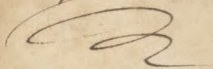


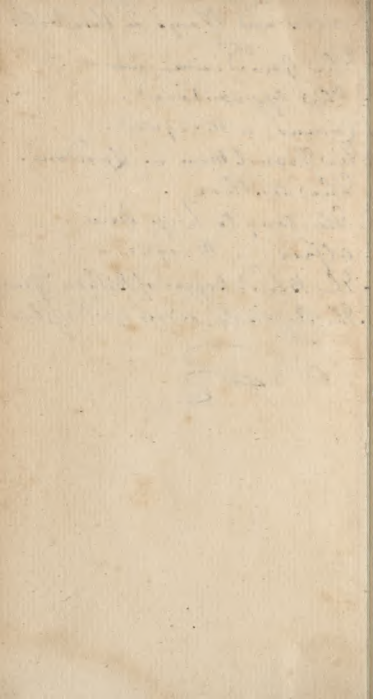
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5
Characters and Plays in this vol:

1. The Guardian
2. The Apprentice.
3. Comus, a Masque.
4. The French Man in London.
5. The Author.
6. The way to keep Him.
7. Alfred, a Masque.
8. The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green
9. The Reprisal, or Goss of Old England





8
THE

BLIND BEGGAR

OF

BETHNAL GREEN.

A DRAMATIC TALE.

By MR. DODSLEY.

GLASGOW:

Printed in the Year MDCCLVIII.

P E R S O N S.

<i>The</i> Blind BEGGAR,		<i>Mr.</i> Berry.
BESSY, <i>his</i> daughter,		<i>Mrs.</i> Clive.
SIR WILLIAM MORLEY, <i>in</i>	}	<i>Mr.</i> Cashell.
<i>love with her,</i>		
WELFORD, <i>in love with, and</i>	}	<i>Mr.</i> Lowe.
<i>belov'd by her,</i>		
Lord RANBY, } <i>Suitors to BESSY</i>	}	<i>Mr.</i> Ridout.
JOHN SLY, } <i>as a Mistress,</i>		

Neighbours, Passengers, &c.

SCENE, Bethnal Green, *and the Beggar's house*
upon it.

T H E
BLIND BEGGAR
O F
BETHNAL GREEN.

SCENE I. *The Beggar's house.*

WELFORD *alone.*

TRUE, she is but a beggar's daughter, yet her person is a miracle; and her amiable qualities such as might well besit a better station. The fame of her uncommon beauty is now spread round the country, and every day produces some new rival of my happiness. How can I hope her heart will continue mine, against so many, and such powerful competitors? But him whom I most fear is Sir WILLIAM MORLEY; and her letter to me concerning him has alarm'd me. But here she comes.

S C E N E II.

Bessy, Welford.

Ah Bessy! What is it you tell me? Surely you will not be so unkind!

Bes. You ought not, Welford, you cannot justly accuse me of unkindness!

Wel. Is it not unkind, to tell me you will marry Sir William Morley?

Bes. I will obey my father.

Wel. I am much afraid, Bessy, your duty to your father is not the only motive to your obedience in this affair.—Sir William has wealth and titles to bestow.

Bes. Now you are unkind, nay cruel, to think that

any motive so mean as that of interest or vanity could have the least influence over me.

Wel. What can I think ?

Bef. Think on the situation I am in ; think on my father. Can I leave him, blind and helpless, to struggle with infirmity and want, when it is in my power to make his old age comfortable and happy ?

SONG.

*The faithful stork behold,
A duteous wing prepare,
It's sire, grown weak and old,
To feed with constant care.
Should I my father leave,
Grown old, and weak, and blind ;
To think on storks, would grieve
And shame my weaker mind.*

Wel. That shall be no objection ; no, Bessy, whilst these hands can work, he never shall know want : Your father shall be mine, nay dearer, a thousand times dearer to me than my own.

Bef. Why can I not requite such faithful love ? [*Aside.* But Welford, suppose my father commands me to marry Sir William, would you have me disobey him ? 'Tis true, he is but a poor man, a beggar, yet he is my father ; and the best of fathers he has been to me.

