

The Poor, Singing Dame

By Mrs. Mary Robinson

Beneath an old wall, that went round an old Castle,
For many a year, with brown ivy oerspread;
A neat little Hovel, its lowly roof raising,
Defied the wild winds that howl'd over its shed:
The turrets, that frown'd on the poor simple dwelling,
Were rock'd to and fro, when the Tempest would roar,
And the river, that down the rich valley was swelling,
Flow'd swiftly beside the green step of its door,

The Summer Son, gilded the rushy-roof slanting,
The bright dews bespangled its ivy-bound hedge
And above, on the ramparts, the sweet Birds were chanting,
And wild buds thick dappled the clear, river's edge.
When the Castle's rich chambers were haunted, and dreary,
The poor little Hovel was still, and secure;
And no robber e'er enter'd, or goblin or fairy,
For the splendours of pride had no charms to allure.

The Lord of the Castle, a proud surly ruler,
Oft heard the low dwelling with sweet music ring:
For the old Dame that liv'd in the little Hut chearly,
Would sit at her wheel, and merrily sing:
When revels the Castle's great Hall was resounding,
The old Dame was sleeping, not dreading of fear;
And when over the mountain the Huntsmen were bounding
She would open her wicket, their clamours to hear.

To the merry-ton'd horn, she would dance on the threshold,
And louder, and louder, repeat her old Song:
And when Winter its mantle of Frost was displaying
She caroll'd, undaunted, the bare woods among:
She would gather dry Fern, ever happy and singing,
With her cake of brown bread, and her jug of brown beer,
And would smile when she heard the great Castle-bell ringing,
Inviting the Proud—to their prodigal chear.

The she liv'd, ever patient and ever contented,
Till Envy the Lord of the Castle possess'd,
For he hated that Poverty should be so cheerful,
While care could the fav'rites of Fortune molest;
He sent his bold yeomen with threats to prevent her,

And still would she carol her sweet roundelay.
At last, an old steward, relentless he sent her—
Who bore her, all trembling, to Prison away!

Three weeks did she languish, then died, broken-hearted,
Poor Dame! how the death-bell did mournfully sound!
And along the green path six young Bachelors bore her,
And laid her, for ever, beneath the cold ground!
And the primroses pale, 'mid the long grass were growing,
The bright dews of twilight bespangled her grave
And morn heard the breezes of summer soft blowing
To bid the fresh flow'rets in sympathy wave.

The Lord of the Castle, from that fatal moment
When poor Singing MARY was laid in her grave,
Each night was surrounded by Screech-owls appalling,
Which o'er the black turrets their pinions would wave!
On the ramparts that frown'd on the river, swift flowing,
They hover'd, still hooting a terrible song,
When his windows would rattle; the Winter blast blowing,
They would shriek like a ghost, the dark alleys among!

Wherever he wander'd they followed him crying,
At dawnlight, at Eve, still they haunted his way!
When the Moon shone across the wide common, they hooted,
Nor quitted his path, till the blazing of day.
His bones began wasting, his flesh was decaying,
And he hung his proud head; and he perish'd with shame;
And the tomb of rich marble, no soft tear displaying,
O'ershadows the grave, of THE POOR SINGING DAME!