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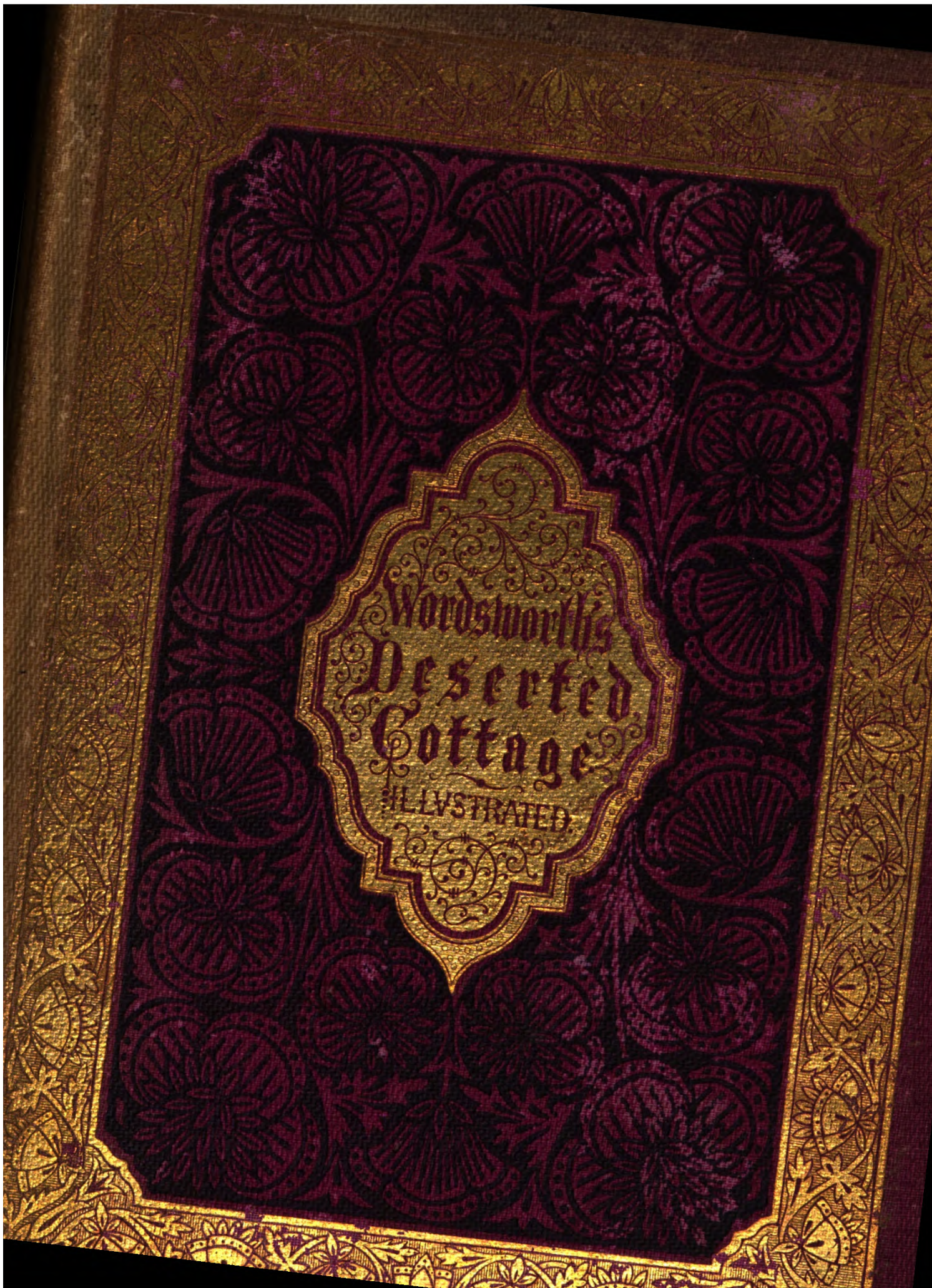
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Wordsworth's  
Deserted  
Cottage  
ILLUSTRATED





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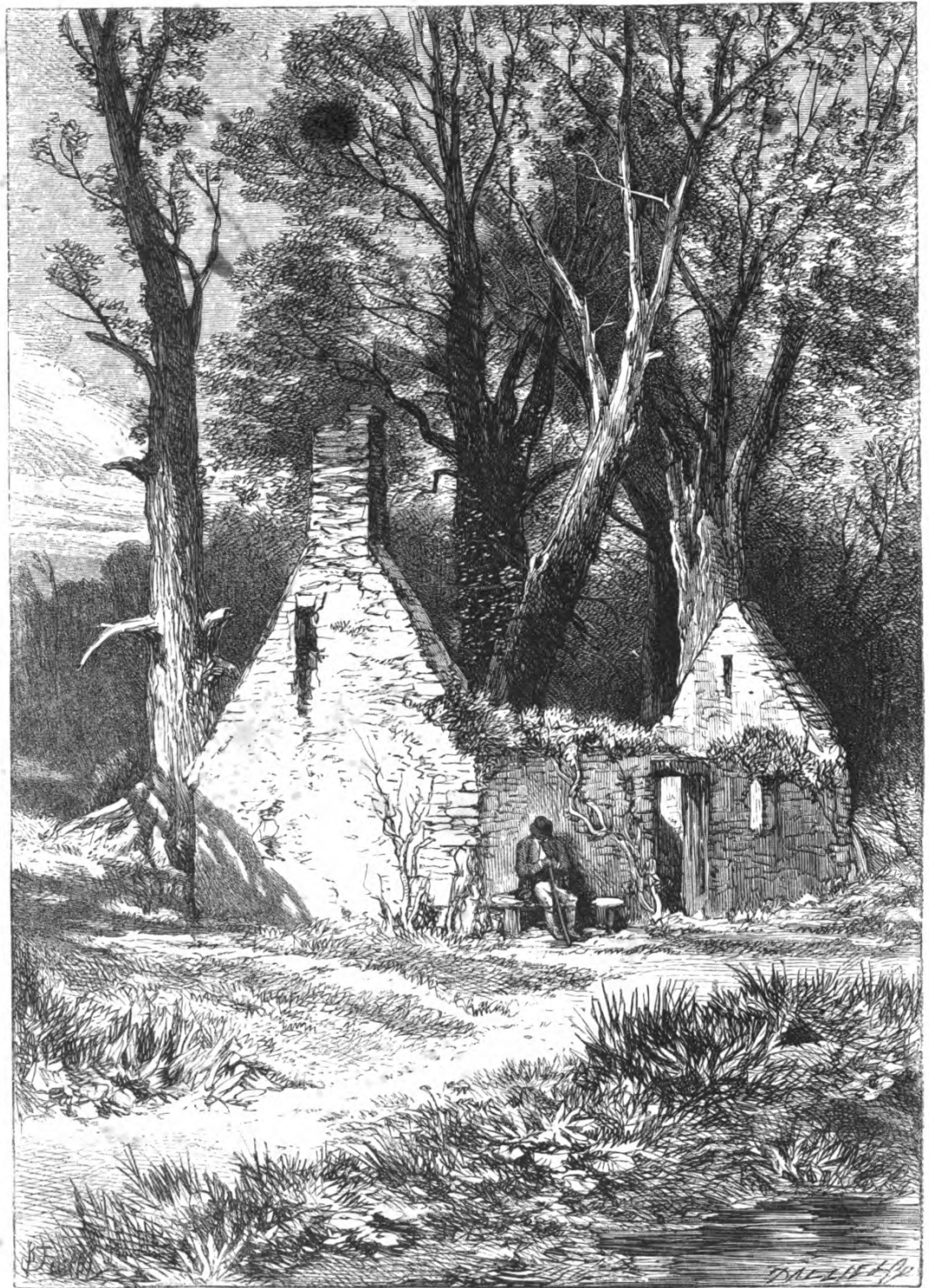
Frances J. Sparks

