

**Appendix 1.5: Commendatory Verses by Stevens, Polwhele, Cowper, Hayley and Mundy,
from *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791, 1795, 1799)**

In the combined editions of *The Botanic Garden*, verses in tribute to ED were printed in the front matter of Volume 1. In the 1791 edition of Volume 1, only Stevens's verses were included. 1795 and 1799 include the complete set below (transcribed from 1795).

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TO
THE AUTHOR
OF THE
POEM ON THE LOVES OF THE PLANTS.

BY THE REV. W. B. STEPHENS.¹

OFT tho' thy genius, DARWIN! amply fraught
With native wealth, explore new worlds of mind;
Whence the bright ores of drossless wisdom brought,
Stamp'd by the Muse's hand, enrich mankind;

Tho' willing Nature to thy curious eye,
Involved in night, her mazy depths betray;
Till at their source thy piercing search decry
The streams, that bathe with Life our mortal clay;

Tho', boldly soaring in sublimer mood
Through trackless skies on metaphysic wings,
Thou darest to scan the approachless Cause of Good,
And weigh with steadfast hand the Sum of Things;

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Yet wilt thou, charmed amid his whispering bowers,
Oft with lone step by glittering Derwent stray,
Mark his green foliage, count his musky flowers,
That blush or tremble to the rising ray;

While FANCY, seated in her rock-roof'd dell,
Listening the secrets of the vernal grove,
Breathes sweetest strains to they symphonious shell,
And "gives new echoes to the throne of Love."²

*Repton, Nov. 28, 1788.*³

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TO

Dr. D A R W I N.

WHILE Sargent⁴ winds with fond and curious eyes
Thro' every mazy region of "the mine——"
While, as entrancing forms around him rise,
With magic light the mineral kingdoms shine;

Behold! amid the vegetable bloom,
O DARWIN, thy ambrosial rivers flow,
And suns more pure the fragrant earth illumine,
As all the vivid plants with passion glow.

Yes!—and, wheree'er with life creation teems,
I trace thy spirit thro' the kindling whole;
As with new radiance to the genial beams
Of Science, isles emerge, or oceans roll,
And *Nature*, in primordial beauty, seems
To breathe, inspir'd by Thee, the PHILOSOPHIC SOUL!

R. POLWHELE.⁵

*Kenton, near Exeter,
April 18, 1792.*

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TO

Dr. D A R W I N.

TWO Poets,⁶ (poets, by report,
Not oft so well agree)
Sweet harmonist of Flora's court!
Conspire to honour Thee.

They best can judge a Poet's worth,
Who oft themselves have known
The pangs of a poetic birth
By labours of their own.

We, therefore pleas'd, extol thy song,
Though various yet complete,
Rich in embellishment, as strong
And learn'd as it is sweet.

No envy mingles with our praise,
Though could our hearts repine
At any Poet's happier lays,
They would, they must, at thine.

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But we in mutual bondage knit
Of Friendship's closest tie,
Can gaze on even DARWIN'S wit
With an unjaundic'd eye;

And deem the bard, whoe'er he be,
And howsoever known,
Who would not twine a wreath for Thee,
Unworthy of his own.

WM. COWPER.⁷

*Weston Underwood, Olney, Bucks,
June 23, 1793.*

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TO

Dr. D A R W I N.

AS Nature lovely Science led
Thro' all her flow'ry maze,
The volume she before her spread
Of DARWIN'S radiant lays.

Coy Science starts—so started Eve
At beauties yet unknown:

“The figure that you there perceive
(Said Nature) is your own.”

“My own? It is:—but half so fair
“I never seem’d till now:
“And here, too, with a soften’d air,
“Sweet Nature! here art Thou.”

“Yes—in this mirrour of the Bard
“We both embellish’d shine;
“And grateful will unite to guard
“An artist so divine.” ——

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Thus Nature and thus Science spake
In Flora’s friendly bower;
While DARWIN’S glory seem’d to wake
New life in every flower.

