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HILL WALKING  
POEMS

# Hill Walking Poems

## PREFACE

IT IS EASY TO THINK of Coleridge's passion for "Nature" as some sort of metaphysical abstraction (see No. 18). Yet he was the son of a country vicar, was uneasy in cities, and for the first forty years of his life he gardened, rambled, botanized, climbed and sea-bathed as often as he could. The outdoor world was vital to him. Wordsworth describes him carrying magnifying glasses and special coloured filters to view plants and insects. His Notebooks, certainly up to 1812, are filled with minute descriptions of wildlife, effects of wind and sunlight, studies of clouds and birds, and the subtlest impressions of flowing water. (Many of his library books still contain pressed flowers, gathered as he read in some field.)

But Coleridge's greatest passion was for hill walking: whether rambling, scrambling, long-distance hiking, tramping, yomping, peak climbing or simply idling on a grassy slope (No. 42). He had walked over the Welsh mountains (including Snowdon); over the Mendip, Exmoor and Quantock hills in the west of England; over the Hartz Mountains and the Brocken in Germany; over most of the major peaks in the Lake District (including Skiddaw, Helvellyn, and Scafell); over much of the Highlands of Scotland; and even over Mount Etna in Sicily. It is this open-air theme that unites the otherwise varied poems of this group, all written during the decade of his greatest expeditions between 1794 and 1804, when he became one of the pioneers of fell-walking.

Their style is various, leisurely or energetic. They include amorous meditations (Nos. 37 and 44), uplifting invitations (No. 38), quick sketches (No. 40), tender inscriptions (No. 41), rhetorical adaptations (No. 43) and wild hillside fantasies (No. 42). But all vividly display Coleridge's tireless early enthusiasm for exploring the countryside, which after a long middle period of illness, came back to him again in old age when he used to perambulate over Hampstead Heath at

his "after-dinner alderman-like pace" (according to Keats) and bowl gently along the beaches of Kent and Sussex (see "Youth and Age", No. 69).

Physically, young Coleridge was a formidable walker, and this drive had a particular shaping effect on his poetry. It should not be forgotten that in 1796 he walked from Stowey to Bristol (a distance of some forty miles) in one day; and then walked back the following day, "not much tired"; while seven years later in 1803 he walked through the Scottish Highlands alone, carrying a small canvas bag, and covering 263 miles in eight days. He once said he could never remember a single occasion on which he turned back from a hill walk because of bad weather.

This impetuous movement through a changing landscape, often up towards some commanding peak or viewpoint, becomes a structural principle in his writing. Hazlitt (another enthusiastic walker) noticed this in his fine essay, "On Going on a Journey", in which he recalls how Coleridge "could go on in the most delightful explanatory way, over hill and dale, a summer's day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode." The imaginative, "explanatory" journeys of the Hill Walking Poems all tend to use this open, dynamic form in which the mobile details of landscape are gradually "converted" into some sort of cumulative enchantment or vision.

The classical trope behind this highly Romantic structure is perhaps the seventeenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon's conception of knowledge as a winding, upward path, only achieved with much effort and digression (see No. 38). The same instinctive movement towards a commanding "viewpoint" is found in the plein-air painters of the time, notably Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W. Turner. But in Coleridge it becomes deeply internalized, far beyond the scope of these early poems, and is eventually responsible for the digressive structure of prose works like the *Biographia Literaria* and *The Friend*.

For Coleridge, the early experience of hill walking remained something fresh and astonishing, and a profound spiritual discovery. In 1803 he wrote this rousing declaration to his friend Tom Wedgwood, an invalid whom he was trying to rally and encourage:

"In simple earnest, I never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks & hills, a traveller up an alpine road, but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies, like a Leaf in Autumn. A

wild activity, of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion, rises up from within me . . . I think, that my soul must have pre-existed in the body of a Chamois-chaser . . . The farther I ascend from animated Nature, from men, and cattle, & the common birds of the woods, & fields, the greater becomes in me the Intensity of the feeling of Life . . . I do not think it possible, that any bodily pains could eat out the love & joy, that is so substantially part of me, towards hills, & rocks, & steep waters! And I have had some Trial.