Jan. 14. 1863  
from E. I. S.

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Amid the gloom  
Spread by a brotherhood of lefty elms,  
Appeared a roofless Hut.

THE  
DESERTED COTTAGE.

BY  
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

ILLUSTRATED WITH TWENTY-ONE DESIGNS BY BIRKET FOSTER,  
J. WOLF, AND JOHN GILBERT,  
ENGRAVED BY THE BROTHERS DALZIEL.

LONDON:  
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & CO. FARRINGDON STREET.  
NEW YORK: 18, BEEKMAN STREET.

MDCCC LIX.





LONDON:  
PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY,  
BREAD STREET HILL.

## PREFACE.



“ I HAVE often wished,” was the observation of Mr. Coleridge, “ that the first two books of the Excursion had been published separately, under the name of ‘The Deserted Cottage.’ They would have formed, what indeed they are, one of the most beautiful poems in the language.” The wish of Coleridge is now fulfilled, and the Poem is before the Reader, who will find in it some of the most thoughtful and musical strains of the Author.





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ENGRAVED BY THE BROTHERS DALZIEL.

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### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

'T WAS summer, and the sun had mounted high :  
Southward the landscape indistinctly glared

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Through a pale stream ; but all the northern downs,  
In clearest air ascending, showed far off  
A surface dappled o'er with shadows flung  
From many a brooding cloud ; far as the sight  
Could reach, those many shadows lay in spots  
Determined and unmoved, with steady beams  
Of bright and pleasant sunshine interposed ;  
Pleasant to him who on the soft cool moss  
Extends his careless limbs along the front  
Of some huge cave, whose rocky ceiling casts  
A twilight of its own, an ample shade,  
Where the wren warbles ; while the dreaming man,  
Half conscious of the soothing melody,  
With side-long eye looks out upon the scene,  
By that impending covert made more soft,  
More low and distant ! Other lot was mine ;  
Yet with good hope that soon I should obtain  
As grateful resting-place, and livelier joy.  
Across a bare wide Common I was toiling  
With languid feet, which by the slippery ground  
Were baffled ; nor could my weak arm disperse  
The host of insects gathering round my face,  
And ever with me as I paced along.

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Upon that open level stood a grove,  
The wished-for port to which my steps were bound.  
Thither I came, and there, amid the gloom  
Spread by a brotherhood of lofty elms,  
Appeared a roofless Hut ; four naked walls  
That stared upon each other !—I looked round,  
And to my wish and to my hope espied  
Him whom I sought ; a Man of reverend age,  
But stout and hale, for travel unimpaired.  
There was he seen upon the cottage-bench,  
Recumbent in the shade, as if asleep ;  
An iron-pointed staff lay at his side.

Him had I marked the day before—alone  
And in the middle of the public way  
Stationed, as if to rest himself, with face  
Turned toward the sun then setting, while that staff  
Afforded to his figure, as he stood  
Detained for contemplation or repose,  
Graceful support ; the countenance of the Man  
Was hidden from my view, and he himself  
Unrecognised ; but, stricken by the sight,  
With slackened footsteps I advanced, and soon



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

A glad congratulation we exchanged  
At such unthought-of meeting.—For the night  
We parted, nothing willingly ; and now  
He by appointment waited for me here,  
Beneath the shelter of these clustering elms.



We were tried Friends: I from my childhood up  
Had known him.—In a little Town obscure,  
A marked village, seated in a tract  
Of mountains, where my school-day time was passed,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

One room he owned, the fifth part of a house.  
A place to which he drew, from time to time,  
And found a kind of home or harbour there.

He loved me ; from a swarm of rosy boys  
Singled out me, as he in sport would say,  
For my grave looks, too thoughtful for my years.  
As I grew up, it was my best delight  
To be his chosen comrade. Many a time,  
On holidays, we wandered through the woods.  
A pair of random travellers, we sate—  
We walked ; he pleased me with his sweet discourse  
Of things which he had seen ; and often touched  
Abstrusest matter, reasonings of the mind  
Turned inward ; or at my request he sang  
Old songs, the product of his native hills ;  
A skilful distribution of sweet sounds,  
Feeding the soul, and eagerly imbibed  
As cool refreshing water, by the care  
Of the industrious husbandman diffused  
Through a parched meadow-ground in time of drought.  
Still deeper welcome found his pure discourse :  
How precious when in riper days I learned

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

To weigh with care his words, and to rejoice  
In the plain presence of his dignity!

