

Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-39)

4 *The Vicar*

Some years ago, ere Time and Taste
Had turned our parish topsy-turvy,
When Darnel Park was Darnel Waste,
And roads as little known as scurvy,
The man who lost his way between 5
St. Mary's Hill and Sandy Thicket,
Was always shown across the Green,
And guided to the Parson's wicket.

Back flew the bolt of lissom lath;
Fair Margaret, in her tidy kirtle, 10
Led the lorn traveller up the path,
Through clean-clipped rows of box and myrtle:
And Don and Sancho, Tramp and Tray,
Upon the parlour steps collected,
Wagged all their tails, and seemed to say, 15
"Our master knows you; you're expected!"

Up rose the Reverend Doctor Brown,
Up rose the Doctor's winsome marrow,
The lady laid her knitting down,
Her husband clasped his ponderous Barrow; 20
Whate'er the stranger's caste or creed,
Pundit or papist, saint or sinner,
He found a stable for his steed,
And welcome for himself, and dinner.

If, when he reached his journey's end, 25
And warmed himself in court or college,
He had not gained an honest friend,
And twenty curious scraps of knowledge; —
If he departed as he came,
With no new light on love or liquor, — 30
Good sooth, the traveller was to blame,
And not the Vicarage, nor the Vicar.

His talk was like a stream which runs

With rapid change from rocks to roses:
It slipped from politics to puns; 35
It passed from Mahomet to Moses;
Beginning with the laws which keep
The planets in their radiant courses,
And ending with some precept deep
For dressing eels or shoeing horses. 40

He was a shrewd and sound divine,
Of loud Dissent the mortal terror;
And when, by dint of page and line,
He 'stablished Truth, or started Error, 45
The Baptist found him far too deep;
The Deist sighed with saving sorrow;
And the lean Levite went to sleep,
And dreamed of tasting pork to-morrow.

His sermon never said or showed
That Earth is foul, that Heaven is gracious, 50
Without refreshment on the road
From Jerome, or from Athanasius;
And sure a righteous zeal inspired
The hand and head that penned and planned them,
For all who understood, admired, 55
And some who did not understand them.

He wrote, too, in a quiet way,
Small treatises, and smaller verses;
And sage remarks on chalk and clay,
And hints to noble lords and nurses; 60
True histories of last year's ghost,
Lines to a ringlet or a turban;
And trifles to the Morning Post,
And nothing for Sylvanus Urban.

He did not think all mischief fair, 65
Although he had a knack of joking;
He did not make himself a bear,
Although he had a taste for smoking:
And when religious sects ran mad,
He held, in spite of all his learning, 70
That if a man's belief is bad,
It will not be improved by burning.

And he was kind, and loved to sit
In the low hut or garnished cottage,
And praise the farmer's homely wit, 75
And share the widow's homelier pottage:
At his approach complaint grew mild,
And when his hand unbarred the shutter,
The clammy lips of Fever smiled
The welcome which they could not utter. 80

He always had a tale for me
Of Julius Cæsar or of Venus:
From him I learned the rule of three,
Cat's-cradle, leap-frog, and *Quæ genus*;
I used to singe his powdered wig, 85
To steal the staff he put such trust in;
And make the puppy dance a jig
When he began to quote Augustine.

Alack the change! in vain I look
For haunts in which my boyhood trifled; 90
The level lawn, the trickling brook,
The trees I climbed, the beds I rifled:
The church is larger than before;
You reach it by a carriage entry:
It holds three hundred people more: 95
And pews are fitted up for gentry.

Sit in the Vicar's seat: you'll hear
The doctrine of a gentle Johnian,
Whose hand is white, whose tone is clear,
Whose phrase is very Ciceronian. 100
Where is the old man laid? — look down,
And construe on the slab before you,
HIC JACET GVLIELMVS BROWN,
VIR NULLA NON DONANDUS LAURA.

1829

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