

The Farmer's Boy

By Robert Bloomfield, introduced and edited by Peter Cochran

Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* was the poem most frequently printed in the "romantic" period. William St Clair credits it with having sold over 100,000 copies between 1800 and 1826.¹ Crabbe, Bloomfield's rival Suffolk poet, enjoyed much smaller sales.² Joseph Weston, the editor of Bloomfield's *Remains* (1824) writes,

... I have been informed by persons who travel into every quarter of the country, that almost the only books they are frequently able to find, are the Bible and the poems of Bloomfield.³

Bloomfield was born at Honington, south-east of Thetford in Suffolk, on December 3rd 1766.



Bloomfield's birthplace, Honington

A distant cousin, called Blomfield, was Bishop of London. His father died of smallpox when he was a year old, and he was taught to read and write by his mother. He had five siblings, and when he was seven his mother married again, and had another family. At the age of eleven he was sent to his mother's brother-in-law at the nearby village of Sapiston. He is said to have been too small to be helpful at farmwork (though there is no agreement about his height);⁴ and so he was sent to two of his brothers in London to train as a shoemaker. There he ran errands and read the newspapers aloud.

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1: William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p.582.

2: *Ibid*, p.596.

3: *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield* (1824), pp.xvii-xviii.

4: See *The Farmer's Boy* (2nd edition, 1800), p.xvii, has "about 5 F. 4 I. high"; but B.C.Bloomfield, *The Publication of The Farmer's Boy by Robert Bloomfield, The Library*, Vol XV (No.2) June 1993 (BCB hereafter), has "barely five feet tall" (p.76).



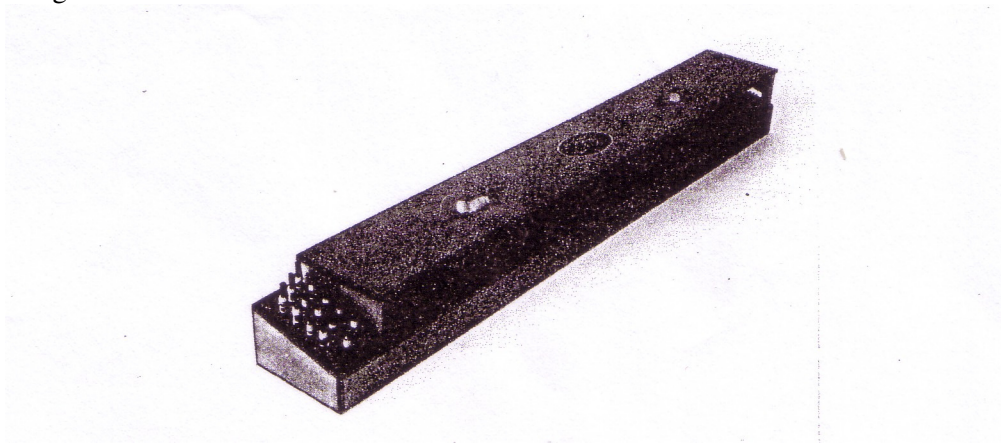
Robert Bloomfield



Capel Lofft

He was fond especially of reading the poetry section of the *London Magazine*. Thomson's *The Seasons* was one of his favourite poems, as were Gray's *Elegy* and Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*.

Bloomfield learned the violin, and became a maker of Aeolian harps – he improved their design.⁵



Bloomfield's 1808 Aeolian harp, restored by Alan Grove

He returned for three months to Suffolk after an apprenticeship dispute, and then came back to London, where in 1790 he married. In the garret where he worked with five or six others, he composed *The Farmer's Boy*, initially for his mother's pleasure, creating and correcting long sections in his head. Published in 1800, it was an instant success, counting Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge among its admirers. Bloomfield was introduced to the Duke of Grafton,⁶ had his portrait taken, and almost met the Prince of Wales. The first part of

⁵: See *Selections from the Correspondence of Robert Bloomfield The Suffolk Poet*, edited by W.H.Hart, F.S.A. (London 1870: hereafter "Hart"), p.43.

⁶: Augustus Henry Fitzroy, third Duke of Grafton (1735-1811) MP for Bury St Edmunds and sometime Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk. Colleague of Pitt the Elder (see Byron, *The Vision of Judgement* 71, 4). Chancellor of Cambridge University. Frequenter of Newmarket races. Rumoured to be a Deist.

The Farmer's Boy was translated into Latin (as *Agricola puer*, Ipswich, 1804): all of it, into French prose (as *Le valet du fermier, poème champêtre*, Paris, 1802), and Italian. A Welsh translation appeared, but not until 1880. It was published in America and Germany. A second edition was out in two months; by the seventh edition, it had sold 26,100 copies.⁷ By 1820 there had been fourteen editions. Bloomfield met and breakfasted with Samuel Rogers, and met Mrs Barbauld. He corresponded with Fox. He recited his own poetry in society, “with a symphony of broken expression and with frequent tears”.⁸ People were amazed to find that he had Thomson’s *The Seasons* and *Castle of Indolence*, and “most of Burns” off by heart.⁹

Success alienated him from his own class, from the original agricultural section of which he was, as a shoemaker in London, alienated already. He writes, quoting a private memorandum of his own:

a short time after the above date [*of the publication of The Farmer's Boy*] I spent a delightful month at Wakefield Lodge, in Whittlebury Forest, Northamptonshire; [*the official residence of one of his patrons, the Duke of Grafton*] upon which visit I find recorded the following remark:

WHEN I was at Wakefield Lodge I conceived that I saw the workmen and neighbours look at me as at an idle fellow. I had nothing to do but to read, look at them, and their country and concerns. They did not seem to know how to estimate me. I was not a constant companion at the Duke’s table, nor was I much in his company; yet, seeing me noticed with attention by the family, that attention was caught, and dealt out to me at second-hand. I sometimes thought of the Spectator when at Sir Roger de Coverly’s, and of the *silent gentleman* whom nobody knew much about. Six months only before that time I was in sickness and in trouble; sometimes two, sometimes three days in a week racked with a head-ach that nearly drove me distracted. To lie down almost destitute of the necessaries of life, tortured with pain till I cried out, and that pain augmented by the sight of a wife and children whom I could not help, was certainly a hard trial for my philosophy. The Poem became public in two months after, and my first relief was from the hand of the right worthy owner of Wakefield Lodge. What a glorious thing is a present of ——— to a man in distress.¹⁰

His financial success was thus sweet, but his social success a mixed blessing, for it shut him off from one group of people while not making him feel that he belonged to any other.

He had been shut off, too, from the preparation of the text of his poem. *The Farmer's Boy* was edited for the press by the Suffolk landowner and magistrate Capel Lofft, with no consultation with its author at all. Bloomfield had tried various London publishers, with no luck. He had sent it to his brother Nathaniel, who had shown it to Lofft, who admired it at once, and set about editing it, a process which took him a year and three months. Bloomfield was not even told the publication date. He resumes the tale:

The printing was now going on, and that I knew little of its progress (which was the case) I have only to blame myself. I seldom called to enquire after it. I knew it to be in good hands. Yet, during the fifteen months which elapsed before its publication, the latter part of which time was attended by very bad health, I felt much anxiety; and, (having the Poem then perfect in my memory,) after a hard day’s work, with my back to the fire, and in the stillness of the night, I have often repeated aloud the whole, or greater part of the Poem, until my wife was fast asleep, before I could find resolution to put out the candle. The reader who disdains such little anecdotes had better lay down the book; for I shall proceed in my own way.

At length, in March 1800, my brother Nathaniel (with whom I wish the world was better acquainted) called to say that he had seen, in a shop window, a book called *The Farmer's Boy*, with a motto. I told him I supposed it must be mine; but I knew nothing of the motto: and the more I believed it to be mine, having just received through the hands of Mr. Lofft a request to wait on the Duke of Grafton, in Piccadilly. I had a very slight personal remembrance of the Duke from my childhood; and I felt as most men would feel in my circumstances on a similar occasion. I met with

7: BCB p.83.

8: The Earl of Buchan, letter of Mar 11 1806, Hart p.39.

9: Jonathan Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield* (Twayne 1980: hereafter “Lawson”), p.28.

10: *The Poems of Robert Bloomfield*, two vols 1809, I xxiv-xxv.

condescension in its noblest features, and even with congratulations; and amongst the conversation was very naturally asked, “How I liked the execution of the work? Was it not beautifully printed?” &c. I replied, that I had not yet seen it. The Duke himself then brought from the library one of the large paper copies, and spread it on the table. *Giles* never was so hard put to it in his life to keep his face in order as at that moment. At that moment the Preface was *as new to me as the Poem was to the world*. I could not read it there; but on my return home I saw the high praise which my Brother had given me, and which had been so advantageously laid before the public by Mr. Lofft. I thanked them both for having spared me the task of telling my own story, thanked God for his providential interposition, and felt my heart at ease.¹¹

What he means by “I met with condescension in its noblest features” is made clear in a letter: “The Duke gave me five guineas screwed up in a little piece of paper”.¹²

The Farmer’s Boy remained popular for much of the nineteenth century. One firm alone, Milner, sold 65,550 copies between 1835 and 1895, and Bloomfield was their fifth poetry seller, after Burns, Byron, Milton, and Pope.¹³

Five more books of verse by Bloomfield, a children’s story, and a play,¹⁴ followed, all on rural themes; but fared less well. Southey wrote of Bloomfield’s second volume, *Rural Tales*:

When we took up *The Farmer’s Boy*, no popular opinion had been pronounced upon its merit. Robert Bloomfield was a name unknown to us and to the world; and amid the volumes of insipidity which it is our lot to examine, we were delighted to meet with excellence that we had not expected. The present volume appears with less advantage; it has a more difficult test to encounter. To acquire reputation has ever been easier than to preserve it. Mr Bloomfield’s poems will ever be compared with what he formerly produced; and *The Farmer’s Boy* is his most dangerous rival.¹⁵

A.J.Sambrook wrote, in 1967, with accurate cruelty:

... each of Bloomfield’s eight volumes after *The Farmer’s Boy* achieved a little less notice than the one before it. In his first book he had fully worked out his narrow vein of talent; having sung the farmer’s boy he had nothing more to say.¹⁶

Perhaps because Bloomfield was writing consciously for the market – which he certainly was not when writing *The Farmer’s Boy* – his poetry became uninspired, politically safe, and dull: never again did he write such passages such as the one about the sufferings of post-horses in *Winter*, in *The Farmer’s Boy*. At his best when celebrating family unity, or social conviviality, he never, in his later books, puts those things under threat from anything more serious than stormy weather (*Market Night*, in *Rural Tales*), or alcohol (*The Drunken Father*, in *May Day with the Muses*), two admittedly dangerous factors which, in his verse narratives, are, however, readily met and overcome. Incident, and therefore tension, is what he’s weak at creating in his later verse; whereas, in *The Farmer’s Boy*, threat lurks even in the farmyard gander.

Bloomfield shared his income generously with his family, including his brother: a fact which led to his ultimate impoverishment.¹⁷

Grafton had him appointed Under-Sealer in the Court of King’s Bench, a menial job which exhausted him, and from which he resigned in 1803.¹⁸ He went into bookselling, where nothing went right for him, though Grafton compensated by awarding him fifteen pounds a

11: *Ibid*, I xxxiii-xxxiv.

12: Hart p.5.

13: BCB p.92.

14: *Rural Tales* (1802); *Good Tidings; or, News from the Farm* (1804); *Wild Flowers; or, Pastoral and Local Poetry* (1806); *The Banks of Wye* (1811); *The History of Little Davy’s New Hat* (story: 1813); *May Day with the Muses* (1822); *Hazelwood Hall* (play: 1824).

15: *The Critical Review*, XXXV (1802), pp.67-8; for Southey’s authorship, see Hart, p.28.

16: A.J.Sambrook, *The Farmer’s Boy: Robert Bloomfield, 1766-1823*, *English XVI*, Summer 1967, p.171.

17: BCB pp.93-4.

18: Hart p.30.

year pension.¹⁹ His publisher Hood died, and Sharpe, another partner, sold up. In 1812, the firm failed, and its successor failed two years later.²⁰ There were arguments over copyright, especially of *The Farmer's Boy*. Bloomfield described himself as “cheated and bamboozled”.²¹ Sales declined. One of his daughters died, and his wife became a follower of Johanna Southcott, giving money to that dropsical prophetess's doomed movement. Grafton had died and been succeeded by his son, who was at first less generous than his father had been. Wordsworth himself was moved to protest. On January 20th 1817 he wrote to Benjamin Robert Haydon:

Bloomfield the Poet has been and I believe is, in considerable distress, probably owing to the failure of his Bookseller, by whom he has lost several 100 pounds. A subscription was set on foot for his benefit. You know perhaps that he is a native of Euston the Duke of Grafton's parish, his Grace's principal Seat and Residence. This Spot, and its neighbourhood are the scene of the Farmer's Boy; from this bond of connection something was expected from the noble Duke, nor was that expectation wholly fruitless – for he has given – five Pounds!!! This same illustrious person sold the Library which his Father had collected – God help the Literati of England if his Grace of Grafton be a fair specimen of the Patrons of the Day. But I know that he is not so.

O may the man who has the muses scorned,
Alive or dead be never of a muse adorned.²²

Grafton, however, made up the arrears quickly,²³ and even suggested new subjects for Bloomfield to write about.²⁴

Bloomfield became seriously ill: he suffered throughout his life from rheumatism and migraines, which often prevented him from reading and writing. His eyesight began to fail. He was attacked by both political sides: Tories said he was a republican, and Cobbett claimed he'd been pensioned “for fear that he should write for the people”.²⁵ He sold his Suffolk cottage; but owing to litigation, realised nothing from the sale. He died in poverty at Shefford, Bedfordshire, on August 19th 1823, aged fifty-seven. He is buried in the churchyard of All Saints, Campton.

Clare, whom he admired, and whose *Shepherd's Calendar* derives in part from him, had returned the empathetic feeling, with interest, with some envy. He wrote:

... Bloomfield had not a £100 a year to maintain 5 or 6 in the family why I have not £50 to maintain 8 with this is a hungry difference²⁶

I have desires to know something of Bloomfield's latter days but I can hearing of nothing further than his dying neglected so it is of no use enquiring further – for we know that to be the common lot of genius²⁷

poor Bloomfield I wish that death had left me a little longer the pleasure of his friendship²⁸

19: BCB pp.80 and 84.

20: BCB p.86.

21: Hart p.55.

22: *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Moorman (Oxford 1970), III pp.362-3.

23: Hart p.59.

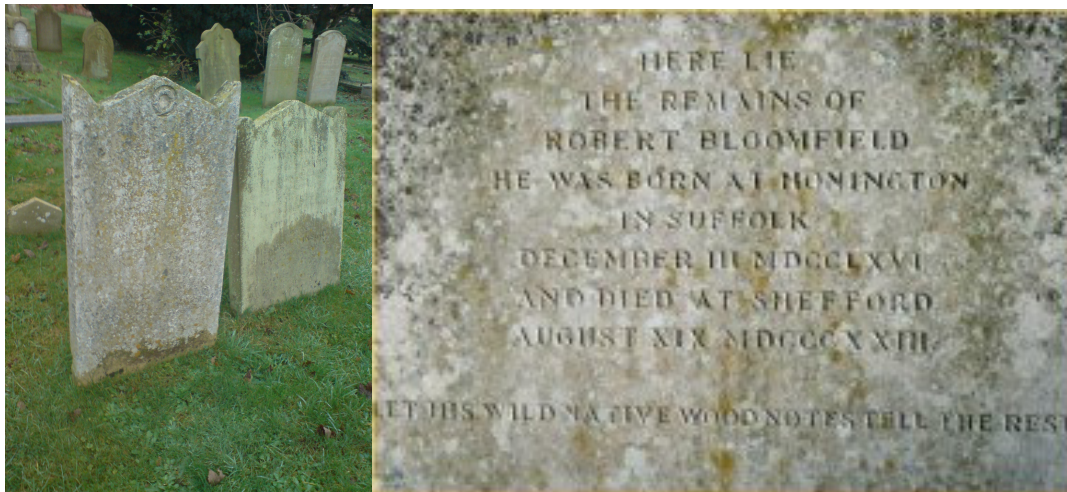
24: Lawson p.43

25: Cobbett, *Political Register*, 24 April 1819, quoted Ingrams, *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett*, HarperCollins (2005), p.47. For R.B.'s feelings, see Hart p.30.

26: *John Clare By Himself*, p.200.

27: *John Clare By Himself*, p.194.

28: *John Clare By Himself*, p.216.



*Bloomfield's grave at All Saints' Church, Campton, Bedfordshire:
the inscription is much less legible now (October 2007).*

Bloomfield left an epitaph for himself, which was not used, as can be seen in the photos above:

First made a Farmer's Boy, and then a snob,
A poet he became, and here lies Bob.
April 1823²⁹

Byron's friend John Cam Hobhouse (another propertied gentleman, masquerading as a radical), spent Tuesday April 8th 1823 with his other friend, and role-model, Sir Francis Burdett (a feudalistic plutocrat masquerading as a radical). He wrote in his diary:

Burdett and I rode nearly thirty miles to meet the Pytchley hounds on Rockingham Forest – we did not find them for two hours, and when we did find them, had no sport. We put up afterwards at the George Inn, Kettering, dined, and slept comfortably. I read a little book of Lindley Murray's, containing accounts of men who had either lived or died piously. I do not think these sort of books are ever written well enough for their subject, which requires skill and address.

Burdett read the *Farmer's Boy* for the first time – thought the versification smooth.³⁰

Just as Hobhouse deflects the need to think about Murray's book on pious lives by impugning its style, so Burdett, disturbed by the idea that lower-class country people have a viewpoint, deflects the need to think about the poem by praising its style – and that with the most general of comments. Books, for both, are to be criticised and appreciated, not taken to heart. Gentlemen of property and leisure don't need books to teach them about life. Their patrician role is to apportion praise and criticism. It's an attitude they share with Capel Lofft, Bloomfield's editor. Look at the way he describes his first reaction to it:

I had ... the pleasure of ... discovering, that, although the delineation of RURAL SCENERY naturally branches itself into these divisions, there was little else except the General Qualities of a musical ear, flowing numbers, Feeling, Piety, poetic Imagery and Animation, a taste for the picturesque, a true sense of the natural and pathetic, force of thought, and liveliness of imagination, which were in common between Thomson and this Author. And these are qualities which whoever has the eye, the heart, the awakened and surrounding intellect, and the diviner sense of the Poet, which alone can deserve the name, must possess.

But, with these general Characters of true Poetry, "*The Farmer's Boy*" has, as I have said, a character of its own ...³¹

29: BL. Add. Mss. 30809 f. 11, quoted *Robert Bloomfield: Selected Poems*, edited by John Goodridge and John Lucas, with an introduction by John Lucas, Trent Editions, 1998, p.131.

30: B.L. Add. Mss. 56547 f.46r.

31: Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy* (1st edition, 1800), p.ii.

There is political thought implicit, at least, in *The Farmer's Boy* (see below): but Lofft – who would wish poetry not to be political – isn't concerned to direct our attention to it.

The Farmer's Boy and eighteenth-century pastoral

Anyone with experience of agricultural labour knows that it is filthy, exhausting, monotonous, depressing and mind-numbing. When Robert Southey writes to Horace Walpole Bedford, of the Pantisocracy scheme, "... when Coleridge and I are sawing down a tree we shall discuss metaphysics; criticise poetry when hunting a buffalo, & write sonnets whilst following the plough. Our society will be of the most polished order ..."32 it's clear he's never tried it. Bloomfield composed at work, but cobbling is stationary work, needing nowhere near as much energy as farm-work. What farm-work he had done, indeed, was relaxing in contrast to, for example, threshing, for which he does not seem to have been robust enough. Threshing had been admirably described by Stephen Duck:

Now in the air our knotty weapons fly,
And now with equal force descend from high;
Down one, one up, so well they keep the time, 40
The *Cyclops*' hammers could not truer chime;
Nor with more heavy strokes could *Aetna* groan,
When *Vulcan* forg'd the arms for *Thetis*' Son.
In briny streams our sweat descends apace,
Drops from our locks, or trickles down our face. 45
No intermission in our works we know;
The noisy Threshall must for ever go.
Their Master absent, others safely play;
The sleeping Threshall doth itself betray.
Nor yet the tedious Labour to beguile, 50
And make the passing minutes sweetly smile,
Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry tale;
The voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail.³³

I do not think Duck's work was known to Bloomfield.

