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### **The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.**

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing His Translations And Imitations

**Pope, Alexander**

**London, 1751**

January and May, from Chaucer

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January and May:

OR THE

MERCHANT'S TALE.

FROM

C H A U C E R.

§ F 3

January and May:

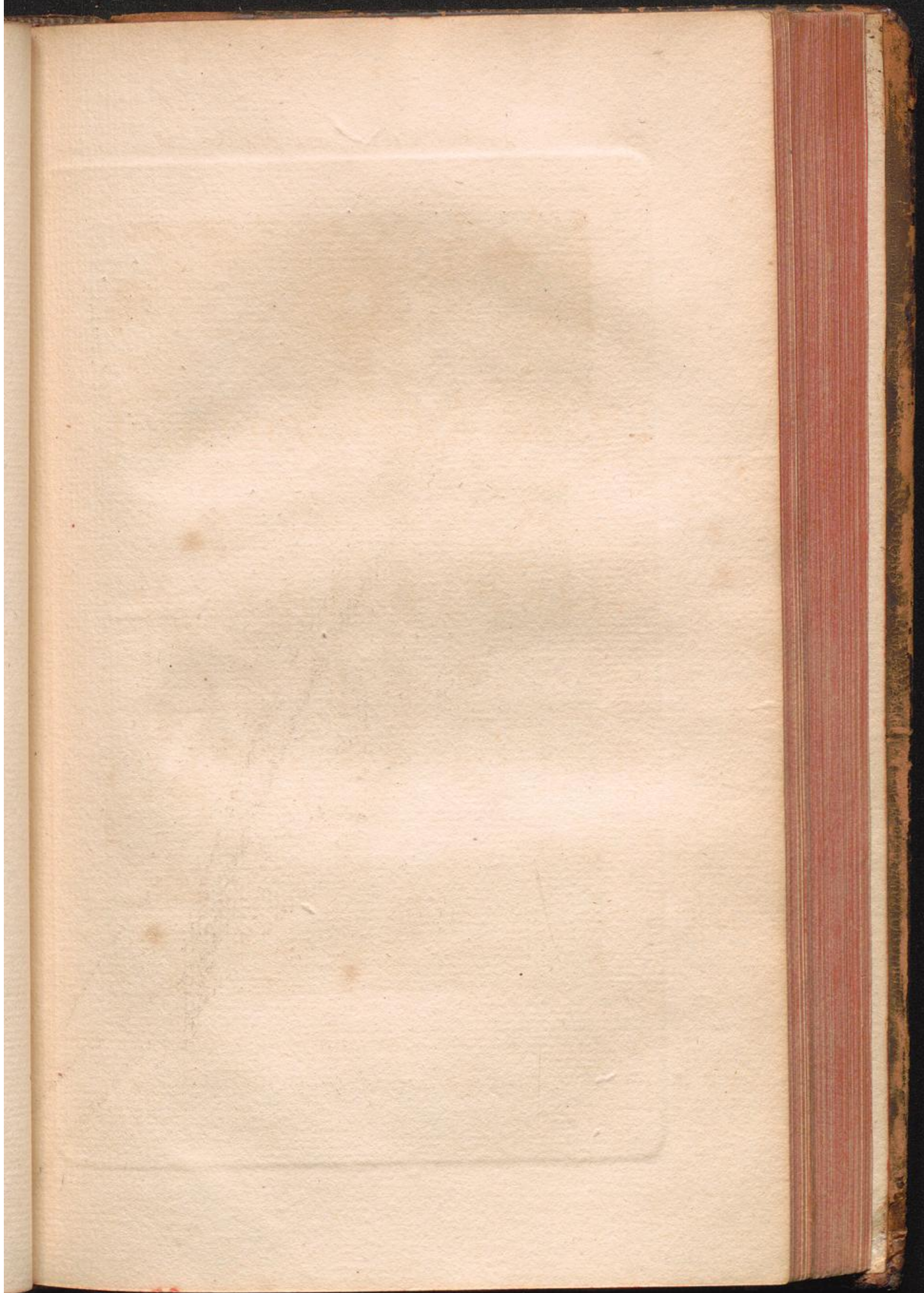
OR THE

MERCHANT'S TALE.

FROM

CHAUCEER.

173





*Sam. Wale Delin*

*C. Mosley Sculp.*

*Old as he was, and void of Eye-sight too,  
What could alas! a helpless Husband do.*

*Jan. & May.*

## J A N U A R Y

A N D

## M A Y.

THERE liv'd in Lombardy, as authors write,  
 In days of old, a wise and worthy knight;  
 Of gentle manners, as of gen'rous race,  
 Blest with much sense, more riches, and some grace.  
 Yet led astray by Venus' soft delights, 5  
 He scarce could rule some idle appetites:  
 For long ago, let Priests say what they cou'd,  
 Weak sinful laymen were but flesh and blood.

But in due time, when sixty years were o'er,  
 He vow'd to lead this vitious life no more; 10  
 Whether pure holiness inspir'd his mind,  
 Or dotage turn'd his brain, is hard to find;  
 But his high courage prick'd him forth to wed,  
 And try the pleasures of a lawful bed.

## NOTES.

JANUARY AND MAY.] This Translation was done at sixteen or seventeen years of Age. P.

§ F 4

This was his nightly dream, his daily care,      15  
 And to the heav'nly pow'rs his constant pray'r,  
 Once, ere he dy'd, to taste the blisful life  
 Of a kind husband and a loving wife.

These thoughts he fortify'd with reasons still,  
 (For none want reasons to confirm their will.)      20  
 Grave authors say, and witty poets sing,  
 That honest wedlock is a glorious thing :  
 But depth of judgment most in him appears,  
 Who wisely weds in his maturer years.

