

# *Edmund Spenser* (?1552–1599)

## **Prothalamion: or, A Spousal Verse**

Calm was the day, and through the trembling air  
Sweet-breathing Zephyrus did softly play  
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay  
Hot Titan's beams, which then did glisten fair;  
When I, (whom sullen care, 5  
Through discontent of my long fruitless stay  
In prince's court, and expectation vain  
Of idle hopes, which still do fly away,  
Like empty shadows, did afflict my brain,)  
Walked forth to ease my pain 10  
Along the shore of silver streaming Thames;  
Whose rutty bank, the which his river hems,  
Was painted all with variable flowers,  
And all the meads adorned with dainty gems,  
Fit to deck maidens' bowers, 15  
And crown their paramours  
Against the bridal day, which is not long:  
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

There, in a meadow, by the river's side,  
A flock of Nymphs I chanced to espy, 20  
All lovely daughters of the flood thereby,  
With goodly greenish locks, all loose untied,  
As each had been a bride;  
And each one had a little wicker basket,  
Made of fine twigs, entrained curiously, 25  
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket,  
And with fine fingers cropt full feateously  
The tender stalks on high.  
Of every sort, which in that meadow grew,  
They gathered some; the violet, pallid blue, 30  
The litle daisy, that at evening closes,  
The virgin lily, and the primrose true,

With store of vermeil roses,  
To deck their bridegrooms' posies  
Against the bridal day, which was not long: 35  
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

With that I saw two swans of goodly hue  
Come softly swimming down along the lee;  
Two fairer birds I yet did never see;  
The snow, which doth the top of Pindus strew, 40  
Did never whiter shew,  
Nor Jove himself, when he a swan would be  
For love of Leda, whiter did appear;  
Yet Leda was (they say) as white as he,  
Yet not so white as these, nor nothing near; 45  
So purely white they were,  
That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,  
Seemed foul to them, and bade his billows spare  
To wet their silken feathers, lest they might  
Soil their fair plumes with water not so fair, 50  
And mar their beauties bright,  
That shone as heaven's light,  
Against their bridal day, which was not long:  
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

Eftsoons, the Nymphs, which now had flowers their fill, 55  
Ran all in haste to see that silver brood,  
As they came floating on the crystal flood;  
Whom when they saw, they stood amazed still,  
Their wondering eyes to fill;  
Them seem'd they never saw a sight so fair, 60  
Of fowls, so lovely, that they sure did deem  
Them heavenly born, or to be that same pair  
Which through the sky draw Venus' silver team;  
For sure they did not seem  
To be begot of any earthly seed, 65  
But rather angels, or of angels' breed;  
Yet were they bred of Somers-heat, they say,  
In sweetest season, when each flower and weed  
The earth did fresh array;  
So fresh they seemed as day, 70  
Even as their bridal day, which was not long:  
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

Then forth they all out of their baskets drew  
Great store of flowers, the honour of the field,

That to the sense did fragrant odours yield, 75  
 All which upon those goodly birds they threw,  
 And all the waves did strew,  
 That like old Peneus' waters they did seem,  
 When down along by pleasant Tempe's shore,  
 Scattered with flowers, through Thessaly they stream, 80  
 That they appear, through lilies' plenteous store,  
 Like a bride's chamber floor.  
 Two of those Nymphs, meanwhile, two garlands bound  
 Of freshest flowers which in that mead they found,  
 The which presenting all in trim array, 85  
 Their snowy foreheads therewithal they crowned,  
 Whilst one did sing this lay,  
 Prepared against that day,  
 Against their bridal day, which was not long:  
 Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song. 90

'Ye gentle Birds! the world's fair ornament,  
 And heaven's glory, whom this happy hour  
 Doth lead unto your lovers' blissful bower,  
 Joy may you have, and gentle hearts' content  
 Of your love's complement; 95  
 And let fair Venus, that is Queen of Love,  
 With her heart-quelling son upon you smile,  
 Whose smile, they say, hath virtue to remove  
 All love's dislike, and friendship's faulty guile  
 For ever to assoil. 100  
 Let endless peace your steadfast hearts accord,  
 And blessed plenty wait upon your board;  
 And let your bed with pleasures chaste abound,  
 That fruitful issue may to you afford,  
 Which may your foes confound, 105  
 And make your joys redound  
 Upon your bridal day, which is not long:  
 Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.'