(*Letters*, 14 January 1803.)

There is a sense in which Coleridge hill-walked his way into much of his early poetry. Again it was Hazlitt, in another essay, "My First Meeting with Poets", who pointed out that Coleridge's blank verse line often reflected his physical pace over the ground, and was actually composed while walking. "Coleridge has told me he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood . . ."

As this impulse declined (see Nos. 43 and 44) the nature of Coleridge's inspiration changed, and his landscapes moved inwards. But the upward, striding, airy quality of these poems remain; while the sport he helped to pioneer has also become an intrinsic aspect of the English sensibility. His influence in this stretches from Alfred Lord Tennyson to Alfred Wainwright.

Lines Composed while Climbing  
the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb,  
Somersetshire, May 1795

With many a pause and oft reverted eye  
I climb the Coomb's ascent: sweet songsters near  
Warble in shade their wild-wood melody:  
Far off the unvarying Cuckoo soothes my ear.  
Up scour the startling stragglers of the flock 5  
That on green plots o'er precipices browse:  
From the deep fissures of the naked rock  
The Yew-tree bursts! Beneath its dark green boughs  
(Mid which the May-thorn blends its blossoms white)  
Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats, 10  
I rest: — and now have gain'd the topmost site.  
Ah! what a luxury of landscape meets  
My gaze! Proud towers, and Cots more dear to me,  
Elm-shadow'd Fields, and prospect-bounding Sea!  
Deep sighs my lonely heart: I drop the tear: 15  
Enchanting spot! O were my Sara here!

## To a Young Friend on his Proposing to Domesticate with the Author

A mount, not wearisome and bare and steep,  
 But a green mountain variously up-piled,  
 Where o'er the jutting rocks soft mosses creep,  
 Or colour'd lichens with slow oozing weep;  
 Where cypress and the darker yew start wild; 5  
 And, 'mid the summer torrent's gentle dash  
 Dance brighten'd the red clusters of the ash;  
 Beneath whose boughs, by those still sounds beguil'd,  
 Calm Pensiveness might muse herself to sleep;  
 Till haply startled by some fleecy dam, 10  
 That rustling on the bushy cliff above  
 With melancholy bleat of anxious love,  
 Made meek enquiry for her wandering lamb:  
 Such a green mountain 'twere most sweet to climb,  
 E'en while the bosom ach'd with loneliness – 15  
 How more than sweet, if some dear friend should bless  
 The adventurous toil, and up the path sublime  
 Now lead, now follow: the glad landscape round,  
 Wide and more wide, increasing without bound!

O then 'twere loveliest sympathy, to mark 20  
 The berries of the half-uprooted ash  
 Dripping and bright; and list the torrent's dash, –  
 Beneath the cypress, or the yew more dark,  
 Seated at ease, on some smooth mossy rock;  
 In social silence now, and now to unlock 25  
 The treasur'd heart; arm linked in friendly arm,  
 Save if the one, his muse's witching charm  
 Muttering brow-bent, at unwatch'd distance lag;  
 Till high o'er head his beckoning friend appears,  
 And from the forehead of the topmost crag 30  
 Shouts eagerly: for haply *there* uprears  
 That shadowing Pine its old romantic limbs,

Which latest shall detain the enamour'd sight  
 Seen from below, when eve the valley dims,  
 Tinged yellow with the rich departing light; 35  
 And haply, bason'd in some unsunn'd cleft,  
 A beauteous spring, the rock's collected tears,  
 Sleeps shelter'd there, scarce wrinkled by the gale!  
 Together thus, the world's vain turmoil left,  
 Stretch'd on the crag, and shadow'd by the pine, 40  
 And bending o'er the clear delicious fount,  
 Ah! dearest youth! it were a lot divine  
 To cheat our noons in moralising mood,  
 While west-winds fann'd our temples toil-bedew'd:  
 Then downwards slope, oft pausing, from the mount, 45  
 To some lone mansion, in some woody dale,  
 Where smiling with blue eye, Domestic Bliss  
 Gives *this* the Husband's, *that* the Brother's kiss!