Then let him chuse a damsel young and fair,      25  
 To bless his age, and bring a worthy heir ;  
 To sooth his cares, and, free from noise and strife,  
 Conduct him gently to the verge of life.

Let sinful batchelors their woes deplore,  
 Full well they merit all they feel, and more :      30  
 Unaw'd by precepts, human or divine,

Like birds and beasts, promiscuously they join :  
 Nor know to make the present blessing last,  
 To hope the future, or esteem the past :

But vainly boast the joys they never try'd,      35  
 And find divulg'd the secrets they would hide.

The marry'd man may bear his yoke with ease,  
 Secure at once himself and heav'n to please ;

JANUARY AND MAY. 89

And pass his inoffensive hours away,  
In bliss all night, and innocence all day: 40  
Tho' fortune change, his constant spouse remains,  
Augments his joys, or mitigates his pains.

But what so pure, which envious tongues will  
spare?

Some wicked wits have libell'd all the fair.  
With matchless impudence they style a wife 45  
The dear-bought curse, and lawful plague of life;  
A bosom-serpent, a domestic evil,  
A night-invasion, and a mid-day-devil.

Let not the wise these slanderous words regard,  
But curse the bones of ev'ry lying bard. 50

All other goods by fortune's hand are giv'n,  
A wife is the peculiar gift of heav'n.  
Vain fortune's favours, never at a stay,  
Like empty shadows, pass, and glide away;  
One solid comfort, our eternal wife, 55  
Abundantly supplies us all our life:

This blessing lasts, (if those who try, say true)  
As long as heart can wish—and longer too.

Our grandfire Adam, ere of Eve possess'd,  
Alone, and ev'n in Paradise unblest'd, 60  
With mournful looks the blissful scenes survey'd,  
And wander'd in the solitary shade:



90      J A N U A R Y   A N D   M A Y .

The Maker saw, took pity, and bestow'd  
Woman, the last, the best reserv'd of God.

A Wife! ah gentle deities, can he                      65  
That has a wife, e'er feel adversity?  
Would men but follow what the sex advise,  
All things would prosper, all the world grow wise.  
'Twas by Rebecca's aid that Jacob won  
His father's blessing from an elder son:                      70  
Abusive Nabal ow'd his forfeit life  
To the wise conduct of a prudent wife:  
Heroic Judith, as old Hebrews show,  
Preserv'd the Jews, and slew th' Assyrian foe:  
At Hester's suit, the persecuting sword                      75  
Was sheath'd, and Israel liv'd to bless the Lord.

These weighty motives, January the sage  
Maturely ponder'd in his riper age;  
And charm'd with virtuous joys, and sober life,  
Would try that christian comfort, call'd a wife. 80  
His friends were summon'd on a point so nice,  
To pass their judgment, and to give advice;  
But fix'd before, and well resolv'd was he;  
(As men that ask advice are wont to be.)                      84

My friends, he cry'd (and cast a mournful look  
Around the room, and sigh'd before he spoke:)

JANUARY AND MAY. 91

Beneath the weight of threescore years I bend,  
And, worn with cares, am hast'ning to my end ;  
How I have liv'd, alas! you know too well,  
In worldly follies, which I blush to tell ; 90  
But gracious heav'n has ope'd my eyes at last,  
With due regret I view my vices past,  
And, as the precept of the Church decrees,  
Will take a wife, and live in holy ease.  
But since by counsel all things should be done, 95  
And many heads are wiser still than one ;  
Chuse you for me, who best shall be content  
When my desire's approv'd by your consent.

One caution yet is needful to be told,  
To guide your choice; this wife must not be old:  
There goes a saying, and 'twas shrewdly said, 101  
Old fish at table, but young flesh in bed.  
My soul abhors the tasteless, dry embrace  
Of a stale virgin with a winter face:  
In that cold season Love but treats his guest 105  
With bean-straw, and tough forage at the best.  
No crafty widows shall approach my bed ;  
Those are too wise for batchelors to wed ;  
As subtle clerks by many schools are made, 109  
Twice-marry'd dames are mistresses o'th' trade:

But young and tender virgins, rul'd with ease,  
We form like wax, and mold them as we please.

Conceive me, Sirs, nor take my sense amiss;  
'Tis what concerns my soul's eternal bliss;  
Since if I found no pleasure in my spouse,      115  
As flesh is frail, and who (God help me) knows?  
Then should I live in leud adultery,  
And sink downright to Satan when I die.  
Or were I curs'd with an unfruitful bed,  
The righteous end were lost, for which I wed;  
To raise up seed to bless the pow'rs above,      121  
And not for pleasure only, or for love.

Think not I doat; 'tis time to take a wife,  
When vig'rous blood forbids a chaster life:  
Those that are blest with store of grace divine,      125  
May live like faints, by heav'n's consent, and mine.

And since I speak of wedlock, let me say,  
(As, thank my stars, in modest truth I may)  
My limbs are active, still I'm found at heart,  
And a new vigour springs in ev'ry part.      130  
Think not my virtue lost, tho' time has shed  
These rev'rend honours on my hoary head;  
Thus trees are crown'd with blossoms white as snow,  
The vital sap then rising from below:

JANUARY AND MAY. 93

Old as I am, my lusty limbs appear 135

Like winter greens, that flourish all the year.

Now, Sirs, you know to what I stand inclin'd,

Let ev'ry friend with freedom speak his mind.

He said; the rest in diff'rent parts divide;

The knotty point was urg'd on either side: 140

Marriage, the theme on which they all declaim'd,

Some prais'd with wit, and some with reason blam'd.