Wel. He is the best of men : and, if report say true, far from a common beggar.

Bef. Sometimes, indeed, I myself suspect that he is not what he seems ; and what principally induces me to it is the extraordinary care he has taken of my education, instructing me himself, and teaching me a thousand things above my sphere of life ; and this is a further reason why I ought not to disobey him.

Wel. You shall not disobey him, I will not desire it. But suppose it were possible for me to gain his consent.

Bef. Then you have mine ; for believe me, Welford, I can propose no happiness to myself, if not with you ;

and should I marry Sir William, it is only because I chuse rather to make myself unhappy than my father.

Wel. Unequall'd goodness ! Surely he will not make you miserable, who are so afraid of making him so ! And he is too wise to think all happiness confin'd to greatness.

S O N G.

*Observe the fragrant blushing rose,
Tho' in the humble vale it spring,
It smells as sweet, as fair it blows,
As in the garden of a king :
So calm content as oft is found compleat
In the low cot, as in the lofty seat.*

I will go this instant to him, and try how far I can prevail. I hope your wishes will be in my favour.

Bef. Go: I dare not wish, lest they should be too much so. For how strongly soever I may be determin'd to obey my father, I fear that love will steal away my heart in spite of duty. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. *Bethnal Green.*

Enter the BLIND BEGGAR led in by a boy.

Beggar.

So, boy, we are at our journey's end I find: come stay by me, there's a good boy.

Two passengers cross the stage.

Pray remember the blind !

First Pas. I have nothing for you, friend: One cannot stir a step without being plagu'd with the cant of beggars.

Second Pas. 'Tis an infamous thing in a trading country, that the poor are not some way or other employ'd. [*They go out.*

Beg. I am afraid the rich are employ'd full as ill ; and what is still worse, the poor are not the only beggars. Wants, real or imaginary, reach all states ; and

as some beg in rags, there are some not ashamed to beg even in velvet. All men are beggars in some shape or other; those only are scandalous ones, who beg by impudence what they should earn by merit.

S O N G.

*Let begging no more then be taunted,
If honest and free from offence;
Were each man to beg what he wanted,
How many would beggars commence!
Grave church-men might beg for more grace,
Young soldiers for courage might call;
And many that beg for a pension or place,
Might beg for some merit withall.*

S C E N E IV.

Enter another Passenger.

Beggar.

Pray remember the blind!

Pas. So, neighbour, you are got to your old seat this afternoon.

Beg. Is not that my neighbour Greenfield?

Pas. Ay.

Beg. You have been in town, I suppose, what news?

Pas. I hear none, but that the earl of Essex is dead this morning.

Beg. The earl of Essex dead! That's greater news to me than you imagine.

Pas. I hope it is not bad.

Beg. No.

Pas. Here's my lord Ranby seems to be coming this way, as if he wanted to speak with you.

Beg. Does he? Well, I am prepar'd for him. This worthy man is one of those who has the goodness, because he thinks me poor, to solicit me to prostitute my daughter, and sell her virtue for his borrow'd gold.

Pas. Very charitable tru'y! and I don't doubt but you'll thank him as he deserves. Good bye.

Beg. I wish you a good walk.

[*Exit Passenger.*]

S C E N E V.

Enter Lord RANBY.

Ranby.

Well, honest beggar, have you thought of the proposals I made when I saw you last?

Beg. Yes, I have thought of you and your proposals with contempt.

Ranby. With contempt!

Beg. Yes, my lord, with contempt.

Ranby. Don't be impudent, friend.

Beg. 'Tis not I that am impudent, my lord.

Ranby. Hark ye, old fellow, were it not for your daughter, your age should not protect your insolence.

Beg. And were it not for my age, young fellow, your quality should not protect yours.—Insolence! I'd have thee know, proud lord, my birth is at least equal to thine; and tho' now a beggar, I have not yet disgrac'd my family, as thou hast done. Go home, young man, and pay your debts, it will more become you than this infamous errand.