Oh! many are the Poets that are sown  
By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts—  
The vision and the faculty divine—  
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,  
(Which, in the docile season of their youth,  
It was denied them to acquire, through lack  
Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,  
Or haply by a temper too severe,  
Or a nice backwardness afraid of shame,)  
Nor having e'er, as life advanced, been led  
By circumstance to take unto the height  
The measure of themselves, these favoured Beings,  
All but a scattered few, live out their time,  
Husbanding that which they possess within,  
And go to the grave unthought of. Strongest minds  
Are often those of whom the noisy world  
Hears least; else surely this Man had not left  
His graces unrevealed and unproclaimed,  
But, as the mind was filled with inward light,  
So not without distinction had he lived,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Beloved and honoured—far as he was known.  
And some small portion of his eloquent speech,  
And something that may serve to set in view  
The feeling pleasures of his loneliness,  
The doings, observations, which his mind  
Had dealt with—I will here record in verse :  
Which, if with truth it correspond, and sink  
Or rise as venerable Nature leads,  
The high and tender Muses shall accept  
With gracious smile, deliberately pleased,  
And listening Time reward with sacred praise.

Among the hills of Athol he was born ;  
There, on a small hereditary farm,  
An unproductive slip of rugged ground,  
His Father dwelt ; and died in poverty ;  
While he, whose lowly fortune I retrace,  
The youngest of three sons, was yet a babe,  
A little one, unconscious of their loss.  
But ere he had outgrown his infant days,  
His widowed mother, for a second mate,  
Espoused the teacher of the village school ;  
Who on her offspring zealously bestowed

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Needful instruction ; not alone in arts  
Which to his humble duties appertained,  
But in the lore of right and wrong, the rule  
Of human kindness, in the peaceful ways  
Of honesty, and holiness severe.  
A virtuous household, though exceeding poor !  
Pure livers were they all, austere and grave,  
And fearing God ; the very children taught  
Stern self-respect, a reverence for God's word,  
And an habitual piety, maintained  
With strictness scarcely known on English ground.

From his sixth year, the Boy of whom I speak  
In summer tended cattle on the hills ;  
But through the inclement and perilous days  
Of long-continuing winter, he repaired  
To his stepfather's school, that stood alone,  
Sole building on a mountain's dreary edge,  
Far from the sight of city spire, or sound  
Of Minster clock ! From that bleak tenement  
He, many an evening, to his distant home  
In solitude returning, saw the hills  
Grow larger in the darkness ; all alone



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Beheld the stars come out above his head,  
And travelled through the wood, with no one near  
To whom he might confess the things he saw.  
So the foundations of his mind were laid.



In such communion, not from terror free,  
While yet a child, and long before his time,  
Had he perceived the presence and the power  
Of greatness ; and deep feelings had impressed

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Great objects on his mind, with portraiture  
And colour so distinct, that on his mind  
They lay like substances, and almost seemed  
To haunt the bodily sense. He had received  
(Vigorous in native genius as he was)  
A precious gift; for, as he grew in years,  
With these impressions would he still compare  
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms;  
And, being still unsatisfied with aught  
Of dimmer character, he thence attained  
An active power to fasten images  
Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines  
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired  
The liveliness of dreams. Nor did he fail,  
While yet a child, with a child's eagerness  
Incessantly to turn his ear and eye  
On all things which the moving seasons brought  
To feed such appetite—nor this alone  
Appeased his yearning,—in the after-day  
Of boyhood, many an hour in caves forlorn,  
And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags,  
He sate, and e'en in their fixed lineaments,  
Or from the power of a peculiar eye,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Or by creative feeling overborne,  
Or by predominance of thought oppressed,  
E'en in their fixed and steady lineaments,  
He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,  
Expression ever varying !

Thus informed,

He had small need of books ; for many a tale  
Traditionary round the mountains hung,  
And many a legend, peopling the dark woods,  
Nourished Imagination in her growth,  
And gave the Mind that apprehensive power  
By which she is made quick to recognise  
The moral properties and scope of things.  
But eagerly he read, and read again,  
Whate'er the Minister's old shelf supplied ;  
The life and death of martyrs, who sustained,  
With will inflexible, those fearful pangs  
Triumphantly displayed in records left  
Of persecution, and the Covenant—times  
Whose echo rings through Scotland to this hour !  
And there, by lucky hap, had been preserved  
A straggling volume, torn and incomplete,  
That left half-told the preternatural tale,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Romance of giants, chronicle of fiends,  
Profuse in garniture of wooden cuts  
Strange and uncouth; dire faces, figures dire,  
Sharp-kneed, sharp-elbowed, and lean-ankled too,  
With long and ghostly shanks—forms which once seen  
Could never be forgotten!

In his heart,

Where Fear sate thus, a cherished visitant,  
Was wanting yet the pure delight of love  
By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,  
Or by the silent looks of happy things,  
Or flowing from the universal face  
Of earth and sky. But he had felt the power  
Of Nature, and already was prepared,  
By his intense conceptions, to receive  
Deeply the lesson deep of love which he,  
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught  
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.  
From early childhood, even, as hath been said,  
From his sixth year, he had been sent abroad  
In summer to tend herds; such was his task  
Thenceforward till the later day of Youth.  
O then what soul was his, when, on the tops



Of the high mountains, he beheld the sun  
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth  
And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay  
In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,  
And in their silent faces did he read  
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,  
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,  
All melted into him; they swallowed up  
His animal being; in them did he live,  
And by them did he live; they were his life.  
In such access of mind, in such high hour  
Of visitation from the living God,  
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.  
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;  
Rapt into still communion that transcends  
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
His mind was a thanksgiving to the Power  
That made him; it was blessedness and love!

A Herdsman on the lonely mountain-tops,  
Such intercourse was his, and in this sort  
Was his existence oftentimes *possessed*.  
O then how beautiful, how bright, appeared



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The written promise ! He had early learned  
To reverence the Volume which displays  
The mystery, the life which cannot die ;  
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.  
There did he see the writing ; all things there  
Breathed immortality, revolving life,  
And greatness still revolving ; infinite :  
There littleness was not ; the least of things  
Seemed infinite ; and there his spirit shaped  
Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*.  
What wonder if his being thus became  
Sublime and comprehensive ? Low desires,  
Low thoughts had there no place ; yet was his heart  
Lowly ; for he was meek in gratitude.  
Oft has he called those ecstasies to mind,  
And whence they flowed ; from them he acquired  
Wisdom, which works thro' patience ; thence he learned,  
In many a calmer hour of sober thought,  
To look on Nature with a humble heart,  
Self-questioned where it did not understand,  
And with a superstitious eye of love.

