

"And Katie." "And Katie." "Art out with the glow-worms to-night, My Katie?" "My Katie!" For gladness I break into laughter
 And tears. Then it all comes again as from far-away years
 Again, some one else — oh, how softly! — with laughter comes after,
 Comes after — with laughter comes after.

PRELUDES TO A PENNY READING.

A Schoolroom.

SCHOOLMASTER (*not certificated*), VICAR, and CHILD.

Vicar. Why did you send for me? I hope all's right?

Schoolmaster. Well, sir, we thought this end o' the room was dark.

V. Indeed! So 'tis. There's my new study lamp —

S. 'Twould stand, sir, well beside yon laurel wreath.

Shall I go fetch it?

V. Do, we must not fail.

Bring candles also.

[*Exit SCHOOLMASTER.* VICAR *arranges chairs.*]

Now, small six years old,
 And why may you be here?

Child. I'm helping father;
 But, father, why d' you take such pains?

V. Sweet soul,
 That's what I'm for!

C. What, and for nothing else?

V. Yes! I'm to bring thee up to be a man.

C. And what am I for?

V. There, I'm busy now.

C. Am I to bring you up to be a child?

V. Perhaps! Indeed, I have heard it said thou art.

C. Then when may I begin?

V. I'm busy, I say.
 Begin to-morrow an thou canst, my son,
 And mind to do it well.

[*Exit VICAR and CHILD.*]

Enter a group of women, and some children.

Mrs. Thorpe. Fine lot o' lights!

Mrs. Jillifer. Should be! Would folk put on their Sunday best
 I' the week unless they looked to have it seen?
 What, you here, neighbor!

Mrs. Smith. Ay, you may say that.
 Old madam called; said she, "My son would feel
 So sorry if you did not come," and slipped
 The penny in my hand, she did; said I,
 "Ma'am, that's not it. In short, some say your
 last

Was worth the penny and more. I know a man,
 A sober man, who said, and stuck to it,
 Worth a good twopence. But I'm strange, I'm shy."
 "We hope you'll come for once," said she. In short,

I said I would to oblige 'em.

Mrs. Green. Ah, 'twas well.

Mrs. S. But I feel strange, and music gets i'
my throat,

It always did. And singers be so smart,
Ladies and folk from other parishes,
Candles and cheering, greens and flowers and all,
I was not used to such in my young day;
We kept ourselves at home.

Mrs. J. Never say "used,"
The most of us have many a thing to do
We were not used to. If you come to that,
Why none of us are used to growing old,
It takes us by surprise, as one may say,
That work, when we begin 't, and yet 'tis work
That all of us must do.

Mrs. G. Nay, nay, not all.

Mrs. J. I ask your pardon, neighbor; you be
right,

Not all.

Mrs. G. And my sweet maid scarce three
months dead.

Mrs. J. I ask your pardon truly.

Mrs. G. No, my dear,
Thou'lt never see old days. I cannot stint
To fret, the maiden was but twelve years old,
So toward, such a scholar.

Mrs. S. Ay, when God,
That knows, comes down to choose,
He'll take the best.

Mrs. T. But I'm right glad you came,
it pleases *them*.

My son, that loves his book, "Mother," said he,

"Go to the Reading when you have a chance,
For there you get a change, and you see life."
But Reading or no Reading, I am slow
To learn. When parson after comes his rounds,
"Did it," to ask with a persuading smile,
"Open your mind?" the woman doth not live
Feels more a fool.

Mrs. J. I always tell him "Yes,"
For he means well. Ay, and I like the songs.
Have you heard say what they shall read to-night?

Mrs. S. Neighbor, I hear 'tis something of the
East.

But what, I ask you, is the East to us,
And where d' ye think it lies?

Mrs. J. The children know,
At least they say they do; there's nothing deep
Nor nothing strange but they get hold on it.

Enter SCHOOLMASTER and a dozen children.

S. Now ladies, ladies, you must please to sit
More close; the room fills fast, and all these lads
And maidens either have to sing before
The Reading, or else after. By your leave
I'll have them in the front, I want them here.

[*The women make room.*]

Enter ploughmen, villagers, servants, and children.