Ranby. 'Tis very well: but I shall perhaps make you repent this freedom.

Beg. Repeat your own follies, child; no honest freedom ought to be repented of.

Ranby. You are a brave fellow!

Beg. And you are not a brave fellow.

Ranby. The old wretch confounds me so, I don't know what to say. (*Aside.*)—I shall take a course with you, Sir, for this impudence.

Beg. An idle course you have taken all your life; be wise, and mend it.

Ranby. Damn him! Why should I talk to such a creature? I must enjoy his daughter however; and since fair means won't prevail, foul must. [*Exit.*]

Beg. What strange creatures are the greatest part of

mankind! What a composition of contradictions! Always pursuing happiness, yet generally thro' such ways as lead to misery: admiring every virtue in others, indulging themselves in every vice: fond of fame, yet labouring for infamy. In so bad a world, the loss of sight is not really so great an evil as it may be apprehended.

SONG.

*Tho' darkness still attends me,
It aids internal sight;
And from such scenes defends me,
As blush to see the light.
No villain's smile deceives me,
No gilded sop offends,
No weeping object grieves me,
Kind darkness me befriends.
Henceforth no useless wailings,
I find no reason why;
Mankind to their own failings
Are all as blind as I.
Who painted vice desires,
Is blind, whate'er he thinks;
Who virtue not admires,
Is either blind, or winks.*

SCENE VI. Bethnal Green.

Enter JOHN SLY.

Sly.

Friend, if thou beest at leisure, I would commune with thee.

Beg. Is not that Mr. Sly?

Sly. John Sly, at thy service.

Beg. Well, friend Sly, what is your pleasure with me?

Sly. Thou hast a daughter, friend, whose charms I have beheld with the eye of wonder and admiration. As a goldfinch among sparrows, or as a peacock amongst

fowls, even such is thy child amongst the daughters of men. Her beauty maketh the rose to blush with shame, and the lilly turneth pale with envy thereat. Ah, friend! what pity it were this innocent lamb should fall amongst wolves, and be devoured!

Beg. It were great pity indeed.

Sly. My soul melteth in compassion, yea, my heart is moved with affection unto her: let her be mine handmaid, and I will protect her from the pollutions of the ungodly.

Beg. And so, friend, thou would'st debauch my daughter thyself, that the wicked may not have the sin to answer for?

Sly. Nay, friend, thou should'st not call it debauching her. Come, come, I will make a proposition that shall please thee. Thou art a poor man, and thou knowest that I am rich; what part of my fortune shall I give unto her? Name the sum, and it shall be settled upon her according to thy direction.

Beg. How dare any man have the impudence to ask another the price of his virtue? Surely, friend, thou must be very glad that I am blind.

Sly. Why so, friend?

Beg. Because I cannot see how much like a rogue thou must now look. Out of my reach, vile hypocrite! or I will make thee feel the weight of my resentment.

Sly. Verily, friend, thou knowest not the ways of the world, nor the wisdom thereof—But I will not be cast down, the daughter may perhaps have more wit than her father; I will try at least. [Exit.

S C E N E VII.

Enter WELFORD.

Welford.

How shall I address him? Sure there is something venerable about this poor old man; something that commands more than common reverence and respect. (*Aside.*)—I am come, Sir, to speak with you about an

affair that to me is of consequence, and I beg you will not think me impertinent or troublesome.

Beg. Who is it that can be afraid of being impertinent to a poor beggar?

Wel. My name is Welford.

Beg. O, I know you very well, Mr. Welford; your father was formerly my very good friend and benefactor; I was sorry, poor gentleman, for his misfortunes; all he had, I think, was lost at sea.

Wel. 'Tis true; and my chief misfortune in that loss, is, that it has depriv'd me of the power of making it your's.

Beg. I understand ye; you have a kindness for my daughter, and would have married her; I have heard something of it, and suppose that is the business you are come about, is it not?

Wel. It is; and I hope I shall have your consent.

