

*The Woman's
Labour*

an epistle to

MR STEPHEN DUCK

in answer to his late poem called

THE THRESHER'S LABOUR

by

MARY COLLIER

and published here with

THE THRESHER'S LABOUR

by

MR STEPHEN DUCK



RENARD PRESS

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THE WOMAN'S
LABOUR

an epistle to

MR STEPHEN DUCK

in answer to his late poem called

THE THRESHER'S LABOUR

to which are added

THE THREE WISE SENTENCES

taken from

THE FIRST BOOK OF ESDRAS

ch. III and IV

by

MARY COLLIER

now a washerwoman at

PETERSFIELD IN HAMPSHIRE

ADVERTISEMENT

IT IS THOUGHT PROPER to assure the reader that the following verses are the real productions of the person to whom the title page ascribes them.

Tho' she pretends not to the genius of Mr Duck, nor hopes to be taken notice of by the great, yet her friends are of opinion that the novelty of a washerwoman's turning poetess will procure her some readers.

If all that follow the same employment would amuse themselves and one another during the tedious hours of their labour in this, or some other way as innocent, instead of tossing scandal to and fro, many reputations would remain unwounded, and the peace of families be less disturb'd.

THE WOMAN'S LABOUR

I think it no reproach to the author, whose life is toilsome, and her wages inconsiderable, to confess honestly that the view of her putting a small sum of money in her pocket, as well as the reader's entertainment, had its share of influence upon this publication. And she humbly hopes she shall not be absolutely disappointed; since, tho' she is ready to own that her performance could by no means stand a critical examination, yet she flatters herself that, with all its faults and imperfections, the candid reader will judge it to be something considerably beyond the common capacity of those of her own rank and occupation.

MARY COLLIER

1739

Immortal Bard! thou fav'rite of the Nine!*
Enrich'd by peers, advanc'd by Caroline!*
Deign to look down on one that's poor and low,
Remembering you yourself was lately so;
Accept these lines: Alas! what can you have
From her, who ever was, and's still a slave?
No learning ever was bestow'd on me;
My life was always spent in drudgery:
And not alone; alas! with grief I find,
It is the portion of poor womankind. 10
Oft have I thought, as on my bed I lay,
Eas'd from the tiresome labours of the day,
Our first extraction from a mass refin'd,
Could never be for slavery design'd;
Till time and custom by degrees destroy'd
That happy state our sex at first enjoy'd.

THE WOMAN'S LABOUR

When men had us'd their utmost care and toil,
Their recompense was but a female smile;
When they by arts or arms were render'd great,
They laid their trophies at a woman's feet; 20
They, in those days, unto our sex did bring
Their hearts, their all, a free-will offering;
And as from us their being they derive,
They back again should all due homage give.

Jove,* once descending from the clouds, did drop
In show'rs of gold on lovely Danaë's* lap;
The sweet-tongu'd poets, in those generous days,
Unto our shrine still offer'd up their lays:
But now, alas! that golden age is past;
We are the objects of your scorn at last. 30
And you, great Duck, upon whose happy brow
The muses seem to fix the garland now,
In your late poem boldly did declare
Alcides'* labours can't with yours compare;
And of your annual task* have much to say –
Of threshing, reaping, mowing corn and hay;
Boasting your daily toil, and nightly dream,

THE WOMAN'S LABOUR

But can't conclude your never-dying theme,
And let our hapless sex in silence lie
Forgotten, and in dark oblivion die; 40
But on our abject state you throw your scorn,
And women wrong, your verses to adorn.
You of hay-making speak a word or two,
As if our sex but little work could do:
This makes the honest farmer smiling say
He'll seek for women still to make his hay;
For if his back be turn'd, their work they mind
As well as men, as far as he can find.
For my own part, I many a summer's day
Have spent in throwing, turning, making hay; 50
But ne'er could see what you have lately found –
Our wages paid for sitting on the ground.
'Tis true that when our morning's work is done,
And all our grass expos'd unto the sun,
While that his scorching beams do on it shine,
As well as you, we have a time to dine:
I hope that since we freely toil and sweat
To earn our bread, you'll give us time to eat.
That over, soon we must get up again,

THE THREE WISE
SENTENCES

*From the First Book of Esdras**
Chap. III and IV

In gentle numbers fain my muse would sing
Of great Darius, Persia's royal king;*
That potent monarch, whose imperial sway
So many mighty kingdoms did obey;
From India's coast to Ethiopia's land,
All people did submit to his command.

The King with feasting in most noble sort
Did entertain the princes of his Court,
Till night came on, and all retired were,
Then to his chamber did to rest repair; 10
Where several noble youths strict watch did keep,
To guard his sacred person in his sleep:
Among them three young men of virtuous mind,
Whose hearts to study wisdom were inclin'd,
Had privately, between themselves, agreed

THE THRESHER'S LABOUR

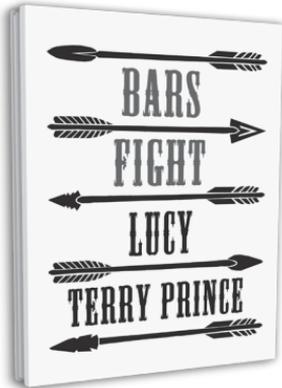
*To the Revd. Mr Stanley**

The grateful tribute of these rural lays,
Which to her patron's hand the muse conveys,
Deign to accept: 'tis just she tribute bring
To him, whose bounty gives her life to sing;
To him, whose gen'rous favours tune her voice;
And bid her, 'midst her poverty, rejoice.
Inspir'd by these, she dares herself prepare
To sing the toils of each revolving year;
Those endless toils, which always grow anew,
And the poor thresher's destin'd to pursue: 10
Ev'n these, with pleasure, can the muse rehearse,
When you and gratitude demand her verse.

Soon as the golden harvest quits the plain,
And Ceres'* gifts reward the farmer's pain;
What corn each sheaf will yield, intent to hear,



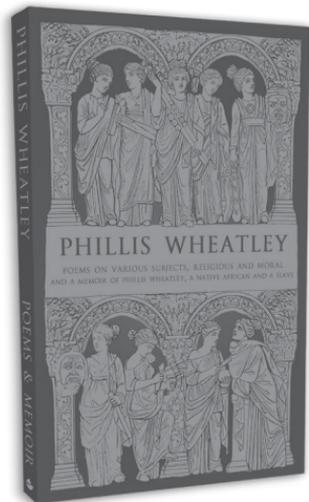
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