Till, what with proofs, objections, and replies,

Each wond'rous positive, and wond'rous wise,

There fell between his brothers a debate, 145

Placebo this was call'd, and Justin that.

First to the Knight Placebo thus begun,

(Mild were his looks, and pleasing was his tone)

Such prudence, Sir, in all your words appears,

As plainly proves, experience dwells with years!

Yet you pursue sage Solomon's advice, 151

To work by counsel when affairs are nice:

But, with the wiseman's leave, I must protest, }

So may my soul arrive at ease and rest }

As still I hold your own advice the best. 155 }

Sir, I have liv'd a Courtier all my days,

And study'd men, their manners, and their ways;

And have observ'd this useful maxim still,  
To let my betters always have their will.      159

Nay, if my lord affirm'd that black was white,  
My word was this, Your honour's in the right.

Th' assuming Wit, who deems himself so wise,  
As his mistaken patron to advise,

Let him not dare to vent his dang'rous thought,  
A noble fool was never in a fault.      165

This, Sir, affects not you, whose ev'ry word  
Is weigh'd with judgment, and befits a Lord :

Your will is mine ; and is (I will maintain)

Pleasing to God, and should be so to Man ;

At least, your courage all the world must praise,

Who dare to wed in your declining days.      171

Indulge the vigour of your mounting blood,

And let grey fools be indolently good,

Who, past all pleasure, damn the joys of sense,

With rev'rend dulness and grave impotence.      175

Justin, who silent sate, and heard the man,

Thus, with a Philosophic frown, began.

A heathen author, of the first degree,

(Who, tho' not Faith, had Sense as well as we)

Bids us be certain our concerns to trust      180

To those of gen'rous principles, and just.

The venture's greater, I'll presume to say,  
 To give your person, than your goods away :  
 And therefore, Sir, as you regard your rest,  
 First learn your Lady's qualities at least : 185  
 Whether she's chaste or rampant, proud or civil ;  
 Meek as a faint, or haughty as the devil ;  
 Whether an easy, fond, familiar, fool,  
 Or such a wit as no man e'er can rule ?  
 'Tis true, perfection none must hope to find 190  
 In all this world, much less in woman-kind ;  
 But if her virtues prove the larger share,  
 Bless the kind fates, and think your fortune rare.  
 Ah, gentle Sir, take warning of a friend,  
 Who knows too well the state you thus commend ;  
 And spight of all his praises must declare, 196  
 All he can find is bondage, cost, and care.  
 Heav'n knows, I shed full many a private tear,  
 And sigh in silence, lest the world should hear :  
 While all my friends applaud my blisful life, 200  
 And swear no mortal's happier in a wife ;  
 Demure and chaste as any vestal Nun,  
 The meekest creature that beholds the sun !  
 But, by th' immortal pow'rs, I feel the pain,  
 And he that smarts has reason to complain. 205

Do what you list, for me ; you must be sage,  
 And cautious sure ; for wisdom is in Age :  
 But at these years, to venture on the fair !  
 By him, who made the ocean, earth, and air,  
 To please a wife, when her occasions call,      210  
 Would busy the most vig'rous of us all.  
 And trust me, Sir, the chastest you can chuse  
 Will ask observance, and exact her dues.  
 If what I speak my noble Lord offend,  
 My tedious sermon here is at an end.      215

'Tis well, 'tis wondrous well, the Knight replies,  
 Most worthy kinsman, faith you're mighty wife !  
 We, Sirs, are fools ; and must resign the cause  
 To heath'nish authors, proverbs, and old laws.  
 He spoke with scorn, and turn'd another way : —  
 What does my friend, my dear Placebo say ?

I say, quoth he, by heav'n the man's to blame,  
 To slander wives, and wedlock's holy name.  
 At this the council rose, without delay ;  
 Each, in his own opinion, went his way ;      225  
 With full consent, that, all disputes appeas'd,  
 The knight should marry, when and where he pleas'd.

Who now but January exults with joy ?  
 The charms of wedlock all his soul employ :

Each nymph by turns his wav'ring mind possess'd,  
 And reign'd the short-liv'd tyrant of his breast ;  
 While fancy pictur'd ev'ry lively part,  
 And each bright image wander'd o'er his heart.  
 Thus, in some publick Forum fix'd on high,  
 A Mirrour shows the figures moving by ; 235  
 Still one by one, in swift succession, pass  
 The gliding shadows o'er the polish'd glass.  
 This Lady's charms the nicest could not blame,  
 But vile suspicions had aspers'd her fame ; 239  
 That was with sense, but not with virtue, blest ;  
 And one had grace, that wanted all the rest.  
 Thus doubting long what nymph he should obey,  
 He fix'd at last upon the youthful May.  
 Her faults he knew not, Love is always blind,  
 But ev'ry charm revolv'd within his mind : 245  
 Her tender age, her form divinely fair,  
 Her easy motion, her attractive air,  
 Her sweet behaviour, her enchanting face,  
 Her moving softness, and majestic grace.

Much in his prudence did our Knight rejoice,  
 And thought no mortal could dispute his choice :  
 Once more in haste he summon'd ev'ry friend,  
 And told them all, their pains were at an end.



Heav'n, that (said he) inspir'd me first to wed,  
 Provides a consort worthy of my bed: 255  
 Let none oppose th' election, since on this  
 Depends my quiet, and my future blifs.