So ended she; and all the rest around  
 To her redoubled that her undersong, 110  
 Which said, their bridal day should not be long:  
 And gentle Echo from the neighbour ground  
 Their accents did resound.  
 So forth those joyous birds did pass along  
 Adown the lee, that to them murmured low, 115  
 As he would speak, but that he lacked a tongue,  
 Yet did by signs his glad affection show,  
 Making his stream run slow.

And all the fowl which in his flood did dwell  
Gan flock about these twain, that did excel 120  
The rest, so far as Cynthia doth shend  
The lesser stars. So they, enranged well,  
Did on those two attend,  
And their best service lend  
Against their wedding day, which was not long: 125  
    Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

At length they all to merry London came,  
To merry London, my most kindly nurse,  
That to me gave this life's first native source,  
Though from another place I take my name, 130  
An house of ancient fame:  
There when they came, whereas those bricky towers  
The which on Thames' broad aged back do ride,  
Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers,  
There whilome wont the Templar Knights to bide, 135  
Till they decayed through pride;  
Next whereunto there stands a stately place,  
Where oft I gained gifts and goodly grace  
Of that great lord, which therein wont to dwell,  
Whose want too well now feels my friendless case; 140  
But ah! here fits not well  
Old woes, but joys, to tell  
Against the bridal day, which is not long:  
    Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

Yet therein now doth lodge a noble peer, 145  
Great England's glory, and the world's wide wonder,  
Whose dreadful name late through all Spain did thunder,  
And Hercules' two pillars standing near  
Did make to quake and fear:  
Fair branch of honour, flower of chivalry! 150  
That fillest England with thy triumph's fame,  
Joy have thou of thy noble victory,  
And endless happiness of thine own name  
That promiseth the same;  
That through thy prowess, and victorious arms, 155  
Thy country may be freed from foreign harms,  
And great Elisa's glorious name may ring  
Through all the world, filled with thy wide alarms,  
Which some brave Muse may sing  
To ages following, 160  
Upon the bridal day, which is not long:  
    Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

From those high towers this noble lord issuing,  
 Like radiant Hesper, when his golden hair  
 In the ocean billows he hath bathed fair, 165  
 Descended to the river's open viewing,  
 With a great train ensuing.  
 Above the rest were goodly to be seen  
 Two gentle Knights of lovely face and feature,  
 Beseeming well the bower of any queen, 170  
 With gifts of wit, and ornaments of nature,  
 Fit for so goodly stature,  
 That like the Twins of Jove they seem'd in sight,  
 Which deck the baldric of the heavens bright;  
 They two, forth pacing to the river's side, 175  
 Received those two fair Brides, their love's delight;  
 Which, at the appointed tide,  
 Each one did make his bride  
 Against their bridal day, which is not long:  
 Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song. 180

FROM *THE FAERIE QUEENE*

1. The bower of Bliss (II. xii)

LXX

Eftsoons they heard a most melodious sound,  
 Of all that might delight a dainty ear,  
 Such as at once might not on living ground,  
 Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere; 625  
 Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,  
 To read what manner music that might be;  
 For all that pleasing is to living ear  
 Was there consorted in one harmony;  
 Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree: 630

LXXI

The joyous birds, shrouded in cheerful shade,  
 Their notes unto the voice attemperd sweet;  
 The angelical soft trembling voices made  
 To the instruments divine response meet;  
 The silver-sounding instruments did meet 635  
 With the base murmur of the waters' fall;  
 The waters' fall with difference discreet,  
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;  
 The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.

LXXII

There, whence that music seemed heard to be, 640  
 Was the fair witch herself now solacing  
 With a new lover, whom, through sorcery  
 And witchcraft, she from far did thither bring:  
 There she had him now laid a slumbering  
 In secret shade after long wanton joys; 645  
 Whilst round about them pleasantly did sing  
 Many fair ladies and lascivious boys,  
 That ever mixt their song with light licentious toys.

LXXIII

And all that while right over him she hong 650  
 With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,  
 As seeking medicine whence she was stong,  
 Or greedily depasturing delight;  
 And oft inclining down, with kisses light,  
 For fear of waking him, his lips bedewed,  
 And through his humid eyes did suck his sprite, 655  
 Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;  
 Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rued.