And mark me, boys, if I hear cracking o' nuts,
Or see you flicking acorns and what not
While folks from other parishes observe,
You'll hear on it when you don't look to. Tom
And Jemmy and Roger, sing as loud 's ye can,
Sing a the maidens do, are they afraid?

And now I'm stationed handy facing you,
Friends all, I'll drop a word by your good leave.

Young ploughman. Do, master, do, we like your
words a vast.

Though there be naught to back 'em up, ye see,
As when we were smaller.

S. Mark me, then, my lads.
When Lady Laura sang, "I don't think much,"
Says her fine coachman, "of your manners here.
We drove eleven miles in the dark, it rained,
And ruts in your cross roads are deep. We're
here,

My lady sings, they sit all open-mouthed,
And when she's done they never give one cheer."

Old man. Be folks to clap if they don't like the
song?

S. Certain, for manners.

*Enter VICAR, wife, various friends with violins and a
flute. They come to a piano, and one begins softly
to tune his violin, while the VICAR speaks.*

V. Friends, since there is a place where you
must hear

When I stand up to speak, I would not now
If there were any other found to bid
You welcome. Welcome, then; these with me ask
No better than to please, and n good sooth
I ever find you willing to be pleased.

When I demand not more, but when we fain
Would lead you to some knowledge fresh, and ask
Your careful heed, I hear that some of you
Have said, "What good to know, what good to us?
He puts us all to school, and our school days

Should be at end. Nay, if they needs must teach,
Then let them teach us what shall mend our lot;
The laws are strict on us, the world is hard."
You friends and neighbors, may I dare to speak?
I know the laws are strict, and the world hard,
For ever will the world help that man up
That is already coming up, and still
And ever help him down that's going down.
Yet say, "I will take the words out of thy mouth,
O world, being yet more strict with mine own life.
Thou law, to gaze shall not be worth thy while
On whom beyond thy power doth rule himself."
Yet seek to know, for whoso seek to know
They seek to rise, and best they mend their lot.
Methinks, if Adam and Eve in their garden days
Had scorned the serpent, and obediently
Continued God's good children, He Himself
Had led them to the Tree of Knowledge soon
And bid them eat the fruit thereof, and yet
Not find it apples of death.

Vicar's wife (aside). Now, dearest John,
We're ready. Lucky too! you always go
Above the people's heads.

Young farmer stands forward, VICAR presenting him.

SONG.

I.

Sparkle of snow and of frost,
Blythe air and the joy of cold,
Their grace and good they have lost,
As print o' her foot by the fold.
Let me back to yon desert sand,

Rose-lipped love — from the fold,
 Flower-fair girl — from the fold,
 Let me back to the sultry land.
 The world is empty of cheer,
 Forlorn, forlorn, and forlorn,
 As the night-owl's sob of fear,
 As Memnon moaning at morn.
 For love of thee, my dear,
 I have lived a better man,
 O my Mary Anne,
 My Mary Anne.

II.

Away, away, away and away,
 To an old palm-land of tombs,
 Washed clear of our yesterday
 And where never a snowdrop blooms,
 Nor wild becks talk as they go
 Of tender hope we had known,
 Nor mosses of memory grow
 All over the wayside stone.

III.

Farewell, farewell, and farewell,
 As voice of a lover's sigh
 In the wind let yon willow wave
 "Farewell, farewell, and farewell."
 The sparkling frost-stars brave
 On thy shrouded bosom lie;
 Thou art gone apart to dwell,
 But I fain would have said good-bye.
 For love of thee in thy grave

I have lived a better man,
 Oh my Mary Anne,
 My Mary Anne.

Mrs. Thorpe (aside). O hearts! why, what a song!

To think on it, and he a married man!

Mrs. Jillifer (aside). Bless you, that makes for nothing, nothing at all,

They take no heed upon the words. His wife,
 Look you, as pleased as may be, smiles on him.

Mrs. T. (aside). Neighbors, there's one thing beats me. We've enough

O' trouble in the world; I've cried my fill
 Many and many a time by my own fire:
 Now why, I'll ask you, should it comfort me
 And ease my heart when, pitiful and sweet,
 One sings of other souls, and how they mourned?
 A body would have thought that did not know
 Songs must be merry, full of feast and mirth,
 Or else would all folk flee away from them.

