

ESTHER: A POEM

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Esther: A Poem by Jane Elizabeth Holmes

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JANE ELIZABETH HOLMES

ESTHER: A POEM

ESTHER

PREFACE.

WHATEVER may be the character of the reception given to this Poem by the critics or the public, it cannot affect the authoress, who is far removed beyond the reach of all human praise or blame.

About two years after writing the last lines of 'ESTHER,' Miss HOLMES, then in the twenty-fifth year of her age, to the deep distress of her family, and the sincere regret of all who knew her, ceased to be on earth. Their sorrow, however, was greatly mitigated by a knowledge of the fact that she died, as she lived, in the faith of the Gospel. Her temper naturally sweet, and her manners gentle and graceful, adorned as they were by the higher excellences of Christian holiness, rendered her greatly endeared and universally beloved.

Without professing to give a biography of

Miss Holmes in this brief Preface, it may be stated that her father, a Leeds merchant, died before she was nine years of age. Much of her childhood was spent at her maternal grandfather's, the late Mr. Timothy Hackworth, of Shildon, near Darlington; a remarkable man, to whose mechanical genius, as the 'father of locomotive engines,' sufficient justice has not yet been done. Her school-days were passed in the neighbourhood of the English lakes, where the scene of this Poem is laid.

Miss Holmes' family, in giving this production of her pen to the public, have no apology to offer. If they did not think it worthy of publication, they would not have sent it to the press. At the same time, it is confessed that a knowledge of the authoress's intentions in this respect has had considerable weight with them in the decision to which they have come.

It would have been a pleasing task to the writer of these prefatory remarks (who is unconnected with the family) to point out some of the peculiar excellencies, both in description and in sentiment, to be found in the following lines. This, however, he leaves to the discriminating reader, who, no doubt, will make the discovery for himself.

The genius of Miss Holmes, unlike that of her grandfather, was not applied to utilitarian purposes. Adam Smith, had he lived to the present, would have placed 'ESTHER' in the class of 'unproductive labour;' while very different would have been his estimate of Timothy Hackworth's 'Royal George'—the first engine furnished with his important invention, the blast-pipe; and of his 'Sanspareil,'* now in the Kensington Museum. And yet, some readers, despite the 'Wealth of Nations,' pleased with the imaginative in literature, and stirred by the emotional, struck with the descriptive power of this Poem, affected by its tenderness and pathos, and charmed with the purity of sentiment pervading the whole, will rise from its perusal in admiration of the writer, and mention gratefully the name of JANE ELIZABETH HOLMES.

DARLINGTON: *April 1865.*

* Which competed for the 500*l.* premium on the Manchester and Liverpool Railway in 1829.

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ESTHER.

PART FIRST.

'T WAS morning, and the sunshine fair
Was falling softly ev'rywhere ;
The mountain heights, yet tipp'd with snow,
Were dazzling in its brilliant glow ;
It rested on the forest deep,
And up its sombre paths would peep ;
Each tall and stately ancient tree
Smiled gaily in its company,
While tiny leaflets all around
Were whisp'ring secrets most profound,
And nodding in the light spring breeze
To friendly leaves on neighb'ring trees.
The brook that wailed the night before,
And moan'd along, now meaned no more,
But danced and sported in its glee,
And sang its song right merrily,
Telling its gladness to the sun,
Its sorrows to the gentle moon.

Not only on the woodland shade,
Or mountain crest or streamlet, played
Those merry sunbeams ;—glancing far,
And unrestrained by bolt or bar,
They visited the homes of men,
And waken'd cities once again.
Softly, how softly, they would creep
To rouse the children from their sleep—
Gently reminding them 'twas day,
And bidding them come out to play.
The aged felt their youth renewed,
Their pulses quickened as they stood,
Pleased to inhale the morning air,
And gaze upon a scene so fair ;
While brave, true workers rose again,
To do their part as earnest men ;
And idlers blush'd to waste away
The precious hours of such a day.
The young and gay felt life was sweet,
And hasten'd forth its joys to meet ;
To feel their own hearts' gladness
Augmented by the general bliss :
Thousands, who laid them down to rest,
Burdened with cares, by doubts oppress'd,
Awoke to feel their load was gone,
Or seemed a very little one ;
For hopes were theirs, instead of fears,
And smiles had quite displaced their tears.