So passed the time ; yet to the nearest town

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

He duly went with what small overplus  
His earnings might supply, and brought away  
The book which most had tempted his desires  
While at the stall he read. Among the hills  
He gazed upon that mighty orb of song,  
The divine Milton. Lore of different kind,  
The annual savings of a toilsome life,  
His stepfather supplied; books that explain  
The purer elements of truth involved  
In lines and numbers, and, by charm severe  
(Especially perceived where Nature droops  
And feeling is suppressed), preserve the mind  
Busy in solitude and poverty.  
These occupations oftentimes deceived  
The listless hours, while in the hollow vale,  
Hollow and green, he lay on the green turf  
In pensive idleness. What could he do,  
With blind endeavours, in that lonesome life,  
Thus thirsting daily? Yet, still uppermost,  
Nature was at his heart as if he felt,  
Though yet he knew not how, a wasting power  
In all things which from her sweet influence  
Might tend to wean him. Therefore with her hues,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Her forms, and with the spirit of her forms,  
He clothed the nakedness of austere truth.



While yet he lingered in the rudiments  
Of Science, and among her simplest laws,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

His triangles—they were the stars of heaven,  
The silent stars ! Oft did he take delight  
To measure th' altitude of some tall crag  
That is the eagle's birthplace, or some peak  
Familiar with forgotten years, that shows  
Inscribed, as with the silence of the thought,  
Upon its bleak and visionary sides,  
The history of many a winter-storm,—  
Or obscure records of the path of fire.

And thus, before his eighteenth year was told,  
Accumulated feelings pressed his heart  
With an increasing weight ; he was o'erpowered  
By Nature, by the turbulence subdued  
Of his own mind ; by mystery and hope,  
And the first virgin passion of a soul  
Communing with the glorious universe.  
Full often wished he that the winds might rage  
When they were silent ; far more fondly now  
Than in his earlier season did he love  
Tempestuous nights—the conflict and the sounds  
That live in darkness :—from his intellect  
And from the stillness of abstracted thought

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

He asked repose ; and I have heard him say  
That often, failing at this time to gain  
The peace required, he scanned the laws of light  
Amid the roar of torrents, where they send  
From hollow clefts up to the clearer air  
A cloud of mist, which in the sunshine frames  
A lasting tablet—for the observer's eye  
Varying its rainbow hues. But vainly thus,  
And vainly by all other means, he strove  
To mitigate the fever of his heart.

In dreams, in study, and in ardent thought,  
Thus, even from childhood upward, was he reared :  
For intellectual progress wanting much,  
Doubtless, of needful help—yet gaining more ;  
And every moral feeling of his soul  
Strengthened and braced, by breathing in content  
The keen, the wholesome air of poverty,  
And drinking from the well of homely life.  
But, from past liberty, and tried restraints,  
He now was summoned to select the course  
Of humble industry that promised best  
To yield him no unworthy maintenance.

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The Mother strove to make her son perceive  
With what advantage he might teach a school  
In the adjoining village ; but the Youth,  
Who of this service made a short essay,  
Found that the wanderings of his thoughts were then  
A misery to him ; that he must resign  
A task he was unable to perform.

That stern yet kindly Spirit, who constrains  
The Savoyard to quit his naked rocks,  
The free-born Swiss to leave his narrow vales  
(Spirit attached to regions mountainous,  
Like their own steadfast clouds)—did now impel  
His restless mind to look abroad with hope.  
An irksome drudgery seems it to plod on,  
Through dusty ways, in storm, from door to door,  
A vagrant Merchant bent beneath his load !  
Yet do such travellers find their own delight ;  
And their hard service, deemed debasing now,  
Gained merited respect in simpler times,  
When Squire, and Priest, and they who round them dwelt  
In rustic sequestration—all dependent  
Upon the Pedlar's toil—supplied their wants,



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Or pleased their fancies, with the wars he brought.  
Not ignorant was the Youth that still no few  
Of his adventurous countrymen were led,  
By perseverance in this track of life,  
To competence and ease; to him it bore  
Attractions manifold;—and this he chose.  
He asked his Mother's blessing; and with tears  
Thanking his second father, asked from him  
Paternal blessings. The good pair bestowed  
Their farewell benediction, but with hearts  
Foreboding evil. From his native hills  
He wandered far; much did he see of men,  
Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,  
Their passions, and their feelings; chiefly those  
Essential and eternal in the heart,  
Which, 'mid the simpler forms of rural life,  
Exist more simple in their elements,  
And speak a plainer language. In the woods,  
A lone Enthusiast, and among the fields,  
Itinerant in this labour he had passed  
The better portion of his time; and there  
Spontaneously had his affections thriven  
Upon the bounties of the year, and felt

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The liberty of nature ; there he kept  
In solitude and solitary thought  
His mind in a just equipoise of love.  
Serene it was, unclouded by the cares  
Of ordinary life ; unvexed, unwarped  
By partial bondage. In his steady course,  
No piteous revolutions had he felt,  
No wild varieties of joy and grief.  
Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,  
His heart lay open ; and, by nature tuned  
And constant disposition of his thoughts  
To sympathy with man, he was alive  
To all that was enjoyed where'er he went,  
And all that was endured ; for, in himself  
Happy, and quiet in his cheerfulness,  
He had no painful pressure from without  
That made him turn aside from wretchedness  
With coward fears. He could *afford* to suffer  
With those whom he saw suffer. Hence it came  
That in our best experience he was rich,  
And in the wisdom of our daily life.  
For hence, minutely, in his various rounds,  
He had observed the progress and decay

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Of many minds, of minds and bodies too ;  
The history of many families ;  
How they had prospered ; how they were o'erthrown  
By passion or mischance, or such misrule  
Among the unthinking masters of the earth  
As makes the nations groan. This active course,  
Chosen in youth, through manhood he pursued,  
Till due provision for his modest wants  
Had been obtained ;—and thereupon resolved  
To pass the remnant of his days, untasked  
With needless services, from hardship free.  
His calling laid aside, he lived at ease :  
But still he loved to pace the public roads  
And the wild paths ; and, when the summer's warmth  
Invited him, would often leave his home  
And journey far, revisiting those scenes  
That to his memory were most endeared.  
—Vigorous in health, of hopeful spirits, untouched  
By worldly-mindedness or anxious care ;  
Observant, studious, thoughtful, and refreshed  
By knowledge gathered up from day to day ;  
Thus had he lived a long and innocent life.