Thus rudely vers'd in allegoric lore,  
 The Hill of Knowledge I essayed to trace; 50  
 That verdurous hill with many a resting-place,  
 And many a stream, whose warbling waters pour  
 To glad, and fertilise the subject plains;  
 That hill with secret springs, and nooks untrod,  
 And many a fancy-blest and holy sod 55  
 Where Inspiration, his diviner strains  
 Low-murmuring, lay; and starting from the rock's  
 Stiff evergreens, (whose spreading foliage mocks  
 Want's barren soil, and the bleak frosts of age,  
 And Bigotry's mad fire-invoking rage!) 60  
 O meek retiring spirit! we will climb,  
 Cheering and cheered, this lovely hill sublime;  
 And from the stirring world up-lifted high  
 (Whose noises, faintly wafted on the wind,  
 To quiet musings shall attune the mind, 65  
 And oft the melancholy *theme* supply),  
 There, while the prospect through the gazing eye  
 Pours all its healthful greenness on the soul,  
 We'll smile at wealth, and learn to smile at fame,  
 Our hopes, our knowledge, and our joys the same, 70  
 As neighbouring fountains image each the whole:

Then when the mind hath drunk its fill of truth

We'll discipline the heart to pure delight,  
Rekindling sober joy's domestic flame.

They whom I love shall love thee, honour'd youth!

Now may Heaven realise this vision bright!

75



## Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest

I stood on Brocken's sovran height, and saw  
 Woods crowding upon woods, hills over hills,  
 A surging scene, and only limited  
 By the blue distance. Heavily my way  
 Downward I dragged through fir groves evermore, 5  
 Where bright green moss heaves in sepulchral forms  
 Speckled with sunshine; and, but seldom heard,  
 The sweet bird's song became a hollow sound;  
 And the breeze, murmuring indivisibly,  
 Preserved its solemn murmur most distinct 10  
 From many a note of many a waterfall,  
 And the brook's chatter; 'mid whose islet-stones  
 The dingy kidling with its tinkling bell  
 Leaped frolicsome, or old romantic goat  
 Sat, his white beard slow waving. I moved on 15  
 In low and languid mood: for I had found  
 That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive  
 Their finer influence from the Life within; —  
 Fair cyphers else: fair, but of import vague  
 Or unconcerning, where the heart not finds 20  
 History or prophecy of friend, or child,  
 Or gentle maid, our first and early love,  
 Or father, or the venerable name  
 Of our adoréd country! O thou Queen,  
 Thou delegated Deity of Earth, 25  
 O dear, dear England! how my longing eye  
 Turned westward, shaping in the steady clouds  
 Thy sands and high white cliffs!

My native Land!

Filled with the thought of thee this heart was proud,  
 Yea, mine eye swam with tears: that all the view 30  
 From sovran Brocken, woods and woody hills,  
 Floated away, like a departing dream,

Feeble and dim! Stranger, these impulses  
Blame thou not lightly; nor will I profane,  
With hasty judgment or injurious doubt,  
That man's sublimer spirit, who can feel  
That God is everywhere! the God who framed  
Mankind to be one mighty family,  
Himself our Father, and the World our Home.

35

## A Thought Suggested by a View of Saddleback in Cumberland

On stern Blencartha's perilous height  
The winds are tyrannous and strong;  
And flashing forth unsteady light  
From stern Blencartha's skiey height,  
As loud the torrents throng!  
Beneath the moon, in gentle weather,  
They bind the earth and sky together.  
But oh! the sky and all its forms, how quiet!  
The things that seek the earth, how full of noise and riot!

5

## Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath

This Sycamore, oft musical with bees, –  
 Such tents the Patriarchs loved! O long unharmed  
 May all its agéd boughs o'er-canopy  
 The small round basin, which this jutting stone  
 Keeps pure from falling leaves! Long may the Spring,     5  
 Quietly as a sleeping infant's breath,  
 Send up cold waters to the traveller  
 With soft and even pulse! Nor ever cease  
 Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance,  
 Which at the bottom, like a Fairy's Page,     10  
 As merry and no taller, dances still,  
 Nor wrinkles the smooth surface of the Fount.  
 Here Twilight is and Coolness: here is moss,  
 A soft seat, and a deep and ample shade.  
 Thou may'st toil far and find no second tree.     15  
 Drink, Pilgrim, here; Here rest! and if thy heart  
 Be innocent, here too shalt thou refresh  
 Thy spirit, listening to some gentle sound,  
 Or passing gale or hum of murmuring bees!