All one can do after a day's work on a farm is sit still, and then sleep. If one were as guilt- and stress-free (and lucky in being fit only for light work), as is Jiles, Bloomfield's protagonist, one would admittedly sleep very well:

Delicious Sleep! from sleep who could forbear
With no more guilt than Jiles, and no more care? (*Summer*, 107-8)

... but if, like the worried farmers themselves, or like farmers' boys whose work was heavier and more repetitive, one might not ever sleep peacefully. Here again is Stephen Duck:

Nor, when asleep are we secure from pain;
We then perform our labours o'er again;
Our mimic fancy always restless seems,
And what we act awake, she acts in dreams.³⁴

32: Robert Southey to Horace Walpole Bedford, September 22nd 1794 (Bodleian M.S. Eng. Letters c 22 126-7; Curry I pp.70-4).

33: Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, from POEMS ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS: WRITTEN BY STEPHEN DUCK, Lately a poor *Thresher* in a Barn in the County of *Wilts*, at the Wages of Four Shillings and Six Pence *per Week* ... (1730), lines 38-53.

34: *Ibid*, lines 251-4.

In modern times the suicide rate among farmers is higher than that of any other profession. Of all poetic traditions, pastoral is the most mendacious. Few pastoral poems are written in the country – Clare’s being the exception.

That *The Farmer’s Boy* is in an eighteenth-century style throughout is characteristic of the “romantic” period, which had the disadvantage, to our twenty-first-century eyes, of not realising that it was the romantic period, and thinking instead that it was the age of Napoleon, Byron and Scott – all three as backward-looking and unromantic, in their different idioms, as Bloomfield. And yet there are ways in which Bloomfield is not eighteenth-century.

Thomson’s *The Seasons* was a poem of which Bloomfield was fond (it was reading an imperfect copy of *The Seasons* which Clare said inspired him to his first writing). *The Seasons* was, but was not, a model for Bloomfield.³⁵ He was in critical reaction against its pomposity, though he couldn’t stop himself from being pompous now and then. He would never write, about the silence before an anticipated downpour,

Hush’d in short suspense,
The plummy people streak their wings with oil,
To throw the lucid moisture trickling off;
And wait th’approaching sign to strike, at once,
Into the general choir. Even mountains, vales,
And forests seem, impatient, to demand
The promis’d sweetness. Man superior walks,
Amid the glad creation, musing praise,
And looking lively gratitude.³⁶

Birds can never be, for Bloomfield, “plummy people” striking into a “general choir” as if nature is a Handel oratorio. However, we have to concede that pigs are “The restless wand’ring tenants of the sty” at *Autumn* 8, and birds “the feather’d tribe” at *Autumn* 241.³⁷ But it’s by no means clear that, to Bloomfield, man, as Jiles embodies him, is “superior” to anything. In *Summer*, Thomson writes (of daybreak),

Falsely luxurious, will not man awake;
And, springing from the bed of sloth, enjoy
The cool, the fragrant, and the silent hour,
To meditation due, and sacred song?³⁸

To which the answer, from Bloomfield’s viewpoint, might be “Yes, if he has a private income and no work to do first thing in the morning”. For Thomson, a blue sky is a “kindling azure” (*Summer*, 83), with a “hue cerulean” (*ibid*, 151): for Bloomfield, less consistent about his style, it’s “the clear blue sky” (*Summer* 100); but can also be “heaven’s bright azure” (*Summer* 27).

What Bloomfield didn’t take from Thomson was his blank verse, with its capacity for run-over and bustle, and confident moralising:

Thick in yon stream of light, a thousand ways,
Upward, and downward, thwarting, and convolv’d,
The quiv’ring nations sport; till tempest-wing’d,
Fierce Winter sweeps them from the face of day.
E’en so luxurious Men, unheeding, pass
An idle summer-life in fortune’s shine,

35: John Goodridge describes *The Farmer’s Boy* as a “popular Imitation” of *The Seasons* (*Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*, Cambridge 1995, p.24).

36: James Thomson, *The Seasons*, *Spring*, 164-72.

37: “For my part when it was written I had no precise idea of what constituted a fault of that kind. It was only good luck that such lines were not frequent in the Poem.” (R.B.’s note to the “bombastic” line, *Spring* 82). A.J.Sambrook (op.cit., p.169) that we “wish that Bloomfield had been as confident as Clare was in using his own countryman’s language, instead of feeling constrained to employ ‘received’ poetic diction”.

38: Thomson, op cit., *Summer*, 67-70.

A season's glitter! Thus they flutter on
 From toy to toy, from vanity to vice;
 Till, blown away by death, oblivion comes
 Behind, and strikes them from the book of life.³⁹

Bloomfield, to whose ear “the quivering nations” – meaning insects – would be an impossibility, is more interested in the insect itself (as Clare is, compared with Keats, when contemplating the nightingale; or Byron, compared with Shelley, contemplating the eagle):

The small dust-colour'd Beetle climbs with pain
 O'er the smooth plantain leaf, a spacious plain!
 Thence higher still by countless steps convey'd,
 He gains the summit of a shiv'ring blade
 And flirts his filmy wings and looks around,
 Exulting in his distance from the ground. (*Summer*, 75-80).

... and his moralising is subtler and more indirect.

Thomson's scope is universal. He ranges from ancient times to the present, and from the Arctic to the Equator. Bloomfield stays in late-eighteenth-century Suffolk. He takes the eighteenth-century pastoral tradition, not only of Thomson (whose ambition is only partly pastoral), but of Pope, Gay and Goldsmith, and appropriates it to his own class. Capel Lofft, wittingly or not, would hide this fact: his Popean motto diverts our attention from the qualified proletarian realism of Bloomfield's poetry by dressing it up in wig, lace, and an embroidered waistcoat. Here is his epigraph (which Bloomfield rejected) in its context, at the start of Pope's *Summer: or, Alexis*:

TO DR. GARTH.

A shepherd's boy (he seeks no better name)
 Led forth his flocks along the silver Thame
 Where dancing sun-beams on the waters play'd,
 And verdant alders formed a quiv'ring shade.
 Soft as he mourn'd, and streams forgot to flow,
 The flocks around a dumb compassion show,
 The Naiads wept in ev'ry watery bow'r,
 And Jove consented to the silent shower.
 Accept, O Garth, the Muse's early lays,
 That adds this wreath of ivy to thy bays,
 Hear what from love unpractis'd hearts endure,
 From love, the sole disease thou canst not cure. (Pope, *Summer*)

Augustan urbanity (in the address to Garth) and Spenserian nostalgia (“the silver Thame”) combine with Pope's own classicism to create a modern idyll in the tradition of Theocritus or Virgil.

John Gay's mock-pastorals are erotical-comical, the story of Shakespeare's Sylvius and Phoebe told in the voices of Jacques and Touchstone (and the love of Pope's Alexis is called “Rosalinda”):

While bulls bear horns upon their curled brow,
 Or lasses with soft stroaking milk the cow,
 While paddling ducks the standing lake desire,
 Or batt'ning hogs roll in the sinking mire,
 While moles the crumbl'd earth in hillocks raise,
 So long shall swains tell Blouzelinda's praise.
 Thus wail'd the louts in melancholy strain ...
 (Gay, *The Shepherd's Week; Friday*)

³⁹: Ibid, *Summer*, 342-51.

We notice, however, that Bloomfield doesn't draw back from writing of "the veriest clown that treads the sod" (*Summer* 127). "Clown" was at any rate synonymous in some contexts with "agricultural labourer", and was not necessarily demeaning.

With Goldsmith's lament over the disruptive consequences of enclosure and urban migration, Bloomfield would have been in greater sympathy:

Ah, turn thine eyes
Where the poor houseless shiv'ring female lies.
She, once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,
Has wept at tales of innocence distress;
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;
Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,
And, pinch'd with cold, and shrinking from the show'r,
With heavy heart deplores the luckless hour,
When idly first, ambitious of the town,
She left her wheel and robes of country brown.
(Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*)

The plight of Bloomfield's "mad girl" (in *Autumn*) is not so desperate as this in the long run – a note tells us that she recovered; but while it lasts, is as bad:

oh how much more forlorn
Her night, that knows of no returning dawn.
Slow from the threshold, once her infant seat,
O'er the cold earth she crawls to her retreat;
Quitting the Cot's warm walls in filth to lie,
Where the swine grunting yields up half his sty.
The damp night air her shivering limbs assails;
In dreams she moans, and fancied wrongs bewails.
When morning wakes, none earlier rous'd than she,
When pendant drops fall glit'ring from the tree,
But nought her rayless melancholy cheers,
Or soothes her breast or stops her streaming tears.
Her matted locks unornamented flow;
Clasping her knees and waving to and fro;
Her head bow'd down, her faded cheek to hide;
A piteous mourner by the pathway side.
Some tufted molehill through the live-long day
She calls her throne; there weeps her life away. (Bloomfield, *Autumn*, 133-50)

John Clare wrote two poems about Bloomfield. Here is one:

Sweet unassuming Minstrel not to thee
The dazzling fashions of the day belong
Natures wild pictures field and cloud and tree
And quiet brooks far distant from the throng
In murmurs tender as the toiling bee
Make the sweet music of thy gentle song
Well—nature owns thee let the crowd pass bye—
The tide of fashion is a stream too strong
For pastoral brooks that gently flow and sing
But nature is their source and earth and sky
Their annual offerings to her current bring
Thy injured muse and memory need no sigh
For thine shall murmur on to many a spring

When their proud stream is summer burnt and dry⁴⁰

There's an element, even in Clare's attitude, of something which Bloomfield was never without – condescension. For Clare, Bloomfield is one of Gray's "mute inglorious Miltons," except that he was gifted with a voice, and was glorious – or, at least, found a patron.⁴¹

Bloomfield was born near where Thomas Paine was born, but *seems* to share none of Paine's radicalism. He does not want the suffrage extended to all adult males, nor does he ask for annual parliaments. As William J. Christmas has written, Bloomfield ...

... willingly submits to the old (supposedly) natural order of things, and does not represent any of the disruptive, levelling energy that was everywhere in evidence among rural and urban laborers in the 1790s.⁴²

Jiles' cockade is "unambitious" and "peaceable" (*Spring*, 205). Bloomfield acknowledges working-class suffering, but his political ambition is restricted to getting masters to pay their labourers more and to give them a better life: "Let Labour have its due" is his modest request (*Summer*, 397, 399). See his note to *Summer*, 341:

In reference to this passage, and as a thought, by way of illustration, I subjoined a passage from Cook's Voyage, not knowing but it was written by Cook himself, which I now find was not the case. I was quite uncertain during the 15 months which the poem remained in the hands of Mr Lofft and the publishers, whether this note would be printed or not. I was pleading for kindness between the ranks of society, and it seemed to suit my purpose. And if I could believe that what I said of Letting "Labour have its due" would only in one instance persuade a Farmer to give his men more wages, instead of giving, or suffering him to buy cheap corn in the time of trouble, I should feel a pleasure of the most lasting sort, having no doubt but that an extra half Crown earned is worth, morally, and substantially, a five Shilling Gift; to those who in the house of their fathers work for bread.

More often he writes of cruelty and injustice cryptically, and transfers what he knows of the sufferings of agricultural labourers on to their animals. Speaking to Dobbin, the worthy carthorse of whom Clare was to make such a symbol, he declares:

Thy chains were freedom and thy toils repose,
 Could the poor Post-horse tell thee all his woes
 Shew thee his bleeding shoulders and unfold
 The dreadful anguish he endures for gold
 Hir'd at each call of business, lust, or rage
 That prompt the trav'ler on from stage to stage
 Still on his strength depends their boasted speed
 For them his limbs grow weak, his bare ribs bleed
 And though he groaning quickens at command
 Their extra shilling in the rider's hand
 Becomes his bitter scourge – 'tis he must feel
 The double efforts of the lash and steel ... (*Winter* 161-72)

Bloomfield may be reflecting here on the difference between farm labour and urban labour (he had more experience of the latter than he had of the former). Even so, on the farm where he works, it's a jungle: parasites abound, for instance the Gander at *Summer*, 225-42, who makes life hell for all the other beasts, or the "the Mastiff, or the meaner Cur" at *Winter*, 221-32, whose irresponsible activities pre-echo those of Gabriel Oak's dog in *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

40: John Clare, ed. Robinson and Powell, *The Oxford Authors*, (no date) p.108.

41: An interesting essay by Mina Gorji linking Bloomfield's memory with Clare's poem *The Mole* is found at Simon White, John Goodridge and Bridget Keenan (eds). *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), pp.232-52.

42: William J.Christmas, at *ibid.*, p.31.

It was Byron (a rich radical, like Capel Lofft, whom he affected to mock), who said in the Lords:

You must call these men a mob, desperate, dangerous, and ignorant; and seem to think that the only way to quiet the “*Bellua multorum capitum*” is to lop off a few superfluous heads. But even a mob may be better reduced to reason by a mixture of conciliation and firmness, than by additional irritation and redoubled penalties. Are we aware of our obligations to a *Mob*? It is the Mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses, – that man your navy, and recruit your army, – that have enabled you to defy all the world, and can also defy you when Neglect and Calamity have driven them to despair.

But Byron had earlier, in *English Bards*, mocked the very idea of working-class poets, including Bloomfield:

Heavens! how the vulgar stare! how crowds applaud!
 How ladies read, and Literati laud!
 If chance some wicked wag should pass his jest,
 'Tis sheer ill-nature; don't the world know best?
 Genius must guide when wits admire the rhyme,
 And CAPEL LOFFT declares 'tis quite sublime.
 Hear, then, ye happy sons of needless trade!
 Swains! quit the plough, resign the useless spade!
 Lo! BURNS and BLOOMFIELD, nay, a greater far,
 GIFFORD was born beneath an adverse star,
 Forsook the labours of a servile state,
 Stemmed the rude storm, and triumphed over Fate:
 Then why no more? if Phœbus smiled on you,
 BLOOMFIELD! why not on brother NATHAN too?
 Him too the Mania, not the Muse, has seized;
 Not inspiration, but a mind diseased:
 And now no Boor can seek his last abode,
 No common be enclosed without an ode.
 Oh! since increased refinement deigns to smile
 On Britain's sons, and bless our genial Isle,
 Let Poesy go forth, pervade the whole,
 Alike the rustic and mechanic soul:
 Ye tuneful cobblers! still your notes prolong,
 Compose at once a slipper and a song;
 So shall the fair your handy work peruse,
 Your sonnets sure shall please – perhaps your shoes.⁴³

It was one thing to express compassion for the poor; quite another to admit them to one's side as fellow artists. William Gifford, born into working-class Dorset and now editor of the *Quarterly* (and Byron's “literary father”), is, we protest, much less interesting as a poet than Robert Bloomfield: but Byron isn't concerned with fine distinctions.

At the end of *Spring* Bloomfield contemplates the slaughter of sheep, and it's in danger of getting to him as seriously as it will to Clarice Starling. He needs willpower to change his tone:

His gay companions Jiles beholds no more,
 Clos'd are their eyes, their fleeces drench'd in gore,
 Nor can compassion with her softest notes,
 Withhold the knife that plunges through their throats.
 Down, indignation! hence, ideas foul!
 Away the shocking image from my soul!
 Let kindlier visitants attend my way
 Beneath approaching Summer's fervid ray;
 Nor thankless glooms obtrude, nor cares annoy

43: EBSR 769-96.

Whilst the sweet theme is universal joy. (*Spring*, 349-58)

Keats, contemplating the natural world, could not turn his imagination away from “The core / Of an eternal, fierce destruction”; but Bloomfield’s conservative instinct is to provide uplift, a “theme of universal joy”. “Indignation”, whether radical, vegetarian, or both, won’t in any case get published in the 1790s, let alone read. Capel Lofft is more overtly radical than he; being rich, Lofft can afford to be. See Lofft’s note, in his preface, on the suppression of working-class debating societies. Bloomfield could not put such thoughts into the poem: it’s left to his patron and editor, the compassionate magistrate, to put one in a note. Bloomfield has to restrict himself to some thoughts – derived unimpeachably from Captain Cook – about the relatively class-free society of Otaheite (see his note to *Summer*, 341, referred to above).

Sometimes Bloomfield’s references are at two removes, not one. Man’s inhumanity to animals stands in for man’s inhumanity to man. It’s a development of Burns’ *To A Mouse*: Burns has no ill-will towards the mouse – he’s full of empathy for its houselessness. But Bloomfield laments, for example, the decorative docking of horses’ tails:

Poor patient Ball! and with insulting wing
 Roar in thine ears, and dart the piercing sting;
 In thy behalf thy crest of Boughs avail,
 More than thy short-clip’d remnant of a tail, 210
 A moving mockery, a useless name,
 A living proof of cruelty and shame.
 Shame to the man whatever fame he bore,
 Who took from thee what man can ne’er restore,
 Thy weapon of defence, thy chiefest good,
 When swarming flies contending suck thy blood. (*Summer*, 207-61)

The name was a common one for horses, yet it might imply that it’s gelding, not docking, to which Bloomfield is objecting – even though docking, involving the application of a hot iron, was cruel enough, and often commented on even by gentlemen. How poor and weak men are unmanned by rich and powerful men becomes clear in *Autumn*, when the field becomes a prison, just as palaces have for Blake and will for Byron:

His banquet marr’d, grown dull his hermitage,
 The Field becomes his prison; till on high,
 Benighted Birds to shades and coverts fly.
 Midst Air, Health, Daylight, can he prisoner be?
 If fields are prisons, where is Liberty?
 Here still she dwells and here her votarys stroll,
 But disappointed hope untunes the Soul.
 Restraints unfelt whilst hours of rapture flow,
 When troubles press, to chains and barriers grow. (*Autumn*, 222-30)

Liberty, Bloomfield concedes, exists; but it is liberty without hope – freedom to hope and be disappointed. It seems to be the passing of the old order which imprisons and unmans men:

Such were the days: of days long past I sing,
 When pride gave place to mirth without a sting;
 Ere tyrant customs strength sufficient bore,
 To violate the feelings of the poor;
 To leave them distanc’d in the mad’ning race,
 Where-e’er refinement shows its hated face:
 Nor causeless hated; ’tis the peasant’s curse
 That hourly makes his wretched station worse;
 Destroy’s life’s intercourse; the social plan,
 That rank to rank cements, as man to man;
 Wealth flows around him; fashion lordly reigns
 Yet poverty is his, and mental pains ... (*Summer*, 333-44)

And how does wealth flow around him where hitherto it had flowed (in part) through him, but in the remorseless and greedy process of enclosure – to which, being a careful writer, knowing the dangers of his place, Bloomfield makes no reference? “No common be enclosed without an ode,” sneered Byron – a rent-raiser, if not an encloser, himself (his great uncle had enclosed everything at Newstead that could be enclosed). The Duke of Grafton was a major encloser;⁴⁴ and, on June 19th 1800, an enclosure act was passed by Parliament, enclosing 831 acres of the village of Stanton in Suffolk – a process which had been in train since Capel Lofft had initiated it in 1784.⁴⁵

Bloomfield has a mild protest at enclosure at *The Broken Crutch*, from *Wild Flowers*, 1806, lines 57-78. His brother Nathaniel composed a whole poem on the subject, *Honington Green* (1803), which, Bloomfield wrote, “... had melted me into salt water, and opened every latent weakness of my heart to a very uncommon degree”.⁴⁶ Here are the fifth and sixth of its twenty-two stanzas:

Sighs speak the poor Labourers’ pain,
 While the new mounds and fences they rear,
 Intersecting their dear native plain,
 To divide to each rich Man his share;
 It cannot but grieve them to see,
 Where so freely they rambled before,
 What a bare narrow track is left free
 To the foot of the unportion’d Poor.