Beg. Mr. Welford, I had a respect for your father, for his sake I have a regard for you; and as you have unhappily no fortune of your own, I would not have you do so imprudent a thing as to marry the daughter of a beggar.

Wel. I have already learnt not to place any part of my happiness in the enjoyment of riches; and my heart tells me, that the greatest pleasure I could have, would be to maintain you and your daughter by the honest labour of my hands.

S O N G.

*To keep my gentle Bessy,
 What labour would seem hard?
 Each toilsome task how easy!
 Her love the sweet reward,
 The bee thus uncomplaining,
 Esteems no toil severe,
 The sweet reward obtaining,
 Of honey all the year.*

Beg. Your intentions are very kind, and I don't

doubt but your love to my daughter is sincere; but I would have you suppress it: for, to deal plainly with you, I have already determined to marry my daughter to Sir William Morley.

Wel. But will you marry her to Sir William against her consent?

Beg. I doubt not her consent; she never disobey'd me yet; and will not now, I dare say.

Wel. I know she will obey if you command; but surely, in an affair of so much consequence to her, you will have some regard to her own happiness. Let me only beg you to consider this, and then I leave it to your paternal affection. At present I will trouble you no farther. *[Exit.*

Beg. I have consider'd of it, and I hope she will consider of it too. I would not make my child unhappy, nor will I marry her against her mind: but Sir William, besides the largeness of his fortune, is of so good-natur'd and agreeable a disposition, that I hope she will soon be won to taste the happiness of her condition, and then will thank me for my care.—Come, boy, the wind methinks blows cold here, we'll go to the other side of the green. *[Exit.*

SCENE VIII.

SCENE changes to the BEGGAR'S house.

SIR WILLIAM MORLEY and BESSY.

Bessy.

I am very sensible, Sir William, of the honour you do me in descending so much beneath yourself, as to think of marrying the daughter of a beggar.

Sir Wil. My dear Bessy, talk not of inequality; true love forgets condition, and despises any thought so mean as that of interest.

Bes. Some would esteem such love at best but weakness. Nay you yourself, as passion cools, and reason

gathers strength, perhaps may censure and regret as a folly, what now you seriously fancy to be love.

SONG.

*The boy thus of a bird possesseth,
 At first how great his joys !
 He strokes it soft, and in his breast
 The little fav'rite lies :
 But soon as grown to riper age,
 The passion quits his mind,
 He hangs it up in some cold cage,
 Neglected and confin'd.*

Sir Wil. This, my Bessy, is impossible; as your beauties have subdu'd my heart, your virtues have endear'd, and will secure the conquest.

Bes. I wish, Sir William, you would excuse my fears; I was not born for grandeur, and dare not venture on a state so much above my rank.

Sir Wil. So far from truth is that unjust pretence, that 'tis your present rank alone you are unfit for. You have not only beauty to adorn, but sense to support a higher.

Bes. I know you flatter me; but granting what you say were true, yet I had rather attend my father on this humble green, than run the risk of falling from the greatness which I neither covet nor deserve.

Sir Wil. And am I then so much your aversion, that poverty, nay beggary itself, is preferable to wealth when brought by me? What risk, what hazard do you run? Do I not offer to marry you? Does not your father join with me in desiring your compliance? And ought not you to rejoice at the hopes of being protected from the insolence of those who daily invade your innocence, and attempt your chastity?—But we are interrupted. I'll go wait on your father home, and be with you again immediately.

[Exit.

SCENE IX.

*Enter Lord RANBY.**Ranby.*

Ha! my little cherubim, is not that the grave knight, that would fain seduce you to commit matrimony with him? Methinks he went away in the dumps, as if you had rejected his suit.

Bef. Suppose I did, Sir, what then?

Ranby. Why then, my dear, you did wisely. 'Tis as ridiculous for a beautiful woman to throw herself away upon a husband, in order to preserve her honour, as it would be for a man of fortune to give away his estate for fear he should spend it.

Bef. I rather think it were as foolish for a woman to trust herself to a man without marriage, as it would be for a merchant to venture his ship to sea without insurance.

