

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

AND

THYRSIS





SCREEN'D IS THIS NOOK O'ER THE HIGH, HALF-REAP'D FIELD,
AND THE EYE TRAVELS DOWN TO OXFORD'S TOWERS.

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

AND

THYRSIS

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. H. NEW

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THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY



SHEPHERDS HAD MET HIM ON THE HURST IN SPRING.

THE SCHOLAR-GIPSY

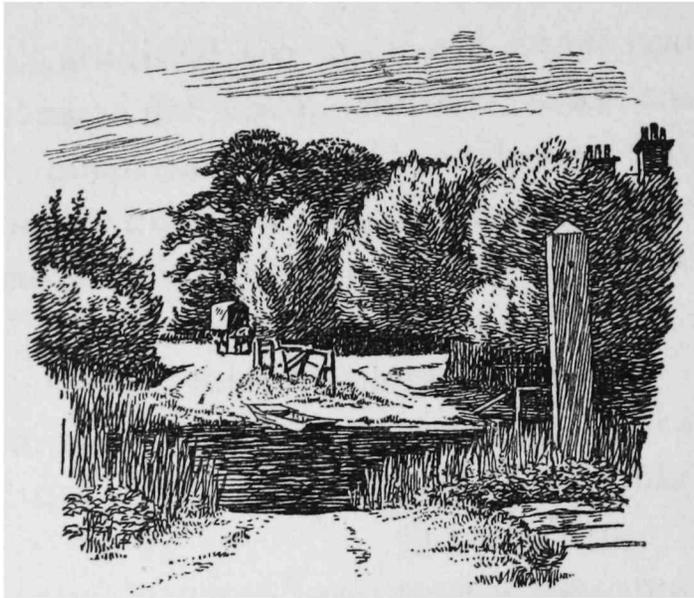
Go, for they call you, shepherd, from the hill ;
Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes !
No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,
Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,
Nor the cropp'd herbage shoot another
head.

But when the fields are still,
And the tired men and dogs all gone to
rest,
And only the white sheep are sometimes
seen
Cross and recross the strips of moon-
blanch'd green,
Come, shepherd, and again begin the quest !

Here, where the reaper was at work of late—
In this high field's dark corner, where he leaves
His coat, his basket, and his earthen cruse,
And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves,
Then here, at noon, comes back his stores
to use—
Here will I sit and wait,
While to my ear from uplands far away
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,
With distant cries of reapers in the corn—
All the live murmur of a summer's day.

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,
And here till sun-down, shepherd ! will I be.
 Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies
 peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
 Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep ;
 And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed
 showers
 Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with
 shade ;
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil's book—
Come, let me read the oft-read tale again !
3 The story of the Oxford scholar poor,
34 Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
Who, tired of knocking at preferment's
door,
One summer-morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore,
And roam'd the world with that wild
brotherhood,
And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.



THE STRIPLING THAMES AT BAB-LOCK-HITHE.

But once, years after, in the country-lanes,
Two scholars, whom at college erst he knew,
Met him, and of his way of life enquired ;
Whereat he answer'd, that the gipsy-crew,
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired
The workings of men's brains,
And they can bind them to what thoughts they
will.
“And I,” he said, “the secret of their art,
When fully learn'd, will to the world impart ;
But it needs heaven-sent moments for this
skill.”

This said, he left them, and return'd no more.—

1 But rumours hung about the country-side,
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,
In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,
The same the gipsies wore.

Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring ;
At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire moors,
On the warm ingle-bench, the smock-frock'd
boors

Had found him seated at their entering,

But, 'mid their drink and clatter, he would fly.
And I myself seem half to know thy looks,
And put the shepherds, wanderer ! on thy
trace ;
And boys who in lone wheatfields scare the rooks
I ask if thou hast pass'd their quiet place ;
Or in my boat I lie
Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer-heats,
'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine
fills,
And watch the warm, green-muffled Cumner
hills,
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.

