

JOHN CLARE BY HIMSELF

those divine writings. I must digress to say that I think the manner of learning children in village schools very erroneous, that is soon as they learn their letters to task them with lessons from the bible and testament and keeping them dinging at them, without any change, till they leave it. A dull boy never turns with pleasures to his school days when he has often been beat 4 times for bad readings in 5 verses of Scripture, no more then a Man in renewed prosperity to the time when he was a debtor in a Jail. Other books as they grow up become a novelty and their task book at school, the Bible, loses its relish. The painful task of learning wearied the memory. Irksome inconvenience never prompts recollection. The bible is laid by on its peaceful shelf and by 9 Cottages out of 10 never disturb'd or turn'd too further then the minutes reference for reciting the text on a Sunday, a task which most christians nowadays think a sufficient duty at least in the lower orders. I cannot speak with assurance only where experience informs me. So much for village schools. About now all my stock of learning was gleaned from the Sixpenny Romances of 'Cinderella', 'Little Red Riding hood', 'Jack and the bean Stalk', 'Zig Zag', 'Prince Cherry',<sup>10</sup> etc etc etc and great was the pleasure, pain, or surprise increased by allowing them authenticity, for I firmly believed every page I read and considered I possessed in these the chief learning and literature of the country. But as it is common in villages to pass judgment on a lover of books as a sure indication of laziness, I was drove to the narrow necessity of stinted opportunities to hide in woods and dingles of thorns in the fields on Sundays to read these things, which every sixpence thro the indefatigable savings of a penny and halfpenny when collected was willingly thrown away for them, as opportunity offered when hawkers offered them for sale at the door. To read such things on sundays was not right while necessity is a good apology for iniquity and ignorance is more so I knew no better and it may be said that ignorance is one of the sweetest hopes that a poor man carries to the grave, when his manhood muses oer the exclamation of his dying Saviour, asking and offering the same plea for the worst of Sinners 'Father