Mrs. S. (aside). 'Tis strange, and I too love
 the sad ones best.

Mrs. T. (aside). Ay, how they clap him!

'Tis as who should say,

Sing! we were pleased; sing us another song;

As if they did not know he loves to sing.

Well may he, not an organ pipe they blow

On Sunday in the church is half so sweet;

But he's a hard man.

Mrs. J. (aside). Mark me, neighbors all,
 Hard though he be — ay, and the mistress hard —
 If he do sing 'twill be a sorrowful

Sad tale of sweethearts, that shall make you wish
Your own time would come over again, although
Were partings in 't and tears. Hist! now he
sings.

Young farmer sings again.

"Come hither, come hither." The broom was in
blossom all over yon rise;
There went a wide murmur of brown bees about
it with songs from the wood.

"We shall never be younger! O love, let us forth,
for the world 'neath our eyes,
Ay, the world is made young e'en as we, and
right fair is her youth and right good."

Then there fell the great yearning upon me, that
never yet went into words;

While lovesome and moansome thereon spake
and falter'd the dove to the dove.
And I came at her calling, "Inherit, inherit, and
sing with the birds;"

I went up to the wood with the child of my
heart and the wife of my love.

O pure! O pathetic! Wild hyacinths drank it,
the dream light, apace

Not a leaf moved at all 'neath the blue, they
hung waiting for messages kind;
Tall cherry-trees dropped their white blossom that
drifted no whit from its place,

For the south very far out to sea had the lulling
low voice of the wind.

And the child's dancing foot gave us part in the
ravishment almost a pain,

An infinite tremor of life, a fond murmur that
cried out on time,
Ah short! must all end in the doing and spend
itself sweetly in vain,
And the promise be only fulfilment to lean from
the height of its prime?

"We shall never be younger;" nay, mock me not,
fancy, none call from yon tree;
They have thrown me the world they went over,
went up, and, alas! for my part
I am left to grow old, and to grieve, and to change;
but they change not with me;
They will never be older, the child of my love,
and the wife of my heart.

Mrs. J. I told you so!

Mrs. T. (aside). That did you, neighbor. Ay,
Partings, said you, and tears: I liked the song.

Mrs. G. Who be these coming to the front to
sing?

Mrs. J. (aside). Why, neighbor, these be sweet-
hearts, so 'tis said,

And there was much ado to make her sing;
She would, and would not; and he wanted her,
And, mayhap, wanted to be seen with her.
'Tis Tomlin's pretty maid, his only one.

Mrs. G. (aside). I did not know the maid, so
fair she looks.

Mrs. J. (aside). He's a right proper man she
has at last;

Walks over many a mile (and counts them naught)
To court her after work hours, that he doth,

Not like her other — why, he'd let his work
Go all to wrack, and lay it to his love,
While he would sit and look, and look and sigh.
Her father sent him to the right-about.
"If love," said he, "won't make a man of you,
Why, nothing will! 'Tis mainly that love's for.
The right sort makes," said he, "a lad a man;
The wrong sort makes," said he, "a man a fool."

VICAR presents a young man and a girl.

DUET.

She. While he dreams, mine old grand-sire,
And yon red logs glow,
Honey, whisper by the fire,
Whisper, honey, low.

He. Honey, high 's yon weary hill,
Stiff 's yon weary loam;
Lacks the work o' my good will,
Fain I'd take thee home.

O how much longer, and longer, and longer,
An' how much longer shall the waiting last?
Berries red are grown, April birds are flown,
Martinmas gone over, ay, and harvest past.

She. Honey, bide, the time's awry,
Bide awhile, let be.

He. Take my wage then, lay it by,
Till 't come back with thee.

The red money, the white money,
Both to thee I bring —

She. Bring ye aught beside, honey?

He. Honey, ay, the ring.

Duet. But how much longer, and longer, and
longer,
O how much longer shall the waiting
last?
Berries red are grown, April birds are
flown,
Martinmas gone over, and the harvest
past.

[Applause.]

Mrs. S. (aside). O she's a pretty maid, and
sings so small
And high, 'tis like a flute. And she must blush
Till all her face is roses newly blown.
How folks do clap! She knows not where to look.
There now she's off; he standing like a man
To face them.

