THE PRAISE OF THE NEEDLE

by

JOHN TAYLOR (1580-1653)

This famous old poem is here reprinted from a photostatic reproduction of the copy in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, of The Needles Excellency, 10th ed. (London). Printed for James Boler, 1634.

The author, John Taylor, was known as “The Water Poet” (1580-1653) because he was actually a Thames waterman, as well as a very prolific writer.

Although his collected works were published in 1630, this was not among them; so that it may have first appeared in the volume from which it is here reproduced.
The Praye of the Needle.

It will intitle their made, enland their floor,
To see their thought in tre, and their Needle more.
The Needle the parent, prospers yields, and pleasure,
Ben charpelle of the ages, here out of measure.

A Needle (though in this small and slender)
Yet is both a maker and a mender;
A grave Returner of old Rums decayed,
To make them ready, and to make them be;
No hour or minute, our nakedness to hide,
No Garners gay, to make as magnifie:
No Shadowes, Quapowasses, Canes, Bands, Ruffs, Kno's,
Art Knistered, Quipers, muslin, or Mary Müders,
No Old clothes, Apron, handkerchief or Fals,
No Eye-sacke for Patternes or for Halls,
No Skirts, no Towells, Napkins, Pillow holists,
No ornament, or ornament needs.

Then is a Needle profe, an instrument
Of peace, pleasure, and of ornament.

Worshipp'y Queenes have graced in hand to take,
An high base Ladies by chance did make,
That stilly Daughters the gapers up did grace,
The Needle Art, they to their children done.

And as hence an extatice of prattice,
So what different prospers honour in their days,
Then this which daily doth itself appear,
A great enemy to idle.
The use of Sewing is exceeding old,
As in the sacred Texts is enjoyn;
One that blesseth the Fruits of the Sun.

Which hath denned far from man to man:
The Mother taught their Daughters, Siers their Sons,
Thus in a line sucessfully in runs
For general peace, and for recreation,
From generation upon generation.

Wee work the Cherubems Embrodered rare,
The Covers of the Temple made
And by the Almigh'ty great command, we see,
That Aaron Garments bequeathed works should be;
And further, God did bid his Vestments should
Be made much gay, and glorious to behold.

Thus plainly, and most truly is declared
The Needle worketh hath full in regard,
For to it we are NATUR'F made,
As if it were HER Sister of the SAME.

(Flowers)

The Praye of the Needle.

Flowers, Fruits, and Fishes, Bees, Birds, Flies, and Bees,
Hills, Dales, Plains, Pastures, Skies, Seas, Rivers, Trees;
There's nothing rare at hand, or farre behind,
But what the Needle may be chap'd and wrought,
In clothes of Arras I have often seen;
Men say'd the artesiers in Italy have bene,
But what the graces & Artes has been in place,
Yet ART would rise with NATUR' for the grace
Nor prepare, Poet's rare, and Anastasius,
Signifying setenness from Nature,
True History, or various pleasant fictions

In lonyd colour's mix't, with Arm's commision,
All in one Sash, one Square, and Round;
Ams life inclind within Nature's bounds;
Nor that Art beaneth merely natural,
Informing Shape or Geoemtry;
And though our Country everywhere is old
With Ladders, and with Gentlewomen, child
This rare Art; yet here they may discern
Some things to teach them, if they wil learn.
And in this book some pleasing works doth teach,
For Jacky, and Mary, and Peter, and John,
Some times the art, and skill, and rarity;
And some times, as a good guide for Nature's sake.

This book, and it, each good use may make.
All form of works, show me, that I may bene.
Here are directions how they may be done.
And for this kingdom's good are hereicommon.

From the remotest parts the Chretends
Collected with much pains and industry.
From Sketching Spain, and painting Majorca,
From ferreolFrance, and pleasant Italy,
From Poland, France, Denmark, Germany,
And some rare pictures there have bene set
Beyond the bounds of this book's Toledo.

From Spains, and these Kingdoms too,
And from great artists, the Ladies well.
Thus are these works, form of all, and dearly bought;
And consequently, good for ladies to see.
Nor do I degrease (in any case)
Or the pleasantness of other teachings base.
For Art make Nature, and make Nature, and Nature,
That the art, and skill, and rarity.

To one, and to another, and to all.

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The Praye of the Needle.

All shee is good, and shee we must allow,
And ches in every where as perfect now;
And in this Book, these are of Chese some store,
With many others, never bene before.
Here Praye and Lamentation may be free,
And as a spinners ship from tree to tree,
So Maid may (from these Middett, or their Master)
Lastly to leave no works, and no un finish.
For here they may make choice of which to work,
And they may work to worke, from Rush to Rush,
Witch, worst, largest, well finished and fast.
(With profit) make them perfect in them all,
This hoping that their works may have this guide
To serve for ornament, and not for praise.
So with her verse, there is no decline,
For she to end, may these books have good success.

Here follows certaine Sonnets in the Honorable memory of Queens and great Ladies, who have been famous for their rare inventions, and profest with the Needle.


I read this in the French Kin. Henri: Daugher to the Great King.
Came into England with a purpose therein
Of spoyling her, to which she these did bring.
Shes the eight King, merry married she was,
And afterwards divorced, where remains
(Although)

The Praye of the Needle.

(Although a Queen) yet the her days did passe,
In working with the Needle curiously.
On the Table, and places more beside,
Her excellent memorial may be forme:
Whereby the Needles people be enlarke
By her faire Ladies, and her self a Queen,
Thus for her pleasure, hope her service is left,
Her works proclaime her prays, though she be dead.

Mary, Queen of England, and wife to Philip, King of Spain.

Her daughter Mary, where the Scheme was laid,
And though she were a Queen of mighty power,
Her memory will never be erad,
Which by her works are likewise in the Tower,
In Poynt or Cullent, and in Remorses Court,
In that most prosperous room called Paradise,
Who over plenteous dience to return,
May bee some work of hers, of wonderous price,
Her gremets held in no disorder,
To take the Needle in her Royal hand:

Which was a good example to our Nation,
To serve all men from worship Lord.
And thus this Queen, to whom it was sent,
The Needles were pleas'd her, and the grace she,
Elizabeth Queen of England, and Daughter to King Henry the eighth.

Whom this great Queen, whose memory shall now
By any name of love be overspread
For when she was, and all therein shall not,
Yet shall her glorious name for ever last.
When in a bed, had many troubles past,
From youth to age, by many angry spleen
And fierce spleen, and the Tower was one with
And after all, was English Penitent Queen.
Yet however sorrow came or went,
She made the Needle her companion still
And in that exercise her time spent.
As many living yet, doe know her skill.
Thus blis was Captive, or else Crown'd,
A Needle women Royall, and remain'd.

(Although)
The Praye of the Needle.

The Right Honourable, Vertuous, and learned
Lady, Mary, late Countesse of Pembroke.

To all degrees of humbleness, that know or live by
the laudable employment of
the Needle.

Then let our Pride looke sternly on thee,
Without the Needle, Pride would never see.
Nor yet les humble cry pitch, and call, and swear,
Sew as I say, much in doing so.
Nor yet let any one presume to praise,
And call these lines prose, and wise, by name.
Let our opinion be prejudice.
But need it, are they base to discriminate,
To save our souls, our retrenching books,
I must premise that all who take it,
Will like and ascend the wondrous good of thee.
Fools play the Fools, but wise through want of wit,
Who all sweetome content do fabricate.

FINIS: John Taylor.