

Flora

Remote from scenes, where the o'erwearied mind
 Shrinks from the crimes and follies of mankind,
 From hostile menace, and offensive boast,
 Peace, and her train of home-born pleasures lost;
 To Fancy's reign, who would not gladly turn,
 And lose awhile the miseries they mourn
 In sweet oblivion?—Come then Fancy! deign,
 Queen of ideal pleasure, once again
 To lend thy magic pencil, and to bring
 Such lovely forms, as in life's happier Spring
 On the green margin of my native Wey,
 Before mine infant eyes were wont to play,
 And with that pencil, teach me to describe
 The enchanting Goddess of the flowery tribe,
 Whose first prerogative it is to chase
 The clouds that hang on languid beauty's face;*
 And, while advancing Suns, and tepid showers,
 Lead on the laughing Spring's delicious hours,
 Bid the wan maid the hues of health assume,
 Charm with new grace, and blush with fresher bloom,

The vision comes!—While slowly melt away
 Night's hovering shades before the eastern ray,
 Ere yet declines the morning's humid star,
 Fair Fancy brings her; in her leafy car
 Flora descends, to dress the expecting earth,
 Awake the germs, and call the buds to birth,

* "The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns, / The lowering eye, the petulance, the frown, / And sullen sadness, that do shade, distort, / And mar the face of beauty, when no cause / For such immeasurable grief appears, / These Flora banishes." Cowper [*The Task*, 1.455—60].

Bid each hybernacle its cell unfold,
And open silken leaves, and eyes of gold!

Of forest foliage of the firmest shade
Enwoven by magic hands the Car was made,
Oak and the ample Plane, without enwind,
And Beech and Ash the verdant concave lined;
The Saxifrage,* that snowy flowers emboss,
Supplied the seat; and of the mural Moss
The velvet footstool rose, where lightly rest
Her slender feet in Cypripedium drest.
The tufted Rush† that bears a silken crown,
The floating feathers of the Thistle's° down,
In tender hues of rainbow lustre dyed,
The airy texture of her robe supplied;
And wild Convolvulus,‡ yet half unblown,
Form'd with their wreathing buds her simple zone;
Some wandering tresses of her radiant hair
Luxuriant floated on the enamour'd air,
The rest were by the Scandix** points confin'd,
And graced, a shining knot, her hair behind—
While as a sceptre of supreme command,
She waved the Anthoxanthum‡ in her hand.

* Saxifrage. *Saxifraga hypnoides*, Moss Saxifrage, commonly called Ladies' cushion.

† Rush. *Eriophorum angustifolium*. ° Thistle. *Carduus*.

‡ Convolvulus. *Convolvulus arvensis*, a remarkably pretty plant, but no favourite with the husbandman. [The morning glory is a flowering vine of quick growth and an almost ineradicable root system.]

* Scandix. *Scandix pectum*, Venus's comb, or Shepherd's needle.

‡ Anthoxanthum. *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Vernal Meadow Grass. It is to this grass that hay owes its fine odour.

Line 27. hybernacle: hibernacle; winter covering of a bud.

Line 31. ample Plane: European cousin to the sycamore.

Line 34. mural Moss: moss growing on a wall. Line 42. zone: belt; cincture.

Around the Goddess, as the flies that play
In countless myriads in the western ray,
The Sylphs innumerable throng, whose magic powers
Guard the soft buds, and nurse the infant flowers,
Round the sustaining stems weak tendrils bind,
And save the Pollen from dispersing wind,
From Suns too ardent shade their transient hues,
And catch in odorous cups translucent dews.
The ruder tasks of others are, to chase
From vegetable life the Insect race,
Breathe the polluting thread the Spider weaves,
And brush the Aphis* from the unfolding leaves.