Ranby. A husband, child, becomes your master; a gallant will continue your adorer and your slave.

Bef. A husband rather is a protector of that virtue which a gallant would rob me of, and then desert me.

SONG.

*As death alone the marriage knot unties,
So vows that lovers make
Last until sleep, death's image, close their eyes,
Dissolve when they awake;
And that fond love which was to-day their theme,
Is thought to-morrow but an idle dream.*

Ranby. Do you think then, that love is more likely to continue when it is constrain'd, than when it is free and voluntary?

Bef. I should think I had but small security for the continuance of his love, who was afraid of engaging with me any longer than from day to day.

Ranby. What better security can you have from a gentleman, than his honour?

Bef. He that would refuse me all other security but his honour, I should be afraid had too little of that to be trusted.

Ranby. Well then, my dear Bessy, to come close to the point, you cannot suspect my sincerity, since I have not desir'd you to trust entirely to my honour, but have offered to make you a handsome settlement.

Bef. But, my lord, as I don't like the terms, I hope I may be excus'd accepting it.

Ranby. Come, come, child, since I find you are so very obstinate, that you will not accept of what is so much for your own good, I must be oblig'd to force you to it, my dear.

Bef. What do you mean, my lord?

Ranby. Only to make you happy, my angel, whether you will or no.

Bef. O heaven defend me!

Ranby. Look ye, my dear, no noise, no struggling; it will avail you nothing.—But let me not forget to turn the key.

S C E N E X.

Enter SLY.

Sly ^{ris}

Indeed, friend, thou should'st have done that before.

Ranby. Curse on the sanctify'd hypocrite! What envious demon sent him here?

Bef. Heaven rather sent him to preserve my virtue. O save me from the brutal violence of that monster!

Sly. Yea verily, I will protect thy virtue, and save thee—for myself. [*Aside.*]—Friend, friend, why walkest thou in vanity? Verily, thou hast done the thing that is not right.—

Ranby. Verily, friend, and so hast thou: and unless thou dost immediately return from whence thou camest, I will exalt the arm of flesh against thee, and thy iniquity shall be upon thy bones.

Sly. Hum! my spirit burneth within me, yea, my

inward man is moved to wrath. Howbeit, I doubt he's stronger than I, therefore I will be peaceable, and try if I cannot gain my point by seeming to join with him. (*Aside.*)—Restrain thy choler, friend; I mean not to disappoint thee; for, to confess the truth, I came with the same design myself; wherefore I may, peradventure, be of service unto thee, in persuading the virgin to yield unto our solicitations. What, say'st thou, shall I try?

Ranby. And does the carnal passion lurk beneath this sober mask of sanctity? What the devil can he say to her! It must be a ridiculous scene, I'll hear it. [*Aside.*]—Well, friend, pr'ythee try thy talent upon her; but, do ye hear, don't play false.

Sly. Thy self shall judge.

Bef. What means this parley? I don't like it. [*Aside.*]

Sly. Fair maiden, I am moved, yea I am strongly moved, and as it were pushed forth by the spirit towards thee: suffer me therefore to entreat thee, and to prevail upon thee to answer the end of thy creation. The sun of thy beauty nourisheth my love as a plant; my soul longeth, yea I do long exceedingly, to taste thy sweets, to feel the softness of thy panting breast.—

Bef. First feel my hand, thou holy hypocrite. [*Gives him a box on the ear.*] What will become of me!

Ranby. How like ye her salute? methinks she kiss'd you with a smack.

Sly. Verily, if her hand is the softest part of her, her heart must be exceeding hard.

Ranby. I see no likelihood of prevailing with her by fair means; suppose we force her into my coach, and drive her to a little house I have about ten miles off, we shall there bring her to a compliance.

Sly. The proposal is good, and I will assist thee in it.

Ranby. Come, madam, 'tis in vain to resist, you must along with us this instant.

Bessy kneeling. For heaven's sake, my lord, forbear! Think on my poor blind father, and take not from him

the support of his old age, his only child: alas! he will die distracted.