A dame there is, the darling of my eyes,  
 Young, beauteous, artless, innocent, and wife;  
 Chaste, tho' not rich; and tho' not nobly born, 260  
 Of honest parents, and may serve my turn.  
 Her will I wed, if gracious heav'n so please;  
 To pass my age in sanctity and ease:  
 And thank the pow'rs, I may possess alone  
 The lovely prize, and share my blifs with none!  
 If you, my friends, this virgin can procure, 266  
 My joys are full, my happiness is sure.

One only doubt remains: Full oft I've heard,  
 By casuists grave, and deep divines averr'd;  
 That 'tis too much for human race to know 270  
 The blifs of heav'n above, and earth below.  
 Now should the nuptial pleasures prove so great,  
 To match the blessings of the future state,  
 Those endless joys were ill exchange'd for these;  
 Then clear this doubt, and set my mind at ease.

This Justin heard, nor could his spleen controul,  
 Touch'd to the quick, and tickled at the soul.

Sir Knight, he cry'd, if this be all you dread,  
 Heav'n put it past your doubt, whene'er you wed;  
 And to my fervent pray'rs so far consent, 280  
 That ere the rites are o'er, you may repent!  
 Good heav'n, no doubt, the nuptial state approves,  
 Since it chastises still what best it loves.

Then be not, Sir, abandon'd to despair;  
 Seek, and perhaps you'll find among the fair, 285  
 One, that may do your business to a hair;  
 Not ev'n in wish, your happiness delay,  
 But prove the scourge to lash you on your way:  
 Then to the skies your mounting soul shall go,  
 Swift as an arrow soaring from the bow! 290  
 Provided still, you moderate your joy,  
 Nor in your pleasures all your might employ,  
 Let reason's rule your strong desires abate,  
 Nor please too lavishly your gentle mate.  
 Old wives there are, of judgment most acute, 295  
 Who solve these questions beyond all dispute;  
 Consult with those, and be of better cheer;  
 Marry, do penance, and dismiss your fear.

So said, they rose, nor more the work delay'd;  
 The match was offer'd, the proposals made. 300

100      J A N U A R Y   A N D   M A Y .

The parents, you may think, would soon comply;  
The Old have int'rest ever in their eye.

Nor was it hard to move the Lady's mind;  
When fortune favours, still the Fair are kind.

I pass each previous settlement and deed, 305  
Too long for me to write, or you to read;  
Nor will with quaint impertinence display  
The pomp, the pageantry, the proud array.

The time approach'd, to Church the parties went,  
At once with carnal and devout intent: 310

Forth came the Priest, and bade th' obedient wife  
Like Sarah or Rebecca lead her life:

Then pray'd the pow'rs the fruitful bed to bless,  
And made all sure enough with holiness.

And now the palace-gates are open'd wide, 315 }  
The guests appear in order, side by side, }  
And plac'd in state, the bridegroom and the bride. }  
The breathing flute's soft notes are heard around,  
And the shrill trumpets mix their silver sound;  
The vaulted roofs with echoing musick ring, 320  
These touch the vocal stops, and those the trem-  
bling string.

Not thus Amphion tun'd the warbling lyre,  
Nor Joab the founding clarion could inspire,

Nor fierce Theodamas, whose sprightly strain 324  
 Could swell the soul to rage, and fire the martial train.

Bacchus himself, the nuptial feast to grace,  
 (So Poets sing) was present on the place :  
 And lovely Venus, Goddess of delight,  
 Shook high her flaming torch in open sight :  
 And danc'd around, and smil'd on ev'ry Knight :  
 Pleas'd her best servant would his courage try,  
 No less in wedlock, than in liberty.

Full many an age old Hymen had not spy'd  
 So kind a bridegroom, or so bright a bride. 334

Ye bards! renown'd among the tuneful throng  
 For gentle lays, and joyous nuptial song ;  
 Think not your softest numbers can display  
 The matchless glories of this blisful day :  
 The joys are such, as far transcend your rage,  
 When tender youth has wedded stooping age. 340

The beauteous dame fate smiling at the board,  
 And darted am'rous glances at her Lord.  
 Not Hester's self, whose charms the Hebrews sing,  
 E'er look'd so lovely on her Persian King :  
 Bright as the rising sun, in summer's day, 345  
 And fresh and blooming as the month of May !  
 The joyful Knight survey'd her by his side,  
 Nor envy'd Paris with the Spartan bride :

102 JANUARY AND MAY.

Still as his mind revolv'd with vast delight  
 Th' entrancing raptures of th' approaching night,  
 Restless he fate, invoking ev'ry pow'r 351  
 To speed his bliss, and haste the happy hour.  
 Mean time the vig'rous dancers beat the ground,  
 And songs were sung, and flowing bowls went round.  
 With od'rous spices they perfum'd the place, 355  
 And mirth and pleasure shone in ev'ry face.

Damian alone, of all the menial train,  
 Sad in the midst of triumphs, sigh'd for pain;  
 Damian alone, the Knight's obsequious squire,  
 Consum'd at heart, and fed a secret fire. 360  
 His lovely mistress all his soul possess'd,  
 He look'd, he languish'd, and could take no rest:  
 His task perform'd, he sadly went his way,  
 Fell on his bed, and loath'd the light of day.  
 There let him lie; till his relenting dame 365  
 Weep in her turn, and waste in equal flame.

The weary sun, as learned Poets write,  
 Forsook th' Horizon, and roll'd down the light;  
 While glitt'ring stars his absent beams supply,  
 And night's dark mantle overspread the sky. 370  
 Then rose the guests; and as the time requir'd,  
 Each paid his thanks, and decently retir'd.