The proud City’s gay wealthy train.
 Who nought but refinements adore,
 May wonder to hear me complain
 That Honington Green is no more;
 But if to the Church you e’er went,
 If you knew what the village has been,
 You will sympathize, while I lament
 The Enclosure of Honington Green.⁴⁷

Capel Lofft, who did not think of himself part of “The proud City’s gay wealthy train,” had the editing of *Honington Green*, too. He writes of the theme:

Of HONINGTON GREEN I am to speak next. And here it may be right to obviate some prejudice against the Poem, which, in the minds of several, may arise from the subject. I am not an Enemy to Enclosures: if the RIGHTS and INTERESTS of the POOR, and of SMALL OWNERS, be very carefully guarded, an ENCLOSURE may be a common Benefit. However, it is very liable to become otherwise. But be an Enclosure good or bad, (and every Man has a right to his opinion, and to support it by argument, on this subject and every other) there are particular circumstances and considerations which stand clear of the scope of the general question. The Spot which is the subject of the Ballad is less, I believe, than Half an Acre. It did certainly ornament the Village; independent of a just and laudable partiality in the Author. Thus it would have seem’d to the casual glance of a stranger. To the BLOOMFIELDS every circumstance gave it peculiar endearment. There the Author of ‘THE FARMER’S BOY,’ and of these POEMS, first drew breath. There grew the first Daisies which their feet press’d in childhood. On this little Green their Parents look’d with delight: and the Children caught the affection; and learn’d to love it as soon as they lov’d any thing. By it’s smallness and it’s situation it was no object: and could have been left out of Enclosure without detriment to the General Plan, or to any individual Interest. I wish it had: and most who love

44: See David Dymond and Peter Northeast, *A History of Suffolk* (Philimore 1985), p.82.

45: See David Dymond, *Opposition to Enclosure in a Suffolk Village* (*The Suffolk Review*, Summer 1980 (Vol. V No 1), pp.13-22.

46: Hart, p.8.

47: Nathaniel Bloomfield, *An Essay on War ... Honington Green, A Ballad* (1803) pp.31-2.

Poetry, and respect Genius, and are anxious to preserve the little innocent Gratifications of the Poor, will have the same wish.⁴⁸

Had Honington Green been larger, and its inhabitants less amenable to his patronage, Lofft would not, we assume, have encouraged and assisted the publication of Nathaniel Bloomfield's poem.

What the bourgeois readers of the "romantic" period thought they were reading when they bought *The Farmer's Boy* was a harmless and reassuring thing, celebrating a rural life which few of them knew anything of, and about which they could afford to be complacent: what the working-class readers may have read, if they were alert to subtextual allegory, was a depiction of man's cruelty to beasts, disguising not too covertly a depiction of man's exploitation of man.⁴⁹ Jiles's patient dumbness, and the fact that "he seeks no better name" than that of "A Shepherd's Boy" may not have hidden Bloomfield's message from them. The reassuring motto from Pope was added by Lofft, and that he felt the need for it shows how insecure even Whig squires could be, in those times, with the Captain Swing disturbances not too far off, about the revolutionary potential of the agricultural poor. For not only does Jiles seek no better name, and no better place: neither does anyone else in the poem, by whom either he or we can measure Jiles's social passivity. Like Dickens' Stephen Blackpool, the fact that Jiles is so a-political makes his life even sadder. Lofft added the motto to assure potential purchasers that this was no Jacobinical poem; and added "rural" to the subtitle to increase their anticipation of something sentimental and English – like Goldsmith.

In fact *The Farmer's Boy* gives a very partial account of country life in social terms, as well as in terms of back-breaking toil. Jiles, the Boy, exists in a social vacuum. He speaks only to himself (*Winter*, 283-302: his interlocutor, seeming to be a spectre, is in fact an ash-tree). Only the Dairy-maid and his master speak to him (*Spring*, 167, and *Winter*, 80-126). There is another, "lovely MAID" depicted (*Summer* 169-80), with a "full, ripe bosom, exquisitely white;" but Jiles is not interested in her, and all she takes part in is

... In many a local tale of harmless mirth,
And many a jest of momentary birth ...

It was Harriet Martineau who mocked the blindness of Wordsworth about the sex-lives of country folk:

I, deaf, can hardly conceive how he, with eyes & ears, & a heart which leads him to converse with the poor in his incessant walks, can be so unaware of their personal state. I dare say you [*Elizabeth Barrett*] need not be told how sensual vice abounds in rural districts. Here [*in the Lakes*] it is flagrant beyond anything I ever could have looked for; & here, while every Justice of the peace is filled with disgust, and every clergyman with (almost) despair at the drunkenness, quarrelling & extreme licentiousness with women, – here is dear good Wordsworth for ever talking of rural innocence, & deprecating any intercourse with towns, lest the purity of his neighbours should be corrupted!⁵⁰

It's hard to believe things were any tamer in Suffolk a mere thirty years before; but either Bloomfield didn't see it, or thought it unworthy of inclusion. I'm sure its omission increased the respectability and saleability of his poem: Bernard Barton, in his poem *On the Death of Robert Bloomfield*, referred to the poet as "Our own more chaste Theocritus".⁵¹ Jiles seems, from Bloomfield's hints, to be a beginner in sexual matters:

48: *Ibid.*, pp.xviii-xix.

49: Compare this, from his *Letter ... from an Earwig, deploring the Loss of all her Children* (1824): "I am surrounded by wood-peckers, jack-daws, magpies, and other devouring creatures, and think myself very unfortunate. Yet, perhaps, if I could know the situation of some larger creatures – I mean particularly such as would tread me to death if I crossed their path – they may have complaints to make as well as I".

50: Quoted Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth, A Life*, pp.410-11.

51: *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield* (1824), II p.179.

The fullcharg'd Udder yields its willing streams,
 While MARY sings some lover's amorous dreams,
 And crouching Jiles beneath a neighbouring tree,
 Tugs o'er his pail, and chants with equal glee ... (*Spring*, 197-200)

Masculinity he would seem to lack. At *Autumn* 197, he is told by his master to "... wield thy shotless gun ...". James Thomson had been more advanced: see the tale of Damon and Musidora at *Summer*, 1269-1370; and see this, which leads straight on to *The Farmer's Boy*:

His folded flock secure, the shepherd home
 Hies, merry-hearted; and by turns relieves
 The ruddy milk-maid of her brimming pail;
 The beauty whom perhaps his witless heart,
 Unknowing what the joy-mixt anguish means,
 Sincerely loves, by that best language shewn
 Of cordial glances, and obliging deeds.⁵²

... or would have led on to it, had Jiles possessed more initiative.

Death, without which any rural scene is incomplete, is – with the striking exception of the slaughtered lambs – absent from Bloomfield's fictional work (*Good Tidings or, News from the Farm*, his book about vaccination, which does contain scenes of death, is polemical, documentary poetry: and *The Spindle*, about his mother's death, was not published in his lifetime). No human actors meet their ends in *The Farmer's Boy*; even the "mad girl" – we're informed in a note – got over it and led a normal life. This is so throughout Bloomfield's poetry. Even when his protagonists are extremely old, and might without strain or excessive grief have been depicted as dying content and surrounded by family and well-wishers, Bloomfield appears unwilling to face any scenes of terminal closure. Richard and Kate, the Baucis and Philemon, the Darby and Joan, of *Rural Tales* (1802), live on beyond the poem's end: and old Sir Ambrose Higham, the focal character of *May Day with the Muses* (1822) even though the fact that he "goes to town no more" is the talk of the territory, survives the poem still hale and hearty.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

Two manuscripts of *The Farmer's Boy* exist. I quote and transcribe them by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, where their call numbers are fMS Eng 776 and MS Eng 776.1. Both are fair copies, bound.

fMS Eng 776 contains, glued-in and mounted, the original manuscript. This seems cropped: some of the line-numbers, in the outside margins, are partially lost. It is on grey laid paper whose measurements vary, but which average 18 x 14.5cm. It contains corrections in both pen and pencil. A few of these may be by the printer, whose marginalia – which do not relate to the text – I have not transcribed; we have Bloomfield's word, in a note to the first page of *Summer* in MS Eng 776.1, that it was not the printer, but Lofft himself, who "corrected the spelling, and substituted Capitals in many places". Some of the substantive changes are in pencil, though most are in pen; some of the changes in spelling are in pen, though many are in pencil: my assumption, based on Bloomfield's words just quoted, is that all are by Capel Lofft.

fMS Eng 776 also contains two prefaces, other letters, and numerous illustrations glued in with care.⁵³

The letters are: from Bloomfield to Thomas Hill, apologising for missing a dinner engagement with Southey; from George Bloomfield to William Holloway, exchanging some poems; and another letter, from Robert Bloomfield to Hill, about a "Dramatic pastoral" he has

⁵²: Thomson, *Summer* 1564-70.

⁵³: For a discussion of the illustrations, see BCB 87-91, and Graver, Bruce, *Illustrating The Farmer's Boy, Romanticism* 9:2 (2003) pp.157-75.

left Hill, written by his brother (he does not say which one); and a bookseller's note relative to "the proofs of the memoir" and "Mr White's anecdotes of Miss Seward".

The illustrations show: Lofft; Bloomfield's mother (who was, as he informs us in a prose note to *A Spindle*, losing her faculties when the picture was made, in summer 1804); the house in Bell-Alley, London, where Bloomfield lived; Bloomfield himself; Thomas Hill the book-collector, to whom Lofft entrusted the first manuscript, and from whom Bloomfield had to borrow it to make a copy of the second; the Duke of Grafton; and numerous pictures of rural life, emphasising its idyllic qualities. One picture of a docked horse concedes space to one of the poem's grimmer sections (though the horse appears proud enough). A wash-drawing of Jiles, the Farmer's Boy, shows him sitting robust and well-dressed, staring at the viewer blankly, his mouth neither open nor shut. The hunting section from *Autumn* is endowed with thirteen illustrations, far more, proportionally, than the section warrants in terms of length: some are comical, showing riders stuck, sunk, or lost. One shows a horse fallen and unable to rise.

MS Eng 776.1 is from 1801: unlike fMS Eng 776, it is itself the manuscript, bound. ("in contemporary calf, rebacked, in a 33cm brown morocco pull-off case made by C.J.Sawyer Ltd", as the Houghton catalogue tells us.) It has no line-numbers, and is of white, laid paper, of higher quality than fMS Eng 776, measuring 31 x 19cm. It contains no illustrations, and is prefaced by two notices. The first is glued in:

To My Dear Charlotte;
Sincerely wishing that She may be as mild as *Phoebe*, as frank as *June* – and as worthy as
Peggy Meldrum.

Rob Bloomfield

May 19. 1817.

Charlotte is Bloomfield's daughter, born April 20th 1801. Peggy Meldrum (a good Suffolk name) is the heroine of Bloomfield's poem *The Broken Crutch* from his 1806 volume *Wild Flowers*.

The second notice is part of the manuscript:

City Road, London.
Oct 8th 1801.

The Original Manuscript of my "Farmer's Boy" is not likely ever to be in my possession again; it being left, by Mr Lofft's desire, in the hands of T Hill Esq. of Henrietta Street Covent Garden; where it now remains; except about two hundred and Sixty lines of the <Poem> commencement of the Poem which are lost.

Wishing to possess a Manuscript like the Original, I mean that the right hand page of this Book shall contain a genuine *Copy of the Poem As I wrote it at first*;⁵⁴ and that the *left hand page* shall shew the amendments and alterations introduced by Mr Lofft. This I can do *now* while my memory retains the deviations; but, some years hence, I may not be able, and may then wish that I had done it when it was in my power.

Robert Bloomfield

MS Eng 776.1 is therefore another fair copy, made by Bloomfield for himself after the first two editions. It has Capel Lofft's substantive corrections (not his spelling corrections), recorded on the left-hand side (the verso), together with several notes, and what Bloomfield wishes to record of the original on the right (the recto). This presents a version of the text as it left his pen, and before Lofft got at it. Bloomfield mentions making the copy in a letter to his brother George, dated November 30th 1801. The letter also shows what a success the poem was financially:

I mentioned nothing about money; but you see his answer (inclosed) mentions it, and is in all points highly satisfactory. The fifth and sixth edition of 'Giles' comprise together 10,000 copies,

⁵⁴: The phrases are more heavily inked-over than the rest.

the new work 7,000, so that I have at any rate to share the profits of 17,000 books, for which (at full price) the public, if they are goodnatured enough to buy them, will pay no less than 36,025! I have felt sad, and uncommon trouble of mind; and I doubt it is not over yet. I am writing a fair copy of 'The Farmer's Boy,' exactly as you saw it in MS., and marking the alterations made by Mr. Lofft, and adding notes of information, &c. This I do, that as I have not the original, something in *my own hand* may be found hereafter; and I do it too to improve my handwriting: I shall have it bound carefully. I have by me the real original MSS. of the new volume, and shall bind them too. The printers say now that it will not be out before Christmas; but I think that it will.⁵⁵

Why Bloomfield wished "to possess a Manuscript like the Original" isn't clear. The point about improving his handwriting is borne out by the manuscript: his script is much more elegant than that of Lofft. Sometimes he seems, in his notes, to agree with Lofft's changes, sometimes he demurs. Much as he owed to Lofft, he seems nostalgic for the time before Lofft came between him and his work (though several of Lofft's changes, "enuff" to "enough", for instance, and "Giles" for "Jiles", are silently accepted). I have another edition, larger than this one, in which I've reproduced the original manuscript, Lofft's text, and the fair copy which Bloomfield made for his own reading; and have then added my own text.

THE TEXTS

The business of setting the poem's first edition up in type, and adding preface and notes, was done without Bloomfield being consulted once. The dialogues between Bloomfield's two manuscripts, and the text which Lofft prepared from the first manuscript, is full of comical class-tension. Lofft wants to transform Bloomfield's hybrid original into a thing which his landowner's class can read with complacency. Bloomfield, though he's not completely articulate on the point, resents this, and (for private use, *not* for publication) recreates what he had originally written: though he isn't acute enough to be one-hundred-percent consistent in doing so.

In the seventeenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge, placing himself in dialogue with Wordsworth, delivers the following judgement:

... a rustic's language, purified from all provincialism and grossness, and so far reconstructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar—(which are in essence no other than the laws of universal logic, applied to psychological materials)—will not differ from the language of any other man of common sense, however learned or refined he may be, except as far as the notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate. This will become still clearer, if we add the consideration—(equally important though less obvious)—that the rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of their cultivation, aims almost solely to convey insulated facts, either those of his scanty experience or his traditional belief; while the educated man chiefly seeks to discover and express those connections of things, or those relative bearings of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deducible. For facts are valuable to a wise man, chiefly as they lead to the discovery of the indwelling law, which is the true being of things, the sole solution of their modes of existence, and in the knowledge of which consists our dignity and our power.

But if provincialism, grossness, and ungrammatical constructions are removed from the language of the "rustic", it ceases to be the language of the "rustic". Coleridge's easy assumption that the rustic must of necessity have imperfectly developed faculties, in a lower state of cultivation than those of "the educated man" – as if anyone who hadn't been to Oxbridge must needs be like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – as if you can't be "a wise man" if you've spent all your time in the country – is contradicted by *The Farmer's Boy*,

55: Hart, pp.17-18.

a poem which Coleridge, knowing it only in the “purified” version of Capel Lofft, admired. My aim is to restore to its text a bit of ungrammatical provincial grossness.

Just how innocent Robert Bloomfield was of literature when he wrote *The Farmer’s Boy* is clear from the following note:

I chose to do it in rhyme for this reason: because I found always that when I put two or three lines together in blank verse, or something that sounded like it, it was a great chance if it stood right when it came to be wrote down, for blank verse has ten syllables in a line, and this particular I could not adjust, nor bear in memory as I could rhimes. Winter, and half Autumn, were done long before I could find leisure to write them.⁵⁶

But couplets too, we protest, have “ten syllables in a line”, and it’s not strictly by the syllable-count that they’re measured, but by the stress-count. “Iambic pentameter” doesn’t seem to be a phrase in Bloomfield’s lexicon. Faced with this lack of sophistication (which is born out by his spelling well after he became a success), the skill and discretion with which much of *The Farmer’s Boy* is written occasions still more amazement.

The Farmer’s Boy was at first written partly in a Suffolk “accent” which is today (2007) by no means extinct, though it’s less common than it once was. Some rhymes (or “rhimes”) work better with Suffolk vowel-sounds – “plough / blow” for example, or “repose / Ouse,” (at *Spring*, 65-6, and 249-50). *Spring* 297-8 (about the stupidity of sheep, always expecting more from the next pasture) is, as written,

Instinctively they haunt the homeward gate
And starve and pine with plenty at their feet.

The ugly “gate / feet” rhyme is loaded with Suffolk derision. Bloomfield calls it a “bad rhyme” in a note; but in Suffolk, it works as well as any other rhyme. If only the sheep knew what their fate would be, they wouldn’t reject the pleasure of eating good grass just because they’re used to it. The line is edited by Lofft to,

Bleating around the homeward gate they meet,
And starve, and pine, with plenty at their feet.

The sheep’s “instinctive haunting”, of the gate of self-delusion and destruction, has to be rejected in favour of improved English. Bloomfield conceded, and changed the line.

The up-and-down of Suffolk cannot be reproduced in print (we need a CD), and so its main feature noticeable on the page is the suppression of the terminal “s” in third-person singular verbs, with which everyone who’s been to the Ipswich area (at least) will be familiar. Thus *Spring* 115-16 (about how birds become accustomed to scarecrows) is, in the original

Familiarised to these they boldly rove
Nor heed a Centinal that never move.

This becomes, in Lofft’s version,

Familiarised to these they boldly rove
Nor heed such Centinels that never move.

The farmer’s use of “Have” at *Summer* 33-4 (“Boy bring thy Harrows, try how deep the rain / Have forced its way”) could not be more Suffolk. At *Autumn* 193-8, and *Winter* 89-126, contrariwise, the farmer speaks with perfect eighteenth-century diction.

56: BL.Add.Mss. 28266 ff.85r.-v., quoted Lawson p.21.

Though he writes for a Suffolk voice, Bloomfield does not write in dialect (he reserves that for *The Horkey*, in his 1806 volume *Wild Flowers*). Apart from “Cagg” (for “keg”) at *Summer* 186 (first manuscript only: it is a Scots word, found in Burns), I find only standard eighteenth-century English words throughout.

Bloomfield’s effect is often half-hearted, as if he isn’t quite clear what he’s doing. “Correct” and “incorrect” usage co-exist in the same line. Thus *Spring* 66 is, “While health impregnates every breeze that blow,” where to be consistent it should be “While health impregnate every breeze that blow”. *Spring* lines 115-18 promise greater confidence:

From knotty particles first floating wide
Congealing Butter dash from side to side
New milk around through flowing coolers stray ...

– Bloomfield has given us two authentic Suffolk verbs in succession – but he continues,

... And snow-white Curd abounds, and wholesome whey ...

Where we might legitimately expect “snow-white Curd abound”. However, it’s true that Suffolk speakers are inconsistent themselves: sometimes you drop the “s”, sometimes you don’t.

Elsewhere the intention is more confident, and is as confidently silenced by Capel Lofft: as at *Winter* 18, where “No nourishment in frozen pastures grow” is corrected to “... pasture grows”. At *Autumn* 204 “lo! the structure rise” has to give way under the pen of Lofft to the correct “see the structure rise.” At *Autumn* 320, the original and authentic “many a human leader daily shine” has to go. Capel Lofft uses the text’s preparation as a process of “social collaboration” by removing every sign of the fact that it’s been written in the dialect of the county in which he lives. In a preface to a privately-printed edition of *Spring* only, he wrote:

I have desired that the *Manuscript* may be preserved. *There* will be found the Poem; such as it will be publish’d; what differences there are amounting to merely verbal corrections: and those almost solely of one kind resulting from a peculiarity in the provincial Dialect of this County.⁵⁷

“I have desired that the *Manuscript* may be preserved” shows us how lucky we are to have both the manuscript that was first printer’s copy, and also Bloomfield’s second copy, made from the first: it was normal practice, once the poem had been set up, for the original to be destroyed.

In the first edition, Lofft expresses a more explicit pride in his work:

My part has been this, and it has been a very pleasing one: to revise the MS. making occasionally corrections with respect to Orthography, and sometimes in the grammatical construction. The corrections, in point of Grammar, reduce themselves almost wholly to a circumstance of provincial usage, which even well educated persons in *Suffolk and Norfolk* do not wholly avoid; and which may be said, as to general custom, to have become in these Counties almost an established Dialect:...that of adopting the plural for the singular termination of verbs, so as to exclude the *s*. But not a line is added or substantially alter’d through the whole Poem. I have requested the MS. to be preserv’d for the satisfaction of those who may wish to be satisfied on this head.⁵⁸

The “MS.” to which he refers is fMS Eng 776. As Clare, however, wrote:

Received another letter from the Editor of Bloomfields Correspondence requesting me to alter a line in my Sonnets on Bloomfield ... Editors are troubled with nice amendings and if Doctors

57: Houghton Library, fMS Eng 776.