Mrs. G. (aside). Makes his bow, and after her;
But what's the good of clapping when they're
gone?

Mrs. T. (aside). Why 'tis a London fashion as
I'm told,
And means they'd have 'em back to sing again.

Mrs. J. (aside). Neighbors, look where her
father, red as fire,
Sits pleased and 'shamed, smoothing his Sunday
hat;
And Parson bustles out. Clap on, clap on.
Coming? Not she! There comes her sweetheart
though.

VICAR presents the young man again.

SONG.

I.

Rain clouds flew beyond the fell,
 No more did thunders lower,
 Patter, patter, on the beck
 Dropt a clearing shower.
 Eddying floats of creamy foam
 Flecked the waters brown,
 As we rode up to cross the ford,
 Rode up from yonder town.
 Waiting on the weather,
 She and I together,
 Waiting on the weather,
 Till the flood went down.

II.

The sun came out, the wet leaf shone,
 Dripped the wildwood vine.
 Betide me well, betide me woe,
 That hour's forever mine.
 With thee Mary, with thee Mary,
 Full oft I pace again,
 Asleep, awake, up yonder glen,
 And hold thy bridle rein.
 Waiting on the weather,
 Thou and I together,
 Waiting on the weather,
 Till the flood shall wane.

III.

And who, though hope did come to naught,
 Would memory give away?
 I lighted down, she leaned full low,
 Nor chid that hour's delay.
 With thee Mary, with thee Mary,
 Methought my life to crown,
 But we ride up, but we ride up,
 No more from yonder town.
 Waiting on the weather,
 Thou and I together,
 Waiting on the weather,
 Till the flood go down.

Mrs. J. (aside). Well, very well; but what of fiddler Sam?

I ask you, neighbors, if 't be not his turn.
 An honest man, and ever pays his score;
 Born in the parish, old, blind as a bat,
 And strangers sing before him; 'tis a shame!

Mrs. S. (aside). Ay, but his daughter —

Mrs. J. (aside). Why, the maid's a maid
 One would not set to guide the chant in church,
 But when she sings to earn her father's bread,
 The mildest mother's son may cry "Amen."

Mrs. S. (aside). They say he plays not always true.

Mrs. J. (aside). What then?

Mrs. T. (aside). Here comes my lady. She's
 too fat by half

For love songs. O! the lace upon her gown,
 I wish I had the getting of it up,
 'Twould be a pretty penny in my pouch.

Mrs. J. (aside). Be quiet now for manners.

VICAR presents a lady, who sings.

I.

Dark flocks of wildfowl riding out the storm
Upon a pitching sea,
Beyond gray rollers vex'd that rear and form,
When piping winds urge on their destiny,
To fall back ruined in white continually.

And I at our trysting stone,
Whereto I came down alone,
Was fain o' the wind's wild moan.
O, welcome were wrack and were rain
And beat of the battling main,
For the sake of love's sweet pain,
For the smile in two brown eyes,
For the love in any wise,
To bide though the last day dies;
For a hand on my wet hair,
For a kiss e'en yet I wear,
For — bonny Jock was there.

II.

Pale precipices while the sun lay low
Tinct faintly of the rose,
And mountain islands mirror'd in a flow,
Forgotten of all winds (their manifold
Peaks reared into the glory and the glow),
Floated in purple and gold.
And I, o'er the rocks alone,
Of a shore all silent grown,

Came down to our trysting stone.
And sighed when the solemn ray
Paled in the wake o' the day.
"Wellaway, wellaway —
Comfort is not by the shore,
Going the gold that it wore,
Purple and rose are no more,
World and waters are wan,
And night will be here anon,
And — bonny Jock's gone."

[Moderate applause, and calls for fiddler Sam.]

Mrs. J. (aside). Now, neighbors, call again and
be not 'shamed;
Stand by the parish, and the parish folk,
Them that are poor. I told you! here he comes,
Parson looks glum, but brings him and his girl.

The fiddler Sam plays, and his daughter sings.

Touch the sweet string. Fly forth, my heart,
Upon the music like a bird;
The silvery notes shall add their part,
And haply yet thou shalt be heard.
Touch the sweet string.

The youngest wren of nine
Dimpled, dark, and merry,
Brown her locks, and her two eyne
Browner than a berry.