LXXIV

The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;  
*Ah! see, whoso fair thing dost fain to see,*  
*In springing flower the image of thy day!* 660  
*Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she*  
*Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,*  
*That fairer seems the less ye see her may!*  
*Lo! see soon after how more bold and free*  
*Her bared bosom she doth broad display;* 665  
*Lo! see soon after how she fades and falls away!*

LXXV

*So passeth, in the passing of a day,*  
*Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;*  
*Ne more doth flourish after first decay,*  
*That erst was sought to deck both bed and bower* 670  
*Of many a lady, and many a paramour!*  
*Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,*  
*For soon comes age that will her pride deflower:*  
*Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,*  
*Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime* 675

LXXVI

He ceased; and then gan all the choir of birds  
 Their diverse notes to attune unto his lay,  
 As in approvance of his pleasing words.

The constant pair heard all that he did say,  
 Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way 680  
 Through many covert groves and thickets close,  
 In which they creeping did at last display  
 That wanton Lady with her lover lose,  
 Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

## LXXVII

Upon a bed of roses she was laid, 685  
 As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;  
 And was arrayed, or rather disarrayed,  
 All in a veil of silk and silver thin,  
 That hid no whit her alabaster skin,  
 But rather showed more white, if more might be: 690  
 More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;  
 Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see  
 Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

## LXXVIII

Her snowy breast was bare to ready spoil  
 Of hungry eyes, which n'ote therewith be filled; 695  
 And yet through languor of her late sweet toil,  
 Few drops, more clear then nectar, forth distilled,  
 That like pure orient pearls adown it trilled;  
 And her fair eyes, sweet smiling in delight,  
 Moistened their fiery beams, with which she thrilled 700  
 Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,  
 Which, sparkling on the silent waves, does seem more bright.

## LXXIX

The young man, sleeping by her, seemed to be  
 Some goodly swain of honourable place;  
 That certes it great pity was to see 705  
 Him his nobility so foul deface:  
 A sweet regard and amiable grace,  
 Mixed with manly sternness, did appear,  
 Yet sleeping, in his well-proportioned face  
 And on his tender lips the downy hair; 710  
 Did now but freshly spring, and silken blossoms bear.

## LXXX

His warlike arms, the idle instruments  
 Of sleeping praise, were hung upon a tree;  
 And his brave shield, full of old monuments,  
 Was foully rased, that none the signs might see; 715  
 Ne for them, ne for honour cared he,

Ne ought that did to his advancement tend;  
But in lewd loves, and wasteful luxury,  
His days, his goods, his body he did spend:  
O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend! 720

LXXXI

The noble elfe and careful palmer drew  
So nigh them, minding nought but lustful game,  
That sudden forth they on them rushed, and threw  
A subtle net, which only for that same  
The skilful palmer formally did frame: 725  
So held them under fast; the whiles the rest  
Fled all away for fear of fouller shame.  
The fair enchantress, so unwares opprest,  
Tried all her arts and all her sleights thence out to wrest;

LXXXII

And eke her lover strove; but all in vain: 730  
For that same net so cunningly was wound,  
That neither guile nor force might it distract.  
They took them both, and both them strongly bound  
In captive bands, which there they ready found:  
But her in chains of adamant he tied; 735  
For nothing else might keep her safe and sound:  
But Verdant (so he hight) he soon untied,  
And counsel sage in stead thereof to him applied.

LXXXIII

But all those pleasant bowers, and palace brave,  
Guyon broke down with rigour pitiless: 740  
Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save  
Them from the tempest of his wrathfulness,  
But that their bliss he turned to balefulness,  
Their groves he felled; their gardens did deface;  
Their arbours spoil; their cabinets suppress; 745  
Their banquet-houses burn; their buildings race;  
And, of the fairest late, now made the foulest place.

LXXXIV

Then led they her away, and eke that knight  
They with them led, both sorrowful and said:  
The way they came, the same returned they right, 750  
Till they arrived where they lately had  
Charmed those wild beasts that raged with fury mad;  
Which, now awaking, fierce at them gan fly,



As in their mistress' rescue, whom they lad;  
 But them the palmer soon did pacify. 755  
 Then Guyon asked, what meant those beasts which there did lie.