58: Bloomfield, *The Farmer’s Boy*, 1st edition (1800), p.xv.

were as fond of amputations as they are of altering and correcting the world would have nothing but cripples⁵⁹

For “amputation”, see below, Bloomfield’s note to *Spring*, 179-80.

Lofft wrote poetry. He had in 1781 published *Eudisia, or a Poem on the Universe*, a seven-book work on what we should call astronomy and physics. He had also, in 1792, brought out an edition of *Paradise Lost*, “printed from the First and Second Editions collated, the original orthography restored; the punctuation corrected and extended. With various readings”. He was thus an expert.

John Hookham Frere, in his mock-epic *Whistlecraft* (“by William and Robert Whistlecraft, of Stow-Market in Suffolk, harness and collar-makers”), is satirical about Bloomfield’s relationship with Lofft:

Squire Humphrey Bamberham, of Boozley Hall,
 (Whose name I mention with deserv’d respect),
 On market-days was often pleas’d to call,
 And to suggest improvements, or correct;
 I own the obligation once for all,
 Lest critics should imagine they detect
 Traces of learning and superior reading,
 Beyond, as they suppose, my birth and breeding.⁶⁰

But he overestimates Lofft’s sociability. Capel Lofft was never “pleas’d to call” on Robert Bloomfield. Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee offer a more radical assessment of Lofft’s intervention:

... Bloomfield found himself subject – in public – to others’ proprietorial manipulation of his words: he had glimpsed the tantalizing and democratic possibility of communicating directly with a mass readership only to discover that it was a mirage ... he could not be a “man speaking to men.”⁶¹

In the case of *The Farmer’s Boy* this is not strictly true: Bloomfield’s ideal readership in that case consisted, at first, of his mother and his family. But the point about “proprietorial manipulation” remains valid.

It is clear, examining the first manuscript, fMS Eng 776, which is Bloomfield’s original ink and which are Lofft’s additions. Much of the punctuation fits naturally in with the surrounding letters, and may confidently be attributed to Bloomfield. Conversely, many additions are overlineations (some in pen, some in pencil, some in both), accompanied by crossings-out and caret-signs, and may as confidently be attributed to Lofft. Some terminal punctuation-marks are clearly Lofft’s emendations. Some of his corrections are over originals which have been scratched out with such care that they cannot be recovered; beneath other scratchings-out, the originals can be seen. An excellent example is *Autumn* 320, which – to judge from the second manuscript – originally read

Full many a human leader daily shine!

But which, in the first manuscript, has the “a” scratched-out, and an “s” added on the end of “leader”, so cunningly “forged” as to resemble Bloomfield’s script, in order to produce Lofft’s new “correct” reading,

59: *John Clare By Himself*, p.225.

60: Hookham Frere, *Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work* (Murray, 1818), III, XXXVIII.

61: Fulford and Lee, at White, op.cit., pp.144-5.

Full many human leaders daily shine!

There seems no rule, and so, in transcribing, I have judged each instance on its merits. One place where Lofft's touch falters is *Spring* 263-6:

Inglorious victory! Ye Cheshire meads,
Or Severn's flow'ry dales, where plenty treads,
Was your rich milk to suffer wrongs like these,
Farewell your pride! farewell renowned cheese!

Where we might expect "Were your rich milk ..."

In claiming correct orthography and grammar as his sole aims in editing Bloomfield, Lofft is disingenuous. What he does is to take the roughly-styled work and appropriate it into the safe tradition of classical versification that he knows. It's not the case that "not a line is added or substantially alter'd". Indecency is another of his targets. There's little or no sex in the poem, but *Summer* 141-2 changes under his hand from

Each sturdy Mower emulous and strong
Whose writhing loins meridian heat defies
to

Each sturdy Mower emulous and strong
Whose writhing form meridian heat defies

Autumn 343 alters from

And many a clamorous Hen and capon gay
to
And many a clamorous Hen and cockrel gay

Bloomfield himself expresses unease elsewhere about "Cockrel" (see his note to *Winter* 98); but the change still underlines what I write of above about docking and gelding, for capons (neutered products of man's gluttony), cannot enjoy the company of hens in the way that cockerels can. Lofft, perhaps fondly remembering Chaucer's Chauntecleer, cuts another implied criticism of farmyard cruelty.

Lofft decided that squalor needed veiling. *Autumn* 136-8, about the "mad girl", are, in all editions,

O'er the cold earth she crawls to her retreat;
Quitting the cot's warm walls unhous'd to lie,
Or share the swine's impure and narrow sty ...

What Bloomfield actually wrote was

Oer the cold earth she crawls to her retreat
Quitting the cott's warm walls in filth to lie,
Where the swine grunting yields up half his sty ...

Perhaps Lofft changed⁶² "in filth" to "unhoused" in order to remind us of *King Lear*; but I doubt it.

Lastly, *Winter* 389-91 are substantively altered, too. Here is the original:

Seedtime and Harvest let me see again
Pierce the dark wood, and brave the sultry plain;
Let Field, and dimpled Brook, and flow'r, and Tree ...

This becomes

62: This correction is in pencil on the first manuscript, and may therefore not be by Lofft: but it fits his style.

'*Seed-time and Harvest* let me see again;
 'Wander the *leaf-strewn* wood, the *frozen* plain:
 'Let the first Flower, corn-waving field, Plain, Tree ...

... thereby losing the clear implication that Suffolk is either a "dark wood" to be pierced or a "sultry" desert to be braved ("the paths of wild obscurity" – *Spring* 6). Those who venture into Suffolk, Bloomfield implies in his original, are either Dantes or Mungo Parks (Jiles is also "the Crusoe of the lonely fields" – *Autumn*, 210: this was a favourite line of Clare). God may ultimately be your guide through Suffolk – the rhetorical drift of the poem's last lines insist that he is: nevertheless, as Bloomfield portrays his native county, it's a place where traditional roles are cruelly reversed:

Though frantic ewes may mourn the savage deed
 Their Shepherd comes a messenger of blood (*Spring* 342-3)

and what generals do on battlefields, the innocent Jiles replicates because it's his job:

... 'twas Jiles's evening care,
 His feather'd victims to suspend in air,
 High on a bough that nodded oer his head,
 And thus each morn to strew the field with dead. (*Spring* 159-62)

Capel Lofft won't have any of this violence: his Suffolk is the property of gentlemen – though this is not his express reason for making the change. Bloomfield claims to have agreed with Lofft's argument, which is a structural one (see note to *Winter* 391): but he still puts back the original when he makes his own fair copy.

It was not usual for an editor's corrections, or a printer's corrections, to be itemised and apologised for, but in the case of *The Farmer's Boy*, they were, to defend Bloomfield's originality. Thomas Park, a Hampstead friend of the poet, makes, in later editions, what he claims is check-list of Lofft's alterations. The following appeared first in *The Monthly Mirror* for January 1802:

MR. PARK'S STATEMENT OF VERBAL VARIATIONS Between the *MS. Copy* and *Printed Poem* of "THE FARMER'S BOY."

As it is not improbable that some of those invidious spirits who reluctantly allow to any popular writer the credit of having produced his own work, may hereafter report, to the disadvantage of Mr. Bloomfield, that his learned friend and Editor was materially concerned in composing "THE FARMER'S BOY," I have taken the most effectual means in my power, to counteract the injurious tendency of such report, by collating the printed poem with the author's original manuscript [*n: Now in the possession of Mr. Hill*], which had passed through the hands of Mr. Capel Lofft; and I transmit all the verbal variations which have been observed in the course of such collation, that they may be perpetuated on the pages of a miscellany which has been uniformly zealous in extending the well-earned reputation of our rural bard. I must also premise, what affects not the merits of the composition in any degree, that Capital Letters and Italic Characters were supplied by Mr. Lofft, as were various defects in orthography and punctuation, which arose from the Author's want of Education, and of leisure fitly to supply that loss.⁶³

He then prints approximately two pages of collations, done, though he doesn't acknowledge it, with Bloomfield's help (see Bloomfield's note to *Spring* 277). The two make several mistakes, crediting Lofft with "corrections" which are already present in the original, such as "these" for "those" (*Summer* 14), "or Ouse" for "and Ouse" (*Spring* 250),⁶⁴ and ignoring "every opening" for "each apperture" at *Winter*, 67 (this is in pencil, and may be by

⁶³: *The Farmer's Boy*, tenth edition (1808), pp.xliii-iv.

⁶⁴: Bloomfield claims this as a Lofft alteration in a note to the second Ms.

someone other than Lofft). They make no mention of “Jiles” being replaced by “Giles”, and no reference to the emendations to *Autumn* 136-8, about the mad girl in the sty, referred to above.

Park, too, is pleased with the alterations:

It will be seen, from this minute statement, that the Editor’s emendations were very inconsiderable, though most of them appear highly judicious, and many of them absolutely necessary, for the purpose of removing certain grammatical inaccuracies, which may be considered as mere freckles on the natural complexion of our Farmer’s Boy.⁶⁵

The only places where I can say that I detect Bloomfield truly nodding off in his copying of the second manuscript are “ang” (for “and”) at *Autumn* 79, and the places where he elides the past participle of a verb ending in “e”, but retains the “e” as well, such as “serve’d” at *Spring* 51, or “Chace’d” at *Autumn* 338.

Examination of Bloomfield’s re-alterations from Lofft reveals that Bloomfield almost invariably upcases the first letters of animals’ names (“Foxes,” “Ox,” and so on – an exception is “pigs” at *Spring*, 168) and the names of crops (“Oats,” and “Barly”). Lofft had refused them all. Bloomfield removes much of Lofft’s punctuation, leaving a skeleton of commas (“coma’s”) and full-stops when absolutely necessary, and not always then. He actually ignores a lot of what seems to be his own punctuation in his first manuscript (where Lofft’s accidentals are distinct from his). A different, less rational, less Augustan rhythm may be indicated; or the writer’s confidence may be that the poem carries its own rhythm without assistance from “pointing”. Conceivably he has punctuated for a more chanted delivery: most likely, given that MS Eng 776.1 was to be for his own domestic use only, he trusted his instinct for the poem’s phrasing and pointing. He writes, at the head of *Spring*, “As I am not master of punctuation I shall not attend to it in the following Sheets”.

When Lofft has corrected his spelling in the first manuscript, Bloomfield systematically “de-corrects” it in the second, ignoring all Lofft’s careful inkings-in, as “rehearse / rehearse” at *Spring* 7, “unreckoned / unrecon’d” at *Spring* 22, “transient / trancient” at *Spring* 25, “tyranny / tyranny” and “pursued / persue’d” at *Spring* 29, “terify” at *Spring* 120, and even “ne’er / near” at *Autumn* 179. At *Winter* 147, Lofft corrects his “defusing” to “diffusing”; but in his second manuscript he restores the anachronistic error. At *Winter* 306 occurs the word “lineaments”: Bloomfield at first spells it “leniments”. Lofft corrects it, with some labour, but Bloomfield, in his second manuscript, mis-spells it differently, as “leaniments”.

Bloomfield is very attached to “persue” and “wellcome,”⁶⁶ both of which are allowed as “obsolete” by the OED. Now and again he even introduces new mis-spellings, as with “Scikle” at *Summer* 133, which, in the first manuscript, he seems to spell correctly (Lofft may have scratched it through, but if so he’s done so very discreetly). Some words Bloomfield knows by sight only, such as “aperture” at *Autumn* 67, in which he doesn’t know which syllable to stress. It looks as if Lofft didn’t explain why he changed the word, and as if Bloomfield, either bewildered or indifferent, changed it back.

Bloomfield’s determination to re-appropriate his own material at whatever cost may be seen at *Winter* 352, which runs “Paternal fondness may be fresh apply’d”, even though it refers to ewes being trained to accept lambs which are not their own. Lofft – perhaps with irrefutable justice, though see my notes – corrects it to “Maternal fondness may be fresh apply’d”; but in his second manuscript, Bloomfield, even though confessing in a note to the error, perpetuates the error, and “paternal” remains.

One major change, however, he does accept in silence, and that is Lofft’s substitution of a “G” for his original “J” for the protagonist’s name. He also allows “Minstrel” to replace his original “Minstrill” at *Spring* 146; and (perhaps unsurprisingly, perhaps not), “enough” for “enuff” at *Summer* 95, 225, and 238 (the OED permits this as archaic). Occasionally he shows himself an attentive pupil: at *Summer* 338 in the first manuscript, “Refinement shows its hated

⁶⁵: Text from *Poems of Robert Bloomfield* (1821), p.xlvi.

⁶⁶: He’s still using “persuing” in correspondence in 1817 (Lawson p.43).

face”: in Lofft’s version, it “shews its hated face”; and this is what it does in the second manuscript. At *Autumn* 144, Lofft changes *falling tears* to *streaming tears*; Bloomfield at first replaces *falling*, then has a second thought and accepts Lofft’s change.

Bloomfield’s eye and memory are not infallible. Occasionally he underlines what he claims is a change by Lofft, though it is in fact his own original.

He rejects most of Lofft’s italicisations and small-cap effects (though see *Autumn*, 260). Most of these are for either decoration or ideology. For decoration, see Lofft’s text here:

His guests by promise; playmates young and gay:...
BUT AH! *fresh pastimes* lure their steps away! (*Autumn* 217-18))

Where it’s by no means clear what different kinds of emphasis the successive small-caps and italics are supposed to suggest. For ideology, see *Autumn* 80, where “the house of God” must become “the *house* of GOD”. This despite the context, which is a complaint on behalf of the horse whose job it is to carry the parson to church, thereby breaking the Sabbath injunction against labour.

Now and then Bloomfield employs colons, semi-colons, and even the printer’s “;...” or “,—” as if to prove that he is acquainted with them. He rejects all Lofft’s parenthetical bracketing.

Lofft contrariwise favours “poetical” spellings, such as “plowman” for “ploughman,” “tho” and “thro” for “though” and “through,” and “try’d” for “tried.” He had dressed the poem in an Augustan garb; Bloomfield’s reappropriation may have a corresponding class motive, whether conscious or not: though he occasionally lets a “plow” through. He expresses no annoyance at what Lofft had done – how could he? – but his act of rewriting seems motivated by a sense that his work had been presented to the world in a style to which he was antipathetic. Lofft had corrected *Summer* 373-6, from

The selfsame Horn is still at our command
But serves none other than the Plebeian hand
For home-brew’d Ale, neglected and debas’d
Is quite discarded from the realms of Tastes.

to

‘The self-same Horn is still at our command,
‘But serves none now but the plebeian hand:
‘For *home-brew’d Ale*, neglected and debas’d,
‘Is quite discarded from the realms of taste.

In re-copying, Bloomfield admits that he was wrong (“I had accented “Plebeian” on the first syllable”, he writes in the margin): but retains the incorrect stress. The version he dedicates to his daughter is the one he wrote, not the one the Squire doctored.

John Goodridge and John Lucas, in their 1998 edition (the only modern one so far),⁶⁷ take as copytext the 1808 two-volume *Poems* prepared, for stereotyping, by Bloomfield himself. They concede that “Bloomfield regarded Capel Lofft’s prefatory material and editing as intrusive, and in the stereotype edition of his first four volumes ... he took the opportunity to correct the text, and in some cases to restore manuscript readings”⁶⁸ But both Bloomfield and they avoid the embarrassment of having to correct Lofft, by having firstly no title page for the poem, thus side-stepping the problem of the subtitle (“A Rural Poem”) and secondly by ignoring the question of the patronising motto (“A SHEPHERD’S BOY ... HE SEEKS NO

⁶⁷: *Robert Bloomfield: Selected Poems*, edited by John Goodridge and John Lucas, with an introduction by John Lucas, Trent Editions, 1998.

⁶⁸: *Ibid*, Preface. A full account of the tensions between Bloomfield and Lofft, as the editions accumulated, will be found at BCB, pp.82-4.

BETTER NAME”). And in following the 1808 text, they restore some manuscript readings only: *writhing loins* at *Summer*, 143 is still *writhing form*; at *Autumn*, 137 the mad girl lies not *in filth* but *unhous’d*; and *Winter*, 390 is still *Wander the leaf-strewn wood, the frozen plain*. At the same time, they drop all the small-caps and italics which Bloomfield, in 1808, retained from Capel Lofft’s editing: so that their text is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. While implying a negative evaluation of Lofft’s interference, they can’t get away from the text which results from it.

Bloomfield was, in public, inhibited by the polite typographical and orthographical restraints of his time: in private, he had no such problems. The text below grasps the nettle, and presents *The Farmer’s Boy* as Robert Bloomfield preferred to read it himself, at home.

THIS EDITION

The aim of this edition is to create a text of *The Farmer’s Boy* as free of Capel Lofft’s emendations as possible. I have used both fMS Eng 776, Bloomfield’s original, and MS Eng 776.1, his reconstructed original, as copytexts.

The effect I aim at is to create a poem which hovers between two cultures, confident of its idiom in most ways but still clumsy over details. Lofft had appropriated it entirely into his class and culture, where Bloomfield wrote with his mother as his primary audience, his super-addressee. As Lofft’s notes show, it was to him a development – a marvellous development, given the uninstructed nature of its author – of the pastoral tradition of Homer, Theocritus, Ausonius, Virgil, and Milton. For Bloomfield, it was a poem, inspired by Thomson, about Suffolk.

I have taken over many of Capel Lofft’s question marks and exclamation marks. Bloomfield seems indifferent about exclamation marks.

I have observed the following rules:

- 1) Preserve all Bloomfield’s capitals, even those which only occur in one of the two manuscripts.
- 2) Leave all Bloomfield’s spelling mistakes, even “enuff”, and certainly the less ambiguous ones, such as *wellcome* and *chearful*. Be consistent in the use of unorthodox spellings. *Croud* was standard for many years, and the OED allows the following, as obsolete or alternative forms: *chace*; *chearful*; *compleat*; and *persue*. “Chace”, “chear”, “chearful” and “chearfulness” are Thomson’s preferred spellings (mostly), in *The Seasons*. I also find “gaurd” at Thomson, *Summer*, 1342, and “guarded” at *Summer* 1456: this is Bloomfield’s spelling at *Spring* 113 and *Summer* 228.
- 3) Use as few colons as possible.
- 4) Where Bloomfield drops the “s” from a third-person verb, in the Suffolk manner, drop it.
- 5) Where Bloomfield has written a word in larger letters than those surrounding, use small caps.
- 6) Call the hero “Jiles”, as in the first manuscript.
- 7) Follow the manuscripts’ primary practice and allow elisions, as in “o’er”, “show’r”, “wish’d”, and “th’impending storm”.

(R.B.) – note by Bloomfield; I have put some of these in the margin, the longer ones in notes.

(C.L.) – note by Lofft.

(P.C.) – note by me.

THE FARMER'S BOY.
A POEM.

April 1796.

Spring.

*Invocation, &c. Seed time. Harrowing. Morning
walks. Milking. The Dairy. Suffolk Cheese.
Spring coming forth. Sheep fond of changing.
Lambs at play. The Butcher, &c.*

O Come, bless'd Spirit! whatsoe'er thou art,
Thou rushing warmth that hover round my heart,
Sweet inmate, hail! thou source of sterling joy,
That Poverty itself cannot destroy,
Be thou my Muse; and faithful still to me,
Retrace the paths of wild obscurity.
No deeds of Arms my lowly tale rehearse,
No Alpine wonders thunder through my verse;
The roaring Cataract, the Snow-top'd hill,
Inspiring awe, till breath itself stands still: 10
Nature's sublimer scenes ne'er charm'd mine eyes;
Nor Science led me through the boundless skies;⁶⁹
From meaner objects far my raptures flow;
O point these raptures; bid my bosom glow;
And lead my Soul to ecstasies of praise
For all the blessings of my infant days!
Bear me through regions where gay Fancy dwells,
But mould to truth's fair form what memory tells!

Live, trifling incidents, and grace my Song,
That to the humblest menial belong, 20
To him, whose drudgery unheeded goes,
His joys unrecon'd as his cares or woes;
Though joys and cares in every path are sown,
And youthful minds have feelings of their own,
Quick springing sorrows, transient as the dew,
Delights from trifles, trifles ever new.

'Twas thus with Jiles; meek, fatherless, and poor;
Labour his portion, but he felt no more,
No stripes, no Tyranny, his steps persu'd;
His life was constant, chearful servitude; 30
Strange to the World, he wore a bashful look,
The Fields his studdy, Nature was his book;
And, as revolving Seasons chang'd the scene

69: R.B. states his inability to write a poem like Thomson's *The Seasons*.

