
SIR EDWARD DYER
1543–1607

Dyer was a courtier, a friend of Sir Philip Sidney, and a patron of poets. Since he published nothing himself, not much poetry has survived that can be confidently assigned to him. But his contemporaries, such as Nashe, thought that he was the first “that repurified poetry from arts pedantism [presumably the learned language of the university] and that instructed it to speak courtly.” His best-known lyric, “My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is,” is one of the great expressions in English of the ideal of *otium* or the contented mind. It is of course related to the idyllic simplicity of pastoral, and to the glorification of the mean estate (moderate living) in Surrey’s poem “My Friend, the Things That Do Attain.”

My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is

- My mind to me a kingdom is;
 Such present joys therein I find
 That it excels all other bliss
 That earth affords or grows by kind.¹
 5 Though much I want² which most would have,
 Yet still my mind forbids to crave.
- No princely pomp, no wealthy store,
 No force to win the victory,
 No wily wit to salve a sore,
 10 No shape to feed a loving eye;
 To none of these I yield as thrall.
 For why³ my mind doth serve for all.
- I see how plenty suffers oft,
 And hasty climbers soon do fall;
 15 I see that those which are aloft
 Mishap doth threaten most of all;
 They get with tail, they keep with fear.
 Such cares my mind could never bear.
- Content I live, this is my stay;
 20 I seek no more than may suffice;
 I press to bear no haughty sway;
 Look, what I lack my mind supplies;
 Lo, thus I triumph like a king,
 Content with that my mind doth bring.
- 25 Some have too much, yet still do crave;
 I little have, and seek no more.

1. Nature.
 2. Lack.

3. Because.

They are but poor, though much they have,
 And I am rich with little store.
 They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
 30 They lack, I leave; they pine, I live.

I laugh not at another's loss;
 I grudge not at another's gain;
 No worldly waves my mind can toss;
 My state at one doth still remain.
 35 I fear no foe, I fawn no friend;
 I loathe not life, nor dread my end.

Some weigh their pleasure by their lust,
 Their wisdom by their rage of will;
 Their treasure is their only trust;
 40 A cloakéd craft their store of skill.
 But all the pleasure that I find
 Is to maintain a quiet mind.

My wealth is health and perfect ease;
 My conscience clear my choice defense;
 45 I neither seek by bribes to please,
 Nor by deceit to breed offense.
 Thus do I live; thus will I die.
 Would all did so as well as I!