## A Stranger Minstrel

WRITTEN TO MRS ROBINSON,  
A FEW WEEKS BEFORE HER DEATH

As late on Skiddaw's mount I lay supine,  
Midway th' ascent, in that repose divine  
When the soul centred in the heart's recess  
Hath quaff'd its fill of Nature's loveliness,  
Yet still beside the fountain's marge will stay 5  
    And fain would thirst again, again to quaff;  
Then when the tear, slow travelling on its way,  
    Fills up the wrinkles of a silent laugh –  
In that sweet mood of sad and humorous thought  
A form within me rose, within me wrought 10  
With such strong magic, that I cried aloud,  
"Thou ancient Skiddaw by thy helm of cloud,  
And by thy many-colour'd chasms deep,  
And by their shadows that for ever sleep,  
By yon small flaky mists that love to creep 15  
Along the edges of those spots of light,  
Those sunny islands on thy smooth green height,  
    And by yon shepherds with their sheep,  
    And dogs and boys, a gladsome crowd,  
That rush e'en now with clamour loud 20  
Sudden from forth thy topmost cloud,  
And by this laugh, and by this tear,  
I would, old Skiddaw, she were here!  
A lady of sweet song is she,  
Her soft blue eye was made for thee! 25  
O ancient Skiddaw, by this tear,  
I would, I would that she were here!"

Then ancient Skiddaw, stern and proud,  
    In sullen majesty replying,  
Thus spake from out his helm of cloud 30  
    (His voice was like an echo dying!): –  
"She dwells belike in scenes more fair,  
And scorns a mount so bleak and bare."

I only sigh'd when this I heard,  
 Such mournful thoughts within me stirr'd 35  
 That all my heart was faint and weak,  
 So sorely was I troubled!  
 No laughter wrinkled on my cheek,  
 But O the tears were doubled!  
 But ancient Skiddaw green and high 40  
 Heard and understood my sigh;  
 And now, in tones less stern and rude,  
 As if he wish'd to end the feud,  
 Spake he, the proud response renewing  
 (His voice was like a monarch wooing): — 45  
 "Nay, but thou dost not know her might,  
 The pinions of her soul how strong!  
 But many a stranger in my height  
 Hath sung to me her magic song,  
 Sending forth his ecstasy 50  
 In her divinest melody,  
 And hence I know her soul is free,  
 She is where'er she wills to be,  
 Unfetter'd by mortality!  
 Now to the 'haunted beach' can fly, 55  
 Beside the threshold scourged with waves,  
 Now where the maniac wildly raves,  
 '*Pale moon, thou spectre of the sky!*  
 No wind that hurries o'er my height  
 Can travel with so swift a flight. 60  
 I too, methinks, might merit  
 The presence of her spirit!  
 To me too might belong  
 The honour of her song and witching melody,  
 Which most resembles me, 65  
 Soft, various, and sublime,  
 Exempt from wrongs of Time!"

Thus spake the mighty Mount, and I  
 Made answer, with a deep-drawn sigh: —  
 "Thou ancient Skiddaw, by this tear, 70  
 I would, I would that she were here!"

## Hymn before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni

Besides the Rivers, Arve and Arveiron, which have their sources in the foot of Mont Blanc, five conspicuous torrents rush down its sides; and within a few paces of the Glaciers, the Gentiana Major grows in immense numbers, with its "flowers of loveliest blue."