From Heat to Cold, tempestuous to serene,
 Though every change still varied his employ,
 Yet each new duty brought its share of joy.

Where NOBLE GRAFTON⁷⁰ spreads his rich domains,
 Round EUSTON'S water'd Vale, and sloping plains,
 Where Woods and Groves in solemn grandeur rise, 40
 Where the Kite brooding unmolested flies,
 The Woodcock and the painted Pheasant race
 And sculking Foxes destin'd for the chace;
 There Jiles, untaught and unrepining, stray'd
 Through every Copse, and Grove, and winding glade,
 There his first thoughts to Nature's charms inclin'd,
 That stamps devotion on th'enquiring mind.
 A little Farm his generous Master⁷¹ till'd,
 Who with peculiar grace his station fill'd;
 By deeds of hospitality endear'd, 50
 Serv'd from affection, for his worth rever'd,
 A happy offspring blest his plenteous board;
 His fields were fruitful, and his Barns well stored,
 And fourscore Ewes he fed, a sturdy Team,
 And lowing Kine that grazed beside the stream;
 Unceasing industry he kept in view,
 And never lack'd a job for Jiles to do.

Fled now the sullen murmurs of the north,
 The splendid raiment of the Spring peeps forth,
 Her universal green; and the clear sky
 Delight still more and more the gazing eye. 60
 Wide o'er the fields, in rising moisture strong
 Shoots up the simple flower, or creeps along
 The mellow'd soil, imbibing as it goes,
 Fresh sweets from frequent showers, and evening dews;
 That summon from its shed the slumb'ring plough,
 While health impregnates every breeze that blow.
 No wheels support the diving pointed Share;
 No groaning Ox is doom'd to labour there;
 No helpmate teach the docile steed his road,
 Alike unknown the plough-boy and the goad; 70
 But, unassisted through each toilsome day,
 With smiling brow the ploughman cleaves his way,
 Draws his fresh parallels, and, wid'ning still,
 Treads slow the heavy Dale, or climbs the Hill;
 Strong on the wing his busy followers play,
 Where writhing earth-worms meet th'unwellcome day,
 Till all is changed; and Hill and level down
 Assumes a livery of sober brown;
 Again disturb'd, when Jiles with wearying strides
 From ridge to ridge the ponderous Harrow guides; 80
 His heels deep sinking every step he goes,

70: Augustus Henry Fitzroy, third Duke of Grafton (1735-1811) MP for Bury St Edmunds and sometime Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk. Colleague of Pitt the Elder (see Byron, *The Vision of Judgement* 71, 4). Chancellor of Cambridge University. Frequenter of Newmarket races.

71: The "Master" (that is, the farmer who employs Jiles), is based on the Bloomfields' uncle, William Austin, one of Grafton's tenants.

Till dirt adhesive loads his clouted Shoes.⁷²
 Wellcome green headland! firm beneath his feet,
 Wellcome! the friendly Bank's refreshing seat!
 There, warm with toil his panting Horses browse
 Their shelt'ring canopy of pendent boughs,
 Till rest, delicious, chace each trancient pain
 And new-born vigour swells in every vein.
 Hour after hour, and day to day succeeds,
 Till every clod and deep-drawn furrow spreads 90
 To crumbling mould; a level surface clear,
 And strew'd with corn to crown the rising year;
 And o'er the whole Jiles traverse once again,
 In Earth's moist bosom buries up the grain;
 The work is done; no more to Man is given;
 The grateful Farmer trusts the rest to Heaven.
 Yet oft with anxious heart he looks around
 And marks the first green blade that pierce the ground;
 In fancy sees his trembling Oats uprun,
 His tufted Barly yellow with the Sun, 100
 Sees clouds propitious shed their timely store,
 And all his Harvest gather'd round his door.
 But still unsafe the big swol'n grain below,
 A favorite morsel with the Rook and Crow;
 From field to field the flock increasing goes,
 To level crops most formidable foes;
 Their danger well the wary plunderers know,
 And place a watch on some conspicuous bough;
 Yet oft the skulking Gunner by surprise
 Will scatter death amongst them as they rise. 110
 These, hung in triumph round the spacious field,
 At best will but a short-lived terror yield;
 Nor Gaurds of property (not penal law)
 But harmless riflemen of rags and straw;
 Familiarised to these they boldly rove,
 Nor heed a Centinel that never move.
 Let then your Birds lie prostrate on the earth
 In dying posture, and with wings stretch'd forth;
 Shift them at Eve or morn from place to place,
 And death shall terify the pilfering race; 120
 In the mid-air while circling round and round,
 They'll call their lifeless comrades from the ground;
 With quick'ning wing and notes of loud alarm,
 Warn the whole flock to shun th'impending harm.
 This task had Jiles, in fields remote from home;
 Oft has he wish'd the rosy morn to come;
 Yet never fam'd was he, nor foremost found
 To break the seal of Sleep; his sleep was sound;
 But when at day break summon'd from his bed,⁷³

72: Line 82: *Till dirt usurp the empire of his shoes.* (1st, 2nd, 3rd editions). **R.B.'s note.** This line past muster with Mr Lofft, but not without his seeing its faults which he excused on account of its being almost a solitary instance of BOMBAST, and in his opinion admissible, (as he has since said by letter). But the Criticks thought otherwise on its being publish'd. For my part when it was written I had no precise idea of what constituted a fault of that kind. It was only good luck that such lines were not frequent in the Poem.

Light as the Lark that carol'd o'er his head, 130
 His sandy way deep-worn by hasty showers,
 O'erarch'd with Oaks that form'd fantastic bow'rs,
 Waving aloft their tow'ring branches proud
 In borrow'd tinges from the eastern cloud,
 Gave inspiration, pure as ever flow'd,
 And genuine transport in his bosom glow'd;
 His own shrill mattin join'd the various notes
 Of Nature's music, from a thousand throats;
 The Blackbird strove with emulation sweet,
 And echo answer'd from her close retreat; 140
 The sporting White-throat on some twig's end borne,
 Pour'd hymns to Freedom, and the rising morn;
 Stopt in her song, perchance the starting Thrush
 Shook a bright shower from the Blackthorn bush,⁷⁴
 Where dewdrops thick as early blossoms hung,
 And trembled as the Minstrill sweetly sung.
 Across his path in either grove to hide,
 The timid Rabbit scouted by his side;
 Or bold Cock-pheasant stalk'd along the road,
 Whose gold and purple tints alternate glow'd. 150
 But Groves no farther fenc'd the devious way;
 A wide extended Heath before him lay,
 Where on the grass the stagnant shower had run,
 And shone a mirror to the rising Sun,
 Thus doubly seen to clear a distant wood,⁷⁵
 To give new life to each expanding bud,
 Effacing quick the dewy foot-marks found
 Where prowling Reynard trod his nightly round;
 To shun whose thefts 'twas Jiles's evening care
 His feather'd victims to suspend in air 160
 High on a bough that noded o'er his head,
 And thus each morn to strew the field with dead.
 His simple errand done, Jiles homeward hies;⁷⁶
 Another instantly its place supplies;
 The clat'ring Dairymaid immers'd in steam,
 Singing and scrubbing midst her milk and cream,
 Bawls out, "Go fetch the Cows!" he hears no more,
 For Pigs, and Ducks, and Turkeys, throng the door;
 And sitting Hens for constant War prepar'd,
 A concert strange to that which late he heard. 170
 Straight to the meadow then he whistling goes,
 With well-known halloo calls his lazy Cows;
 Down the rich pasture heedlessly they graze,
 Or hear the summons with an idle gaze;

73: R.B.'s note. This description was the first part composed, before I thought of making it a regular poem; this passage, and the Lambs at play allways pleased me best; and were recited with greater interest than any other lines in the piece; perhaps because they were the original efforts as to the Farmers Boy, or perhaps because they brought the most pleasurable recollections to my mind.

74: Line 144: *white shower* (1st, 2nd, 3rd editions). **R.B.'s note.** "White" I meant that the Bird in starting to fly, shook the dewdrops, and not the Blossoms from the Thorn. But perhaps the Blossoms is best.

75: R.B.'s note. I meant by the Sun's clearing a distant Wood, his Orb appearing round above the trees, and the same glorious sight repeated in the water; "doubly seen to clear a distant Wood" (R.B.)

76: Line 163: ... *he homeward hies* (1st, 2nd and 3rd editions).

For well they know the Cow-yard yields no more
 Its tempting fragrance, nor its Wint'ry store;
 Reluctance marks their steps, sedate and slow,
 The right of conquest all the law they know;
 Subordination stage by stage succeed,
 And one amongst them allways takes the lead, 180
 Is ever foremost, wheresoe'er they stray;
 Allow'd precedence, undisputed sway;
 With jealous pride her station is maintain'd,
 For many a broil that post of honour gain'd.
 At home, the yard affords a grateful scene,
 For Spring makes e'en a miry Cow-yard clean;
 Thence from its chalky bed behold convey'd,
 The rich manure that drenching Winter made;
 And pil'd near home grows green with many a weed,
 A promis'd nutriment for Autumn's seed. 190
 Forth comes the Maid, and like the morning smiles,
 The Mistress too, and follow'd close by Jiles;
 A friendly Tripod⁷⁷ forms their humble seat,
 With pails bright scour'd, and delicately sweet:
 Where shadowing Elms obstruct the morning ray,
 Begins their work begins the simple lay;
 The fullcharg'd Udder yields its willing streams,
 While MARY sings some lover's amorous dreams,
 And crouching Jiles beneath a neighbouring tree,
 Tuggs o'er his pail, and chants with equal glee; 200
 Whose hat with tatter'd brim, of napp so bare,
 From the cow's side purloins a coat of hair,
 A mottl'd ensign of his harmless trade,
 An unambitious, peacable cockade;
 As unambitious too that chearfull aid
 The Mistress yields beside her rosy Maid,
 With joy she views her plenteous reeking store,
 And bears a brimmer to the Dairy door;
 Her Cows dismiss'd, the luscious Mead to roam 210
 Till eve again recall them loaded home.
 And now the dairy claims her choicest care,
 And half her household find employment there;
 Slow rolls the Churn; its load of cloging cream
 At once foregoes its quality and name,
 From knotty particles first floating wide,
 Congealing butter's dash'd from side to side;
 New milk around, through flowing coolers stray
 And snow-white Curd abounds, and wholesome whey;
 Due north the unglazed windows, cold and clear,
 For warming Sunbeams are unwellcome here; 220
 Brisk goes the work beneath each busy hand,
 And Jiles must trudge, whoever gives command;
 A Gibeonite,⁷⁸ that serves them all by turns;

77: R.B.'s note. Never saw the word here used, but in Gay's "Trivia" when he speaks of the Shoe-black having a stool. R.B. writes to George: "I have read Gay's 'Trivia;' it descends to minute descriptions of London, more minute than mine do of the country; his minutiae must be more subject to change than mine, less dependant on nature" (Hart, p.1: letter of Sep. 8, 1799).

He drains the pump, from him the faggot burns;
 From him the noisy Hogs demand their food;
 While at his heels run many a chirping brood,
 Or down his path in expectation stand,
 With equal claims upon his strewing hand.
 Thus waste the morn, till each with pleasure sees
 The bustle o'er, and press'd the new-made Cheese. 230
 Unrivall'd stands thy country Cheese, O Jiles,
 Whose very name alone engender smiles,⁷⁹
 Whose fame abroad by every tongue is spoke,
 The well-known butt of many a flinty joke,
 That pass like current coin the nation through,
 And oh! experience proves the satyr true.
 Provisions grave, thou ever craving mart;
 Dependant, huge Metropolis; where art
 Her poring thousands stows in breathless rooms,
 Midst pois'nous smokes and steams, and rattling loom 240
 Where grandure revels in unbounded stores,
 Restraint, a slighted stranger at their doors!
 Thou, like a whirlpool, drain the country round,
 Till London market, London price, resound
 Through every Town, round every passing load,
 And dairy produce throng the eastern road,
 Delicious veal, and butter, every hour,
 From Essex lowlands, and the banks of Stour;
 And further far, where numerous Herds repose,
 From Orwell's brink, from Weveny, or Ouse.⁸⁰ 250
 Hence, Suffolk dairy-wives run mad for cream,
 And leave their milk with nothing but its name;
 Its name derision and reproach persue,
 And strangers tell of, "Three times scim'd sky-blue";
 To cheese converted, what can be its boast?
 What, but the common virtues of a post?
 If drought o'ertake it faster than the knife,
 Most fair it bids for stubborn length of life,
 And like the oaken shelf whereon 'tis laid
 Mocks the weak efforts of the bending blade; 260
 Or in the hog-trough rests in perfect spite,
 Too big to swallow, and too hard to bite;
 Inglorious victory! ye Cheshire meads!
 Or Severn's flow'ry dales, where plenty treads,
 Was your rich milk to suffer wrongs like these,
 Farewell your pride! farewell renowned cheese!
 The skimmer dread, whose ravages alone,
 Thus turn the meads' sweet nectar into stone.
 Neglected now the early daisy lies

78: Gibeonites were condemned to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Joshua IX 27).

79: There was a saying, "Hunger will break through stone walls and anything but Suffolk cheese". The Navy had always issued Suffolk Cheese, a thin, hard and durable variety (it contained no cream), but practically inedible. There were frequent complaints against it, and in 1758 the Admiralty switched to Cheshire and Gloucester Cheese, even though they were considerably more expensive and probably did not keep so well. Bloomfield's satire turns on the idea that it is the metropolitan demand for Suffolk cream which deprives the county's cheese of quality.

80: The mouth of the rivers Stour and Orwell is at Harwich; that of the Waveney at Lowestoft, and that of the (East Anglian) Ouse at King's Lynn.

Nor thou pale primrose bloom the only prize: 270
 Advancing Spring profusely spreads abroad
 Flowers of all hues, with sweetest fragrance stor'd;
 Where'er she treads, Love gladdens every plain,
 Delight on tiptoe bears her lucid train;
 Sweet Hope with conscious brow before her flies,
 Anticipating wealth from Summer skies;
 All Nature feels her renovating sway,
 The sheep-fed pasture and the meadow gay;
 And trees, and shrubs, no longer budding seen,
 Display the new-grown branch of lighter green; 280
 On airy downs the shepherd idling lies,
 And sees tomorrow in the marbled skies
 Here then, my Soul, thy darling theme persue,
 For every day was Jiles a shepherd too.
 Small was his charge, no wilds had they to roam,
 But bright enclosures circling round their home;
 Nor yellow blossom'd Furse, nor stubborn thorn,
 The heath's rough produce, had their fleeces torn,
 Yet ever roving, ever seeking thee,
 Enchanting Spirit, dear variety! 290
 O happy tennants, prisoners of a day,
 Released to ease, to pleasure, and to play;
 Indulg'd through every field by turns to range,
 And taste them all in one continual change;
 For though luxuriant their grassy food,
 Sheep, long confin'd, but loathe the present good;
 Instinctively they haunt the homeward gate,
 And starve, and pine, with plenty at their feet.⁸¹
 Loos'd from the winding lane, a joyful throng,
 See, o'er yon pasture how they pour along! 300
 Jiles round their boundarys takes his usual stroll:
 Sees every pass secur'd, and fences whole;
 High fences, proud to charm the gazing eye,
 Where many a nestling first assays to fly,
 Where blows the Woodbine faintly streak'd with red,
 And rests on every bough its tender head,
 Round the young Ash its twining branches meet,
 Or crown the Hawthorn with its odours sweet.
 Say, ye that know, ye who have felt and seen
 Spring's morning smiles, and soul enlivening green,³¹⁰
 Say, did you give the thrilling transport way?
 Did your eye brighten, when young Lambs at play
 Leap'd o'er your path with animated pride,
 Or gaz'd in merry clusters by your side?
 Ye, who can smile, to wisdom no disgrace,
 At the arch meaning of a Kitten's face,
 If spotless innocence, and infant mirth,
 Excites to praise, or gives reflection birth,
 In shades like these persue your favorite joy,
 Midst Nature's revels, sports that never cloy. 320

81: Lines 297-8: *Bleating around the homeward gate they meet, / And starve, and pine, with plenty at their feet.*
 (amended thus 2nd edition).

A few begin a short but vigorous race,
 And indolence abash'd soon flies the place;
 Thus challeng'd forth, see thither one by one,
 From every side assembling playmates run;
 A thousand wily anticks mark their stay
 A starting croud, impatient of delay.
 Like the fond Dove from fearful prison freed,
 Each seems to say, "Come, let us try our speed!"
 Away they scour, impetuous, ardent, strong,
 The green turf trembling as they bound along; 330
 Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
 Where every molehill is a bed of Thyme,
 There panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain;
 A Bird, a leaf, will set them off again.
 Or, if a gale with strength unusual blow,
 Scat'ring the Wild-brier Roses into snow,
 Their little limbs increasing efforts try,
 Like the torn flower the fair assemblage fly.
 Ah, fallen Rose! sad emblem of their doom;
 Frail as thyself, they perish while they bloom; 340
 Though unoffending innocence may plead,
 Though frantic ewes may mourn the savage deed,
 Their Shepherd comes, a messenger of blood,
 And drive them bleating from their sports and food.
 Care loads his brow, and pity wrings his heart,
 For lo, the murdering Butcher with his Cart,
 Demands the firstlings of his flock to die,
 And makes a sport of Life and Liberty!
 His gay companions Jiles beholds no more,
 Clos'd are their eyes, their fleeces drench'd in gore, 350
 Nor can compassion with her softest notes,
 Withhold the knife that plunges through their throats.
 Down, indignation; hence, ideas foul!
 Away, the shocking image from my soul!
 Let kindlier visitants attend my way
 Beneath approaching Summer's fervid ray,
 Nor thankless glooms obtrude, nor cares annoy;
 Whilst the sweet theme is universal joy.

Composed between May and December 1796. —

Summer.