## LXXXV

Said he; 'These seeming beasts are men in deed,  
 Whom this enchantress hath transformed thus;  
 Whilome her lovers, which her lusts did feed,  
 Now turned into figures hideous, 760  
 According to their minds like monstrous.'  
 'Sad end,' quoth he, 'of life intemperate,  
 And mournful meed of joys delicious!  
 But, Palmer, if it might thee so aggrate,  
 Let them returned be unto their former state.' 765

## LXXXVI

Straightway he with his virtuous staff them strook,  
 And straight of beasts they comely men became;  
 Yet being men they did unmanly look,  
 And stared ghastly; some for inward shame,  
 And some for wrath to see their captive Dame: 770  
 But one above the rest in special  
 That had an hog been late, hight Gryll by name,  
 Repined greatly, and did him miscall  
 That had from hoggish form him brought to natural.

## LXXXVII

Said Guyon; 'See the mind of beastly man, 775  
 That hath so soon forgot the excellence  
 Of his creation, when he life began,  
 That now he chooseth with vile difference  
 To be a beast, and lack intelligence!  
 To whom the Palmer thus; 'The dunghill kind 780  
 Delights in filth and foul incontinence:  
 Let Gryll be Gryll, and have his hoggish mind;  
 But let us hence depart whilst weather serves and wind.'

## 2. The garden of Adonis (III. vi)

## XXX

In that same garden all the goodly flowers,  
 Wherewith dame Nature doth her beautify  
 And decks the garlands of her paramours,  
 Are fetched: there is the first seminary 265  
 Of all things that are born to live and die,

According to their kinds. Long work it were  
Here to account the endless progeny  
Of all the weeds that bud and blossom there;  
But so much as doth need must needs be counted here. 270

XXXI

It sited was in fruitful soil of old,  
And girt in with two walls on either side,  
The one of iron, the other of bright gold,  
That none might thorough break, nor overstride:  
And double gates it had which opened wide, 275  
By which both in and out men moten pass;  
The one fair and fresh, the other old and dried:  
Old Genius the porter of them was,  
Old Genius, the which a double nature has.

XXXII

He letteth in, he letteth out to wend 280  
All that to come into the world desire:  
A thousand thousand naked babes attend  
About him day and night, which do require  
That he with fleshly weeds would them attire:  
Such as him list, such as eternal fate 285  
Ordained hath, he clothes with sinful mire,  
And sendeth forth to live in mortal state,  
Till they again return back by the hinder gate.

XXXIII

After that they again returned been,  
They in that garden planted be again, 290  
And grow afresh, as they had never seen  
Fleshly corruption nor mortal pain:  
Some thousand years so do they there remain,  
And then of him are clad with other hue,  
Or sent into the changeful world again, 295  
Till thither they return where first they grew:  
So, like a wheel, around they run from old to new.

XXXIV

Ne needs there gardener to set or sow,  
To plant or prune; for of their own accord 300  
All things, as they created were, do grow,  
And yet remember well the mighty word  
Which first was spoken by the Almighty Lord  
That bade them to *increase and multiply*:  
Ne do they need, with water of the ford

Or of the clouds, to moisten their roots dry; 305  
 For in themselves eternal moisture they imply.

## XXXV

Infinite shapes of creatures there are bred,  
 And uncouth forms, which none yet ever knew:  
 And every sort is in a sundry bed  
 Set by itself, and ranked in comely row; 310  
 Some fit for reasonable souls to indue;  
 Some made for beasts, some made for birds to wear;  
 And all the fruitful spawn of fishes' hue  
 In endless ranks along enranged were,  
 That seemed the ocean could not contain them there. 315

## XXXVI

Daily they grow, and daily forth are sent  
 Into the world, it to replenish more;  
 Yet is the stock not lessened nor spent,  
 But still remains in everlasting store  
 As it at first created was of yore: 320  
 For in the wide womb of the world there lies,  
 In hateful darkness and in deep horror,  
 An huge eternal Chaos, which supplies  
 The substances of Nature's fruitful progenies.

## XXXVII

All things from thence do their first being fetch, 325  
 And borrow matter whereof they are made;  
 Which, whenas form and feature it does ketch,  
 Becomes a body, and doth then invade  
 The state of life out of the grisly shade.  
 That substance is eterne, and bideth so; 330  
 Ne, when the life decays and form does fade,  
 Doth it consume and into nothing go,  
 But changed is and often altered to and fro.

## XXXVIII

The substance is not changed nor altered,  
 But the only form and outward fashion; 335  
 For every substance is conditioned  
 To change her hue, and sundry forms to don,  
 Meet for her temper and complexion:  
 For forms are variable, and decay  
 By course of kind and by occasion; 340  
 And that fair flower of beauty fades away,  
 As doth the lily fresh before the sunny ray.