Hast thou a charm to stay the morning-star  
In his steep course? So long he seems to pause  
On thy bald awful head, O sovran BLANC,  
The Arve and Arveiron at thy base  
Rave ceaselessly; but thou, most awful Form! 5  
Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,  
How silently! Around thee and above  
Deep is the air and dark, substantial, black,  
An ebon mass: methinks thou piercest it,  
As with a wedge! But when I look again, 10  
It is thine own calm home, thy crystal shrine,  
Thy habitation from eternity!  
O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee,  
'Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,  
Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer 15  
I worshipped the Invisible alone.

Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,  
So sweet, we know not we are listening to it,  
Thou, the meanwhile, wast blending with my Thought,  
Yea, with my Life and Life's own secret joy: 20  
Till the dilating Soul, enrapt, transfused,  
Into the mighty vision passing — there  
As in her natural form, swelled vast to Heaven!

Awake, my soul! not only passive praise  
Thou owest! not alone these swelling tears, 25  
Mute thanks and secret ecstasy! Awake,  
Voice of sweet song! Awake, my heart, awake!  
Green vales and icy cliffs, all join my Hymn.

Thou first and chief, sole sovereign of the Vale!  
O struggling with the darkness all the night, 30  
And visited all night by troops of stars,  
Or when they climb the sky or when they sink:  
Companion of the morning-star at dawn,  
Thyself Earth's rosy star, and of the dawn  
Co-herald: wake, O wake, and utter praise! 35  
Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in Earth?  
Who filled thy countenance with rosy light?  
Who made thee parent of perpetual streams?

And you, ye five wild torrents fiercely glad!  
Who called you forth from night and utter death, 40  
From dark and icy caverns called you forth,  
Down those precipitous, black, jagged rocks,  
For ever shattered and the same for ever?  
Who gave you your invulnerable life,  
Your strength, your speed, your fury, and your joy, 45  
Unceasing thunder and eternal foam?  
And who commanded (and the silence came),  
Here let the billows stiffen, and have rest?

Ye Ice-falls! ye that from the mountain's brow  
Adown enormous ravines slope amain – 50  
Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice,  
And stopped at once amid their maddest plunge!  
Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!  
Who made you glorious as the Gates of Heaven  
Beneath the keen full moon? Who bade the sun 55  
Clothe you with rainbows? Who, with living flowers  
Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet? –  
GOD! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,  
Answer! and let the ice-plains echo, GOD!  
GOD! sing ye meadow-streams with gladsome voice! 60  
Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!  
And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,  
And in their perilous fall shall thunder, GOD!

Ye living flowers that skirt the eternal frost!  
Ye wild goats sporting round the eagle's nest! 65  
Ye eagles, play-mates of the mountain-storm!



Ye lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!  
Ye signs and wonders of the element!  
Utter forth God, and fill the hills with praise!

Thou too, hoar Mount! with thy sky-pointing peaks, 70  
Of from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,  
Shoots downward, glittering through the pure serene  
Into the depth of clouds, that veil thy breast –  
Thou too again, stupendous Mountain! thou  
That as I raise my head, awhile bowed low 75  
In adoration, upward from thy base  
Slow travelling with dim eyes suffused with tears,  
Solemnly seemest, like a vapoury cloud,  
To rise before me – Rise, O ever rise,  
Rise like a cloud of incense from the Earth! 80  
Thou kingly Spirit throned among the hills,  
Thou dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven,  
Great Hierarch! tell thou the silent sky,  
And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun  
Earth, with her thousand voices, praises GOD. 85

## The Picture, or The Lover's Resolution

Through weeds and thorns, and matted underwood  
 I force my way; now climb, and now descend  
 O'er rocks, or bare or mossy, with wild foot  
 Crushing the purple whorts; while oft unseen,  
 Hurrying along the drifted forest-leaves, 5  
 The scared snake rustles. Onward still I toil,  
 I know not, ask not whither! A new joy,  
 Lovely as light, sudden as summer gust,  
 And gladsome as the first-born of the spring,  
 Beckons me on, or follows from behind, 10  
 Playmate, or guide! The master-passion quelled,  
 I feel that I am free. With dun-red bark  
 The fir-trees, and the unfrequent slender oak,  
 Forth from this tangle wild of bush and brake  
 Soar up, and form a melancholy vault 15  
 High o'er me, murmuring like a distant sea.

