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Robert Southey, THE **IDIOT**

The circumstance related in the following ballad happened some years since in Herefordshire.

It had pleased God to form poor Ned
A thing of idiot mind,
Yet to the poor unreas'ning man
God had not been unkind;

Old Sarah loved her helpless child
Whom helplessness made dear,
And life was happiness to him
Who had no hope nor fear.

She knew his wants, she understood
Each half-artic'late call,
And he was ev'rything to her
And she to him was all.

And so for many a year they dwelt
Nor knew a wish beside,
But age at length on Sarah came,
And she fell sick and died.

He tried in vain to waken her,
And called her o'er and o'er;
They told him she was dead—the sound
To him no import bore.

They closed her eyes and shrouded her,
And he stood wond'ring by;
And when they bore her to the grave
He followed silently.

They laid her in the narrow house,
They sung the fun'ral stave,
But when the fun'ral train dispersed
He loitered by the grave.

The rabble boys who used to jeer
Whene'er they saw poor Ned

Now stood and watched him at the grave,
And not a word they said.

They came and went and came again
Till night at last came on,
And still he loitered by the grave
Till all to rest were gone.

And when he found himself alone
He swift removed the clay,
And raised the coffin up in haste
And bore it swift away.

And when he reached his hut he laid
The coffin on the floor,
And with the eagerness of joy
He barred the cottage door.

And out he took his mother's corpse
And placed it in her chair
And then he heaped the hearth and blew
The kindling fire with care.

He placed his mother in her chair
And in her wonted place,
And blew the kindling fire that shone
Reflected on her face.

And pausing now, her hand would feel,
And now her face behold
'—Why, mother, do you look so pale
And why are you so cold?'

It had pleased God from the poor wretch His
only friend to call,
But God was kind to him and soon
In death restored him all.³

The Idiot

This poem was first attributed to Southey by B. R. MeElderry Jr., 'Southey, and Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy"'