For conquest arm'd the pigmy warriors wield
The thorny lance, and spread the hollow shield
Of Lichen† tough; or bear, as silver bright,
Lunaria's° pearly circlet, firm and light.
On the helm'd head the crimson Foxglove‡ glows,
Or Scutellaria* guards the martial brows,
While the Leontodon‡ its plumage rears,
And o'er the casque in waving grace appears;
With stern undaunted eye, one warlike Chief

* Aphis. *Aphis*, or *Aphidea*. These are the "myriads brushed from Russian wilds;" the blights, cankers, lice, or vermin, to use common phrases, that so often disfigure and destroy the fairest vegetable productions. [Smith refers to Thomson's *Seasons*, "Spring," lines 114–22.]

† Lichen. *Lichen*. Of these many have the forms of shields, when in fructification.

° Lunaria. *Lunaria annua*, Moon wort, usually called Honesty.

‡ Foxglove. *Digitalis purpurea*, common Fox-glove.

* Scutellaria. *Scutellaria galericulata*, small Skull-cap.

‡ Leontodon. *Leontodon officinalis*, Common Dent-de-lion.

Line 51. Sylphs: In *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (II, 166–67) Mrs. Talbot cites the precedent of William Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper* and Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, which popularized such fairy-like creatures in late eighteenth-century poetry.

Line 55. ardent: fiercely flaming.

Grasps the tall club from Arum's* blood-dropp'd leaf,
 This with the Burdock's† hooks annoys his foes,
 The purple Thorn, that borrows from the Rose.
 In honeyed nectaries couched, some drive away
 The forked insidious Earwig from his prey,
 Fearless the scaled Libellula° assail,
 Dart their keen lances at the encroaching Snail,
 Arrest the winged Ant, ‡ on pinions light,
 And strike the headlong Beetle* in his flight.

70

75

Nor less assiduous round their lovely Queen,
 The lighter forms of female Fays are seen;
 Rich was the purple vest Floscella wore,
 Spun of the tufts the Tradescantia‡ bore,
 The Cistus' § flowers minute her temples graced,
 And threads of Yucca¶ bound her slender waist.

80

From the wild Bee,** whose wondrous labour weaves,
 In artful folds the Rose's fragrant leaves,

85

* Arum. *Arum maculatum*, vulgarly Cuckoo pint, or Lords and Ladies.

† Burdock's. *Arctium lappa*.

° Libellula. The Dragonfly, or as it is called in the southern countries, the Horse-singer, though it preys only on other insects. Several sorts of these are seen about water, but its introduction here is a poetical licence, as it does not feed on or injure flowers.

‡ Ant. *Formica*. In one state of their existence the male Ants have wings.

* Beetle. *Scarabæus*.

§ Tradescantia. The silk-like tuft within the plant called *Tradescantia* appears to the eye composed of very fine filaments; but on examining one of these small silky threads through a microscope, it looks like a string of amethysts.

¶ Cistus. *Cistus helianthemum*, Dwarf Cistus.

□ Yucca. *Yucca*, Thready Yucca, an aloe, I believe.

** the wild Bee. *Apis centuncularis*. This insect weaves or rather cements rose leaves together to form its cell.

Line 81. Floscella: in *Conversations Introducing Poetry* Mrs. Talbot explains these fanciful creatures: "The attendant nymphs, Floscella, Petalla, Nectarynia, and Calyxa, you will understand are named after the parts of flowers." (II, 181).

Was borrow'd fair Petalla's light cymarre;
 And the Hypericum,* with spangling star,
 O'er her fair locks its bloom minute enwreathed;
 Then, while voluptuous odours round her breathed,
 Came Nectarynia; as the arrowy rays
 Of lambent fire round pictured Seraphs blaze,
 So did the Passiflora's† radii shed
 Cerulean glory o'er the Sylphid's head,
 While round her form the pliant tendrils twined,
 And clasp'd the scarf that floated on the wind.

90

95

More grave, the para-nymph Calyxa drest;
 A brown transparent spatha° formed her vest.
 The silver scales that bound her raven hair,
 Xeranthemum's‡ unfading calyx bear;
 And a light sash of spiral Ophrys* press'd
 Her filmy tunic, on her tender breast.