XXXIX

Great enemy to it, and to all the rest  
That in the Garden of Adonis springs,  
Is wicked Time; who with his scythe addrest 345  
Does mow the flowering herbs and goodly things,  
And all their glory to the ground down flings,  
Where they do wither and are foully marred:  
He flies about, and with his flaggy wings  
Beats down both leaves and buds without regard, 350  
Ne ever pity may relent his malice hard.

XL

Yet pity often did the gods relent,  
To see so fair things marred and spiled quite:  
And their great mother Venus did lament  
The loss of her dear brood, her dear delight: 355  
Her heart was pierced with pity at the sight,  
When walking through the garden them she saw,  
Yet no'te she find redress for such despite:  
For all that lives is subject to that law:  
All things decay in time, and to their end do draw. 360

XLI

But were it not that Time their troubler is,  
All that in this delightful garden grows  
Should happy be, and have immortal bliss:  
For here all plenty and all pleasure flows;  
And sweet Love gentle fits amongst them throws, 365  
Without fell rancour or fond jealousy:  
Frankly each paramour his leman knows;  
Each bird his mate; ne any does envy  
Their goodly merriment and gay felicity.

XLII

There is continual spring, and harvest there 370  
Continual, both meeting at one time:  
For both the boughs do laughing blossoms bear,  
And with fresh colours deck the wanton prime,  
And eke at once the heavy trees they climb,  
Which seem to labour under their fruit's load: 375  
The whiles the joyous birds make their pastime  
Amongst the shady leaves, their sweet abode,  
And their true loves without suspicion tell abroad.

XLIII

Right in the midst of that paradise  
There stood a stately mount, on whose round top 380

A gloomy grove of myrtle trees did rise,  
 Whose shady boughs sharp steel did never lop,  
 Nor wicked beasts their tender buds did crop,  
 But like a garland compassed the height,  
 And from their fruitful sides sweet gum did drop, 385  
 That all the ground, with precious dew bedight,  
 Threw forth most dainty odours and most sweet delight.

## XLIV

And in the thickest covert of that shade  
 There was a pleasant arbour, not by art  
 But of the trees' own inclination made, 390  
 Which knitting their rank branches part to part,  
 With wanton ivy-twine entrayld athwart,  
 And eglantine and caprifole among,  
 Fashioned above within their inmost part,  
 That neither Phoebus' beams could through them throng, 395  
 Nor Aeolus' sharp blast could work them any wrong.

## XLV

And all about grew every sort of flower,  
 To which sad lovers were transformed of yore;  
 Fresh Hyacinthus, Phoebus' paramour  
 And dearest love; 400  
 Foolish Narciss, that likes the watery shore;  
 Sad Amaranthus, made a flower but late,  
 Sad Amaranthus, in whose purple gore  
 Me seems I see Amintas' wretched fate,  
 To whom sweet poet's verse hath given endless date. 405

## XLVI

There wont fair Venus often to enjoy  
 Her dear Adonis' joyous company,  
 And reap sweet pleasure of the wanton boy:  
 There yet, some say, in secret he does lie,  
 Lapped in flowers and precious spicery, 410  
 By her hid from the world, and from the skill  
 Of Stygian gods, which do her love envy;  
 But she herself, whenever that she will,  
 Possesseth him, and of his sweetness takes her fill:

## XLVII

And sooth, it seems, they say; for he may not 415  
 For ever die, and ever buried be  
 In baleful night where all things are forgot;  
 All be he subject to mortality,

Yet is eterne in mutability,  
And by succession made perpetual, 420  
Transformed oft, and changed diversly:  
For him the father of all forms they call;  
Therefore needs mote he live, that living gives to all.

XLVIII

There now he liveth in eternal bliss,  
Joying his goddess, and of her enjoyed; 425  
Ne feareth he henceforth that foe of his,  
Which with his cruel tusk him deadly cloyed:  
For that wild boar, the which him once annoyed,  
She firmly hath imprisoned for aye  
(That her sweet love his malice might avoid) 430  
In a strong rocky cave, which is, they say,  
Hewn underneath that mount, that none him loosen may.

XLIX

There now he lives in everlasting joy,  
With many of the gods in company  
Which thither haunt, and with the winged boy, 435  
Sporting himself in safe felicity:  
Who when he hath with spoils and cruelty  
Ransacked the world, and in the woeful hearts  
Of many wretches set his triumphs high,  
Thither resorts, and, laying his sad darts 440  
Aside, with fair Adonis plays his wanton parts.