*Turnip-sowing. Wheat ripening. Sparrows. Insects.
The Sky lark. Reaping, &c. Harvest field, Dairy
Maid, &c. Labours of the Barn. The Gander. Night;
a Thunder storm. Harvest Home. Reflections, &c.*

The Farmer's life displays in every part,
A moral lesson to the sensual heart;
Though in the lap of plenty, thoughtfull still,
He looks beyond the present good or ill;
Nor estimate alone one blessings worth,
From changefull Seasons, or capricious earth;
But views the future with the present hours,
And looks for failours, as he looks for show'rs;
For casual, as for certain want prepares,
And round his yard the reeking haystack rears; 10
Or Clover, blossom'd lovely to the sight,
His teams rich store through many a wintry night.
What though abundance round his dwelling spreads,
Though ever moist his self-improving meads
Supply his Dairy with a copious flood,
And seem to promise unexhausted food;
That promise fails, when buried deep in snow,
And Vegetative juices cease to flow.
For this, his plough turns up the destin'd lands, 20
Whence, stormy Winter draws its full demands;
For this, the seed minutely small he sows,
Whence sound and sweet the hardy Turnip grows.
But how unlike to April's milder days!
High climbs the Sun, and darts his pow'rful rays;
Whitens the fresh-drawn mould, and parches through
The cumb'rous clods that tumble round the plough.
O'er Heaven's bright azure hence with joyful eyes
The Farmer see dark clouds assembling rise;
Borne o'er his fields a heavy torrent falls, 30
And strikes the earth in hasty driving squalls.
"Right wellcome down, ye precious drops!" he cries;
But soon, too soon, the partial blessing flies.
"Boy, bring thy Harrows, try how deep the rain
Have forced its way!" He comes, but comes in vain,
Dry dust beneath the bubling surface lurks
And mocks his pains the more, the more he works;
Still midst huge clods he plunges on forlorn
That laugh his Harrows and the shower to scorn.
E'en thus the living clod, the stubborn fool,
Resists the stormy lectures of the school; 40

Till tried with gentler means, the dunce to please,
 His head imbibes right reason by degrees;
 As when from eve, till morning's wakeful hour,
 Light, constant rain, evince its secret pow'r
 And e'er the day resume its wonted smiles,
 Presents a chearful easy task for Jiles;
 Down with a touch the mellow'd soil is laid,
 And yon tall crop next claims his timely aid;
 Thither well pleas'd he hies, assured to find,
 Wild, trackless haunts, and objects to his mind. 50

Shot up from broad rank blades that droop below,
 The nodding Wheat-ear forms a graceful bow;
 With milky kernels starting full, weigh'd down
 E'er yet the Sun hath ting'd its head with brown;
 Whilst thousands in a flock, for ever gay,
 Loud chirping Sparrows wellcome on the day,
 And from the mazes of the leafy thorn,
 Drop one by one upon the bending corn;
 Jiles with a pole assails their close retreats,
 And round the grass-grown dewy border beats. 60

On either side compleatly overspread,
 Here, branches bend; there, corn o'ertops his head.
 Green covert hail! for through the varying year
 No hours so sweet, no scene to him so dear.
 Here, Wisdom's placid eye delighted sees
 His frequent intervals of lonely ease,
 And with one ray his infant soul inspires,
 Just kindling there her never-dying fires,
 Whence solitude derives peculiar charms
 And heaven-directed thought his bosom warms. 70

Just where the parting bough's light shadows play
 Scarce in the shade, nor in the scorching day,
 Stretch'd on the turf he lies, a peopled bed,
 Where swarming insects creep around his head;
 The small dust-colour'd Beetle climbs with pain
 O'er the smooth plantain leaf, a spacious plain!
 Thence higher still by countless steps convey'd,
 He gains the summit of a shiv'ring blade
 And flirts his filmy wings and looks around,
 Exulting in his distance from the ground. 80

The tender speckled Moth, here dancing seen,
 The vaulting Grasshopper of glossy Green,
 And all prolific Summer's sporting train,
 Their little lives by various pow'rs sustain;
 But what can unassisted vision do?
 What, but recoil where most it would persue;
 The patient gaze but finish with a sigh,
 When musick waking speaks the Sky-lark nigh.
 Just starting from the corn he⁸² cheerly sings,

82: R.B.'s note. Before my Brother George or Mr Lofft saw the MS, I left it a day or two with my Brother Nathaniel, then in London; who was the first who observ'd that the Lark should have been a Male: and instanc'd Mr Gay's Song of Black-eyed Susan. "The tunefull Lark high poised in air / Shuts close his pinions to his breast". After the poem had been some time publish'd, and Dr Drake had pointed out this passage as possessing much

And trusts with conscious pride his downy wings; 90
 Still louder breaths, and in the face of day
 Mounts up, and calls on Jiles to mark his way.
 Close to his eyes his Hat he instant bends
 And forms a friendly Telescope, that lends
 Just aid enuff to dull the glaring light,
 And place the wand'ring bird before his sight;
 Yet oft beneath a light Cloud sweeps along,
 Lost for awhile, yet pours the varied song;
 The eye still follows, and the cloud moves by,
 Again he stretches up the clear blue sky; 100
 His form, his motion, undistinguish'd quite;
 Save when he wheels direct from shade to light;
 E'en then the Songster a mere speck became,
 Gliding like fancy's bubbles in a dream;
 The gazer sees; but yielding to repose,
 Unwittingly his jaded eyelids close.⁸³
 Delicious sleep! from Sleep who could forbare
 With no more guilt than Jiles, and no more care?
 Peace o'er his slumbers waves her guardian wing,
 Nor conscience once disturbs him with a sting; 110
 He wakes refresh'd from every trivial pain,
 And takes his Pole and brushes round again.
 Its dark green hue, its sicklier tints all fail,
 And ripening Harvest rustles in the gale,
 A glorious sight, if glory dwells below,
 Where Heaven's munificence makes all the show,
 O'er every Field and golden prospect found,
 That glads the ploughman's Sunday-mornings round
 When on some emminence he takes his stand,
 To judge the smiling produce of the land; 120
 Here Vanity slinks back, her head to hide;
 What is there here to flatter human pride?

beauty, A Revd Mr Davies suggested the impropriety of this violation of natural History in making the female the Songster, and Mr Lofft advised to alter it. Admitting its impropriety I forbear to meddle with it because, to render the Lark a Male would create a sad confusion between the two masculine genders of the Bird, and the Observer. It is a blemish as it stands; but to mend it would make a worse. — Note again – I have since mended it to my liking.

83: The substantive text of lines 89-106 here is from 1821. The first and second editions (where the skylark is feminine) have,

Just starting from the corn she cheerly sings,
 And trusts with conscious pride her downy wings; 90
 Still louder breathes, and in the face of day
 Mounts up, and calls on *Giles* to mark her way.
 Close to his eyes his hat he instant bends,
 And forms a friendly telescope, that lends
 Just aid enough to dull the glaring light,
 And place the wand'ring bird before his sight;
 Yet oft beneath a cloud she sweeps along,
 Lost for awhile, yet pours her varied song;
 He views the spot, and as the cloud moves by,
 Again she stretches up the clear blue sky; 100
 Her form, her motion, undistinguish'd quite;
 Save when she wheels direct from shade to light:
 The flutt'ring songstress a mere speck became,
 Like fancy's floating bubbles in a dream;
 He sees her yet, but yielding to repose,
 Unwittingly his jaded eyelids close.

The towering fabric, or the dome's loud roar,
 And stedfast Columns may astonish more,
 Where the charm'd gazer long delighted stays,
 Yet trace but to the Architect the praise,
 Whilst here, the veriest clown that treads the sod,
 Without one scruple gives the praise to God;
 And twofold joys possess his raptur'd mind,
 From gratitude and admiration join'd. 130

Here, midst the boldest triumphs of her worth,
 Nature herself invites the Reapers forth;
 Dares the keen Scikle from its twelvemonth's rest,
 And gives that ardure, which in every breast
 From infancy to age alike appears,
 When the first sheaf its plummy top uprears.
 No rake takes here what heaven to all bestows.
 Children of Want, for you the bounty flows;
 And every Cottage from the plenteous store,
 Receives a burthen nightly at its door! 140

Hark! where the sweeping Scythe now rips along;
 Each sturdy mower emulous and strong,
 Whose writhing loins meridian heat defies,
 Bends o'er his work and every sinew tries,
 Prostrates the waving treasure at his feet,
 But spares the rising Clover, short and sweet.
 Come Health! come Jolity! light footed come!
 Here hold your revels and make this your home.
 Each heart awaits and hails you as its own,
 Each moistened brow that scorns to wear a frown; 150
 Th'unpeopled dwelling mourns its tennants stray'd;
 E'en the domestic laughing Dairy-maid
 Hies to the field, the general toil to share.
 Meanwhile the Farmer quits his elbow chair
 His cool brick-floor, his Pitcher, and his ease,
 And braves the sultry beams, and gladly sees
 His gates thrown open and his team abroad,
 The ready group attendant on his word,
 To turn the swarth, the quiv'ring load to rear,
 Or ply the busy Rake, the land to clear. 160
 Summer's light garb itself now cumbrous grown,
 Each his thin doublet in the shade throws down;
 Where oft the Mastiff sculks with half shut eye
 And rouses at the stranger passing by;
 While unrestrain'd the social converse flows,
 And every breast loves pow'rfull impulse knows,
 And rival wits with more than rustic grace
 Confess the presence of a pretty face;
 For lo! encircled there the lovely Maid,
 In youth's own bloom, and native smiles array'd; 170
 Her Hat awry, divested of her Gown,
 Her creaking Stays of leather, stout and brown; –
 Invidious barrier! why art thou so high,
 When the slight cov'ring of her neck slips by
 There half revealing to the eager sight,
 Her full, ripe bosom exquisitely white?

In many a local tale of harmless mirth,
 And many a jest of momentary birth,
 She bears a part, and as she stops to speak,
 Strokes back the ringlets from her glowing cheek. 180
 Now noon gone by, and four declining hours,
 The weary limbs relax their boasted pow'rs,
 Thirst rages strong, the fainting Spirits fail,
 And ask the sov'reign cordial, home brew'd Ale;
 Beneath some sheltering heap of yellow corn
 Rests the hoop'd cagg; and friendly cooling horn,
 That mocks alike the Goblet's brittle frame,
 Its costlier potions, and its nobler name.
 To Mary first, the briming draught is given,
 By toils made wellcome as the dews of heaven; 190
 And never lip that press'd its homely edge,
 Had kinder blessings or a hartier pledge.
 Of wholesome viands here a banquet smiles,
 A common cheer for all; e'en humble Jiles,
 Who joys his trivial services to yield
 Amidst the fragrance of the open field;
 Oft doom'd in suffocating heat to bear
 The cobweb'd Barn's impure and dusty air;
 To ride in murky state the panting steed,
 Destin'd aloft th'unloaded grain to tread, 200
 Where, in his path as heaps on heaps are thrown,
 He rears, and plunges the loose mountain down;
 Laborious task! with what delight when done
 Both Horse and rider greet the unclouded Sun!
 Yet, by th'unclouded Sun are hourly bred
 The bold assailants that surround thine head,
 Poor patient Ball! and with insulting wing
 Roar in thine ears, and dart the piercing sting;
 In thy behalf thy crest of Boughs avail,
 More than thy short-clip'd remnant of a tail, 210
 A moving mockery, a useless name,
 A living proof of cruelty and shame.
 Shame to the man whatever fame he bore,
 Who took from thee what man can ne'er restore,
 Thy weapon of defence, thy chiefest good,
 When swarming flies contending suck thy blood.
 Nor thine alone the suffering, thine the care,
 The fretfull Ewe bemoans an equal share,
 Tormented into sores her head she hides,
 Or angry brush them from her new-shorn sides. 220
 Pen'd in the yard, e'en now at closing day,
 Unruly Cows with mark'd impatience stay,
 And vainly striving to escape their foes,
 The pail kick down; a piteous current flows.
 Is't not enuff that plagues like these molest?
 Must still another foe annoy their rest?
 He comes, the pest and terror of the yard,
 His full-fledg'd progeny's imperious gaurd;
 The Gander; spitefull, insolent, and bold,
 At the Colt's footlock takes his daring hold, 230

There, serpent-like escapes a dreadful blow,
 And straight attacks a poor defenceless Cow;
 Each booby Goose the unworthy strife enjoys,
 And hails his prowess with redoubled noise.
 Then back he stalks, of self importance full;
 Seizes the shaggy foretop of the Bull,
 Till whirl'd aloft he falls; a timely check,
 Enuff to dislocate his worthless neck;
 For lo! of old, he boasts an honour'd wound,
 Behold that broken wing that trails the ground! 240
 Thus fools and bravo's kindred pranks persue;
 As savage quite; and oft as fatal too.
 Happy the man that foils an envious elf
 And use the darts of spleen to serve himself.
 As when by turns the strolling Swine engage
 The utmost efforts of the Bully's rage,
 Whose nibbling warfare on the grunter's side,
 Is wellcome pleasure to his bristly hide,
 Gently he stoops, or strecht at ease along,
 Enjoys⁸⁴ the insults of the gabling throng, 250
 That march exulting round his fallen head
 As human victors trample on their dead.
 Still Twilight welcome! rest how sweet art thou!
 Now eve o'erhangs the western Cloud's thick brow;
 The farstretch'd curtain of retiring light,
 With fiery treasures fraught, that on the sight
 Flash from its bulging sides, where darkness low'rs,
 In fancy's eye a chain of mould'ring tow'rs,
 Or craggy coasts just rising into view,
 Midst Jav'lins dire, and darts of streaming blue. 260
 Anon, tired labourers bless their shelt'ring homes,
 When midnight, and the frightful tempest comes.⁸⁵
 The Farmer wakes, and sees with silent dread,
 The angry shafts of Heaven gleam round his bed;
 The bursting cloud reiterated roars,
 Shakes his straw roof, and jarrs his bolted doors:
 The slow-wing'd storm along the troubled skies
 Spreads its dark course; the wind begins to rise;
 And full-leaf'd Elms, his dwelling's shade by day,
 With mimick thunder gives its fury way. 270
 Sounds in his chimney top a doleful peal,
 Midst pouring rain, or gusts of rattling hail;
 With tenfold danger low the tempest bends,
 And quick and strong the sulphurous flame descends,
 The frighten'd Mastiff from his kennel flies,
 And cringes at the door with piteous cries.
 Where now's the trifler? where the child of pride?
 These are the moments when the heart is tried!
 Nor lives the man with conscience e'er so clear,
 But feels a solemn, reverential fear; 280
 Feels too a joy relieve his aching breast,

84: Lines 249-50: ... *or lays himself along, / Endures the insults* ... (1st edition). Amended in 2nd edition.

85: Lines 261-2: ... *home / ... come* (2nd and 3rd editions).

When the spent Storm hath howl'd itself to rest.
 Still, wellcome beats the long continued shower,
 And sleep protracted comes with double pow'r,
 Calm dreams of bliss brings on the morning sun,
 For every Barn is fill'd, and Harvest done.

Now, ere sweet Summer bids its long adieu,
 And winds blow keen where late the blossom grew,
 The bustling day and jovial night must come,
 The long accustom'd feast of Harvest-home. 290

No bloodstain'd Victory, in story bright,
 Can give the philosophic mind delight;
 No triumph please while rage and death destroy:
 Reflection sickens at the monstrous joy;
 And where the joy, if rightly understood,
 Like chearful praise for universal good?
 The soul, nor check nor doubtful anguish knows,
 But free and pure the grateful current flows.

Behold the sound Oak table's massy frame
 Bestride the Kitchen floor, the careful Dame 300

And generous Host, invite their friends around,
 While all that clear'd the crop, or till'd the ground,
 Are guests by right of custom: old and young,
 And many a neighbouring Yeoman, joins the throng,
 With artizans that lent their dext'rous aid,
 When o'er each field the flaming sunbeams play'd;
 Yet plenty reigns, and from her boundless hoard,
 Though not one jelly trembles on the board,
 Supplies the feast with all that sence can crave:
 With all that made our great forefathers brave, 310
 E'er the cloy'd palate countless flavours tried,
 And Cooks had Nature's judgment set aside.
 With thanks to Heaven, and tales of rustic lore,
 The mansion echoes when the banquet's o'er;
 A wider circle spreads, and smiles abound;
 As quick the frothing Horn performs its round,
 Care's mortal foe; that sprightly joys impart
 To chear the frame and elevate the heart.

Here, fresh and brown the Hazel's produce lies
 In tempting heaps; and peals of laughter rise; 320
 And crackling musick, with the frequent song,
 Unheeded bears the midnight hour along.

Here, once a year destinction low'rs its crest,
 The Master, servant, and the merry guest,
 Are equal all; and round the happy ring,
 The reaper's eyes exulting glances fling,
 And warm'd with gratitude he quits his place,
 With sunburnt hands and ale-enliven'd face;
 Refills the jugg his honour'd Host to tend,
 To serve at once the Master and the friend. 330
 Proud thus to meet his smiles, to share his tale,
 His Nuts, his conversation, and his Ale.

Such were the days: of days long past I sing,
 When pride gave place to mirth without a sting;
 Ere tyrant customs strength sufficient bore,

To violate the feelings of the poor;
 To leave them distanc'd in the mad'ning race,
 Where-e'er refinement shows its hated face:
 Nor causeless hated; 'tis the peasant's curse
 That hourly makes his wretched station worse; 340
 Destroy's life's intercourse; * the social plan,
 That rank to rank cements, as man to man;

* In reference to this passage, and as a thought, by way of illustration, I subjoin a passage from Cook's Voyage, not knowing but it was written by Cook himself, which I now find was not the case. I was quite uncertain during the 15 months which the poem remained in the hands of Mr Lofft and the publishers, whether this note would be printed or not. I was pleading for kindness between the ranks of society, and it seemed to suit my purpose. And if I could believe that what I said of Letting "Labour have its due" would only in one instance persuade a Farmer to give his men more wages, instead of giving, or suffering him to buy cheap corn in the time of trouble, I should feel a pleasure of the most lasting sort, having no doubt but that an extra half Crown earned is worth, morally, and substantially, a five Shilling Gift; to those who in the house of their fathers work for bread.

Allowing for the imperfect state of sublunary happiness, which is comparative at best, there are not perhaps, many nations existing whose situation is so desirable. Where the means of subsistence are so easy, and the wants of the people so few.

"The evident distinction of ranks, which subsists at Otaheite, does not so materially affect the felicity of the nation, as we might have supposed. The simplicity of their whole life contributes to soften the appearance of distinctions, and to reduce them to a level. Where the climate and the custom of the country do not absolutely require a perfect garment; where it is easy at every step to gather as many plants as form not only a decent, but likewise a customary covering; and where all the necessaries of life are within the reach of every individual, at the expence of a trifling labour; – ambition and envy must in a great measure be unknown. It is true, the highest classes of people possess some dainty articles, such as pork, fish, fowl, and cloth, almost exclusively; but the desire of indulging the appetite in a few trifling luxuries can at most render individuals, and not whole nations, unhappy. Absolute want occasions the miseries of the lower class in some civilized states, and is the result of the unbounded voluptuousness of their superiors. At Otaheite there is not, in general, that disparity between the highest and the meanest man, that subsists in England between a reputable tradesman and a labourer. The affection of the Otaheitans for their chiefs, which they never fail to express upon all occasions, gave us great reason to suppose, that they consider themselves as one family, and respect their eldest born in the persons of their chiefs. The lowest man in the nation speaks as freely with his king as with his equal, and have the pleasure of seeing him as often as he likes. The king, at times, amuses himself with the occupations of his subjects; and not yet depraved by false notions of empty state, he often paddles his own canoe, without considering such an employment derogatory to his dignity. How long such a happy equality may last, is uncertain: and how much the introduction of foreign luxuries may hasten its dissolution, cannot be too

frequently repeated to Europeans. If the knowledge of a few individuals can only be acquired at such a price as the happiness of nations, it were better for the discoverers, and the discovered, that the South Sea had still remaind unknown in Europe and its restless inhabitants.” – *Reflections on Otaheite; Cooks second Voyage.*

Wealth flows around him; fashion lordly reigns
 Yet poverty is his, and mental pains.⁸⁶
 Methinks I hear the mourner thus impart
 The stifled murmurs of his wounded heart:
 “Whence comes this change, ungracious, irksome, cold?
 Whence the new grandure that mine eyes behold?
 The widening distance which I daily see,
 Has Wealth done this? then wealth’s a foe to me; 350
 Foe to our rights; that leaves a pow’rful few
 The paths of emulation to persue:
 For emulation stoops to us no more;
 The hope of humble industry is o’er;
 The blameless hope; the cheering sweet presage
 Of future comforts for declining age.
 Can my sons share from this paternal hand
 The profits with the labours of the land?
 No; though indulgent Heav’n its blessing deigns,
 Where’s the small Farm to suit my scanty means? 360
 Content, the poet sings, with us resides,
 In lonely Cots like mine the Damsell hides;
 And will he then in raptur’d visions tell
 That sweet Content with WANT can ever dwell?
 A Barley loaf ’tis true my table crowns,
 That fast deminishing in lusty rounds
 Stops Nature’s cravings; yet her sighs will flow,
 From knowing this: – that once it was not so.
 Our annual feast when Earth her plenty yields,
 When crown’d with boughs the last load quits the fields, 370
 The aspect still of ancient joy puts on;
 The aspect only, with the substance gone.
 The selfsame Horn is still at our command,
 But serves none other than the Plebeian hand.
 For home-brew’d Ale, neglected and debased,
 Is quite discarded from the realms of Taste.
 Where unaffected freedom charm’d the soul,
 The separate Table, and the costly bowl,
 Cool as the blast that checks the buding Spring
 A mockery of gladness round them fling. 380
 For oft the Farmer, ere his heart approves,
 Yields up the custom which he dearly loves;
 Refinement forses on him like a tide,
 Bold innovasions down its current ride,
 That bear no peace beneath their showy dress,
 Nor add one tittle to his happiness;
 His guests selected; rank’s punctilios known;

86: Compare *To My Old Oak Table*, 111-12: *Teach me unjust distinctions to deride, / And falsehoods gender’d in the brain of Pride ...* (from *Wild Flowers*, 1806).

What trouble waits upon a casual frown!
 Restraint's foul manacles his pleasures maim;
 Selected guests selected phrases claim, 390
 Nor reigns that joy, when hand in hand they join,
 That good old Master felt in shaking mine.
 Heaven bless his memory! bless his honour'd name!
 The Poor will speak his lasting worthy fame,
 To souls fair-purpos'd, strength and guidance give;
 In pity to us still let goodness live;
 Let labour have its due! my cot shall be
 From chilling want, and guilty murmurs free;
 Let Labour have its due: then peace is mine,
 And never, never shall my heart repine." 400

Composed between December 1796 and May 1797.

Autumn.

