

**SMITHY RHYMES AND STITHY
CHIMES; OR, "THE SHORT AND
SIMPLE ANNALS OF THE POOR,
SPELT BY THE UNLETTERED
MUSE," OF YOUR HUMBLE BARD**

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Smithy Rhymes and Stithy Chimes; Or, "The Short and Simple Annals of the Poor, Spelt by the Unlettered Muse," of Your Humble Bard by Joseph Senior

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JOSEPH SENIOR

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PREFACE

TO

"SMITHY RHYMES AND STITHY CHIMES."

IT is usual to assign some reason for publishing a book. Various causes induce men to write. Scotland's Bard describes the following motive:—

Some rhyme a ne'bor's name to lash,
Some rhyme (vain thought) for needful cash;
For me an aim I never fash—
I write for fun.

Another author says:—

Some few in virtue's cause do write,
But these, alas! get little by it;
Some write to please—some do't for spite—
But want of money makes me write.

No such motives influenced the writing of the pieces contained in this little book. They were simply written to *please myself*. This is a motive which few will blame. No person's reputation has been assailed; and it is a question whether any person ever passed more than three score years of an active life without making any enemies. My pilgrimage, if not eventful, has been a *striking* one. Many people suppose that the artisans of Sheffield have ever been ready to "strike," and that *here*, at any rate, the relations of masters and workmen have been one of chronic antagonism. My own experience disproves this, though essentially a member of a *striking* family—as a reference to our pedigree will show. I cannot trace my ancestry further back than my grandfather. He was a pen and pocket-knife blade forger. His son John was brought up to his own trade. My father, following the example, brought up his own lads to the trade; and, about sixty years ago, he entered the service of the now justly celebrated firm of Messrs. Joseph Rodgers and Sons.

My brothers (John, Benjamin, Samuel, and myself) as soon as we were able, began to strike with our hammers; and from my father to now there have been four generations of blade-forgers working for old No. 6, Norfolk street, and I do not remember that any of them ever lost a day from a "trade dispute." In addition to the Seniors being forgers, there were (on my mother's side) two generations of Storks forging blades for the same employers.

In the days of my boyhood, there were no school boards and few schools; and it is rather remarkable that the same school-master taught me who had been the teacher of my good old mother.

In his day, and by his labours, he rendered good service to the locality; and, as an old scholar, I revere his memory, and many of the descendants of his old pupils will be interested in the following tribute to his memory. The "Local Register," under the date of January 12th, 1830, says:—"Decease of Mr. John Tomlinson, master of Crookes Endowed School, aged 73. To this school he had been licensed by the Archbishop of York 47 years. He was an upright and conscientious man, highly respected throughout the neighbourhood of Crookes, Hallam, Fulwood, &c., a great part of the inhabitants of which places were educated by him." Let me add to this that he was interred in what was then called Ecclesall Chapel yard, which has now become a fashionable burial-ground. The sacred spot contains no worthier dust than that of my old school-master.

The retrospect of the days of my boyhood is pleasant even now. If not surrounded with affluence, "My Father's Cot" was a home of domestic comfort, and John and Esther Senior were respected by their neighbours and friends, and were considered to be very "farrantly" people; and if their home was a lowly one, it was happy. The maxim of my parents is embodied by the poet in these lines:—

Onward! onward! may we press,
Through the path of duty;
Virtue is true happiness,
Excellence true beauty—
Minds are of celestial birth—
Make we then a heaven on earth.

As already stated, schools were not numerous in Sheffield. The same remark will apply to places of worship, as the " Million Act " had not then been passed. In the whole district there were the chapel of ease (now Ecclesall Church) and the Independent Chapel at Fulwood, likewise a small Wesleyan Chapel, to which my father frequently went, at Ranmoor. The Wesleyans built Ebenezer Chapel, and at that place, notwithstanding the distance, my father and his family occasionally attended. The houses between Spring Hill and Shales Moor were few, and in stormy weather we kept to the highway and past the Infirmary ; in fine weather we went across Addy's fields and down Watery lane to the chapel. How, in the days of my boyhood, I stood to admire the rooks building their nests in the trees surrounding Mr. Hoyle's house, in Meadow street ! The locality has changed since then ; but, as my father would point out, in simple language, that the parent birds would build their nests and tenderly cherish their young broods, and thus fulfil the purposes of their great Creator in a manner which furnished an example to man, who was endowed with nobler faculties. The philosophy of my father was simple and based on observation. He knew that happiness was more equally divided in this world than riches, and he envied not the wealth of others. Crookes and Crookes Moor Side were then in the country—all the inhabitants knew each other—and the names of Wragg, Skelton, Senior, Marshall, and others, are still common in the neighbourhood, and, on the whole, the locality contained an industrious and useful population. At Crookes feast there were pastimes and sports and some dissipation, now less common ; " Mischief Night," happening on the eve of our festival, a latitude was allowed which could not be tolerated in these days. It was the desire of both my parents to bring up the family to habits of industry and upright life and morals. I have already mentioned that we went to Ebenezer and Ranmoor Chapels. The old Methodist hymns were sung with a heartiness that charmed me. These I often practised at home on my flute, some of the tunes being special favourites. This probably gave me a taste for rythmical numbers and music. At the Sunday School anniversaries instrumental music oft aided the vocal, and in time I assisted in

this good work. On these occasions our services were given, and great was my reward when I enjoyed the luxury of doing good. I have not, like Goldsmith, "travelled over Europe with my flute;" but it has been a loved companion in my rambles amid the beautiful scenery of our Hallamshire hills and dales. With it I was not solitary, and, with any musical companions, we could forget bad trade and the wants and cares of everyday life. Seated on the rocks above Bell Hagg, breathing the invigorating breezes, listening to the joyous lark