SONG.

*Behold me on my bended knee,
Think on my father's cries!
O think the gushing tears you see
Drop from his closed eyes!*

*Let this sad sight your soul possess,
Let kind regret take place;
And save my father from distress,
His daughter from disgrace.*

Ranby. Off! 'tis vain.

Bef. Good heaven protect my virtue. Help! help!
[*As they are forcing her towards the door, enter
Welford, who seizes Lord Ranby's sword.*]

SCENE XI.

WELFORD.

Villains! what means this outrage?

Ranby. Hell and furies! are we disappointed?

Wel. Unhand her, or this moment is thy last.

[*Holds the sword to his breast.*]

Ranby. Hold! hold! I will: have a care, the point may hurt one.

Wel. Base coward! why art thou so afraid to die? Shouldst thou not rather be ashamed to live?—How fares my love?

Bef. O my deliverer! my dear preserver! let my heart thank thee, for I cannot speak.

Wel. Don't tremble so, my dear; compose yourself; the danger's over; come, look up. Vile ravishers! how did you dare to rob the sacred dwelling of this poor old man? did you not think the Gods would take his part?

Ranby. The god of love, methinks, should have taken ours; and if he had been true to his character he would.

SCENE XII.

Enter the BEGGAR and SIR WILLIAM.

Bessy.

O my dear father! do I live to see you once again?

Beg. What means my child?

Ranby. Ay, now we shall have a dismal story, how a trembling dove escap'd the bloody pounces of a hawk.

Sly. Or how an innocent lamb was snatch'd from the jaws of a devouring wolf.

Wel. And can you know your characters so well, and not detest yourselves?

Beg. Are not these, lord Ranby and friend Sly? What has been done?

Sly. Nothing, indeed.

Bef. These wicked men had form'd a base design against my virtue; and would even now have forc'd me from you, had not the friendly arm of my dear Wel-ford, that instant interpos'd to save me. Forgive me, father, that I call him dear, I owe my virtue and my life to his protection.

Beg. Unworthy men! what had I done, that you should wish to make my old age miserable?

Ranby. We did not think of thy old age at all, but of thy daughter's youth and beauty.

Beg. Which I will this instant put beyond the reach of your ungenerous and ungovern'd passions. Sir William, my daughter's virtue——

Bef. My dearest father, suffer me a word, and I have done. The worth and honour of Sir William Morley are what I highly do esteem; and if 'tis your command that I must marry him, so much I value your repose beyond my own, that I will sacrifice my happiness to my obedience, and endeavour to give my heart where you command my hand. But O, forgive me, whilst I freely own, I feel my heart will wish it otherwise.

Beg. Let me proceed. My daughter's virtue, Sir William—has conquer'd me. I did design to have

given her to your honest love; but you yourself will own I ought not to compel a child so gentle, and so tender of me. Can I make her miserable, who prefers my happiness to her own?

Sir Wil. I own your justice, tho' my heart would fain plead against it. Dear Bessy, I will endeavour to subdue that love, which cannot make me happy, since it would make you miserable.

Wel. Generous and kind!

Ranby. Well, there is a pleasure after all in virtue, which we loose fellows know not how to taste.

Beg. Welford, come hither. Your father was a worthy man, and my good friend; his bounty oft relieved my seeming want, and his good nature took me to his friendship. I am glad to find that you inherit his worth, tho' not his fortune. My daughter loves you; receive her therefore from my grateful hand, and with her full five thousand pounds in gold.

Welford and Bessy.

Five thousand pounds!

Beg. Be not surpriz'd. Tho' long conceal'd upon this green, beneath the poor appearance of a beggar, I am no other than Sir Simon Montford, whom the world thinks dead some years ago. Here I have liv'd, and sav'd these poor remains of a once noble fortune.

Bes. I'm in amaze, and scarce know whether I should believe my senses! why did my father conceal himself so long from me?