100

But where shall images or words be found
 To paint the fair ethereal forms, that round
 The Queen of flowers attended? and the while
 Basked in her eyes, and wantond in her smile.

105

Now towards the earth the gay procession bends,
 Lol! from the buoyant air, the Car descends;

* Hypericum. An elegant shrub, of which Cowper thus speaks: "Hypericum all bloom, so thick a swarm / Of flowers like flies clothing her slender rods / That scarce a leaf appears" (*The Task*, VI, 165-67). It seems admirably adapted to a fairy garland.

† Passiflora. *Passiflora cerulea*, the Passion flower.

° spatha. The sheath from which many flowers spring such as the Narcissus, &c.

‡ Xeranthemum. The scales of one species of the *Xeranthemum* are particularly elegant.

* Ophrys. *Ophrys sphegodes*. Spiral Ophrys, Ladies traces.

The following lines describing well known flowers, notes would be superfluous.

Line 87. cymarre: diaphanous chemise.

Line 100. calyx: the outermost part of a flower; its cup.

Anticipating then the various year,
 Flowers of all hues and every month appear,
 From every swelling bulb its blossoms rise;
 Here blow the Hyacinths of loveliest dyes,
 Breathing of heaven; and there her royal brows
 Begemmed with pearl, the Crown Imperial shews;
 Peeps the blue Gentian from the softning ground,
 Jonquils and Violets shed their odours round;
 High rears the Honeysuck his scallop'd horn;
 A snow of blossoms whiten on the Thorn.
 Here, like the fatal fruit to Paris given,
 That spread fell feuds throughout the fabled Heaven,
 The yellow Rose her golden globe displays;
 There, lovelier still, among their spiny sprays
 Her blushing Rivals glow with brighter dyes,
 Than paints the Summer Sun, on western skies;
 And the scarce ting'd, and paler Rose unveil
 Their modest beauties to the sighing gale.

Thro' the deep woodland's wild uncultured scene,
 Spreads the soft influence of the floral Queen.
 A beauteous pyramid, the Chestnut* rears,
 Its crimson tassels on the Larch† appears;
 The Fir,° dark native of the sullen North,
 Owns her soft sway; and slowly springing forth
 On the rough Oak‡ are buds minute unfurl'd,
 Whose giant produce may command the World!
 Each forest thicket feels the balmy air,

* Chestnut. *Hippocastanum*, Horse chestnut. † Larch. *Pinus larix*.
 ° Fir. *Pinus sylvestris*, Scotch Fir. ‡ Oak. *Quercus robur*.

Line 134. *gjaat* ... World: the timber used to build England's navy.

And plants that love the shade are blowing there,
 Rude rocks with Filices and Bryum smile,
 And wastes are gay with Thyme and Chamomile.

Ah! yet prolong the dear delicious dream,
 And trace her power along the mountain stream.
 See! from its rude and rocky source, o'erhung
 With female Fern, and glossy Adder's-tongue,*
 Slowly it wells, in pure and crystal drops,
 And steals soft-gliding thro' the upland copse;
 Then murmuring on, along the willowy sides,
 The Reed-bird whispers, and the Halcyon hides;†
 While among Sallows pale, and bitchen bowers,
 Embarks in Fancy's eye the Queen of flowers[.]—

O'er her light skiff, of woven bull-rush made,
 The water Lily° lends a polish'd shade,
 While Galium† there of pale and silver hue,
 And Epilobium‡ on the banks that grew,
 Form her soft couch; and as the Sylphs divide,
 With pliant arms, the still increasing tide,
 A thousand leaves along the stream unfold;
 Amid its waving swords, in flaming gold
 The Iris towers; and here the Arrowhead,§
 And water Crowfoot,§ more profusely spread,