L

And his true love, fair Psyche, with him plays,  
Fair Psyche to him lately reconciled,  
After long troubles and unmeet upbrays, 445  
With which his mother Venus her reviled,  
And eke himself her cruelly exiled:  
But now in steadfast love and happy state  
She with him lives, and hath him borne a child,  
Pleasure, that doth both gods and men aggrate,  
Pleasure, the daughter of Cupid and Psyche late. 450

### 3. Mutability claims to rule the world (VII. vii)

XIII

This great grandmother of all creatures bred,  
Great Nature, ever young, yet full of eld; 110  
Still moving, yet unmoved from her stead;

Unseen of any, yet of all beheld;  
 Thus sitting in her throne, as I have teld,  
 Before her came Dame Mutability;  
 And, being low before her presence feld 115  
 With meek obeisance and humility,  
 Thus gan her plaintive plea with words to amplify:

## XIV

‘To thee, O greatest goddess, only great,  
 An humble suppliant lo! I lowly fly,  
 Seeking for right, which I of thee entreat; 120  
 Who right to all dost deal indifferently,  
 Damning all wrong and tortious injury,  
 Which any of thy creatures do to other,  
 Oppressing them with power unequally,  
 Sith of them all thou art the equal mother, 125  
 And knittest each to each, as brother unto brother:

## XV

‘To thee therefore of this same Jove I plain,  
 And of his fellow gods that feign to be,  
 That challenge to themselves the whole world’s reign,  
 Of which the greatest part is due to me, 130  
 And heaven itself by heritage in fee:  
 For heaven and earth I both alike do deem,  
 Sith heaven and earth are both alike to thee;  
 And gods no more than men thou dost esteem:  
 For even the gods to thee, as men to gods, do seem. 135

## XVI

‘Then weigh, O sovereign goddess, by what right  
 These gods do claim the world’s whole sovereignty;  
 And that is only due unto my might  
 Arrogate to themselves ambitiously: 140  
 As for the gods’ own principality,  
 Which Jove usurps unjustly, that to be  
 My heritage, Jove’s self cannot deny,  
 From my great grandsire Titan unto me  
 Derived by due descent; as is well known to thee.

## XVII

‘Yet mauger Jove, and all his gods beside, 145  
 I do possess the world’s most regiment;  
 As if ye please it into parts divide,  
 And every part’s inholders to convent

131 Property, possession. 145 In spite of. 146 Chief government. 147 Inhabitants. 147 Convene.

Shall to your eyes appear incontinent.  
And first, the Earth (great mother of us all) 150  
That only seems unmoved and permanent,  
And unto Mutability not thrall,  
Yet is she changed in part, and eke in general:

XVIII

'For all that from her springs, and is ybred,  
However fair it flourish for a time, 155  
Yet see we soon decay; and, being dead,  
To turn again unto their earthly slime:  
Yet, out of their decay and mortal crime,  
We daily see new creatures to arise,  
And of their winter spring another prime, 160  
Unlike in form, and changed by strange disguise:  
So turn they still about, and change in restless wise.

XIX

'As for her tenants; that is, man and beasts;  
The beasts we daily see massacred die  
As thralls and vassals unto men's beheasts; 165  
And men themselves do change continually,  
From youth to eld, from wealth to poverty,  
From good to bad, from bad to worst of all:  
Ne do their bodies only flit and fly;  
But eke their minds (which they immortal call) 170  
Still change and vary thoughts, as new occasions fall.

XX

'Ne is the water in more constant case;  
Whether those same on high, or these below:  
For the ocean moveth still from place to place;  
And every river still doth ebb and flow; 175  
Ne any lake, that seems most still and slow,  
Ne pool so small, that can his smoothness hold  
When any wind doth under heaven blow;  
With which the clouds are also tossed and rolled,  
Now like great hills; and straight, like sluices, them unfold. 180

XXI

'So likewise are all watry living wights  
Still tossed and turned with continual change,  
Never abiding in their steadfast plights:  
The fish, still floating, do at random range,  
And never rest, but evermore exchange 185  
Their dwelling places, as the streams them carry:  
Ne have the watry fowls a certain grange





XXVI

‘So in them all reigns Mutability;  
However these, that gods themselves do call,  
Of them do claim the rule and sovereignty;  
As Vesta, of the fire ethereal;  
Vulcan of this with us so usual; 230  
Ops, of the earth; and Juno, of the air;  
Neptune, of seas; and Nymphs, of rivers all:  
For all those rivers to me subject are;  
And all the rest, which they usurp, be all my share.