The foe once gone, our Knight prepar'd t'undress,  
So keen he was, and eager to possess:

But first thought fit th' assistance to receive, 375

Which grave Physicians scruple not to give;

Satyrion near, with hot Eringo's stood,

Cantharides, to fire the lazy blood,

Whose use old Bards describe in luscious rhymes,

And Critics learn'd explain to modern times. 380

By this the sheets were spread, the bride undress'd,

The room was sprinkled, and the bed was bless'd.

What next ensu'd beseems not me to say;

'Tis sung, he labour'd till the dawning day,

Then briskly sprung from bed, with heart so light,

As all were nothing he had done by night; 386

And sipp'd his cordial as he sat upright.

He kiss'd his balmy spouse with wanton play,

And feebly sung a lusty roundelay:

Then on the couch his weary limbs he cast; 390

For ev'ry labour must have rest at last.

But anxious cares the pensive Squire oppress'd,

Sleep fled his eyes, and peace forsook his breast;

The raging flames that in his bosom dwell,

He wanted art to hide, and means to tell. 395

Yet hoping time th'occasion might betray,  
 Compos'd a sonnet to the lovely May;  
 Which writ and folded with the nicest art,  
 He wrapp'd in silk, and laid upon his heart.

When now the fourth revolving day was run, 400  
 ('Twas June, and Cancer had receiv'd the Sun)  
 Forth from her chamber came the beauteous bride;  
 The good old Knight mov'd slowly by her side.  
 High mass was sung; they feasted in the hall;  
 The servants round stood ready at their call. 405  
 The Squire alone was absent from the board,  
 And much his sickness griev'd his worthy lord,  
 Who pray'd his spouse, attended with her train,  
 To visit Damian, and divert his pain.  
 Th'obliging dames obey'd with one consent; 410  
 They left the hall, and to his lodging went.  
 The female tribe surround him as he lay,  
 And close beside him sat the gentle May:  
 Where, as she try'd his pulse, he softly drew  
 A heaving sigh, and cast a mournful view! 415  
 Then gave his bill, and brib'd the pow'rs divine,  
 With secret vows, to favour his design.

Who studies now but discontented May?  
 On her soft couch uneasily she lay:

JANUARY AND MAY. 105

The lumpish husband snor'd away the night, 420  
Till coughs awak'd him him near the morning light.  
What then he did, I'll not presume to tell,  
Nor if she thought herself in heav'n or hell:  
Honest and dull in nuptial bed they lay,  
Till the bell toll'd, and all arose to pray. 425

Were it by forceful destiny decreed,  
Or did from chance, or nature's pow'r proceed;  
Or that some star, with aspect kind to love,  
Shed its selectest influence from above;  
Whatever was the cause, the tender dame 430  
Felt the first motions of an infant flame;  
Receiv'd th' impressions of the love-sick Squire,  
And wasted in the soft infectious fire.  
Ye fair draw near, let May's example move  
Your gentle minds to pity those who love! 430  
Had some fierce tyrant in her stead been found,  
The poor adorer sure had hang'd, or drown'd:  
But she, your sex's mirrour, free from pride,  
Was much too meek to prove a homicide.

But to my tale: Some fages have defin'd 445  
Pleasure the sov'reign blifs of humankind:  
Our Knight (who study'd much, we may suppose)  
Deriv'd his high philosophy from those;



For, like a Prince, he bore the vast expence  
Of lavish pomp, and proud magnificence:      445

His house was stately, his retinue gay,  
Large was his train, and gorgeous his array.  
His spacious garden made to yield to none,  
Was compass'd round with walls of solid stone;  
Priapus could not half describe the grace      450

(Tho' God of gardens) of this charming place:  
A place to tire the rambling wits of France  
In long descriptions, and exceed Romance;  
Enough to shame the gentlest bard that sings  
Of painted meadows, and of purling springs.      455

Full in the centre of the flow'ry ground,      }  
A crystal fountain spread its streams around,      }  
The fruitful banks with verdant laurels crown'd:      }  
About this spring (if ancient fame say true)  
The dapper Elves their moon-light sports pursue:  
Their pigmy king, and little fairy queen,  
In circling dances gambol'd on the green,  
While tuneful sprites a merry concert made,  
And airy music warbled thro' the shade.

Hither the noble knight would oft repair,      465  
(His scene of pleasure, and peculiar care)

For this he held it dear, and always bore  
 The silver key that lock'd the garden door.  
 To this sweet place in summer's sultry heat,  
 He us'd from noise and bus'ness to retreat; 470  
 And here in dalliance spend the live-long day,  
*Solus cum sola*, with his sprightly May.

For whate'er work was undischarg'd a-bed,  
 The duteous knight in this fair garden sped.  
 But ah! what mortal lives of blifs secure, 475

How short a space our worldly joys endure?  
 O Fortune, fair, like all thy treach'rous kind,  
 But faithless still, and wav'ring as the wind!  
 O painted monster, form'd mankind to cheat,  
 With pleasing poison, and with soft deceit! 480  
 This rich, this am'rous, venerable knight,  
 Amidst his ease, his solace, and delight,  
 Struck blind by thee, resigns his days to grief,  
 And calls on death, the wretch's last relief.

The rage of jealousy then seiz'd his mind, 485  
 For much he fear'd the faith of woman-kind.  
 His wife not suffer'd from his side to stray,  
 Was captive kept, he watch'd her night and day,  
 Abridg'd her pleasures and confin'd her sway. }

## 108 JANUARY AND MAY.

Full oft in tears did hapless May complain, 490  
 And sigh'd full oft; but sigh'd and wept in vain;  
 She look'd on Damian with a lover's eye;  
 For oh, 'twas fixt; she must possess or die!  
 Nor less impatience vex'd her am'rous Squire,  
 Wild with delay, and burning with desire. 495  
 Watch'd as she was, yet could he not refrain,  
 By secret writing to disclose his pain:  
 The dame by signs reveal'd her kind intent,  
 Till both were conscious what each other meant.