When I was not in love
Maidens met I many;

Under sun now walks but one,
Nor others mark I any.

Twin lambs, a mild-eyed ewe,
That would her follow bleating,
A heifer white as snow
I'll give to my sweet sweeting.

Touch the sweet string.
If yet too young,
O love of loves, for this my song,
I'll pray thee count it all unsung,
And wait thy leisure, wait it long.
Touch the sweet string.

[*Much applause.*]

Vicar. You hear them, Sam. You needs must
play again,
Your neighbors ask it.

Fiddler. Thank ye, neighbors all,
I have my feelings though I be but poor;
I've tanged the fiddle here this forty year,
And I should know the trick on 't.

The fiddler plays, and his daughter sings.

For Exmoor —
For Exmoor, where the red deer run, my weary
heart doth cry.
She that will a rover wed, far her foot shall hie.
Narrow, narrow, shows the street, dull the narrow
sky.

(*Buy my cherries, whiteheart cherries, good my mas-
ters, buy.*)

For Exmoor —
O he left me, left alone, aye to think and sigh,
“Lambs feed down yon sunny coombe, hind and
yearling shy,
Mid the shrouding vapors walk now like ghosts
on high.”

(*Buy my cherries, blackheart cherries, lads and las-
sies, buy.*)

For Exmoor —
Dear my dear, why did ye so? Evil days have I,
Mark no more the antler'd stag, hear the curlew
cry.

Milking at my father's gate while he leans anigh.
(*Buy my cherries, whiteheart, blackheart, golden girls,
O buy.*)

Mrs. T. (aside). I've known him play that Ex-
moor song afore.

Ah me! and I'm from Exmoor. I could wish
To hear 't no more.

Mrs. S. (aside). Neighbors, 'tis mighty hot.
Ay, now they throw the window up, that's well,
A body could not breathe.

[*The fiddler and his daughter go away.*]

Mrs. J. (aside). They'll hear no parson's preach-
ing, no not they!
But innocenter songs, I do allow,
They could not well have sung than these to-
night.

That man knows just so well as if he saw
They were not welcome.

The VICAR stands up, on the point of beginning to read, when the tuning and twang of the fiddle is heard close outside the open window, and the daughter sings in a clear, cheerful voice. A little tittering is heard in the room, and the VICAR pauses discomfited.

I.

O my heart! what a coil is here!
Laurie, why will ye count me dear!
Laurie, Laurie, lad, make not wail,
With a wiser lass ye'll sure prevail,
For ye sing like a woodland nightingale.
And there's no sense in it under the sun;
For of three that woo I can take but one,
So what's to be done — what's to be done?

And

There's no sense in it under the sun.

II.

Hal, brave Hal, from your foreign parts
Come home you'll choose among kinder hearts.
Forget, forget, you're too good to hold
A fancy 'twere best should faint, grow cold,
And fade like an August marigold;
For of three that woo I can take but one,
And what's to be done — what's to be done?
There's no sense in it under the sun.

And

Of three that woo I can take but one.

III.

Geordie, Geordie, I count you true,
Though language sweet I have none for you.

Nay, but take me home to the churning mill
When cherry boughs white on yon mounting hill
Hang over the tufts o' the daffodil.

For what's to be done — what's to be done?

Of three that woo I must e'en take one,

Or there's no sense in it under the sun,

And

What's to be done — what's to be done?

V. (*aside*). What's to be done, indeed!Wife (*aside*). Done! nothing, love.Either the thing has done itself, or *they*

Must undo. Did they call for fiddler Sam?

Well, now they have him.

[*More tuning heard outside.*]Mrs. J. (*aside*). Live and let live's my motto.

Mrs. T. So 'tis mine.

Who's Sam, that he must fly in Parson's face?

He's had his turn. He never gave these lights,

Cut his best flowers —

Mrs. S. (*aside*). He takes no pride in us.
Speak up, good neighbor, get the window shut.Mrs. J. (*rising*). I ask your pardon truly, that I
do —La! but the window — there's a parlous draught;
The window punishes rheumatic folk —

We'd have it shut, sir.

Others. Truly, that we would.

V. Certainly, certainly, my friends, you shall.

[*The window is shut, and the Reading begins amid
marked attention.*]