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The Scottish Church, both on himself and those  
With whom from childhood he grew up, had held  
The strong hand of her purity ; and still  
Had watched him with an unrelenting eye.  
This he remembered in his riper age  
With gratitude, and reverential thoughts.  
But by the native vigour of his mind,  
By his habitual wanderings out of doors,  
By loneliness, and goodness, and kind works,  
Whate'er, in docile childhood or in youth,  
He had imbibed of fear or darker thought,  
Was melted all away ; so true was this  
That sometimes his religion seemed to me  
Self-taught, as of a dreamer in the woods ;  
Who to the model of his own pure heart  
Framed his belief, as grace divine inspired,  
Or human reason dictated with awe.  
—And surely never did there live on earth  
A man of kindlier nature. The rough sports  
And teasing ways of children vexed not him ;  
Nor could he bid them from his presence, tired  
With questions and importunate demand.  
Indulgent listener was he to the tongue



Of garrulous age ; nor did the sick man's tale,  
To his fraternal sympathy addressed,  
Obtain reluctant hearing.

Plain his garb ;  
Such as might suit a rustic Sire, prepared

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

For Sabbath duties ; yet he was a man  
Whom no one could have passed without remark.  
Active and nervous was his gait ; his limbs  
And his whole figure breathed intelligence.  
Time had compressed the freshness of his cheek  
Into a narrower circle of deep red,  
But had not tamed his eye ; that, under brows  
Shaggy and grey, had meanings which it brought  
From years of youth ; which, like a Being made  
Of many Beings, he had wondrous skill  
To blend with knowledge of the years to come,  
Human, or such as lie beyond the grave.

So was He framed ; and such his course of life,  
Who now with no appendage but a staff,  
The prized memorial of relinquished toils,  
Upon that cottage-bench reposed his limbs,  
Screened from the sun. Supine the Wanderer lay,  
His eyes as if in drowsiness half shut,  
The shadows of the breezy elms above  
Dappling his face. He had not heard my steps  
As I approached, and near him did I stand  
Unnoticed in the shade some minutes' space.



### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

At length I hailed him, seeing that his hat  
Was moist with water-drops, as if the brim  
Had newly scooped a running stream. He rose,  
And ere the pleasant greeting that ensued  
Was ended, "'Tis," said I, "a burning day ;  
My lips are parched with thirst, but you, I guess,  
Have somewhere found relief." He, at the word,  
Pointing towards a sweet-briar, bade me climb  
The fence hard by, where that aspiring shrub  
Looked out upon the road. It was a plot  
Of garden-ground run wild, its matted weeds  
Marked with the steps of those, whom, as they passed,  
The gooseberry-trees that shot in long lank slips,  
Or currants, hanging from their leafless stems  
In scanty strings, had tempted to o'erleap  
The broken wall. I looked around, and there,  
Where two tall hedge-rows of thick alder-boughs  
Join'd in a cold damp nook, espied a well  
Shrouded with willow-flowers and plummy fern.  
My thirst I slaked, and, from the cheerless spot  
Withdrawing, straightway to the shade returned,  
Where sate the old Man on the cottage-bench ;  
And, while, beside him, with uncovered head,

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

I yet was standing, freely to respire,  
And cool my temples in the fanning air,  
Thus did he speak :—“ I see around me here  
Things which you cannot see : we die, my Friend,  
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved  
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth  
Dies with him, or is chang'd ; and very soon  
Even of the good is no memorial left.  
The Poets, in their elegies and songs  
Lamenting the departed, call the groves,  
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,  
And senseless rocks ; nor idly ; for they speak,  
In these their invocations, with a voice  
Obedient to the strong creative power  
Of human passion. Sympathies there are  
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,  
That steal upon the meditative mind,  
And grow with thought. Beside yon spring I stood,  
And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel  
One sadness, they and I. For them a bond  
Of brotherhood is broken : time has been  
When, every day, the touch of human hand  
Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

In mortal stillness; and they ministered  
To human comfort. As I stooped to drink,  
Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied  
The useless fragment of a wooden bowl,  
Green with the moss of years; a pensive sight  
That mov'd my heart, recalling former days,  
When I could never pass that road but she,  
Who liv'd within these walls, at my approach,  
A daughter's welcome gave, and I lov'd her  
As my own child. Oh, sir! the good die first,  
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust  
Burn to the socket. Many a passenger  
Hath blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks,  
When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn  
From that forsaken spring; and no one came  
But he was welcome; no one went away  
But that it seem'd she lov'd him. She is dead,  
The light extinguished of her lonely hut,  
The hut itself abandoned to decay,  
And she forgotten in the quiet grave!  
I speak," continued he, "of One whose stock  
Of virtues bloomed beneath this lowly roof.  
She was a Woman of a steady mind,



Tender and deep in her excess of love,  
Not speaking much, pleased rather with the joy  
Of her own thoughts: by some especial care  
Her temper had been framed, as if to make

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

A Being, who, by adding love to peace,  
Might live on earth a life of happiness.  
Her wedded Partner lacked not on his side  
The humble worth that satisfied her heart ;  
Frugal, affectionate, sober, and withal  
Keenly industrious. She with pride would tell  
That he was often seated at his loom,  
In summer, ere the mower was abroad  
Among the dewy grass,—in early spring,  
Ere the last star had vanished. They who passed  
At evening, from behind the garden fence  
Might hear his busy spade, which he would ply  
After his daily work, until the light  
Had failed, and every leaf and flower were lost  
In the dark hedges. So their days were spent  
In peace and comfort ; and a pretty boy  
Was their best hope, next to the God in heaven.

