing upon his back had got / Did wonder more and more'.

240 *cattle* any livestock.

278 *road* rhymes in North-country dialect with 'abroad' (line 281).

338 *fourteen years* Jack Stillinger, in his selected edition of Wordsworth's poetry (1965), suggested that this number is possibly intended to show that the narrator is a bit slow-witted, since seven years was the ordinary period of apprenticeship.

THE LAST OF THE FLOCK

Composed probably between early March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); in 1815 and thereafter included among 'Poems Founded on the Affections'.

I. F. note: 'Produced at the same time and for the same purpose [as *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*]. The incident occurred in the village of Holford, close by Alfoxden.' In justifying the use of the word *alone* in line 4, Wordsworth expanded on the background of the poem:

Funerals, alas! we have all attended, and most of us must have seen then weeping in the public roads . . . I was a witness to a sight of this kind the

947 NOTES FOR PP. 295-9

other day in the Streets of Kendal . . . But for my own part, notwithstanding what has here been said in verse, I never in my whole life saw a man weep *alone* in the roads; but a friend of mine did see this poor man weeping *alone*, with the Lamb, the last of his flock, in his arms (Wordsworth to John Kenyon, late autumn, 1836).

41 *six*] 1800; ten: 1798.

WE ARE SEVEN

Composed probably between early March and about 16 May 1798; first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798); from 1815 included among 'Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood'.

I. F. note:

Written at Alfoxden in the spring of 1798, under circumstances somewhat remarkable. The little girl who is the heroine I met within the area of Goodrich Castle in the year 1793 . . . I composed it while walking in the grove at Alfoxden. My friends will not deem it too trifling to relate that while walking to and fro I composed the last stanza first having begun with the last line. When it was all but finished, I came in and recited to Mr Coleridge and my Sister, and said, 'A prefatory stanza must be added, and I should sit down to our little tea-meal with greater pleasure if my task were finished.' I mentioned in substance what I wished to be expressed, and Coleridge immediately threw off the stanza thus:

'A little child, dear brother Jem,' -

I objected to the rhyme, 'dear brother Jem,' as being ludicrous, but we all enjoyed the joke of hitching-in our friend, James Tobin's name, who was familiarly called Jem.

On revisiting Goodrich Castle in 1841, Wordsworth could not find traces of the girl, as he 'did not even know her name'. In 1815 the opening line was shortened to its present form.

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) Wordsworth described the poem as dealing with 'the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion'. As a child, Wordsworth himself had such perplexity, as we are informed in the *I. F. note* to the *Ode: Intimations*:

Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere - [first stanza of *We Are Seven* is quoted]. But it was not so much from [feelings] of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me.

19 *Conway* a seaport in North Wales.