Beg. It was necessary, child: but now I need no longer hide me from the world. The earl of Essex, who long sought my life, this morning died. The reason of his enmity was this: his father, who was standard-bearer in an engagement against the Welch, where I had some command, most cowardly gave way, and occasion'd the loss of the battle; which when I upbraided him with, he gave me the lye, call'd me villain, and would have laid the blame on me. On this I challeng'd him, and it being his ill fortune to fall by my hand, I

have ever since been oblig'd to conceal myself from the revenge of his son.

Wel. My dear Bessy, the surprize of this sudden turn in our favour, has taken from me the power of expression.

Bes. If your joy is but equal to mine, I am happy.

D U E T T.

He.

*The man who in a dungeon lies for debt,
Esteems not light and liberty so dear.*

She.

*The frighted bird, just scap'd the fowler's net,
Its heart not flutters more 'twixt joy and fear.*

He.

*Come to my arms,
And on my breast
From all alarms
Securely rest.*

She.

*In this kind heaven let me lie,
In mutual pleasure live and die.*

Both.

In mutual pleasure live and die.

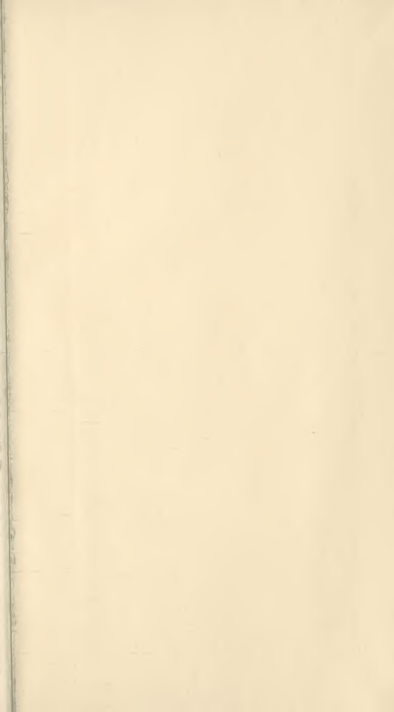
Wel. Dear father; let me indulge the joy to call you so, the happiness you give me with your daughter, is half destroyed by this unexpected fortune. The pleasure I had promised myself in labouring with my hands to maintain the father of my love, is now no more; but let me still rejoice, that by this means

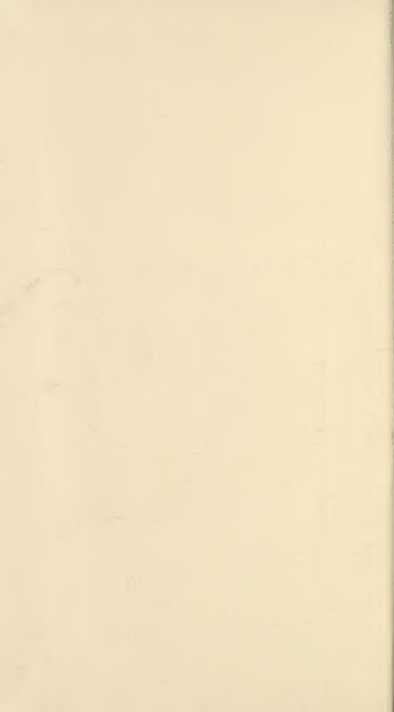
My Bessy's gentle heart is free'd from care,
And her fair hand no labour needs to share.
Hence let this maxim to the world be given,
True love and virtue are the care of heaven.

A TABLE of the SONGS.

SONG	Page.
I. <i>The faithful stork behold,</i>	4
II. <i>Observe the fragrant blushing rose,</i>	5
III. <i>Let begging no more then be taunted,</i>	6
IV. <i>Tho' darkness still attends me,</i>	8
V. <i>To keep my gentle Bessy,</i>	10
VI. <i>The boy thus of a bird possess,</i>	12
VII. <i>As death alone the marriage knot unties,</i>	13
VIII. <i>Behold me on my bended knee,</i>	16
IX. <i>The man who in a dungeon lies for debt,</i>	19







25-7-86