“ Not twenty years ago, but you, I think,  
Can scarcely bear it now in mind, there came  
Two blighting seasons, when the fields were left  
With half a harvest. It pleased Heaven to add  
A worse affliction in the plague of war :

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

This happy Land was stricken to the heart !  
A Wanderer then among the cottages,  
I, with my freight of winter raiment, saw  
The hardships of that season : many rich  
Sank down, as in a dream, among the poor ;  
And of the poor did many cease to be,  
And their place knew them not. Meanwhile, abridged  
Of daily comforts, gladly reconciled  
To numerous self-denials, Margaret  
Went struggling on through those calamitous years  
With cheerful hope ; but ere the second autumn,  
Her life's true Helpmate on a sick-bed lay,  
Smitten with perilous fever. In disease  
He linger'd long ; and when his strength returned,  
He found the little he had stored, to meet  
The hour of accident or crippling age,  
Was all consumed. Two children had they now,  
One newly born. As I have said, it was  
A time of trouble : shoals of artisans  
Were from their daily labour turned adrift  
To seek their bread from public charity,  
They, and their wives and children—happier far  
Could they have lived as do the little birds



That peck along the hedges, or the kite  
That makes his dwelling on the mountain rocks!



## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

“ A sad reverse it was for him who long  
Had filled with plenty, and possessed in peace,  
This lonely Cottage. At his door he stood,  
And whistled many a snatch of merry tunes  
That had no mirth in them; or with his knife  
Carved uncouth figures on the heads of sticks;  
Then, not less idly, sought, through every nook  
In house or garden, any casual work  
Of use or ornament; and with a strange,  
Amusing, yet uneasy novelty,  
He blended, where he might, the various tasks  
Of summer, autumn, winter, and of spring.  
But this endured not; his good humour soon  
Became a weight in which no pleasure was:  
And poverty brought on a pettish mood  
And a sore temper: day by day he drooped,  
And he would leave his work, and to the town,  
Without an errand, would direct his steps;  
Or wander here and there among the fields.  
One while he would speak lightly of his babes,  
And with a cruel tongue; at other times  
He tossed them with a false unnatural joy:  
And 'twas a rueful thing to see the looks

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Of the poor innocent children. ‘Every smile,’  
Said Margaret to me, here beneath these trees,  
‘Made my heart bleed.’”

At this the Wanderer paused ;  
And, looking up to those enormous elms,  
He said, “ ’Tis now the hour of deepest noon.  
At this still season of repose and peace,  
This hour when all things which are not at rest  
Are cheerful; while this multitude of flies  
Is filling all the air with melody ;  
Why should a tear be in an old Man’s eye?  
Why should we thus, with an untoward mind,  
And in the weakness of humanity,  
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away ;  
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,  
And, feeding on disquiet, thus disturb  
The calm of nature with our restless thoughts? ”

He spake with somewhat of a solemn tone :  
But, when he ended, there was in his face  
Such easy cheerfulness, a look so mild,  
That for a little time it stole away  
All recollection ; and that simple tale

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Passed from my mind like a forgotten sound.  
Awhile on trivial things we held discourse,  
To me soon tasteless. In my own despite,  
I thought of that poor Woman as of one  
Whom I had known and loved. He had rehearsed  
Her homely tale with such familiar power,  
With such an active countenance, an eye  
So busy, that the things of which he spake  
Seemed present ; and, attention now relaxed,  
There was a heart-felt chillness in my veins.  
I rose ; and, turning from the breezy shade,  
Went forth into the open air, and stood  
To drink the comfort of the warmer sun.  
Long time I had not stayed,—ere, looking round  
Upon that tranquil Ruin, I returned,  
And begged of the old Man that, for my sake,  
He would resume his story.

He replied,

“ It were a wantonness, and would demand  
Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts  
Could hold vain dalliance with the misery  
Even of the dead ; contented thence to draw  
A momentary pleasure, never marked

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

By reason, barren of all future good.  
But we have known that there is often found  
In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,  
A power to virtue friendly; wer't not so,  
I am a dreamer among men, indeed  
An idle dreamer! 'Tis a common tale,  
An ordinary sorrow of man's life,  
A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed  
In bodily form.—But, without further bidding,  
I will proceed.

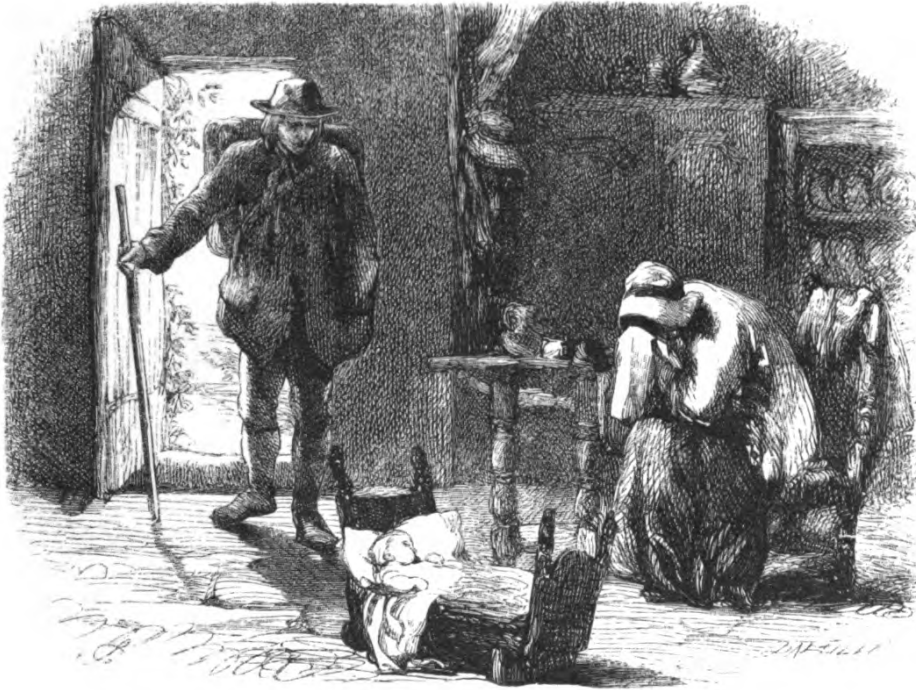
“ While thus it fared with them,  
To whom this Cottage, till those hapless years,  
Had been a blessèd home, it was my chance  
To travel in a country far remote;  
And glad I was, when, halting by yon gate  
That leads from the green lane, once more I saw  
These lofty elm-trees. Long I did not rest:  
With many pleasant thoughts I cheered my way  
O'er the flat Common. Having reached the door,  
I knocked; and when I entered with the hope  
Of usual greeting, Margaret looked at me  
A little while; then turned her head away  
Speechless; and, sitting down upon a chair,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Wept bitterly. I wist not what to do,  
Or how to speak to her. Poor Wretch! at last  
She rose from off her seat, and then,—O sir!  
I cannot *tell* how she pronounced my name:—  
With fervent love, and with a face of grief  
Unutterably helpless, and a look  
That seemed to cling upon me, she inquired  
If I had seen her husband. As she spake,  
A strange surprise and fear came to my heart,  
Nor had I power to answer ere she told  
That he had disappeared—not two months gone.  
He left his house; two wretched days had passed,  
And on the third, as wistfully she raised  
Her head from off her pillow, to look forth,  
Like one in trouble, for returning light,  
Within her chamber-casement she espied  
A folded paper, lying as if placed  
To meet her waking eyes. This tremblingly  
She opened—found no writing, but therein  
Pieces of money carefully enclosed,  
Silver and gold—‘I shuddered at the sight,’  
Said Margaret, ‘for I knew it was his hand  
Which placed it there; and, ere that day was ended,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

