

**THE CITY OF THE PLAGUE,
AND OTHER POEMS.
[EDINBURGH-1816]**

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The City of the Plague, and Other Poems. [Edinburgh-1816] by John Wilson

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CITY OF THE PLAGUE,

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

JOHN WILSON,

AUTHOR OF THE ISLE OF PALMS.



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CONTENTS.

THE CITY OF THE PLAGUE.....Page 3

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

The Children's Dance.....	171
Address to a Wild Deer.....	188
The Voice of Departed Friendship.....	197
Lord Ronald's Child.....	200
The Widow.....	207
Solitude.....	213
Bessy Bell and Mary Gray.....	216
The Scholar's Funeral.....	223
The Convict.....	241
The Sisters.....	292
The Farewell and Return.....	295

THE
CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

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CITY OF THE PLAGUE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Time, the Afternoon.—Two Naval Officers walking along the banks of the Thames.—They sit down on a stone seat fronting the river.

Frankfort. My heart feels heavier every step I take
Towards the city. Oh ! that I could drop
Down like a bird upon its nest, at once
Into my mother's house. There might my soul
Find peace, even 'mid the silent emptiness
That told me she had perish'd.

Wilmot. All around
Appears so bright, so tranquil, and so calm,
That happy omens rise on every side,
To strengthen and support us in our fears.

Frank. Oh Wilmot ! to my soul a field of graves,
A church-yard filled with marble monuments,

Profoundly hush'd in death's own sanctity,
Seems not more alien to the voice of Hope
Than that wide wilderness of domes and spires,
Hanging o'er the breathless city.

Wil. See! my friend,
How bright the sunshine dances in its joy
O'er the still flow of this majestic river.
I know not how, but, gazing on that light
So beautiful, all images of death
Fade from my roused soul, and I believe
That our journey here must end in happiness.

Frank. Is it the hour of prayer?

Wil. The evening service,
Methinks, must now be closed.

Frank. There comes no sound
Of organ-peal or choral symphony
From yonder vast cathedral. How it stands
Amid the silent houses, with a strange
Deep silence of its own! I could believe
That many a Sabbath had pass'd prayerless on
Within its holy solitude. No knee
This day, methinks, hath bent before its altar.

Wil. It is a solemn pile! yet to mine eye
There rests above its massive sanctity
The clear blue air of peace.

Frank. A solemn pile!
Aye! there it stands, like a majestic ruin,
Mouldering in a desert; in whose silent heart

No sound hath leave to dwell. I knew it once,
When music in that chosen temple rais'd
Th' adoring soul to Heaven. But one dread year
Hath done the work of ages ; and the Plague
Mocks in his fury the slow hand of time.

Wil. The sun smiles on its walls.

Frank. Why does the finger,
Yellow 'mid the sunshine on the Minster-clock,
Point at that hour ? It is most horrible,
Speaking of midnight in the face of day.
During the very dead of night it stopp'd,
Even at the moment when a hundred hearts
Paus'd with it suddenly, to beat no more.
Yet, wherefore should it run its idle round ?
There is no need that men should count the hours
Of time, thus standing on eternity.
It is a death-like image.

Wil. I could smile
At such fantastic terrors.

Frank. How can I,
When round me silent Nature speaks of death,
Withstand such monitory impulses ?
When yet far off I thought upon the plague,
Sometimes my mother's image struck my soul
In unchang'd meekness and serenity,
And all my fears were gone. But these green banks,
With an unwonted flush of flowers overgrown,
Brown, when I left them last, with frequent feet,

From morn till evening, hurrying to and fro,
In mournful beauty seem encompassing
A still forsaken city of the dead.

Wil. It is the Sabbath-day—the day of rest.

Frank. O unrejoicing Sabbath! not of yore
Did thy sweet evenings die along the Thames
Thus silently! Now every sail is furl'd,
The oar hath dropt from out the rower's hand,
And on thou flow'st in lifeless majesty,
River of a desert lately filled with joy!
O'er all that mighty wilderness of stone
The air is clear and cloudless as at sea
Above the gliding ship. All fires are dead,
And not one single wreath of smoke ascends
Above the stillness of the towers and spires.
How idly hangs that arch magnificent
Across the idle river! Not a speck
Is seen to move along it. There it hangs,
Still as a rainbow in the pathless sky.

Wil. Methinks such words bespeak a soul at rest,
And willing, in this universal calm,
To abide, whate'er it be, the doom of Fate.

Frank. I feel as if such solemn images
Of desolation had recall'd my soul
From its own individual wretchedness;
As if one moment I forgot my parent,
And all the friends I love, in the sublime
And overwhelming presence of mortality.