THOMAS GRAY
1716–1771

Hymn to Adversity

daughter of Jove, relentless power,
thou tamer of the human breast,
whose iron scourge and torturing hour
the bad affright, afflict the best!

bound in thy adamantine chain,
the proud are taught to taste of pain,
and purple tyrants vainly groan
with pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone.

When first thy sire to send on earth
virtue, his darling child, designed,
to thee he gave the heavenly birth,
and bade to form her infant mind.
stern rugged nurse! thy rigid lore
with patience many a year she bore:
what sorrow was, thou bad’st her know,
and from her own she learned to melt at other’s woe.

scared at thy frown terrific, fly
self-pleasing folly’s idle brood,
Wild Laughter, Noise, and thoughtless Joy,
and leave us leisure to be good.

Light they disperse, and with them go
the summer friend, the flattering foe;
by vain prosperity received,
to her they vow their truth, and are again believed.

Wisdom, in sable garb arrayed,
immersed in rapturous thought profound,
And melancholy, silent maid
with leaden eye, that loves the ground,
still on thy solemn steps attend:

1. “Zeus, who leads mortals to understanding, who has established as a fixed ordinance that wisdom comes by suffering.”
Warm Charity, the general friend,
With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.

Oh, gently on thy suppliant’s head,
Dread Goddess, lay thy chastening hand!
Not in thy Gorgon² terrors clad,
Nor circled with the vengeful band
(As by the impious thou art seen)
With thundering voice, and threatening mien,
With screaming Horror’s funeral cry,
Despair, and fell Disease, and ghastly Poverty.

Thy form benign, O Goddess, wear,
Thy milder influence impart,
Thy philosophic train be there
To soften, not to wound, my heart,
The generous spark extinct revive,
Teach me to love and to forgive,
Exact my own defects to scan,
What others are, to feel, and know myself a man.

². The Gorgons were monsters with snaky locks, one glance of whose eyes turned men to stones; the “vengeful band”: the Furies.