That long and anxious day ! I learned from one  
Sent hither by my husband to impart  
The heavy news, that he had joined a troop



Of soldiers, going to a distant land.  
—He left me thus—he could not gather heart  
To take a farewell of me ; for he feared

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

That I should follow with my babes, and sink  
Beneath the misery of that wandering life.'

“ This tale did Margaret tell with many tears ;  
And, when she ended, I had little power  
To give her comfort, and was glad to take  
Such words of hope from her own mouth as served  
To cheer us both ; but long we had not talked,  
Ere we built up a pile of better thoughts,  
And with a brighter eye she looked around  
As if she had been shedding tears of joy.  
We parted. 'Twas the time of early spring ;  
I left her busy with her garden tools ;  
And well remember, o'er that fence she looked,  
And, while I paced along the footway-path,  
Called out, and sent a blessing after me,  
With tender cheerfulness, and with a voice  
That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts.

“ I roved o'er many a hill and many a dale,  
With my accustomed load ; in heat and cold,  
Through many a wood, and many an open ground,  
In sunshine and in shade, in wet and fair,





Drooping or blithe of heart, as might befall ;

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

My best companions now the driving winds,  
And now the 'trotting brooks' and whispering trees,  
And now the music of my own sad steps,  
With many a short-lived thought that passed between,  
And disappeared. I journeyed back this way  
Toward the wane of summer, when the wheat  
Was yellow; and the soft and bladed grass,  
Springing afresh, had o'er the hay-field spread  
Its tender verdure. At the door arrived,  
I found that she was absent. In the shade,  
Where now we sit, I waited her return.  
Her cottage, then a cheerful object, wore  
Its customary look,—only, I thought,  
The honeysuckle, crowding round the porch,  
Hung down in heavier tufts; and that bright weed,  
The yellow stone-crop, suffered to take root  
Along the window's edge, profusely grew,  
Blinding the lower panes. I turned aside,  
And strolled into her garden. It appeared  
To lag behind the season, and had lost  
Its pride of neatness. From the border lines,  
Composed of daisy and resplendent thrift,  
Flowers straggling forth had on those paths encroached,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Which they were used to deck : carnations, once  
Prized for surpassing beauty, and no less



For the peculiar pains they had required,  
Declined their languid heads without support.

#### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells,  
Had twined about her two small rows of peas,  
And dragged them to the earth. Ere this an hour  
Was wasted. Back I turned my restless steps ;  
A stranger passed ; and, guessing whom I sought,  
He said that she was used to ramble far.—  
The sun was sinking in the west ; and now  
I sate with sad impatience. From within  
Her solitary infant cried aloud ;  
Then, like a blast that dies away self-stilled,  
The voice was silent. From the bench I rose ;  
But neither could divert nor soothe my thoughts.  
The spot, though fair, was very desolate—  
The longer I remained, more desolate.  
And, looking round, I saw the corner stones,  
Till then unnoticed, on either side the door  
With dull red stains discoloured, and stuck o'er  
With tufts and hairs of wool, as if the sheep,  
That fed upon the Common, thither came  
Familiarly ; and found a couching-place  
Even at her threshold. Deeper shadows fell  
From these tall elms ; the cottage-clock struck eight ;  
I turned, and saw her distant a few steps.

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Her face was pale and thin, her figure too  
Was changed. As she unlocked the door, she said,  
'It grieves me you have waited here so long,  
But, in good truth, I've wandered much of late,  
And, sometimes—to my shame I speak—have need  
Of my best prayers to bring me back again.'  
While on the board she spread our evening meal,  
She told me—interrupting not the work  
Which gave employment to her listless hands—  
That she had parted with her elder child,  
To a kind master on a distant farm  
Now happily apprenticed—'I perceive  
You look at me, and you have cause; to-day  
I have been travelling far; and many days  
About the fields I wander, knowing this  
Only, that what I seek I cannot find;  
And so I waste my time: for I am changed;  
And to myself,' said she, 'have done much wrong  
And to this helpless infant. I have slept  
Weeping, and weeping have I waked; my tears  
Have flowed as if my body were not such  
As others are; and I could never die.  
But I am now in mind and in my heart

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

More easy; and I hope,' said she, 'that Heaven  
Will give me patience to endure the things  
Which I behold at home.' It would have grieved  
Your very soul to see her; Sir, I feel  
The story linger in my heart: I fear  
'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings  
To that poor Woman: so familiarly  
Do I perceive her manner, and her look,  
And presence; and so deeply do I feel  
Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks  
A momentary trance comes over me;  
And to myself I seem to muse on One  
By sorrow laid asleep, or borne away;  
A human being destined to awake  
To human life, or something very near  
To human life, when he shall come again  
For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved  
Your very soul to see her: evermore  
Her eyelids drooped, her eyes were downward cast;  
And, when she at her table gave me food,  
She did not look at me. Her voice was low,  
Her body was subdued. In every act  
Pertaining to her house affairs, appeared

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The careless stillness of a thinking mind  
Self-occupied ; to which all outward things  
Are like an idle matter. Still she sighed,  
But yet no motion of the breast was seen,  
No heaving of the heart. While by the fire  
We sate together, sighs came on my ear,  
I knew not how, and hardly whence they came.