Here Wisdom might resort, and here Remorse;  
 Here too the love-lorn man, who, sick in soul,  
 And of this busy human heart aweary,  
 Worships the spirit of unconscious life 20  
 In tree or wild-flower. — Gentle lunatic!  
 If so he might not wholly cease to be,  
 He would far rather not be that he is;  
 But would be something that he knows not of,  
 In winds or waters, or among the rocks! 25

But hence, fond wretch! breathe not contagion here!  
 No myrtle-walks are these: these are no groves  
 Where Love dare loiter! If in sullen mood  
 He should stray hither, the low stumps shall gore  
 His dainty feet, the briar and the thorn 30  
 Make his plumes haggard. Like a wounded bird  
 Easily caught, ensnare him, O ye Nymphs,  
 Ye Oreads chaste, ye dusky Dryades!

And you, ye Earth-winds! you that make at morn  
 The dew-drops quiver on the spiders' webs! 35  
 You, O ye wingless Airs! that creep between  
 The rigid stems of heath and bitten furze,  
 Within whose scanty shade, at summer-noon,  
 The mother-sheep hath worn a hollow bed –  
 Ye, that now cool her fleece with dropless damp, 40  
 Now pant and murmur with her feeding lamb.  
 Chase, chase him, all ye Fays, and elfin Gnomes!  
 With prickles sharper than his darts bemock  
 His little Godship, making him perforce  
 Creep through a thorn-bush on yon hedgehog's back. 45

This is my hour of triumph! I can now  
 With my own fancies play the merry fool,  
 And laugh away worse folly, being free.  
 Here will I seat myself, beside this old,  
 Hollow, and weedy oak, which ivy-twine 50  
 Clothes as with net-work: here will I couch my limbs,  
 Close by this river, in this silent shade,  
 As safe and sacred from the step of man  
 As an invisible world – unheard, unseen,  
 And listening only to the pebbly brook 55  
 That murmurs with a dead, yet tinkling sound;  
 Or to the bees, that in the neighbouring trunk  
 Make honey-hoards. The breeze, that visits me,  
 Was never Love's accomplice, never raised  
 The tendril ringlets from the maiden's brow, 60  
 And the blue, delicate veins above her cheek;  
 Ne'er played the wanton – never half disclosed  
 The maiden's snowy bosom, scattering thence  
 Eye-poisons for some love-distempered youth,  
 Who ne'er henceforth may see an aspen-grove 65  
 Shiver in sunshine, but his feeble heart  
 Shall flow away like a dissolving thing.

Sweet breeze! thou only, if I guess aright,  
 Lifest the feathers of the robin's breast,  
 That swells its little breast, so full of song, 70  
 Singing above me, on the mountain-ash.  
 And thou too, desert stream! no pool of thine,

Though clear as lake in latest summer-eve,  
 Did e'er reflect the stately virgin's robe,  
 The face, the form divine, the downcast look 75  
 Contemplative! Behold! her open palm  
 Presses her cheek and brow! her elbow rests  
 On the bare branch of half-uprooted tree,  
 That leans towards its mirror! Who erewhile  
 Had from her countenance turned, or looked by stealth, 80  
 (For Fear is true-love's cruel nurse), he now  
 With steadfast gaze and unoffending eye,  
 Worships the watery idol, dreaming hopes  
 Delicious to the soul, but fleeting, vain,  
 E'en as that phantom-world on which he gazed, 85  
 But not unheeded gazed: for see, ah! see,  
 The sportive tyrant with her left hand plucks  
 The heads of tall flowers that behind her grow,  
 Lychnis, and willow-herb, and fox-glove bells:  
 And suddenly, as one that toys with time, 90  
 Scatters them on the pool! Then all the charm  
 Is broken – all that phantom world so fair  
 Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,  
 And each mis-shape the other. Stay awhile,  
 Poor youth, who scarcely dar'st lift up thine eyes! 95  
 The stream will soon renew its smoothness, soon  
 The visions will return! And lo! he stays:  
 And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms  
 Come trembling back, unite, and now once more  
 The pool becomes a mirror; and behold 100  
 Each wildflower on the marge inverted there,  
 And there the half-uprooted tree – but where,  
 O where the virgin's snowy arm, that leaned  
 On its bare branch? He turns, and she is gone!  
 Homeward she steals through many a woodland maze 105  
 Which he shall seek in vain. Ill-fated youth!  
 Go, day by day, and waste thy manly prime  
 In mad love-yearning by the vacant brook,  
 Till sickly thoughts bewitch thine eyes, and thou  
 Behold'st her shadow still abiding there, 110  
 The Naiad of the mirror!