This with delight two Poets heard;
Time verifies it daily;
Trust it, dear DARWIN, on the word
Of COWPER and of HAYLEY!—

W. HAYLEY.⁸

*Eartha[m], near Chichester,
June 27, 1792.*

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*Address to the River Derwent, on whose Banks the Author of the
Botanic Garden resides.*

BY F. N. C. MUNDY, ESQ.⁹ 1792.

DERWENT, like thee thy Poet’s splendid song
With sweet vicissitudes of ease and force
Now with enchanting smoothness glides along,
Now pours impetuous its resounding course;

While Science marches down thy wond’ring dells,

And all the Muses round her banners crowd,
Pleas'd to assemble in thy sparry cells,
And chant her lessons to thy echoes proud;

While here Philosophy and Truth display
The shining robes those heaven-born sisters wove,
While Fays and Graces beck'ning smooth their way,
And hand in hand with Flora follows Love.

Well may such radiant state increase thy pride,
Delighted stream! tho' rich in native charms,
Tho' inborn worth and honour still reside,
Where thy chill banks the glow of Chatsworth¹⁰ warms.

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Tho' here her new-found art, as that of yore,
The spinster Goddess to thy rule assigns;
Tho', where her temples crowd thy peopled shore,
Wealth gilds thy urn, and Fame thy chaplet twines.

Ah, while thy nymphs in Derby's towered vale
Lead their sad Quires around MILCENA's bier,
What soothing sweetness breathes along the gale,
Comes o'er the consort's heart, and balms a brother's tear!

Her new-found art, &c. Alluding to the numerous cotton mills on and near the river Derwent.

Milcena's bier. Mrs. French, sister to Mrs. Mundy. Part I. Canto III. l. 308.¹¹

¹ William Bagshaw Stevens (1756–1800), poet and diarist. (His last name is consistently misspelled “Stephens” through the editions of *The Botanic Garden*.)

² In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Viola says, “It gives a very echo to the seat / Where love is throned” (2.4.23–4). This phrase does not have quotation marks in 1791.

³ Repton is in Derbyshire, the county where ED lived from 1781 to 1802.

⁴ John Sargent (1750–1831) published *The Mine: A Dramatic Poem* in 1785.

⁵ Richard Polwhele (1760–1838), author and Anglican clergyman, who published poetry, topography, sermons, translations of ancient Greek writers, and contributions to journals such as *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Anti-Jacobin Review*. He is now best known for *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), a poem with notes. In it he admires and defends ED's poetry, but then criticizes the sexualized botany of *LOTP* while targeting an array of women writers as “A female band despising NATURE's law” (p. 6) envisioned to be led by Mary Wollstonecraft. Polwhele praises other female writers, though, including ED's friend Anna Seward. (See Appendix 5.10.) Polwhele had made the acquaintance of ED's son Erasmus in 1780 and sent this sonnet to ED in 1792 (see King-Hele, ed., *Letters* 92-7).

⁶ Cowper and Hayley. Hayley sent both poems to ED in 1792 (see King-Hele, ed., *Letters* 92-6).

⁷ William Cowper (1731–1800), poet, best known for *The Task* (1785) and his contributions to *Olney Hymns* (1779).

⁸ William Hayley (1745–1820), best known for his poetry (most successfully, *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781)), his biographies of Milton (1796) and Cowper (1803), and his patronage of William Blake (1757–1827). ED met Hayley when Hayley visited Derby in 1781. ED mentions Hayley in the first Interlude of *LOTP* (p. 51).

⁹ Francis Noel Clarke Mundy (1739–1815), friend of ED, author of the poem *Needwood Forest* (1776). See *LOTP* I:161n, IV:33–6, and Additional Notes.

¹⁰ Chatsworth House in Bakewell, Derbyshire is the seat of the Cavendishes, Dukes and Duchesses of Devonshire. The present building dates from the late seventeenth–early eighteenth century. Lancelot “Capability” Brown (bap. 1716, d. 1783) worked on landscape design for the grounds starting in 1760.

¹¹ A reference to *The Economy of Vegetation*. The passage is a description of nymphs sorrowing by the river Derwent (III:297–308), followed by lines “In memory of Mrs. French, a lady who to many other elegant accomplishments added a proficiency in botany and natural history” (III:309–20, III:308n.).