Ah, gentle knight, what would thy eyes avail, 500  
 Tho' they could see as far as ships can fail?  
 'Tis better, sure, when blind, deceiv'd to be,  
 Than be deluded when a man can see!

Argus himself, so cautious and so wise,  
 Was over-watch'd, for all his hundred eyes: 505  
 So many an honest husband may, 'tis known,  
 Who, wisely, never thinks the case his own.

The dame at last, by diligence and care,  
 Procur'd the key her knight was wont to bear;  
 She took the wards in wax before the fire, 510  
 And gave th'impression to the trusty Squire.  
 By means of this, some wonder shall appear,  
 Which, in due place and season, you may hear.

Well sung sweet Ovid, in the days of yore,  
 What flight is that, which love will not explore ?  
 And Pyramus and Thisbe plainly show  
 The feats true lovers, when they list, can do :  
 Tho' watch'd and captive, yet in spite of all,  
 They found the art of kissing thro' a wall.

But now no longer from our tale to stray ; 520  
 It happ'd, that once upon a summer's day,  
 Our rev'rend Knight was urg'd to am'rous play : }  
 He rais'd his spouse e'er Matin-bell was rung,  
 And thus his morning canticle he sung.

Awake, my love, disclose thy radiant eyes ; 525  
 Arise, my wife, my beauteous lady, rise !  
 Hear how the doves with pensive notes complain,  
 And in soft murmurs tell the trees their pain :  
 The winter's past ; the clouds and tempest fly ;  
 The sun adorns the fields, and brightens all the sky.  
 Fair without spot, whose ev'ry charming part 531  
 My bosom wounds, and captivates my heart ;  
 Come, and in mutual pleasures let's engage,  
 Joy of my life, and comfort of my age.

This heard, to Damian strait a sign she made,  
 To haste before ; the gentle Squire obey'd : 536

110 JANUARY AND MAY.

Secret, and undescry'd he took his way,  
And ambush'd close behind an arbour lay.

It was not long ere January came,  
And hand in hand with him his lovely dame; 540  
Blind as he was, not doubting all was sure,  
He turn'd the key, and made the gate secure.

Here let us walk, he said, observ'd by none,  
Conscious of pleasures to the world unknown:  
So may my soul have joy, as thou, my wife, 545  
Art far the dearest solace of my life;  
And rather would I chuse, by heav'n above,  
To die this instant, than to lose thy love.

Reflect what truth was in my passion shewn,  
When unendow'd, I took thee for my own, 550  
And sought no treasure but thy heart alone.

Old as I am, and now depriv'd of sight,  
Whilst thou art faithful to thy own true Knight,  
Nor age, nor blindness rob me of delight.

Each other loss with patience I can bear, 555  
The loss of thee is what I only fear.

Consider then, my lady and my wife,  
The solid comforts of a virtuous life.  
As first, the love of Christ himself you gain;  
Next, your own honour undefil'd maintain; 560

JANUARY AND MAY. 111

And lastly, that which sure your mind must move,  
 My whole estate shall gratify your love:  
 Make your own terms, and ere to-morrow's sun  
 Displays his light, by heav'n it shall be done.

I seal the contract with a holy kifs, 565  
 And will perform, by this--- my dear, and this ---  
 Have comfort, spouse, nor think thy Lord unkind;  
 'Tis love, not jealousy that fires my mind.

For when thy charms my sober thoughts engage,  
 And join'd to them my own unequal age, 570  
 From thy dear side I have no pow'r to part,  
 Such secret transports warm my melting heart.  
 For who that once possess those heav'nly charms,  
 Could live one moment absent from thy arms?

He ceas'd, and May with modest grace reply'd;  
 (Weak was her voice, as while she spoke she cry'd:)  
 Heav'n knows (with that a tender sigh she drew)  
 I have a soul to save as well as you;  
 And, what no less you to my charge commend,  
 My dearest honour, will to death defend. 580  
 To you in holy Church I gave my hand,  
 And join'd my heart in wedlock's sacred band:  
 Yet after this, if you distrust my care,  
 Then hear, my Lord, and witness what I swear:

First may the yawning earth her bosom rend, 585  
 And let me hence to hell alive descend;  
 Or die the death I dread no less than hell,  
 Sew'd in a sack, and plung'd into a well:  
 Ere I my fame by one lewd act disgrace,  
 Or once renounce the honour of my race. 590  
 For know, Sir Knight, of gentle blood I came,  
 I loath a whore, and startle at the name.  
 But jealous men on their own crimes reflect,  
 And learn from thence their ladies to suspect:  
 Else why these needless cautions, Sir, to me? 595  
 These doubts and fears of female constancy!  
 This chime still rings in ev'ry lady's ear,  
 The only strain a wife must hope to hear.

Thus while she spoke a sidelong glance she cast,  
 Where Damian kneeling, worshipp'd as she past. 600  
 She saw him watch the motions of her eye,  
 And singled out a pear-tree planted nigh:  
 'Twas charg'd with fruit that made a goodly show,  
 And hung with dangling pears was ev'ry bough.  
 Thither th'obsequious Squire address'd his pace, 605  
 And climbing, in the summit took his place;  
 The Knight and Lady walk'd beneath in view,  
 Where let us leave them, and our tale pursue.

