

Idyllic-

Fled are those times, when in harmonious strains  
The rustic poet praised his native plains:  
No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,  
Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse.<sup>1</sup>

*Dear Sarah, I'm travelling into the city, approaching the North Downs. Swathes of white chalk variegate the brown fields against an edging of serpentine woodland. Dappled things please the eye. I wonder how fragile the trees are: bastion oaks. A few fruit-pickers yet, huddled in hoarfrost- picturesque toil cloaks old labour removed to exotic clime. I'll arrive in 35 minutes, Stephen.*