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1834–1851: Nathaniel Beverley Tucker

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1836

To--

N. Beverley Tucker

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There is little merit in the following lines besides that rare merit in poetry, *their truth*. They were written in the place of the writer's nativity, where he had at length settled down, after an absence of thirty years. They were written in a house just purchased, and from which the former owner had not yet removed his family, and were inserted in the Album of his daughter. She was young, beautiful, accomplished, newly married, and wealthy. Though confined to her room by bad health, she was preparing for a voyage to Europe, since happily accomplished.

TO ———.

We met as strangers, Lady, tho' the scenes  
On which thine eyes first opened, were the same  
To which the sports of childhood, and the hopes  
Of Manhood's flattering dawn, had bound my heart  
With cords of filial love indissoluble.  
We part as strangers, tho' the self-same roof  
So long has sheltered both. I hear thy voice—  
I hear thy fairy step—and trace the print  
Of the soft kiss, with which thy lip has prest  
My infant's cheek; and see her little hands  
Rich with the gifts thy kindness has bestowed.  
And this is all: but there is more than this  
That with a link of sympathy connects  
My heart with thee, as if some common lot,  
Some common spell of destiny had bound  
Our fates in one. And we have much in common.  
The hope that guides thy steps to distant lands,  
In quest of pleasures, such as boundless wealth,  
And friends, and youth, and peerless beauty promise—  
How much unlike the stern necessity,  
Which drove me forth to roam thro' deserts wild,  
And on the confines of society,  
Where the fierce savage whets the vengeful knife  
'Gainst cultivated brutes more fierce than he,  
Through hardship, toil and strife, to win my bread!

But O! to leave the scenes of happy youth—  
 The Father's sheltering roof, the Mother's care,  
 The blithe play-fellows of our childish sports,  
 The gay companions of our gladsome hours,  
 The cherished friend, whose sympathy consoled  
 The petty griefs, that, like a fleecy cloud,  
 But dimmed the sunshine of our spring of life,  
 And, having shed its freshness on the heart,  
 Melted away, leaving the scene more fair ;—  
 To lose all these!—what is it but the type  
 Of that last fatal wrench, that tears the heart  
 At once from all we love; and in one doom,  
 One common bond of sympathy, unites  
 The unnumbered victims, who in every rank,  
 Through every walk, throng to the gates of Death?  
 May we not deem that the fond Mother's heart,  
 Though couched in bliss celestial, yet will yearn  
 To her deserted Child? And will not thine,  
 Where'er thy steps may roam, true to the pole  
 Of all thy young affections, point thy thoughts  
 To the fair scenes, clothed by thy fairy hand  
 With every charm of hue, and scent, and shade,  
 Thyself the brightest ornament? O yes!  
 From the rich isle, where science, art and wealth  
 Have crowded every joy, the ravished sense,  
 And heart, and mind can covet; from the plains  
 Of France the beautiful; from the vine-crowned hills  
 That in the glassy bosom of the Rhine  
 Their blushing fruitages reflected see;  
 From classic Italy, the "marble waste"  
 Of desecrated fane, and ruined tower,  
 And silent palaces, where once the doom  
 Of empires was decreed, the heart will turn  
 To Home. The trackless wild, where foot of man  
 Has never broke the silence with its tread,  
 Is not more lonely than the thronging scene,  
 The "peopled solitude," where jostling crowds  
 Elbow their way, regardless that we look  
 Upon their strife—unconscious that we live.  
 The moss-grown rock, that in the savage dell  
 Has frowned for ages on the silent scene,  
 In its drear loneliness reflects our own,  
 And seems to give a kind of sympathy;  
 But stony hearts have none.

Known! yet unknown!

There is a strange mysterious interest  
 Follows the form, that flitting through the gloom  
 Of twilight, half concealed, and half disclosed,  
 Glides silently away; and such a spell  
 Upon my memory, thy shadowy image  
 In traces faint but indestructible  
 Has sketched. And I would be remembered too,  
 Not as I am, for thou hast never known me,  
 But as I fain would have thee fancy me.  
 And I shall be remembered—for the scenes  
 On which thy memory will love to dwell,  
 Are now my care. 'Tis mine to dress the vine  
 Which trained by thee its graceful foliage,  
 Gratefully spread to shelter thee: The flower  
 That mourns thy absence, watered by my hand,  
 Shall lift its drooping head and smile; and thou  
 In fancy shalt behold its blue eye glistening  
 Brighter through tears; and, with an answering smile,  
 And answering tear, thine own bright eye will bless me.  
 Then mayst thou think how I, my wanderings o'er,

Have found my way back to my native bowers,  
 Among the few whom Time and Fate have left  
 Of early friends, to render up my breath,  
 And lay my bones beneath the turf, where once  
 My musing childhood strayed. And thou wilt think,  
 That fortune yet may have in store for thee,  
 Like destiny. For who so well may claim  
 To rest beneath the shade, to pluck the rose,  
 Or, on the mossy bank reclined, inhale  
 The violet's balmy breath? And trust me, Lady,  
 Should clouds o'ereast the sunny sky that shines  
 So bright above thee; should a stormy fate,  
 Whelming thy hopes, cast thee a shipwrecked wanderer,  
 Wounded and bleeding, on thy native shore,  
 These are the scenes in which thy heart will seek  
 And find its consolation. Where besides  
 Is *Sympathy* so tender—*Love* so kind—  
*Religion* so sincere? Where else has *Hope*  
 So learned to look, with cheerful confidence,  
 On worlds beyond the grave? Where else does *Faith*  
 So show its *Love to God* by *Love to Man*?

B. T.