For most, I know, thou lov'st retired ground !
Thee at the ferry Oxford riders blithe,
 Returning home on summer-nights, have
 met
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe,
 Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
 As the punt's rope chops round ;
And leaning backward in a pensive dream,
 And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers
 Pluck'd in shy fields and distant Wychwood
 bowers,
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream.

And then they land, and thou art seen no more!—
Maidens, who from the distant hamlets come
To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,
Oft through the darkening fields have seen
thee roam,
Or cross a stile into the public way.
Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leaf'd, white anemony,
Dark bluebells drench'd with dews of summer
eves,
And purple orchises with spotted leaves—
But none hath words she can report of thee.



TO BATHE IN THE ABANDON'D LASHER.

And, above Godstow Bridge, when hay-time's here
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,
Men who through those wide fields of breezy
grass
Where black-wing'd swallows haunt the glitter-
ing Thames,
To bathe in the abandon'd lasher pass,
Have often pass'd thee near
Sitting upon the river bank o'ergrown ;
Mark'd thine outlandish garb, thy figure spare,
Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted air—
But, when they came from bathing, thou wast
gone !

At some lone homestead in the Cumner hills,
Where at her open door the housewife darns,
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a gate
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.
Children, who early range these slopes and late
For cresses from the rills,
Have known thee eying, all an April-day,
The springing pastures and the feeding kine ;
And mark'd thee, when the stars come out
and shine,
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.

In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood—
Where most the gipsies by the turf-edged way
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush
you see
With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of grey,
Above the forest-ground called Thessaly—
The blackbird, picking food,
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all ;
So often has he known thee past him stray,
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill
Where home through flooded fields foot-
travellers go,
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge,
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?
And thou hast climb'd the hill,
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner range ;
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snow-
flakes fall,
The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall—
Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd
grange.

But what—I dream ! Two hundred years are flown
Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
And the grave Glanvil did the tale inscribe
That thou wert wander'd from the studious
walls
To learn strange arts, and join a gipsy-tribe ;
And thou from earth art gone
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—
Some country-nook, where o'er thy unknown
grave
Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave,
Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

—No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours !
For what wears out the life of mortal men ?
'Tis that from change to change their being
 rolls ;
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
 Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
 And numb the elastic powers.
Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,
 And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,
 To the just-pausing Genius we remit
Our worn-out life, and are—what we have
 been.



ABOVE GODSTOW BRIDGE.

Thou hast not lived, why should'st thou
perish, so?

Thou hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire ;
Else wert thou long since number'd with
the dead !

Else hadst thou spent, like other men, thy fire !
The generations of thy peers are fled,
And we ourselves shall go ;

But thou possessest an immortal lot,
And we imagine thee exempt from age
And living as thou liv'st on Glanvil's page,
Because thou hadst—what we, alas ! have not.

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things ;
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
Which much to have tried, in much been
baffled, brings.
O life unlike to ours !
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what
he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives ;
Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

Thou waitest for the spark from heaven ! and we,
Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
Whose vague resolves never have been
fulfill'd ;
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new ;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-
day—
Ah ! do not we, wanderer ! await it too ?

Yes, we await it !—but it still delays,
And then we suffer ! and amongst us one,
Who most has suffer'd, takes dejectedly
His seat upon the intellectual throne ;
And all his store of sad experience he
Lays bare of wretched days ;
Tells us his misery's birth and growth and signs,
And how the dying spark of hope was fed,
And how the breast was soothed, and how
the head,
And all his hourly varied anodynes.

This for our wisest ! and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to
bear ;
With close-lipp'd patience for our only friend,
Sad patience, too near neighbour to despair—
But none has hope like thine !
Thou through the fields and through the woods
dost stray,
Roaming the country-side, a truant boy,
Nursing thy project in unclouded joy,
And every doubt long blown by time away.

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames ;
 Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
 Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife—
 Fly hence, our contact fear !
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering
 wood !
 Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
 From her false friend's approach in Hades
 turn,
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude !



IN AUTUMN, ON THE SKIRTS OF BAGLEY WOOD.

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
 With a free, onward impulse brushing
 through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
 Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,
 On some mild pastoral slope
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales
 Freshen thy flowers as in former years
 With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales !

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly !
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils
for rest ;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy
powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting
made ;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles !
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
 Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
 The fringes of a southward-facing brow
 Among the Ægæan isles ;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
 Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian
 wine,
 Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in
 brine—
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more
sail ;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the western straits ; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through
sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come ;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

THYRSIS



NORTH HINKSEY CHURCHYARD.

THYRSIS

A MONODY, *to commemorate the author's friend,*
ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH, *who died at Florence, 1861.*

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills !
In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same ;
 The village street its haunted mansion lacks,
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,
 And from the roofs the twisted chimney-
 stacks—
 Are ye too changed, ye hills ?
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men
 To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays !
 Here came I often, often, in old days—
Thyrsis and I ; we still had Thyrsis then.



THE TRACK BY CHILDSWORTH FARM

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,
Past the high wood, to where the elm-tree
crowns

The hill behind whose ridge the sunset
flames ?

The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful
Thames ?—

This winter-eve is warm,
Humid the air ! leafless, yet soft as spring,
The tender purple spray on copse and briers !
And that sweet city with her dreaming
spires,
She needs not June for beauty's heightening.

Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!—
 Only, methinks, some loss of habit's power
 Befalls me wandering through this upland dim.
 Once pass'd I blindfold here, at any hour ;
 Now seldom come I, since I came with him.
 That single elm-tree bright
 Against the west—I miss it ! is it gone ?
 We prized it dearly ; while it stood, we said,
 Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not dead ;
 While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here,
 But once I knew each field, each flower, each
 stick ;

And with the country-folk acquaintance made
 By barn in threshing-time, by new-built rick.

Here, too, our shepherd-pipes we first
 assay'd.

Ah me ! this many a year

My pipe is lost, my shepherd's holiday !

Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy
 heart

Into the world and wave of men depart ;

But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

It irk'd him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
 He loved his mates ; but yet he could not
 keep,
For that a shadow lour'd on the fields,
 Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
 Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd his
 head.
 He went ; his piping took a troubled sound
 Of storms that rage outside our happy ground ;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.



NORTH HINKSEY FROM THE FOOTPATH.

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
 Before the roses and the longest day—
When garden-walks and all the grassy floor
 With blossoms red and white of fallen May
 And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
 From the wet field, through the vext garden-
 trees,
 Come with the volleying rain and tossing
 breeze :

The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go ?
Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come
on,
Soon will the musk carnations break and
swell,
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow ;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

He hearkens not ! light comer, he is flown !
What matters it ? next year he will return,
And we shall have him in the sweet spring-
days,
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,
And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,
And scent of hay new-mown.
But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see ;
See him come back, and cut a smoother reed,
And blow a strain the world at last shall
heed—
For time, not Corydon, hath conquer'd thee !

Alack, for Corydon no rival now!—

But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,
Some good survivor with his flute would go,
Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate ;

And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow,
And relax Pluto's brow,
And make leap up with joy the beauteous
head

Of Proserpine, among whose crowned hair
Are flowers first open'd on Sicilian air,
And flute his friend, like Orpheus, from the
dead.

O easy access to the hearer's grace
When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine !
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,
She knew the Dorian water's gush divine,
She knew each lily white which Enna yields,
Each rose with blushing face ;
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
But ah, of our poor Thames she never
heard !
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirr'd ;
And we should tease her with our plaint in
vain !



THE FYFIELD TREE.