Not to thee,

O wild and desert stream! belongs this tale:

Gloomy and dark art thou – the crowded firs  
Spire from thy shores, and stretch across thy bed,  
Making thee doleful as a cavern-well: 115  
Save when the shy king-fishers build their nest  
On thy steep banks, no loves hast thou, wild stream!

This be my chosen haunt – emancipate  
From Passion's dreams, a freeman, and alone,  
I rise and trace its devious course. O lead, 120  
Lead me to deeper shades and lonelier glooms.  
Lo! stealing through the canopy of firs,  
How fair the sunshine spots that mossy rock,  
Isle of the river, whose disparted waves  
Dart off asunder with an angry sound, 125  
How soon to re-unite! And see! they meet,  
Each in the other lost and found: and see  
Placeless, as spirits, one soft water-sun  
Throbbing within them, heart at once and eye!  
With its soft neighbourhood of filmy clouds, 130  
The stains and shadings of forgotten tears,  
Dimness o'erswum with lustre! Such the hour  
Of deep enjoyment, following love's brief feuds;  
And hark, the noise of a near waterfall!  
I pass forth into light – I find myself 135  
Beneath a weeping birch (most beautiful  
Of forest trees, the Lady of the Woods),  
Hard by the brink of a tall weedy rock  
That overbrows the cataract. How bursts  
The landscape on my sight! Two crescent hills 140  
Fold in behind each other, and so make  
A circular vale, and land-locked, as might seem,  
With brook and bridge, and grey stone cottages,  
Half hid by rocks and fruit-trees. At my feet,  
The whortle-berries are bedewed with spray, 145  
Dashed upwards by the furious waterfall.  
How solemnly the pendent ivy-mass  
Swings in its winnow: All the air is calm.  
The smoke from cottage-chimneys, tinged with light,  
Rises in columns; from this house alone, 150  
Close by the water-fall, the column slants,  
And feels its ceaseless breeze. But what is this?

That cottage, with its slanting chimney-smoke,  
 And close beside its porch a sleeping child,  
 His dear head pillowed on a sleeping dog— 155  
 One arm between its fore-legs, and the hand  
 Holds loosely its small handful of wild-flowers,  
 Unfilleted, and of unequal lengths.  
 A curious picture, with a master's haste  
 Sketched on a strip of pinky-silver skin, 160  
 Peeled from the birchen bark! Divinest maid!  
 Yon bark her canvas, and those purple berries  
 Her pencil! See, the juice is scarcely dried  
 On the fine skin! She has been newly here;  
 And lo! yon patch of heath has been her couch— 165  
 The pressure still remains! O blesséd couch!  
 For this may'st thou flower early, and the sun,  
 Slanting at eve, rest bright, and linger long  
 Upon thy purple bells! O Isabel!  
 Daughter of genius! stateliest of our maids! 170  
 More beautiful than whom Alcaeus wooed,  
 The Lesbian woman of immortal song!  
 O child of genius! stately, beautiful,  
 And full of love to all, save only me,  
 And not ungeniue e'en to me! My heart, 175  
 Why beats it thus? Through yonder coppice-wood  
 Needs must the pathway turn, that leads straightway  
 On to her father's house. She is alone!  
 The night draws on — such ways are hard to hit—  
 And fit it is I should restore this sketch, 180  
 Dropt unawares, no doubt. Why should I yearn  
 To keep the relique? 'twill but idly feed  
 The passion that consumes me. Let me haste!  
 The picture in my hand which she has left;  
 She cannot blame me that I followed her: 185  
 And I may be her guide the long wood through.