

Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-39)

1 *The Quince*

“Fallentis senmita vitæ.” — *Horace*.

Near a small village in the West,  
Where many very worthy people  
Eat, drink, play whist, and do their best  
To guard from evil Church and Steeple,  
There stood — alas! it stands no more! 5  
A tenement of brick and plaster,  
Of which, for forty years and four,  
My good friend Quince was lord and master!

Welcome was he in hut and hall,  
To maids and matrons, peers and peasants, 10  
He won the sympathies of all,  
By making puns and making presents;  
Though all the parish were at strife,  
He kept his counsel and his carriage,  
And laughed, and loved a quiet life, 15  
And shrank from Chancery suits and — marriage.

Sound was his claret and his head;  
Warm was his double ale — and feelings;  
His partners at the whist-club said,  
That he was faultless in his dealings. 20  
He went to church but once a week;  
Yet Dr. Poundtext always found him  
An upright man, who studied Greek,  
And liked to see his friends around him.

Asylums, hospitals, and schools, 25  
He used to swear were made to cozen;  
All who subscribed to them were fools,  
And he subscribed to half a dozen;  
It was his doctrine that the poor  
Were always able, never willing; 30

And so the beggar at his door  
Had first abuse, and then a shilling.

Some public principles he had,  
But was no flatterer, nor fretter;  
He rapped his box when things were bad, 35  
And said, "I cannot make them better!"  
And much he loathed the patriot's snort,  
And much he scorned the placeman's shuffle,  
And cut the fiercest quarrels short,  
With — "Patience, gentlemen, and snuffle." 40

For full ten years his pointer, Speed,  
Had couched beneath her master's table;  
For twice ten years his old white steed  
Had fattened in his master's stable —  
Old Quince averred, upon his troth, 45  
They were the ugliest beasts in Devon;  
And none knew why he fed them both,  
With his own hands, six days in seven.

Whene'er they heard his ring or knock,  
Quicker than thought, the village slatterns 50  
Flung down the novel, smoothed the frock,  
And took up Mrs. Glasse, and patterns;  
Adine was studying baker's bills;  
Louisa looked the queen of knitters;  
Jane happened to be hemming frills; 55  
And Bell, by chance, was making fritters.

But all was vain; and while decay  
Came like a tranquil moonlight o'er him,  
And found him gouty still, and gay,  
With no fair nurse to bless or bore him; 60  
His rugged smile, and easy chair,  
His dread of matrimonial lectures,  
His wig, his stick, his powdered hair,  
Were themes for very strange conjectures.

Some sages thought the stars above 65  
Had crazed him with excess of knowledge;

Some heard he had been crossed in love,  
    Before he came away from college —  
Some darkly hinted that his Grace  
    Did nothing, great or small, without him;                     70  
Some whispered, with a solemn face,  
    That there was something odd about him!

I found him at threescore and ten,  
    A single man, but bent quite double;  
Sickness was coming on him then,                                     75  
    To take him from a world of trouble —  
He prosed of slipping down the hill,  
    Discovered he grew older daily;  
One frosty day he made his will —  
    The next he sent for Dr. Bailey!                                     80

And so he lived — and so he died: —  
    When last I sat beside his pillow,  
He shook my hand, and “Ah!” he cried,  
    “Penelope must wear the willow.  
Tell her I hugged her rosy chain                                     85  
    While life was flickering in the socket;  
And say, that when I call again,  
    I’ll bring a license in my pocket.

“I’ve left my house and grounds to Fag —  
    (I hope his master’s shoes will suit him);                     90  
And I’ve bequeathed to you my nag,  
    To feed him for my sake — or shoot him.  
The Vicar’s wife will take old Fox —  
    She’ll find him an uncommon mouser;  
And let her husband have my box,                                     95  
    My Bible, and my Assmanshauser.

“Whether I ought to die or not  
    My doctors cannot quite determine;  
It’s only clear that I shall rot,  
    And be, like Priam, food for vermin.                             100  
My debts are paid; — but Nature’s debt  
    Almost escaped my recollection!  
Tom! we shall meet again; and yet

I cannot leave you my direction!"

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