* Female fern. *Polypodium, silix femina*, Adder's-tongue. *Asplenium Sclopaendrium*, Hart's tongue, more usually called Adder's tongue.
 † Reed-bird. *Motacilla salicaria*, the reed Sparrow, or willow Wren. A bird that in a low and sweet note imitates several others, and sings all night. Halcyon. *Alcedo ispida*, The King fisher, or Halcyon, one of the most beautiful of English birds.
 ° Water lily. *Nymphaea alba*. † Galium. *Galium palustre*, White Lady's bed straw.
 • Epilobiums. Various species of Willow herbs.
 ‡ Iris. *Iris palustris*, common Flag, or yellow Iris. Arrowhead. *Sagittaria sagittifolia*.
 § Crowfoot. *Ranunculus aquatilis*, white water Crowfoot.

Line 136. *blowing*: in blossom. Line 147. Sallows pale: a kind of willow.

From depths where Corals spring from crystal caves,
 And break with scarlet branch the eddying waves,
 Where Algæ* stream, as change the flowing tides,
 And where half flower, half fish, the Polyp† hides,
 And long tenacious bands of Sea-lace twine
 Round palm-shaped leaves empearl'd with Coralline,°
 Enamour'd Fancy now the Sea-maids calls,
 And from their grottos dim, and shell-paved halls,
 Charm'd by her voice, the shining train emerge,
 And buoyant float above the circling surge[:]
 Green Byssus,‡ waving in the sea born gales,
 Form'd their thin mantles, and transparent veils[:]
 Panier'd* in shells, or bound with silver strings
 Of silken Pinna,§ each her trophy brings
 Of plants, from rocks and caverns sub-marine,
 With leathery branch, and bladder'd buds between;
 There its dark folds the pucker'd Laver spread
 With trees in miniature of various red;
 There flag-shaped Olive leaves depending hung,
 And fairy fans from glossy pebbles sprung:

* Algæ. Sea weeds of many sorts. Sea Lace, line 183, is one of them. *Algæ. Fuci* and *Confervia*, include, I believe, all sea plants.

† Polyp. The Polypus, or sea Anemone.

° Coralline. Coralline is, if I do not misunderstand the only book I have to consult, a shelly substance, the work of sea insects, adhering to stones and to sea weeds.

‡ Green Byssus. *Flos aquæ*. Paper Byssus; a semi-transparent substance floating on the waves. • Panier'd: Panier'd is not perhaps a word correctly English, but it must here be forgiven me. [Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this usage as a verb form the only one in English after the sixteenth century. A panier was a frame, usually made of whalebone or wire, which extended a lady's gown at the hips, the mode of high fashion in the late eighteenth century.]

§ Pinna. The Pinna, or Sea-Wing, is contained in a two-valved shell. It consists of fine long silk-like fibres.]—The Pinna on the coast of Provence and Italy, is called the silk-worm of the sea. Stockings and gloves of exquisite fineness have been made of it. See note 27th to the Economy of Vegetation [Erasmus Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, Additional Notes, Note 27—Shell Fish, in *Poetical Works* (London, 1806), I, 369–70]. The subsequent lines attempt a description of sea plants, without any correct classification.

Spangle the quiet current; higher there,
 As conscious of her claims, in beauty rare,
 Her rosy umbels rears the flow'ring Rush,*
 While with reflected charms the waters blush.

The Naiad now the Year's fair Goddess leads,
 Thro' richer pastures, and more level meads,
 Down to the Sea; where even the briny sands
 Their product offer to her glowing hands;
 For there, by Sea-dews nurs'd, and air marine,
 The Chelidonium† blows; in glaucous green,
 Each reflux tide the thorn'd Eryngium° laves
 And its pale leaves seem tintured by the waves;
 And half way up the clift, whose rugged brow
 Hangs o'er the ever[-]toiling Surge below,
 Springs the light Tamarisk[.]‡—The summit bare
 Is tufted by the Statice;° and there,
 Crush'd by the fisher, as he stands to mark
 Some distant signal, or approaching bark,
 The Saltwort's§ starry stalks are thickly sown,
 Like humble worth, unheeded and unknown!—

* Rush. *Butomus umbellatus*, the flow'ring Rush, or water Gladiole, the only native of England of the class *Enneandra hexagynia*.