Well ! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,
Yet, Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour
 In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd
 hill !
Who, if not I, for questing here hath power ?
 I know the wood which hides the daffodil,
 I know the Fyfield tree,
I know what white, what purple fritillaries
 The grassy harvest of the river-fields,
 Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields,
And what sedged brooks are Thames's
 tributaries ;

I know these slopes ; who knows them if not I?—
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,
 With thorns once studded, old, white-
 blossom'd trees,
Where thick the cowslips grew, and far descried
 High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,
 Hath since our day put by
The coronals of that forgotten time ;
 Down each green bank hath gone the
 ploughboy's team,
 And only in the hidden brookside gleam
Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Where is the girl, who by the boatman's door,
Above the locks, above the boating throng,
Unmoor'd our skiff when through the
Wytham flats,
Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among
And darting swallows and light water-gnats,
We track'd the shy Thames shore ?
Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,
Stood with suspended scythe to see us
pass ?—
They all are gone, and thou art gone as well !



SOUTH HINKSEY FROM THE CAUSEWAY.

Yes, thou art gone ! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent
with grey ;
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train ;—
The foot less prompt to meet the morning
dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring
again.

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth ;
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,
The mountain-tops where is the throne of
Truth,
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare !
Unbreachable the fort
Of the long-batter'd world uplifts its wall ;
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil
grows,
And near and real the charm of thy repose,
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.



BARE ON ITS LONELY RIDGE, THE TREE ! THE TREE !

But hush ! the upland hath a sudden loss
Of quiet !—Look, adown the dusk hill-side,
A troop of Oxford hunters going home,
As in old days, jovial and talking, ride !
From hunting with the Berkshire hounds
they come.
Quick ! let me fly, and cross
Into yon farther field !—'Tis done ; and see,
Back'd by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening-sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree ! the
Tree !

I take the omen ! Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,
The west unflushes, the high stars grow
bright,
And in the scatter'd farms the lights come out.
I cannot reach the signal-tree to-night,
Yet, happy omen, hail !
Hear it from thy broad lucent Arno-vale
(For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids
keep
The morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale),

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our tree is there !—
Ah, vain ! These English fields, this upland
 dim,
 These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
That lone, sky-pointing tree, are not for him ;
 To a boon southern country he is fled,
 And now in happier air,
Wandering with the great Mother's train
 divine
 (And purer or more subtle soul than thee,
 I trow, the mighty Mother doth not see)
Within a folding of the Apennine,

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old !—
Putting his sickle to the perilous grain
In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,
For thee the Lityerses-song again
Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth
sing ;
Sings his Sicilian fold,
His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes—
And how a call celestial round him rang,
And heavenward from the fountain-brink he
sprang,
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here
Sole in these fields ! yet will I not despair.
Despair I will not, while I yet descry
'Neath the mild canopy of English air
That lonely tree against the western sky.
Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee !
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the
 hay,
Woods with anemonies in flower till May,
Know him a wanderer still ; then why not me ?

A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,
Shy to illumine ; and I seek it too.

 This does not come with houses or with
 gold,
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew ;
 'Tis not in the world's market bought and
 sold—

 But the smooth-slipping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired ;
 Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,
 He wends unfollow'd, he must house alone ;
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.



ITS FIR-TOPPED HURST.

Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound ;
Thou wanderedst with me for a little hour !
Men gave thee nothing ; but this happy
quest,
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,
If men procured thee trouble, gave thee rest.
And this rude Cumner ground,
Its fir-topped Hurst, its farms, its quiet fields,
Here cam'st thou in thy jocund youthful time,
Here was thine height of strength, thy golden
prime !
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields.

What though the music of thy rustic flute
Kept not for long its happy, country tone ;
 Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,
 Which task'd thy pipe too sore, and tired
 thy throat—
 It fail'd, and thou wast mute !
Yet hadst thou alway visions of our light,
 And long with men of care thou couldst
 not stay,
 And soon thy foot resumed its wandering way,
Left human haunt, and on alone till night.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here !
 'Mid city-noise, not, as with thee of yore,
 Thyrsis ! in reach of sheep-bells is my home.
—Then through the great town's harsh, heart-
 wearying roar,
 Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
 To chase fatigue and fear :
Why faintest thou ? I wander'd till I died.
 Roam on ! The light we sought is shining still.
 Dost thou ask proof ? Our tree yet crowns
 the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.

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