Acorns. Hogs in the wood. Wheat-sowing. The Church. Village Girls. The Mad Girl. The Bird Boy's Hutt. Dissappointments; reflections &c. Euston Hall. Fox hunting. Old Trouncer. Long Nights. a wellcome to Winter.

Again the years decline, midst storms and floods,
 The thund'ring Chace, the yellow fading woods,
 Invite my song; that fain would boldly tell
 Of upland coverts, and the echoing dell,
 By turns resounding loud at eve and morn
 The swineherd's halloo, and the huntsman's horn.
 No more the fields with scatter'd grain supply
 The restless wand'ring tenants of the sty;
 From oak to oak they run with eager haste,
 And wrangling share the first delicious taste 10
 Of fallen Acorns; yet but thinly found
 Till the strong gale have shook them to the ground.
 It comes: and roaring woods obedient wave;
 Their home well pleased the joint adventurers leave;
 The trudging Sow leads forth her numerous young,
 Playful, and white, and clean, the briars among,
 Till briars and thorns increasing fence them round,⁸⁷
 Where last year's mould'ring leaves bestrew the ground,
 And o'er their heads, loud lash'd by furious squalls,
 Bright from their cups the ratling treasure falls, 20
 Hot thirsty food; whence doubly sweet and cool
 The wellcome margin of some rushgrown pool,
 The Wild-duck's lonely haunt, whose jealous eye
 Guards every point; who sits prepar'd to fly,
 On the calm bosom of her little Lake,
 Too closely screen'd for ruffian winds to shake,
 And as the bold intruders press around
 At once she starts and rises with a bound;
 With bristles raised the sudden noise they hear,
 And ludicrously wild, and wing'd with fear,
 The herd decamps with more than swinish speed, 30
 And snorting dash thro' sedge, and rush, and reed;
 Through tangling thickets headlong on they go,
 Then stop, and listen for their fancied foe;
 The hindmost still the growing panic spreads,
 Repeated frights the first alarm succeeds,
 Till folly's wages wounds and thorns they reap,
 Yet glorying in their fortunate escape,

87: Compare *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III ii 29: *For briars and thorns at their apparel snatch ...*

Their groundless terrors by degrees soon cease
 And night's dark reign restores their wonted peace. 40
 For now the gale subsides, and from each bough,
 The roosting pheasant's short but frequent crow,
 Invites to rest; and huddling side by side,
 The herd in closest ambush seeks to hide;
 Seeks some warm slope with shagged moss o'erspread
 Dried leaves their copious covering and their bed.
 In vain may Jiles through gathering glooms that fall,
 And solemn silence, urge his piercing call:
 Whole days and nights they tarry midst their store,
 Nor quit the woods till oaks can yield no more. 50

Beyond bleak Winter's rage, beyond the Spring
 That rolling Earth's unvarying course will bring
 Who tills the ground looks on with mental eye,
 And sees next Summer's sheaves and cloudless sky;
 And even now whilst Nature's beauty dies,
 Deposits seed, and bids new harvests rise;
 Seed well prepar'd, and warm'd with glowing lime,
 'Gainst earth bred grubs, and cold, and lapse of time;
 For searching frosts and various ills invade,
 Whilst wint'ry months depress the springing blade. 60
 The plough moves heavily, and strong the soil,
 And clogging harrows with augmented toil
 Dive deep, and clinging mixes with the mould
 A fat'ning treasure from the nightly fold,
 And all the Cow-yard's highly valued store
 That late bestred the blacken'd surface o'er.
 No idling hours are here, when Fancy trims
 Her dancing taper over outstretch'd limbs,
 And in her thousand thousand colours dress'd,
 Plays round the grassy couch of noontide rest; 70
 Here Jiles for hours of indolence atones
 With strong exertion, and with weary bones;
 And knows no leisure: till the distant chime
 Of sabbath bells he hears at sermon time,
 That down the brook sound sweetly in the gale,
 Or strike the rising hill or scim the dale.
 Nor Jiles alone the sweets of leisure taste;
 Kind rest extends to all; save one poor beast,
 That true to time and place is doom'd to plod,
 To bring the Pastor to the house of God: 80
 Mean structure; where no bones of Heroes lie;
 The rude inelegance of poverty
 Reigns here alone: else why that roof of straw?
 Those narrow windows with the frequent flaw?
 O'er whose low cells the dock and mallow spreads,
 And rampant nettles lift their spiry heads,
 Whilst from the hollows of the tower on high,
 The grey-cap'd Daws in saucy legeons fly.
 Round these lone walls assembling neighbours meet
 And tread departed friends beneath their feet, 90
 And new-bryer'd graves that prompt the secret sigh
 Shows each the spot where he himself must lie.

Midst timely greetings village news goes round,
 Of crops late shorn, or, crops that deck the ground;
 Experienc'd ploughmen in the circle join;
 While sturdy Boys in feats of strength to shine,
 With pride elate their young associates brave
 To jump from hollow-sounding grave to grave;
 Then close consulting each his tallent lends, 100
 To plan fresh sports when tedious service ends.
 Hither at times with chearfulness of soul,
 Sweet village Maids from neighbouring hamlets stroll,
 That like the light-heel'd Does o'er lawns that rove,
 Look shyly curious; ripening into love;
 For love's their errand, and the rose that blow
 On either cheek with heighten'd lustre glow;
 When, conscious of their charms e'en age looks sly,
 And rapture beams from youth's observant eye. *

* Note. It was about this spot that I made my longest rest in writing the Original M.S. I had done it at various opportunities thus far, but wrote no more untill I had composed the remainder of Autumn, and gone through the Winter. Much has been said to me in consequence of its being publickly known by means of Mr Swan's letter. But I must think that Memory is not task'd so hard in retaining what itself is giving birth to, as in taking up and retaining the Ideas or writings of another. The chain of connection so long ponder'd on, and so long rivetted in the mind, is the grand reservoir of Memory, and persued, brings the words, the musick, and all extraneous ornaments readily into the compass of the tongue. Memory, (if that is the wonder) certainly went much further; for the whole of the poem was, while it was printing, very perfectly at my tongue's end. I remember repeating it during a walk to Rotherhithe, through Tooly Street and round by the Kent Road. At this present time I could by no means repeat the whole poem, though I can feel and remember where it was alter'd.

The pride of such a party, Nature's pride,
 Was lovely Poll, † who innocently tried 110

† Mary Rayner of Ixworth-Thorp.⁸⁸

With Hat of airy shape and ribbands gay,
 Love to inspire, and stand in Hymen's way,
 But, ere her twentieth Summer could expand,
 Or youth was render'd happy with her hand,
 Her mind's serenity was lost and gone,
 Her eye grew languid, and she wept alone;
 Yet causeless seem'd her grief; for quick restrain'd,
 Mirth follow'd loud, or indignation reign'd.
 Whims, wild and simple, led her from her home;
 The heath, the Common, or the fields to roam: 120

88: R.B.'s note to line 110: in 1808 R.B. changed *Poll* to *Ann*, on better information: "In the description of the Mad Girl I had originally called her *Poll*; but on my visit to Suffolk, after an absence of twelve years (which gave rise to the lines which follow this preface), I learned that her name was *Ann*. I conversed with her, and found her greatly recovered, and sensible of her past calamity. Instead of giving this information in a note, I have, partly from choice, and partly from the nature of the printing, inserted *Ann* for *Poll* in the text" (1808, p.xxxvii).

Terror and Joy alternate ruled her hours:
 Now blythe she sung and gather'd useless flow'rs,
 Now pluck'd a tender twig from every bough,
 To whip the hov'ring Demons from her brow.
 Ill-fated Maid! thy guiding spark is fled;
 And lasting wretchedness awaits thy bed,
 Thy bed of straw; for mark, where even now,
 O'er their lost child afflicted parents bow;
 Their woe she knows not, but perversely coy
 Inverted customs yield a sullen joy; 130
 Her midnight meals in secrecy she takes
 Low mutt'ring to the Moon, that rising breaks
 Through night's dark glooms; oh how much more forlorn
 Her night, that knows of no returning dawn.
 Slow from the threshold, once her infant seat,
 O'er the cold earth she crawls to her retreat;
 Quitting the Cot's warm walls in filth to lie,
 Where the swine grunting yields up half his sty.⁸⁹
 The damp night air her shivering limbs assails;
 In dreams she moans, and fancied wrongs bewails. 140
 When morning wakes, none earlier rous'd than she,
 When pendant drops fall glit'ring from the tree,
 But nought her rayless melancholy cheers,
 Or sooths her breast or stops her streaming tears.
 Her matted locks unornamented flow;
 Claspng her knees and waving to and fro;
 Her head bow'd down, her faded cheek to hide;
 A piteous mourner by the pathway side.
 Some tufted molehill through the live-long day
 She calls her throne; there weeps her life away. 150
 And oft the gaily passing stranger stays
 His well-timed step, and takes a silent gaze;
 Till sympathetic drops unbidden start,
 And pangs quick springing, muster round his heart;
 And soft he treads with other gazers round,
 And fain would catch her sorrow's plaintive sound;
 One word alone is all that strikes the ear;
 One short, pathetic, simple word – "Oh dear!"⁹⁰
 A thousand times repeated to the wind,
 That wafts the sigh, but leaves the pang behind! 160
 For ever of the proffer'd parley shy
 She hears th'unwelcome foot advancing nigh;
 Nor quite unconscious of her wretched plight,
 Gives one sad look and hurries out of sight.
 Fair promis'd sunbeams of terestrial bliss!
 Health's gallant hopes; and are ye sunk to this?
 For in life's road though thorns abundant grow,
 There still are joys poor Poll can never know;
 Joys, which the gay companions of her prime

89: Lines 147-8: *Quitting the cot's warm walls unhous'd to lie, / Or share the swine's impure and narrow sty* (3rd edition).

90: R.B.'s Note: I forget what critic it was who told me that Poll's "one short word" is two! *Anonymous rejoinder:* Such a Critic can hardly merit recollection.

Sip, as they drift along the stream of Time; 170
 At eve to hear beside their tranquil home
 The lifted latch, that speaks the lover come;
 That love matured, and playful on the knee
 To press the velvet lip of infancy;⁹¹
 To stay the tottering step, the features trace,
 Inestimable sweets of social peace!

O Thou, who bidst the vernal juices rise;
 Thou, on whose blasts Autumnal foliage flies;
 Let peace near leave me, nor my heart grow cold,
 Whilst Life and Sanity are mine to hold. 180

Shorn of their flowers that shed th'untreasur'd seed,
 The withering pasture, and the fading mead,
 Less tempting grown, deminish more and more,
 The Dairy's pride, sweet Summer's flowing store.
 New cares succeed, and gentle duties press,
 Where the fire-side a school of tenderness
 Revives the languid chirp, and warms the blood
 Of cold-nip'd weaklings of the latter brood,
 That from the shell just bursting into day,
 Through yard or pond persue their venturous way. 190
 Far weightier cares, and wider scenes expand;
 What devastation marks the new sown land!

"From hungry woodland foes go, Jiles, and guard
 The rising wheat; ensure its great reward;
 A future sustenance, a summer's pride
 Demand thy vigilance, then be it tried;
 Exert thy voice, and wield thy shotless gun,
 Go, tarry there from morn till seting Sun."
 Keen blows the blast, or ceaseless rain descends,
 The half-strip'd hedge a sorry shelter lends; 200

O for a Hovel, e'er so small or low,
 Whose roof, repelling winds and early snow,
 Might bring home's comforts fresh before his eyes.
 No sooner thought than, lo! the structure rise!
 In some sequester'd nook, embank'd around,
 Sods for its walls, and straw in burdens bound.
 Dried fuel hoarded is his richest store,
 And circling smoke obscures his little door;
 Whence creeping forth, to dutys call he yields;
 And strolls the Crusoe of the lonely fields. 210

On whitethorns tow'ring, and the leafless rose,
 A frost-nip'd feast in bright vermilion glows:
 Where clust'ring Sloes in glossy order rise
 He crops the loaded branch; a cumb'rous prize;
 And o'er the flame the sput'ring fruit he rests,
 And place green sods to seat his coming guests;
 His guests by promise; playmates young and gay;
 But ah! fresh pastimes lure their steps away!
 He sweeps his hearth, and homward looks in vain,
 Till feeling dissappointment's cruel pain, 220

91: Compare Gray's *Elegy*, 23-4: *No children run to lisp their sire's return, / Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.*

His fairy revels are exchanged for rage,
 His banquet marr'd, grown dull his hermitage,
 The Field becomes his prison; till on high,
 Benighted Birds to shades and coverts fly.
 Midst Air, Health, Daylight, can he prisoner be?
 If fields are prisons, where is Liberty?
 Here still she dwells and here her votarys stroll,
 But disappointed hope untunes the Soul.
 Restraints unfelt whilst hours of rapture flow,
 When troubles press, to chains and barriers grow. 230
 Look then from trivial up to greater woes,
 From the poor Bird-boy, with his roasted Sloes,
 To where the dungeon'd mourner heaves the sigh;
 Where not one chearing sunbeam meets his eye.
 Though ineffectual pity thine may be,
 No wealth, no pow'r, to set the captive free;
 Though only to thy ravich'd sight is given
 The golden path that HOWARD⁹² trod to Heav'n;
 Thy slights can make the wretched more forlorn,
 And deeper drive affliction's barbed thorn. 240
 Say not, "I'll come and chear thy gloomy cell
 With news of dearest friends; how good, how well;
 I'll be a joyfull herald to thine heart,"
 Then fail: and play the worthless trifler's part,
 To sip flat pleasures from thy glass's brim,
 And waste the precious hour that's due to him,
 In mercy spare the base, unmanly blow,
 Where can he turn; to whom complain of you?
 Back to past joys in vain his thoughts may stray,
 Trace and retrace the beaten worn-out way; 250
 The rankling injury will pierce his breast,
 And curses on thee break his midnight rest.
 Bereft of Song, and ever chearing green
 The soft endearments of the Summer scene,
 New harmony pervades the solemn wood
 Dear to the Soul, and healthful to the blood;
 For bold exertion follows on the sound
 Of distant Sportsmen, and the chiding Hound;
 First heard from kennel bursting, mad with joy,
 Where smiling EUSTON boasts her good FITZROY,⁹³ 260
 Lord of pure alms, and gifts that wide extend;
 The Farmer's patron, and the poor man's friend:
 Whose Mansion glit'ring with the eastern ray
 Whose elevated TEMPLE points the way,
 O'er slopes and lawns, the park's extensive pride,
 To where the victims of the chace reside,
 Ingulph'd in earth; in conscious safety warm;
 Till lo! a plot portends their coming harm.
 In earliest hours of dark and hooded⁹⁴ morn,

⁹²: John Howard (1726?-90) prison inspector and reform-campaigner.

⁹³: *Fitzroy* is the Duke of Grafton.

⁹⁴: Line 269: *unhooded* (1st, 2nd and 3rd editions). **R.B.'s note.** The poem had gone through one or two Editions before it was observ'd, that, an *unhooded* morning was not dark, but light! The observation was made by the Revd

Ere yet one rosy cloud bespeaks the dawn, 270
 Whilst far abroad the Fox pursues his prey,
 He's doom'd to risk the perils of the day,
 From his strong hold block'd out: perhaps to bleed;
 Or owe his life to fortune, or to speed.
 For now the pack, impatient rushing on,
 Range through the darkest coverts one by one,
 Trace every spot; whilst down each noble glade
 That guides the eye beneath a changful shade
 The loit'ring sportsman feels th'instinctive flame
 And checks his steed to mark the springing game. 280
 Midst intersecting cuts and winding ways
 The Huntsman cheers his dogs; and anxious stays
 Where every narrow riding even shorn,
 Gives back the echo of his mellow horn.
 Till fresh, and lightsome, every power untried,
 The starting fugitive leaps by his side;
 His lifted finger to his ear he plies,
 And the view hallo beds a chorus rise,
 Of Dogs quick-mouth'd, and shouts that mingle loud,
 As bursting thunder rolls from cloud to cloud.⁹⁵ 290
 With ears erect, and chest of vigorous mould,⁹⁶
 O'er ditch, o'er fence, unconquerably bold,
 The shining Courser lengthens every bound,
 And his strong foot-locks suck the moisten'd ground;
 As from the confines of the Wood they pour,
 And joyous Villages partake the roar.
 O'er heath far stretch'd, or down, or valley low,
 The stiff-limb'd peasant glorying in the show
 Persues in vain; where youth itself soon tire,
 Spite of the transports that the chace inspire; 300
 For who unmounted long can charm the eye,
 Or hear the music of the leading cry?
 Poor faithful TROUNCER! thou canst lead no more;
 All thy fatigues, and all thy triumphs o'er!
 Triumphs of worth; whose honorary fame
 Was, still to follow true the hunted game.
 Beneath enormous Oaks, Britannia's boast;
 In thick impenetrable coverts lost,
 When the warm pack in fault'ring silence stood,
 Thine was the note that rous'd the list'ning wood; 310
 Rekindling every joy with tenfold force,
 Through all the mazes of the tainted course.
 Still foremost thou the dashing stream to cross,
 And tempt along the animated horse;
 Foremost o'er Fenn, or level mead to pass,
 And sweep the show'ring dewdrops from the grass;
 Then bright emerging from the mist below,

Mr Fellows, now of Fakenham, July 1805. *Anonymous addition*: N.B. And (if the observation was worth making) was suggested to Mr Fellows by Miss Seward – See her Letters Vol 5th.

95: Compare the dialogue between Theseus and Hippolyta, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV i, 100-14.

96: Line 291: *ears crompt short* (1st and 2nd editions, amended 3rd edition). **R.B.'s note**. Sir Charles Bunbury justly observed to me, that to crop the ears of a Horse was as cruel as the practice of Docking, which I had condemned, and advised to alter it, which is done in the 2d Edition. [should be "3d edition".]

To climb the Woodland hill's exulting brow.
 Pride of thy race! with worth far less than thine,
 Full many a human leader daily shine!⁹⁷ 320
 Less faith, less constancy, less generous zeal! –
 Then no disgrace mine humble verse shall feel,
 Where not one lying line to riches bow,
 Or poison'd sentiment from rancour flow,
 Nor flowers bestrewing round ambition's carr,
 An honest Dog's a Nobler theme by far.
 Each sportsman heard the tidings with a sigh,
 When death's cold touch had stop'd his tuneful cry;
 And though high deeds, and fair exalted praise,
 In memory liv'd, and flow'd in rustick lays; 330
 Short was the strain of monumental woe;
 "Foxes rejoice! here buried lies your foe." *

* Inscribed on a stone in Euston-park wall. I had no doubts with respect to these being the words on the Stone; but I was not quite sure that the Dog's name was "Trouncer."

In safety hous'd, throughout Night's length'ning reign,
 The Cock sends forth a loud and piercing strain;
 More frequent, as the glooms of midnight flee,
 And hours roll round, that brought him liberty
 When Summers early dawn, mild, clear, and bright,
 Chaced quick away the transitory night,
 Hours now in darkness veil'd: yet loud the scream
 Of Geese impatient for the playful stream; 340
 And all the feather'd tribe imprison'd raise,
 Their morning notes of inharmonious praise;
 And many a clamerous Hen, and Capon gay,
 When daylight slowly through the fog breaks way,
 Fly wantonly abroad: but ah, how soon,
 The shades of twilight follow hazy noon!
 Short'ning the busy day! day that slides by,
 Amidst th'unfinish'd toils of Husbandry;
 Toils, still each morn resum'd with double care,
 To meet the icy terrors of the year; 350
 To meet the threats of Boreas⁹⁸ undismay'd
 And Winter's gathering frowns, and hoary head.
 Then wellcome, Cold; welcome, ye snowy nights!
 Heaven midst your rage shall mingle pure delights;
 And confidence of hope the soul sustain,
 While devastation sweeps along the plain,
 Nor shall the child of poverty despair;
 But bless the power that rules the changing year:
 Assur'd, though horrors round his cottage reign,
 That Spring will come, and Nature smile again. 360

Composed between May and Nov, 1797

⁹⁷: Line 320: *Full many human leaders daily shine!* (1st and 2nd editions: amended in 3rd edition).

⁹⁸: Boreas is the god of the north wind. See Thomson, *The Seasons, Autumn* 907: *Bright over Europe bursts the Boreal Morn.*

Winter.

Tenderness to Cattle. Frozen Turnips. The Cow yard; night. The Farm House. Fire side. Farmer's advice, and Instruction. Nightly cares of the Stable. Dobbin. The Post Horse. Sheep stealing Dogs. Walks occasion'd there by. The Ghost. Lamb time. Returning Spring. Conclusion.