JANUARY AND MAY. 113

'Twas now the season when the glorious sun  
 His heav'nly progress thro' the Twins had run; 615  
 And Jove, exalted, his mild influence yields,  
 To glad the glebe, and paint the flow'ry fields.  
 Clear was the day, and Phœbus rising bright,  
 Had streak'd the azure firmament with light; 619  
 He pierc'd the glitt'ring clouds with golden streams,  
 And warm'd the womb of earth with genial beams.

It so befel, in that fair morning-tide,  
 The Fairies sported on the garden side,  
 And in the midst their Monarch and his bride. }  
 So featly tripp'd the light-foot ladies round, 620 }  
 The knights so nimbly o'er the greensword bound, }  
 That scarce they bent the flow'rs, or touch'd the }  
 ground. }

The dances ended, all the fairy train  
 For pinks and daisies search'd the flow'ry plain;  
 While on a bank reclin'd of rising green, 625  
 Thus, with a frown, the King bespoke his Queen.

'Tis too apparent, argue what you can,  
 The treachery you women use to man:  
 A thousand authors have this truth made out,  
 And sad experience leaves no room for doubt. 630



Heav'n rest thy spirit, noble Solomon,  
 A wiser monarch never saw the sun :  
 All wealth, all honours, the supreme degree  
 Of earthly blifs, was well bestow'd on thee !  
 For sagely hast thou said : Of all mankind, 635  
 One only just, and righteous, hope to find :  
 But should'st thou search the spacious world around,  
 Yet one good woman is not to be found.

Thus says the King who knew your wickedness;  
 The son of Sirach testifies no less.

So may some wildfire on your bodies fall, 640  
 Or some devouring plague consume you all ;  
 As well you view the leacher in the tree,  
 And well this honourable Knight you see :  
 But since he's blind and old (a helpless case)  
 His Squire shall cuckold him before your face. 645

Now by my own dread majesty I swear,  
 And by this awful sceptre which I bear,  
 No impious wretch shall 'scape unpunish'd long,  
 That in my presence offers such a wrong.  
 I will this instant undeceive the Knight, 650  
 And, in the very act restore his sight :  
 And set the strumpet here in open view,  
 A warning to these Ladies, and to you,  
 And all the faithless sex, for ever to be true. }

And will you so, reply'd the Queen, indeed? }  
 Now, by my mother's soul it is decreed, 656 }  
 She shall not want an answer at her need. }

For her, and for her daughters, I'll engage,  
 And all the sex in each succeeding age;  
 Art shall be theirs to varnish an offence, 660  
 And fortify their crimes with confidence.

Nay, were they taken in a strict embrace,  
 Seen with both eyes, and pinion'd on the place;  
 All they shall need is to protest and swear,  
 Breathe a soft sigh, and drop a tender tear; 665  
 Till their wise husbands, gull'd by arts like these,  
 Grow gentle, tractable, and tame as geese.

What tho' this slanderous Jew, this Solomon,  
 Call'd women fools, and knew full many a one;  
 The wiser wits of later times declare, 670  
 How constant, chaste, and virtuous women are:  
 Witness the martyrs, who resign'd their breath,  
 Serene in torments, unconcern'd in death;  
 And witness next what Roman Authors tell,  
 How Arria, Portia, and Lucretia fell. 675

But since the sacred leaves to all are free,  
 And men interpret texts, why should not we?

By this no more was meant, than to have shown, }  
 That sov'reign goodness dwells in him alone        }  
 Who only Is, and is but only One.                    680 }

But grant the worst; shall women then be weigh'd  
 By ev'ry word that Solomon has said?

What tho' this King (as ancient story boasts)  
 Built a fair temple to the Lord of hosts;

He ceas'd at last his Maker to adore,                685  
 And did as much for Idol gods, or more.

Beware what lavish praises you confer  
 On a rank leacher and idolater;

Whose reign indulgent God, says holy writ,  
 Did but for David's righteous sake permit;        690  
 David, the monarch after heav'n's own mind,  
 Who lov'd our sex, and honour'd all our kind.

Well, I'm a Woman, and as such must speak;  
 Silence would swell me, and my heart would break.

Know then, I scorn your dull authorities,        695  
 Your idle wits, and all their learned lyes.

By heav'n, those authors are our sex's foes,  
 Whom, in our right, I must and will oppose.

Nay (quoth the King) dear Madam, be not  
 wroth:

I yield it up; but since I gave my oath,        700

That this much-injur'd Knight again should see;  
 It must be done --- I am a King, said he,  
 And one, whose faith has ever sacred been.

And so has mine (she said) --- I am a Queen:  
 Her answer she shall have, I undertake; 705  
 And thus an end of all dispute I make.

Try when you list; and you shall find, my Lord,  
 It is not in our sex to break our word.

We leave them here in this heroic strain,  
 And to the Knight our story turns again; 710  
 Who in the garden, with his lovely May,  
 Sung merrier than the Cuckow or the Jay:  
 This was his song; " Oh kind and constant be,  
 " Constant and kind I'll ever prove to thee."

Thus singing as he went, at last he drew 715  
 By easy steps, to where the Pear-tree grew:  
 The longing dame look'd up, and spy'd her Love  
 Full fairly perch'd among the boughs above.  
 She stopp'd, and sighing: Oh good Gods, she cry'd,  
 What pangs, what sudden shoots distend my side?  
 O for that tempting fruit, so fresh, so green; 721  
 Help, for the love of heav'n's immortal Queen!  
 Help, dearest lord, and save at once the life  
 Of thy poor infant, and thy longing wife!

