

Cleanliness By Charles Lamb

Come my little Robert near—
Fie! what filthy hands are here!
Who that e'er could understand
The rare structure of a hand,
With its branching fingers fine,
Work itself of hands divine,
Strong, yet delicately knit,
For ten thousand uses fit,
Overlaid with so clear skin
You may see the blood within,
And the curious palm, disposed
In such lines, some have supposed
You may read the fortunes there
By the figures that appear—
Who this hand would chuse to cover
With a crust of dirt all over,
Till it look'd in hue and shape
Like the fore-foot of an Ape?
Man or boy that works or plays
In the fields or the highways
May, without offence or hurt,
From the soil contract a dirt,
Which the next clear spring or river

Washes out and out for ever—
But to cherish stains impure,
Soil deliberate to endure,
On the skin to fix a stain
Till it works into the grain,
Argues a degenerate mind,
Sordid, slothful, ill inclin'd,
Wanting in that self-respect
Which does virtue best protect.

All-endearing Cleanliness,
Virtue next to Godliness,
Easiest, cheapest, needful'st duty,
To the body health and beauty,
Who that's human would refuse it,
When a little water does it?