

A PLOUGHMAN'S TALE

Now Les, he was an angry man to mark;
So quick to quarrel, quicker still to fight;
As tough and gnarled as oak, with roughened bark
Not worse, by any judging, than his bite,

Though coarsely he could curse, hoarse voice raised high!
As hard as he was hardy so it seemed,
He looked upon the world with jaundiced eye,
A man who never wondered, never dreamed.

Then why, when ploughing through a plodding day,
Should such a man think fit to bring to rest
His trundling tractor on its grumbling way,
Climb down, and gently lift each moorhen's nest

Which he would always notice lying there;
And, in a new-drawn furrow, softly lay
Those helpless nestlings, saved from slicing share,
Till duck like to the dyke they went their way?

This, once, he told me as we supped our ale
In the New Inn one confidential night.
Half-proud, half-shy, he told his halting tale,
His harsh voice softened, scowling face alight...

Next day a stranger chose he to remain
Gave grudging grunt whenever he passed by
But never ever mentioned it again;
And, this I must confess no more dared I!

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