Sore sigh'd the Knight to hear his Lady's cry,  
 But could not climb, and had no servant nigh:  
 Old as he was, and void of eye-sight too,  
 What could, alas! a helpless husband do?  
 And must I languish then, she said, and die,  
 Yet view the lovely fruit before my eye? 730  
 At least, kind Sir, for charity's sweet sake,  
 Vouchsafe the trunk between your arms to take;  
 Then from your back I might ascend the tree;  
 Do you but stoop, and leave the rest to me.

With all my soul, he thus reply'd again, 735  
 I'd spend my dearest blood to ease thy pain.  
 With that, his back against the trunk he bent,  
 She seiz'd a twig, and up the tree she went.

Now prove your patience, gentle Ladies all!  
 Nor let on me your heavy anger fall: 740  
 'Tis truth I tell, tho' not in phrase refin'd;  
 Tho' blunt my tale, yet honest is my mind.  
 What feats the lady in the tree might do,  
 I pass, as gambols never known to you;  
 But sure it was a merrier fit, she swore, 745  
 Than in her life she ever felt before.

In that nice moment, lo! the wond'ring knight  
 Look'd out, and stood restor'd to sudden fight.

Strait on the tree his eager eyes he bent,  
 As one whose thoughts were on his spouse intent;  
 But when he saw his bosom-wife so dress'd, 751  
 His rage was such as cannot be express'd:  
 Not frantic mothers when their infants die,  
 With louder clamours rend the vaulted sky:  
 He cry'd, he roar'd, he storm'd, he tore his hair;  
 Death! hell! and furies! what dost thou do there?

What ails my lord? the trembling dame reply'd;  
 I thought your patience had been better try'd:  
 Is this your love, ungrateful and unkind,  
 This my reward for having cur'd the blind? 760  
 Why was I taught to make my husband see,  
 By struggling with a Man upon a Tree?  
 Did I for this the pow'r of magic prove?  
 Unhappy wife, whose crime was too much love!

If this be struggling, by this holy light, 765  
 'Tis struggling with a vengeance (quoth the Knight)  
 So heav'n preserve the fight it has restor'd,  
 As with these eyes I plainly saw thee whor'd;  
 Whor'd by my slave --- perfidious wretch! may hell  
 As surely seize thee, as I saw too well. 770

Guard me, good angels! cry'd the gentle May,  
 Pray heav'n, this magic work the proper way!

Alas, my love! 'tis certain, could you see,  
 You ne'er had us'd these killing words to me:  
 So help me, fates, as 'tis no perfect fight, 775  
 But some faint glimm'ring of a doubtful light.

What I have said (quoth he) I must maintain,  
 For by th'immortal pow'rs it *seem'd* too plain---

By all those pow'rs, some frenzy seiz'd your  
 mind,

(Reply'd the dame, are these the thanks I find?  
 Wretch that I am, that e'er I was so kind! 781

She said; a rising sigh express'd her woe,  
 The ready tears apace began to flow,  
 And as they fell she wip'd from either eye  
 The drops (for women, when they list, can cry.) 785

The Knight was touch'd; and in his looks appear'd  
 Signs of remorse, while thus his spouse he cheer'd.  
 Madam, 'tis past, and my short anger o'er;  
 Come down, and vex your tender heart no more:  
 Excuse me, dear, if aught amiss was said, 790  
 For, on my soul, amends shall soon be made:  
 Let my repentance your forgiveness draw,  
 By heav'n, I swore but what I *thought* I saw.

Ah my lov'd lord! 'twas much unkind (she cry'd)  
 On bare suspicion thus to treat your bride. 795

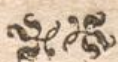
But till your fight's establish'd, for a while,  
 Imperfect objects may your sense beguile.  
 Thus when from sleep we first our eyes display,  
 The balls are wounded with the piercing ray,  
 And dusky vapours rise, and intercept the day.  
 So just recov'ring from the shades of night, 801  
 Your swimming eyes are drunk with sudden light,  
 Strange phantoms dance around, and skim before  
 your sight :

Then, Sir, be cautious, nor too rashly deem ;  
 Heav'n knows how seldom things are what they  
 seem ! 805

Consult your reason, and you soon shall find  
 'Twas you were jealous, not your wife unkind :  
 Jove ne'er spoke oracle more true than this,  
 None judge so wrong as those who think amiss.

With that she leap'd into her Lord's embrace,  
 With well-diffembled virtue in her face. 811  
 He hugg'd her close, and kiss'd her o'er and o'er,  
 Disturb'd with doubts and jealousies no more :  
 Both, pleas'd and bless'd, renew'd their mutual vows,  
 A fruitful wife, and a believing spouse. 815

Thus ends our tale, whose moral next to make,  
 Let all wise husbands hence example take ;  
 And pray, to crown the pleasure of their lives,  
 To be so well deluded by their wives.





But all your rights establish'd in a while  
 Impetuous objects may your sense prevail  
 Thus when from sleep we first our eyes display  
 The balls are wounded with the piercing ray  
 And dusky vapours rise, and intercept the day  
 So just recovering from the shades of night, you  
 Your twinkling eyes are drest with golden light  
 Strange phantoms dance around, and flit before  
 your sight  
 Then, ere the senses, not too ready deem  
 How a new world before them things are what they  
 seem

Confront your reason, and you soon shall find  
 That you were jealous, not your husband blind  
 Love not your looks or charms more than his  
 None judge so wrong as those who think amiss  
 What is the fault if you but love a man  
 Who has distinguished sense to be his  
 The part of sex alone, and kind's best part  
 Intended with love and reason to be  
 Both plain and plain, I renew'd their annual vows  
 A faithful wife, and a believing spouse  
 Thus ends our tale, whose moral next to make  
 Let all wife husbands prove example take  
 And give to crown the pleasure of their lives  
 To be so well beloved by their wives