Carolling, like a Persian bard,
Melodious reverence to the fount of day;

or looking across the distant valley, or in the distant sweep of Scholes Coppice and Wentworth, at the time of harvest, I have screwed together my flute, and in the exuberance of my heart have played unconsciously the tune to Watt's words:—

He makes the grass the hills adorn,
And clothes the smiling fields with corn;
The beasts with food His hands supply,
And the young ravens when they cry.

After this, in an indescribable calm, memory has called up the sayings of my parents—more especially the experience of the Psalmist in his age, that "he had not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." My trade is favourable to contemplation. Working alone in a little smithy, there is naught to distract the attention; and there is music in the ring of the hammer and anvil readily discerned by a trained ear, and the tune varies with different portions of work. Then, a smith may consider the usefulness of his own handicraft; the sacred page shows the importance of the workers in iron and steel. There was a time "when no smith was found in Israel." And there is the time predicted when men "shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." These are contemplations of an elevating character. If a man have vocal ability, he may sing "The Village Blacksmith," and draw lessons from his useful life; or, if he is of an antiquarian turn of mind, he may wonder what kind of steel was forged by the "first worker in brass and iron." After cogitating on the subject, he

will, perhaps, with his hammer beat time to the music of Dr. Mackay, to the same theme:—

Old Tubal Cain was a man of might,
 In the days when earth was young;
 By the fierce red light of his furnace bright,
 The peals of his hammer rung.
 And he lifted high his brawny arm
 On the iron glowing clear,
 And he cried hurrah! for his handiwork
 As he fashioned the sword and spear;
 He cried hurrah! for his handiwork
 As he fashioned the spear and sword;
 Hurrah! for the hand that shall wield them well,
 For he shall be king and lord.

I have stated already that the pieces were written to please myself. The idea of printing them was not entertained. As they pleased me, they were read to my friends and fellow-workmen; through their importunities some of them, at different times, were printed. The pieces written in the local dialect are in that as it was spoken almost a century ago. The progress of education has caused many words in good repute in my father's day to become obsolete. "The Yule Clog" was dedicated to "T'owd Fooaks at Hooam;" "Hannah Cutler's Admonition to their Jack" was written to describe "Bull Week;" and I cannot now express more clearly why I attempted to write my rhymes than was done in "Owd Shevild Celebrities:"—

From sire to son owd truths to spread,
 Aw've sung this simple strain;
 Should one verse live when I am dead,
 Aw shan't have sung in vain.

If any reader expects to find mine a learned book, replete with classical expressions, he will be disappointed. "Smithy Rhymes and Stithy Chimes" are the results of hours spent before and after work, often interrupted by domestic duties and family cares. Such as they are, they would probably have never been published but for the advice of some of my friends, under the following circumstances:—For some time my health has been failing, and I have felt great concern about my eyesight. Latterly this has been a source of trouble, and has interfered materially with the *quantity* of work I have done; and what pains

me more is, I cannot be confident as to the *quality*. In fact, my eyes have failed so rapidly that my fears are that I shall not be able to work much longer. This calamity has overtaken me while these sheets are being printed. It is under these circumstances that some of my friends advised me to print my labours. This was out of the question, except by subscription. In this a number of my friends have helped me. The list of subscribers has far exceeded my most sanguine expectations; and for the kind manner in which my applications have been received I am very grateful. To the Earl of Wharncliffe, the Right Hon. A. J. Mundella, M.P., Mr. C. B. S. Wortley, M.P., J. I. Bingham, Esq., Master Cutler; F. T. Mappin, Esq., M.P., His Worship the Mayor (M. Hunter, Jun., Esq.), and other gentlemen, I am obliged. Amongst the more humble subscribers are those of my own trade and many of my old fellow-workmen, whose kindness I highly appreciate.

It will not be supposed that a poet could live and not *love*. The tender passion just gave my muse its vocal power. The occasion was propitious, and on a fine moonlight night I have told my story with rapturous delight in my first poem in the book. When a man is *touched*, he will sometimes pour out nonsense; and from this I was not exempt. At that time I had not seen a verse written by a fellow poet and musician. I allude to Richard Furness, the author of the "Rag Bag." For the benefit of lovers who wish to describe the charms of the *loved one*, I give the verse from his "Hygeia"—

Her voice was melody itself,
Her steps adorned with grace;
Beauty had modelled well her frame,
And *nature* limned her face.

It has been said that *love* is blind; and if it promotes the happiness of human beings, let us not rudely pull the bandage from her face. It has been already stated that my parents enjoyed the respect of their neighbours; and if these were *poor*, many of them were most worthy. At the sick bed or comforting distress, Alice Platts was a ministering angel, whose worth will be long remembered. Hannah Wilson was another whose good deeds placed her name high amongst the excellent of the earth. Peace