With kindred pleasures moved, and cares oppress'd,
 Sharing alike our weariness and rest,
 Who lives the daily partner of our hours,
 Through every change, of heat, and frost, and show'rs;
 Partakes our chearful meals, or burns with thirst,
 In mutual labour, and in mutual trust;⁹⁹
 The kindly intercourse will ever prove
 A bond of amity and social love.
 To more than man this generous warmth extends:
 And oft the Team and shiv'ring Herd befriends; 10
 Tender solicitude the bosom fills,
 And pity executes what reason wills;
 Youth learns compassion's tale from every tongue,
 And flies to aid the helpless and the young:
 When now, unsparing as the scourge of war,
 Blasts follow blasts, and groves dismantled roar.
 Around their home dependant Cattle low,
 No nourishment in frozen pastures grow,
 Yet frozen pastures every morn resound,
 With fair abundance thund'ring to the ground. 20
 For though on hoary twigs no buds peep out,
 And e'en the hardy bramble cease to sprout
 Beneath dread Winter's level sheets of snow,
 The sweet, nutritious Turnip deigns to grow;
 Till now imperious want, and wide-spread darrth
 Bids labour claim her treasures from the earth.
 On Jiles, and such as Jiles the labour falls,
 To strew the frequent load where hunger calls.
 On driving gales sharp hail indignant flies, 30
 And sleet more irksome still assails his eyes;
 Snow clogs his feet: or if no snow is seen,
 The field with all its juicy store to screen,
 Deep goes the frost, till every root is found
 A rolling mass of ice upon the ground.
 No tender Ewe can break her nightly fast,

99: Lines 5-6: ... *partaking first / In mutual labour and in mutual thirst* (all editions).

Nor Heifer strong begin the cold repast.
 Till Jiles with pond'rous beetle foremost go,
 And scat'ring splinters fly at every blow;
 When pressing round him eager for the prize,
 From their mix'd breath warm exhalations rise. 40

If now in beaded rows drops deck the spray,
 While Phoebus grants a momentary ray,
 Let but a cloud's broad shadow intervene,
 And stiffin'd into gems the drops are seen;
 And down the furrow'd Oak's broad southern side,
 Streams of dissolving rime no longer glide.

Though Night approaching bids the world prepare,
 Still the Flail echoes through the frosty air:
 Nor stops, till deepest shades of darkness come,
 Sending at length the weary labourer home. 50
 From him, with bed and nightly food supplied,
 Throughout the yard hous'd round on every side,
 Deep-plunging Cows their rustling feast enjoy,
 And snatch sweet mouthfulls from the passing boy,
 Who moves unseen beneath his trailing load,
 Fills the tall racks, and leaves a scatter'd road;
 Where oft the swine from ambush warm and dry,
 Bolt out and scamper headlong to his sty;
 When Jiles with well known voice allready there,
 Deigns them a portion of his evening care. 60

Him, though the cold may pierce, and storms molest,
 Succeeding hours shall chear with warmth and rest;
 Gladness to spread, and raise the grateful smile,
 He hurls the faggot bursting from the pile;
 And many a logg and rifted trunk conveys,
 To heap the fire and extend the blaze¹⁰⁰
 That quiv'ring strong through each apperture flies
 Whilst smoak in columns unobstructed rise.
 For the rude architect unknown to fame
 Nor symetry nor elegance his aim 70
 Who spread his floors of solid Oak on high,
 On beams rough-hewn, from age to age that lie;
 Bade his wide fabric unimpair'd sustain
 Pomona's store,¹⁰¹ and Cheese, and golden grain;
 Bade from its central base capacious laid,
 The well-wrought chimney rear its lofty head;
 Where since hath many a savoury Ham been stor'd,
 And tempests howl'd, and Christmas gambols roar'd.
 Flat on the hearth the glowing embers lie,
 And flames reflected dance in every eye: 80
 There the long Billet, forced at last to bend,
 While froathing sap gush out at either end,¹⁰²
 Throws round its wellcome heat: the ploughman smiles,

100: R.B.'s note. This line was deficient in quantity untill Mr L added the word "to", unless we had sounded the word fire like two syllables, — fi-er, which is too often done. *R.B.'s final preference is nevertheless for a two-syllable "fire"*.

101: Pomona was the Roman goddess of fruit: see Ovid, *Meta.*, XIV, 623 ff; Bloomfield's only classical allusion is from Thomson, *The Seasons*, *Summer* 664, or *Autumn* 144.

102: Line 83: ... *gushes at either end* (1st, 2nd and 3rd editions).

And oft the joke runs hard on sheepish Jiles,
 Who sits joint tennant of the corner stool,
 The converse sharing, though in duty's school;
 For now attentively 'tis his to hear,
 Intorogations from the Master's chair.

“Left ye your bleating charge when daylight fled,
 Near where the hay-stack lifts its snowy head? 90
 Whose fence of bushy furze so close and warm,
 May stop the slanting bullets of the storm?
 For hark! it blows; a dark and dismal night:
 Heav'n guide the trav'ler's fearful steps aright!
 Now from the woods, mistrustful and sharp-eyed,
 The Fox in silent darkness seems to glide;
 Stealing around us, list'ning as he goes,
 If chance the Cock, or stam'ring Capon crows;¹⁰³
 Or Goose, or noding Duck should darkling cry,
 As if appris'd of lurking danger nigh: 100
 Destruction waits them, Jiles, if e'er you fail
 To bolt their doors against the driving gale.
 Strew'd you, still mindful of th'unshelter'd head,
 Burthens of straw the Cattle's wellcome bed?
 Thine heart should feel, what thou may'st hourly see,
 That duty's basis is humanity.

Of pain's unsavoury cup tho' thou may'st taste
 The wrath of Winter from the bleak north-east,
 Thine utmost suffrings in the coldest day,
 A period terminates, and joys repay. 110
 Perhaps e'en now, while here those joys we boast,
 Full many a bark rides down the neighbouring Coast,
 Where the high northern waves tremendous roar,
 Drove down by blasts from Norway's icy shore.
 The Sea-boy there, less fortunate than thou,
 Feels all thy pains in every gust that blow;
 His freezing hands now drench'd, now dry, by turns,
 Now lost, now seen, the distant light that burns
 On some tall cliff uprais'd, a flaming guide
 That throws its friendly radiance o'er the tide. 120
 His labours cease not with declining day,
 But toils and perils mark his wat'ry way;
 And whilst in peaceful dreams secure we lie,
 The ruthless whirlwinds rage along the sky,
 Round his head whistling; and shall thou repine,
 While this protecting roof still shelters thine?”¹⁰⁴

Mild as the vernal show'r his words prevail,
 And aid the moral precept of his tale;
 His wond'ring hearers learn, and ever keep
 These first ideas of the restless deep; 130
 And, as the opening Mind a circuit tries,
 Present felicity in value rise.
 Increasing pleasures ev'ry hour they find,
 The warmth more precious, and the shelter kind;

103: Line 98: ... *stamm'ring cockerel* (3rd edition).

104: Contradicts the King's contrast of himself with a "ship-boy" at *Henry IV II* III i, 18-31.

Warmth, that long reigning bids the eyelids close,
 As through the blood its balmy influence goes,
 When the chear'd heart forgets fatigues and cares,
 And drowsiness alone dominion bears.
 Sweet then the ploughman's slumbers, hale and young:
 When the last topick dies upon his tongue; 140
 Sweet then the bliss his trancient dreams inspire,
 Till chilblaines wake him, or the snapping fire.
 He starts, and ever thoughtful of his team,
 Along the glit'ring snow a feeble gleam
 Shoots from his lanthorn, as he yauning goes,
 To add fresh comforts to their night's repose;
 Defusing fragrance as their food he moves,
 And patts the jolly sides of those he loves.
 Thus full replenish'd, perfect ease posses'd;
 From night till morn alternate food and rest, 150
 No rightfull chear withheld, no sleep debar'd,
 But each day's labour brings its sure reward.
 Yet when from plough or lumb'ring cart set free
 They taste awhile the sweets of Liberty,
 E'en sober Dobbin lifts his clumsy heels
 And kicks disdainful of the dirty wheels;
 But soon his frolick ended yields again
 To trudge the road, and wear the clinking chain.
 Shortsighted Dobbin! thou canst only see
 The trivial hardships that encompass thee! 160
 Thy chains were freedom, and thy toils repose,
 Could the poor Post-horse¹⁰⁵ tell thee all his woes:
 Show thee his bleeding shoulders, and unfold
 The dreadful anguish he endures for gold.
 Hired at each call of business, lust, or rage;
 That prompt the trav'ler on from stage to stage,
 Still on his strength depends their boasted speed,
 For them his limbs grow weak, his bare ribs bleed.
 And though he groaning quickens at command,
 Their extra shilling in the rider's hand 170
 Becomes his bitter scourge; 'tis he must feel
 The double efforts of the lash and steel:
 Till when, uphill, the destin'd Inn he gains,
 And trembling under complicated pains,
 Prone from his nostrils, darting on the ground,
 His breath emitted floats in clouds around:
 Drops chace each other down his chest and sides,
 And spatter'd mud his native colour hides:
 Through his swol'n veins the boiling torrent flows,
 And every nerve a separate torture knows. 180
 His harness loos'd, he wellcomes eager-ey'd,
 The pail's full draught that quivers by his side;
 And joys to see the wellknown Stable door,
 As the starv'd mariner the friendly shore.

105: Bloomfield to George, May 30th 1802: "... I doubt not but Sir Richard, and perhaps Mr. Wilberforce too, have *travelled post* and caused more pain to two or four generous animals subjected to *man's* tyranny, than ever a bull in England felt from *dogs*" (Hart, pp.26-7).

Ah, well for him if here his sufferings ceas'd
 And ample hours of rest his pains appeas'd!
 But rous'd again, and sternly bade to rise,
 And shake refreshing slumber from his eyes,
 Ere his exhausted spirits can return,
 Or through his frame reviving ardure burn 190
 Come forth he must; tho' limping, maim'd and sore:
 He hears the whip; the Chaise is at the door;
 The collar tightens, and again he feels
 His half-heal'd wounds inflam'd; again the wheels
 With tiresome sameness in his ears resound,
 O'er blinding dust, or miles of flinty ground.
 Thus nightly rob'd, and injur'd day by day,
 His piece-meal murderers wear his life away.

What say'st thou Dobbin? what though Hounds await
 With open jaws the moment of thy fate; 200
 No better fate attends his publick race,
 His life is misery, and his end disgrace.
 Then freely bear thy burden to the Mill,
 Obey but one short Law; thy driver's will;
 Affection, to thy memory ever true,
 Shall boast of mighty loads that Dobbin drew;
 And back to childhood shall the mind with pride
 Recount thy gentleness, in many a ride
 To pond, or Field, or village Fair; when thou
 Held high thy braided mane and comely brow; 210
 And oft the Tale shall rise to homely fame
 Upon thy generous spirit and thy name.

Though faithful to a proverb, we regard
 The midnight chieftain of the Farmer's yard,
 Beneath whose guardianship all hearts rejoice
 Woke by the echo of his hollow voice,
 Yet, as the Hound may fault'ring quit the Pack,
 Snuff the foul scent, and hasten yelping back;
 And e'en the docile Pointer know disgrace,
 Thwarting the gen'ral instinct of his race; 220
 E'en so the Mastiff, or the meaner Curr,
 At times will from the path of duty err,
 A pattern of fidelity by day,
 By night a murderer, lurking for his prey;
 And round the pastures or the Fold will creep,
 And coward-like attack the peacefull sheep;
 Alone, the wanton mischief he persues,
 Alone, in reeking blood his jaws embrews;
 Chacing amain his fright'ned victims round,
 Till death in wild confusion strews the ground; 230
 Then wearied out, to kennel sneaks away,
 And licks his guilty paws till break of day.

The deed discovered, and the news once spread,
 Vengeance hangs o'er the unknown culprit's head;
 And carefull Shepherds extra hours bestow
 In patient watchings for the common foe;
 A foe most dreaded now, when rest and peace,
 Should wait the season of the Flock's increase.

In part these nightly terrors to dispell,
 Jiles, e'er he sleeps, his little Flock must tell: 240
 From the fire-side with many a shrug he hies,
 Glad if the full-orb'd Moon salute his eyes;
 And through the unbroken stillness of the night
 Shed on his path her beams of chearing light.
 With saunt'ring step he climbs the distant style,
 Whilst all around him wears a placid smile;
 There views the white-rob'd clouds in clusters driven
 And all the glorious pagantry of heav'n;
 Low, on the utmost bound'ry of the sight,
 The rising vapours catch the silver light: 250
 Thence Fancy measures as they parting fly,
 Which first will throw its shadow on the eye
 Passing the source of light: and thence away
 Succeeded quick by brighter still than they.
 Far yet above these wafted clouds are seen¹⁰⁶
 In a remoter sky, still more serene
 Others; detach'd in ranges through the air;
 Spotless as snow, and countless as they're fair;
 Scatter'd immensely wide from east to west,
 The beauteous semblance of a Flock at rest. 260
 These, to the raptur'd mind aloud proclaim
 The mighty Shepherd's everlasting name.
 Whilst thus the loit'rer's utmost stretch of soul
 Climbs the still clouds or traverse those that roll,
 And loos'd imagination soaring goes
 High o'er his home, and all his little woes;
 Time glides away; neglected duty calls;
 At once, from plains of light to Earth he falls;
 And down a narrow Lane well-known by day,
 With all his speed pursues his sounding way, 270
 In thought still half absorb'd; and chill'd with cold:
 When lo! an object frightful to behold.
 A gristly Spectre cloathd in silver-grey,
 Around whose feet the waving shadows play,
 Stands in his path! – He stops; and not a breath
 Heaves from his heart, that sinks almost to death;
 Loud the Owl hallo's o'er his head unseen,
 All else is silent, dimly serene;
 Some prompt ejaculation whisper'd low,
 Yet bears him up against the threat'ning foe; 280
 And thus poor Jiles though half inclin'd to fly,
 Mutters his doubts, and strains his steadfast eye.
 "Tis not my crimes thou com'st here to reprove,
 No murders stain my Soul, no perjur'd Love.
 If thou'rt indeed what here thou seems't to be,
 Thy dreadful mission cannot reach to me!
 By Parents taught still to mistrust mine eyes,
 Still to approach each object of surprise,
 Lest Fancy's formful visions should deceive
 In moonlight paths, or glooms of falling eve; 290

106: Line 255: *For yet above* ... (1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions)

This then's the moment when my heart should try,
 To scan thy motionless deformity;
 But O the fearful task! yet well I know,
 An aged Ash with many a spreading bough,
 Beneath whose leaves I've found a Summer's bow'r,
 Beneath whose Trunk I've weather'd many a show'r,
 Stands singly down this solitary way;
 But, far beyond where now my footsteps stay.
 'Tis true, thus far I've come with heedless haste;
 No reconing kep't, no passing objects trac'd. 300
 And can I then have reach'd that very tree?
 Or is its reverend form assum'd by thee?"
 The happy thought alleviates his pain:
 He creeps another step; then stops again;
 Till slowly, as his noiseless feet draw near,
 Its perfect leaniments at once appear;
 Its crown of shiv'ring Ivy, whispering peace;
 And its white bark that fronts the Moon's pale face.¹⁰⁷
 Now, whilst his blood mount upward, now he knows
 The solid gain that from conviction flows; 310
 And strengthened confidence shall hence fulfill,
 With conscious Innocence more valued still,
 The dreariest task that winter nights can bring,
 In Church-yard dark, or Grove, or Fairy ring,
 Still buoying up the timid mind of youth,
 Till loitr'ing Reason hoists the scale of truth.
 With these blest guardian's Jiles his course pursues
 Till numbering his heavy-sided Ewes,
 Surrounding stillness tranquilize his breast,
 And shape the dreams that wait his hours of rest. 320
 As when retreating tempests we behold,
 Whose skirts at length the azure sky unfold,
 And full of murmurings and mingled wrath
 Slowly unshroud the smiling face of Earth,
 Bringing the bosom joy: so Winter flies;
 And as the source of life and light uprise,
 A height'ning arch o'er southern hills he bends;
 Warm on the cheek the slanting beam descends
 And gives the reeking mead a brighter hue,
 And draws the modest primrose bud to view. 330
 Yet frosts succeed and winds impetuous rush,
 And hail-storms rattle through the budding bush;
 And night-fall'n Lambs require the Shepherd's care,
 And teeming Ewes, that still their burthens bare,
 Beneath whose sides tomorrow's dawn may see
 The milk-white strangers bow the trembling knee
 First at whose birth the pow'rfull instinct's seen
 That fills with champions the daisied green;
 For Ewes that stood aloof with fearful eye
 With stamping foot now Men and dogs defy; 340

107: Identity mistaken at night is common in Bloomfield: compare *The Fakenham Ghost* from *Rural Tales*, (1802), where a seemingly fearful spectre turns out to be a young ass; or *The Horkey* from *Wild Flowers*, (1806), where a young man embraces a suspended pig's carcass under the misapprehension that it's the girl he's chasing.

And obstinately faithful to their young
 Guard their first steps to join the bleating throng.
 But casualties and death from damp and cold,
 Will still attend the well conducted fold;
 Her tender offspring dead, the Dam aloud
 Calls, and runs wild amidst the unconscious croud;
 And Orphan'd sucklings raise the piteous cry,
 No wool to warm them; no defenders nigh;
 And must her streaming milk then flow in vain?
 Must unregarded innocence complain? 350
 No. E'er this strong solicitude subside,
 Paternal fondness may be fresh apply'd;¹⁰⁸
 And the adopted stripling still may find,
 A parent, most assiduously kind.
 For this, he's doom'd awhile disguis'd to range,
 For fraud or forse must work the wish'd-for change,
 For this, his predecessor's skin he wears,
 Till cheated into tenderness and cares,
 The unsuspecting Dam, contented grown,
 Cherish and guard the fondling as her own. 360
 Thus, all by turns to fair perfection rise;
 Thus Twins are parted to increase their size;
 Thus instinct yields as interest points the way,
 Till the bright flock augmenting every day,
 On sunny hills and vales of springing flow'rs
 With ceaseless clamour greet the vernal hours.
 The humbler Shepherd here with joy beholds
 Th'approv'd oeconomy of crouded folds;
 And in his small contracted round of cares,
 Adjusts the practice of each hint he hears: 370
 For Boys with emulation learn to glow,
 And boast their pastures, and their healthfull show
 Of well-grown Lambs, the glory of the Spring;
 And field to field in competition bring.
 E'en Jiles, for all his cares and watchings past,
 And all his contests with the wint'ry blast,
 Claims a full share of that sweet praise bestow'd
 By gazing neighbours, when along the road;
 Or village green, his curly-coated throng
 Suspends the chorus of the Spinner's song;¹⁰⁹ 380
 When admiration's unaffected grace
 Lisps from the tongue, and beams in every face;
 Delightful moments! Sunshine, Health, and Joy,
 Play round, and cheer the elevated Boy!
 "Another Spring!" his heart exulting cries,
 "Another Year with promis'd blessings rise! –
 Eternal Power! from whom those blessings flew,
 Teach me still more to wonder, more to know;
 Seed-time and Harvest let me see again;

108: I assume it is the shepherd, in training the ewe to suckle a lamb not her own, who is being paternal; though my suspicion is that Lofft intended a change to "parental", which would satisfy all parties.

109: Bloomfield's mother was an expert spinner, and as her mind gave way in her last months, practised the skill with obsession; see *To a Spindle (Remains, 1824)*.

Pierce the dark Wood, and brave the sultry plain; 390
 Let Field, and dimpled Brook, and flow'r, and Tree,¹¹⁰
 Here, round my home, still lift my Soul to thee;
 And let me ever, midst thy bountys, raise
 An humble note of thankfulness and praise.”¹¹¹

Finish'd, April 22. 1798 –

Rob Bloomfield

110: Lines 390-1: All editions have Lofft's version, '*Seed-time and Harvest* let me see again; / 'Wander the *leafstrewn* wood, the *frozen* plain: / 'Let the first Flower, corn-waving field, Plain, Tree ...

111: Compare Thomson, *The Seasons, Autumn*, closing lines:

... under closing shades,
 Inglorious, lay me by the lowly brook,
 And whisper to my dreams. From THEE begin,
 Dwell all on THEE, with THEE conclude my song;
 And let me never, never, stray from THEE.