XXVII

‘Which to approven true, as I have told, 235  
Vouchsafe, O goddess, to thy presence call  
The rest which do the world in being hold;  
As times and seasons of the year that fall:  
Of all the which demand in general,  
Or judge thyself, by verdict of thine eye, 240  
Whether to me they are not subject all.’  
Nature did yield thereto; and by-and-by  
Bade Order call them all before her Majesty.

XXVIII

So forth issued the Seasons of the year:  
First, lusty Spring all dight in leaves of flowers, 245  
That freshly budded and new blooms did bear,  
In which a thousand birds had built their bowers  
That sweetly sung to call forth paramours;  
And in his hand a javelin he did bear,  
And on his head (as fit for warlike stoures) 250  
A gilt engraven morion he did wear;  
That as some did him love, so others did him fear.

XXIX

Then came the jolly Summer, being dight  
In a thin silken cassock coloured green,  
That was unlined all, to be more light: 255  
And on his head a garland well beseen  
He wore, from which as he had chafed been  
The sweat did drop; and in his hand he bore  
A bow and shafts, as he in forest green  
Had hunted late the leopard or the boar, 260  
And now would bathe his limbs with labour heated sore.

XXX

Then came the Autumn all in yellow clad,  
As though he joyed in his plenteous store,

Laden with fruits that made him laugh, full glad  
 That he had banished hunger, which before 265  
 Had by the belly oft him pinched sore:  
 Upon his head a wreath, that was enrolled  
 With ears of corn of every sort, he bore;  
 And in his hand a sickle he did hold,  
 To reap the ripened fruits the which the earth had yold. 270

## XXXI

Lastly, came Winter clothed all in frieze,  
 Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill;  
 Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freeze,  
 And the dull drops, that from his purpled bill 275  
 As from a limbec did adown distill:  
 In his right hand a tipped staff he held,  
 With which his feeble steps he stayed still;  
 For he was faint with cold, and weak with eld;  
 That scarce his loosed limbs he able was to weld.

## XXXII

These, marching softly, thus in order went. 280  
 And after them the Months all riding came:  
 First, sturdy March, with brows full sternly bent  
 And armed strongly, rode upon a ram,  
 The same which over Hellespontus swam;  
 Yet in his hand a spade he also hent, 285  
 And in a bag all sorts of seeds ysame,  
 Which on the earth he strewed as he went,  
 And filled her womb with fruitful hope of nourishment.

## XXXIII

Next came fresh April, full of lustyhed,  
 And wanton as a kid whose horn new buds: 290  
 Upon a bull he rode, the same which led  
 Europa floating through the Argolic floods;  
 His horns were gilden all with golden studs,  
 And garnished with garlands goodly dight  
 Of all the fairest flowers and freshest buds 295  
 Which the earth brings forth; and wet he seemed in sight  
 With waves, through which he waded for his love's delight.

## XXXIV

Then came fair May, the fairest maid on ground,  
 Decked all with dainties of her season's pride,  
 And throwing flowers out of her lap around: 300  
 Upon two brethren's shoulders she did ride,  
 The Twins of Leda; which on either side  
 Supported her like to their sovereign queen:

Lord! how all creatures laughed when her they spied,  
And leaped and danced as they had ravished been! 305  
And Cupid self about her fluttered all in green.

XXXV

And after her came jolly June, arrayed  
All in green leaves, as he a player were;  
Yet in his time he wrought as well as played,  
That by his plough-irons might right well appear: 310  
Upon a crab he rode, that him did bear  
With crooked crawling steps an uncouth pace,  
And backward yode, as bargemen wont to fare  
Bending their force contrary to their face;  
Like that ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace 315

XXXVI

Then came hot July boiling like to fire,  
That all his garments he did cast away:  
Upon a lion raging yet with ire  
He boldly rode, and made him to obey: 320  
(It was the beast that whilome did foray  
The Nemaean forest, till the Amphytrionide  
Him slew, and with his hide did him array)  
Behind his back a scythe, and by his side  
Under his belt he bore a sickle circling wide.