† Chelidonium. *Chelidonium glaucum*, the horned or sea Poppy.

° Eryngium. *Eryngium maritimum*, Sea Holly.

‡ Tamarisk. *Tamarix gallica*. This elegant plant is not very uncommon on cliffs in the West of England, and was in 1800 to be found on an high rock to the Eastward of the town of Hastings, in Sussex.

• Statice. *Statice armeria*. Sea Pink. Sea Lavender, commonly called Thrift, is frequently used for borders of flower beds. It covers some of the most sterile cliffs.

§ Saltwort. *Salsola kali*. This plant when burnt affords a fossile alkali, and is used in the manufacture of glass. The best is brought from the Mediterranean, and forms a considerable article of commerce. It is very frequent on the cliffs on the Sussex coast.

Line 163. Naiad: A nymph of the stream escorts Flora to the sea.

Line 168. blows: blooms.

Then her terrestrial train the Nereids meet,
And lay their spoils saline at Flora's feet.

200

O! fairest of the fabled forms that stream,
Dress'd by wild Fancy, thro' the Poet's dream,
Still may thy attributes, of leaves and flowers,
Thy gardens rich, and shrub-*o'*ershadowed bowers,
And yellow meads, with Spring's first honors bright,
The child's gay heart, and frolic step invite;
And, while the careless wanderer explores
The umbrageous forest, or the rugged shores,
Climbs the green down, or roams the broom-clad waste,
May *Truth* and *Nature* form his future taste.
Goddess! on Youth's bless'd hours thy gifts bestow,
Bind the fair wreath on Virgin Beauty's brow,
And still may Fancy's brightest flowers be wove
Round the gold chains of Hymeneal love;
But most for those, by Sorrow's hands oppress'd,
May thy beds blossom, and thy wilds be drest;
And where, by Fortune, and the World, forgot,
The Mourner droops in some sequester'd spot,
("Sad luxury to vulgar minds unknown")
O'er blighted happiness, for ever gone,
Yet the dear image seeks not to forget,
But woos his grief, and cherishes regret,
Loving, with fond and lingering pain, to mourn
O'er joys and hopes that never will return,

205

210

215

220

Thou, visionary Power, may'st bid him view
Forms not less lovely—and as transient too,
And, while they soothe the wearied Pilgrim's eyes,
Afford an antepast of Paradise.

225

Studies by the sea

Ah! wherefore do the incurious say,
That this stupendous Ocean wide
No change presents from day to day,
Save only the alternate tide,
Or save when gales of Summer glide
Across the lightly crisped wave;
Or, when against the cliff's rough side
As equinoctial tempests rave
It wildly bursts; *o'*erwhelms the deluged strand,
Tears down its bounds, and desolates the land?

5

10

He who with more enquiring eyes
Doth this extensive scene survey,
Beholds innumerable changes rise,
As various winds its surface sway;
Now *o'er* its heaving bosom play
Small sparkling waves of silver gleam,
And as they lightly glide away,
Illumine with fluctuating beam
The deepening surge; green as the dewy corn
That undulates in April's breezy morn.

15

20

The far off waters then assume
A glowing amethystine shade,

Line 199. Nereids: sea nymphs.

Line 209. down: high grassland. broom-clad: the barren, chalky soil supports broom, a shrub with yellow flowers.

Line 214. Hymeneal: marital.

Line 219. Sad luxury ... unknown: A likely reference to a long account of blighted love in an exceptional garden in the fourth book of William Mason's *English Garden*, which concludes with an admonition to those skeptical of the mourners: "... let the scorner learn / There is a solemn luxury in grief / Which they shall never taste, well known to those, / And only those, in solitude's deep gloom / Who heave the sigh sincerely."

Flora. Line 228. antepast: foretaste.