

**"It might have been". : her joy was duty and love was law : for one of the brightest poetic gems. P.T.O.**

**Contributors**

J. C. Eno Ltd

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>



*Maud Muller*

"It Might Have Been."

Her Joy was Duty  
And Love was Law.

For one of the brightest poetic gems. P.T.O.

## MAUD MULLER.

MAUD MULLER, on a summer's day, raked the meadow sweet with hay,  
Beneath her torn hat glowed the wealth of simple beauty and rustic health.  
Singing, she wrought, and her merry glee the mock-bird echoed from his tree.  
But when she glanced to the far-off town, white from its hill slope looking down,  
The sweet song died, and a vague unrest and a nameless longing filled her breast,—  
A wish, that she hardly dare to own, for something better than she had known.  
The Judge rode slowly down the lane, smoothing his horse's chestnut mane.  
He drew his bridle in the shade of the apple-trees to greet the maid,  
And asked a draught from the spring that flowed through the meadow across the road.  
She stooped where the cool spring bubbled up, and filled for him her small tin cup,  
And blushed as she gave it, looking down on her feet so bare, and her tattered gown.  
"Thanks!" said the Judge; "a sweeter draught from a fairer hand was never quaffed."  
He spoke of the grass and flowers and trees, of the singing birds and the humming bees;  
Then talked of the haying, and wondered whether the cloud in the west would bring foul  
And Maud forgot her brier-torn gown, and her graceful ankles bare and brown [weather  
And listened, while a pleased surprise looked from her long-lashed hazel eyes.  
At last, like one who for delay seeks a vain excuse, he rode away.  
Maud Muller looked and sighed: "Ah me! That I the Judge's bride might be!  
"He would dress me up in silks so fine, and praise and toast me at his wine.  
"My father should wear a broadcloth coat; my brother should sail a painted boat.  
"I'd dress my mother so grand and gay, and the baby should have a new toy each day.  
"And I'd feed the hungry and clothe the poor, and all should bless me who left our door."  
The Judge looked back as he climbed the hill, and saw Maud Muller standing still.  
"A form more fair, a face more sweet, ne'er hath it been my lot to meet.  
"And her modest answer and graceful air show her wise and good as she is fair  
"Would she were Luine, and I to-day, like her, a harvester of hay;  
"No doubtful balance of rights and wrongs, nor weary lawyers with endless tongues,  
"But low of cattle and song of birds, and health and quiet and loving words."  
But he thought of his sisters proud and cold, and his mother vain of her rank and gold.  
So, closing his heart the Judge rode on and Maud was left in the field alone.  
But the lawyers smiled that afternoon, when he hummed in Court an old love tune;  
And the young girl mused besides the well till the rain on the unraked clover fell.  
He wedded a wife of richest dower, who lived for fashion, as he for power.  
Yet oft, in his marble hearth's bright glow, he watched a picture come and go;  
And sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes looked out in their innocent surprise.  
Oft, when the wine in his glass was red, he longed for the wayside well instead;  
And closed his eyes on his garnished rooms to dream of meadows and clover-blooms.  
And the proud man sighed, with a secret pain, "Ah, that I was free again!  
"Free as when I rode that day, where the barefoot maiden raked her hay."  
She wedded a man unlearned and poor, and many children played round her door.  
But care and sorrow, and childbirth pain, left their traces on heart and brain.  
And oft, when the summer sun shone hot on the new-mown hay in the meadow lot,  
And she heard the little spring brook fall over the road side, through the wall,  
In the shade of the apple-tree again she saw a rider draw his rein.  
And, gazing down with timid grace, she felt his pleased eyes read her face.  
Sometimes her narrow kitchen walls stretched away into stately halls;  
The weary wheel to a spinnet turned, the tallow candle an astral burned.  
And for him who sat by the chimney lug, dozing and grumbling o'er pipe and mug,  
A manly form at her side she saw, and joy was duty and love was law.  
Then she took up her burden of life again, saying only, "It might have been."  
Alas for maiden, alas for Judge, for rich repiner and household drudge!  
God pity them both! and pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall.  
For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been."  
Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies deeply buried from human eyes;  
And, in the hereafter, angels may roll the stone from its grave away!

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