XXXVII

The sixth was August, being rich arrayed 325  
In garment all of gold down to the ground:  
Yet rode he not, but led a lovely maid  
Forth by the lily hand, the which was crowned  
With ears of corn, and full her hand was found:  
That was the righteous Virgin, which of old 330  
Lived here on earth, and plenty made abound;  
But, after wrong was loved, and justice sold,  
She left the unrighteous world, and was to heaven extolled.

XXXVIII

Next him September marched eke on foot;  
Yet was he heavy laden with the spoil 335  
Of harvest's riches, which he made his boot,  
And him enriched with bounty of the soil:  
In his one hand, as fit for harvest's toil,  
He held a knife-hook; and in the other hand  
A Pair of Weights, with which he did assoil 340  
Both more and less, where it in doubt did stand,  
And equal gave to each as Justice duly scanned.

## XXXIX

Then came October full of merry glee;  
 For yet his noule was totty of the must,  
 Which he was treading in the wine-vats' see, 345  
 And of the joyous oil, whose gentle gust  
 Made him so frolic and so full of lust:  
 Upon a dreadful scorpion he did ride,  
 The same which by Diana's doom unjust  
 Slew great Orion; and eke by his side 350  
 He had his ploughing-share and coulter ready tied.

## XL

Next was November; he full gross and fat  
 As fed with lard, and that right well might seem;  
 For he had been a fattening hogs of late,  
 That yet his brows with sweat did reek and steam, 355  
 And yet the season was full sharp and breem;  
 In planting eke he took no small delight:  
 Whereon he rode, not easy was to deem;  
 For it a dreadful centaur was in sight,  
 The seed of Saturn and fair Nais, Chiron hight. 360

## XLI

And after him came next the chill December:  
 Yet he, through merry feasting which he made  
 And great bonfires, did not the cold remember;  
 His Saviour's birth his mind so much did glad:  
 Upon a shaggy-bearded goat he rode, 365  
 The same wherewith Dan Jove in tender years,  
 They say, was nourished by the Idaean maid;  
 And in his hand a broad deep bowl he bears,  
 Of which he freely drinks an health to all his peers.

## XLII

Then came old January, wrapped well 370  
 In many weeds to keep the cold away;  
 Yet did he quake and quiver like to quell,  
 And blow his nails to warm them if he may;  
 For they were numbed with holding all the day  
 An hatchet keen, with which he felled wood 375  
 And from the trees did lop the needless spray:  
 Upon an huge great earth-pot stone he stood,  
 From whose wide mouth there flowed forth the Roman Flood.

## XLIII

And lastly came cold February, sitting  
 In an old waggon, for he could not ride, 380

Drawn of two Fishes for the season fitting,  
Which through the flood before did softly slide  
And swim away; yet had he by his side  
His plough and harness fit to till the ground,  
And tools to prune the trees, before the pride 385  
Of hasting prime did make them burgeon round,  
So passed the twelve months forth, and their due places found.

XLIV

And after these there came the day and night,  
Riding together both with equal pace;  
The one on a palfrey black, the other white: 390  
But night had covered her uncomely face  
With a black veil, and held in hand a mace,  
On top whereof the moon and stars were pight,  
And sleep and darkness round about did trace:  
But day did bear upon his sceptre's height 395  
The goodly sun encompassed all with beames bright.

XLV

Then came the Hours, fair daughters of high Jove  
And timely night; the which were all endued  
With wondrous beauty fit to kindle love;  
But they were virgins all, and love eschewed 400  
That might forsack the charge to them foreshowed  
By mighty Jove; who did them porters make  
Of heaven's gate (whence all the gods issued)  
Which they did daily watch, and nightly wake  
By even turns, ne ever did their charge forsake. 405

XLVI

And after all came Life; and lastly Death:  
Death with most grim and grisly visage seen,  
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath;  
Ne ought to see, but like a shade to ween,  
Unbodied, unsouled, unheard, unseen: 410  
But Life was like a fair young lusty boy,  
Such as they feign Dan Cupid to have been,  
Full of delightful health and lively joy,  
Decked all with flowers and wings of gold fit to employ.

XLVII

When these were past, thus gan the Titaness; 415  
'Lo! mighty Mother, now be judge, and say  
Whether in all thy creatures more or less  
CHANGE doth not reign and bear the greatest sway:

For who sees not that Time on all doth prey?  
But times do change and move continually: 420  
So nothing here long standeth in one stay:  
Wherefore this lower world who can deny  
But to be subject still to Mutability?’