“ Ere my departure to her care I gave,  
For her son’s use, some tokens of regard,  
Which with a look of welcome she received ;  
And I exhorted her to have her trust  
In God’s good love, and seek his help by prayer.  
I took my staff, and when I kissed her babe,  
The tears stood in her eyes. I left her then  
With the best hope and comfort I could give.  
She thanked me for my wish ; but for my hope  
It seemed she did not thank me.

“ I returned,  
And took my rounds along this road again  
Ere on its sunny bank the primrose flower  
Peeped forth, to give an earnest of the Spring.  
I found her sad and drooping ; she had learned



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

No tidings of her husband ; if he lived,  
She knew not that he lived ; if he were dead,  
She knew not he was dead. She seemed the same  
In person and appearance ; but her house  
Bespoke a sleepy hand of negligence.  
The floor was neither dry nor neat, the hearth  
Was comfortless, and her small lot of books,  
Which, in the cottage window, heretofore  
Had been piled up against the corner panes  
In seemly order, now, with straggling leaves  
Lay scattered here and there, open or shut,  
As they had chanced to fall. Her infant Babe  
Had from its Mother caught the trick of grief,  
And sighed among its playthings. Once again  
I turned towards the garden gate, and saw,  
More plainly still, that poverty and grief  
Were now come nearer to her : weeds defaced  
The hardened soil, and knots of withered grass ;  
No ridges there appeared of clear black mould,  
No winter greenness ; of her herbs and flowers,  
It seemed the better part were gnawed away  
Or trampled into earth ; a chain of straw,  
Which had been twined about the slender stem

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Of a young apple-tree, lay at its root ;  
The bark was nibbled round by truant sheep.  
—Margaret stood near, her infant in her arms,  
And, noting that my eye was on the tree,  
She said, ‘I fear it will be dead and gone  
Ere Robert come again.’ Towards the house  
Together we returned, and she inquired  
If I had any hope:—but for her babe,  
And for her little orphan boy, she said,  
She had no wish to live—that she must die  
Of sorrow. Yet I saw the idle loom  
Still in its place ; his Sunday garments hung  
Upon the selfsame nail ; his very staff  
Stood undisturbed behind the door. And when,  
In bleak December, I retraced this way,  
She told me that her little babe was dead,  
And she was left alone. She now, released  
From her maternal cares, had taken up  
The employment common through these wilds, and gained  
By spinning hemp a pittance for herself ;  
And for this end had hired a neighbour’s boy  
To give her needful help. That very time  
Most willingly she put her work aside,

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And walked with me along the miry road,  
Heedless how far; and, in such piteous sort  
That any heart had ached to hear her, begged  
That, wheresoe'er I went, I still would ask  
For him whom she had lost. We parted then—  
Our final parting; for from that time forth  
Did many seasons pass ere I returned  
Into this tract again.

“Nine tedious years  
From their first separation, nine long years,  
She lingered in unquiet widowhood;  
A Wife and Widow. Needs must it have been  
A sore heart-wasting! I have heard, my Friend,  
That in yon arbour oftentimes she sate  
Alone, through half the vacant Sabbath day;  
And, if a dog passed by, she still would quit  
The shade, and look abroad. On this old bench  
For hours she sate; and evermore her eye  
Was busy in the distance, shaping things  
That made her heart beat quick. You see that path,  
Now faint,—the grass has crept o'er its grey line;  
There, to and fro, she paced through many a day  
Of the warm summer, from a belt of hemp

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

That girt her waist, spinning the long drawn thread  
With backward steps. Yet ever as there passed



A man whose garments showed the soldier's red,  
Or crippled mendicant in sailor's garb,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The little child who sate to turn the wheel  
Ceased from his task ; and she with faltering voice  
Made many a fond inquiry ; and when they,  
Whose presence gave no comfort, were gone by,  
Her heart was still more sad. And by yon gate,  
That bars the traveller's road, she often stood,  
And when a stranger horseman came, the latch  
Would lift, and in his face look wistfully ;  
Most happy, if, from aught discovered there  
Of tender feeling, she might dare repeat  
The same sad question. Meanwhile her poor hut  
Sank to decay : for he was gone whose hand,  
At the first nipping of October frost,  
Closed up each chink, and with fresh bands of straw  
Chequered the green-grown thatch. And so she lived  
Through the long winter, reckless and alone ;  
Until her house by frost, and thaw, and rain,  
Was sapped ; and while she slept, the nightly damps  
Did chill her breast ; and in the stormy day  
Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind ;  
Even at the side of her own fire. Yet still  
She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds  
Have parted hence : and still that length of road,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And this rude bench, one torturing hope endeared,  
Fast rooted at her heart: and here, my Friend,—  
In sickness she remained; and here she died;  
Last human tenant of these ruined walls!”

The old Man ceased: he saw that I was moved;  
From that low bench, rising instinctively,  
I turned aside in weakness, nor had power  
To thank him for the tale which he had told.  
I stood, and leaning o'er the garden wall  
Reviewed that Woman's sufferings; and it seemed  
To comfort me, while, with a brother's love,  
I blessed her in the impotence of grief.  
At length towards the Cottage I returned  
Fondly,—and traced, with interest more mild,  
That secret spirit of humanity  
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies  
Of Nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,  
And silent overgrowings, still survived.  
The old Man, noting this, resumed, and said,  
“My Friend, enough to sorrow you have given,  
The purposes of wisdom ask no more:  
Be wise and cheerful; and no longer read

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

The forms of things with an unworthy eye.  
She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.  
I well remember that those very plumes,  
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,  
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,  
As once I passed, did to my heart convey  
So still an image of tranquillity,  
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful  
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,  
That what we feel of sorrow and despair  
From ruin and from change, and all the grief  
That passing shows of Being leave behind,  
Appeared an idle dream, that could not live  
Where meditation was. I turned away,  
And walked along my road in happiness."

He ceased. Ere long the sun declining shot  
A slant and mellow radiance, which began  
To fall upon us, while beneath the trees  
We sate on that low bench: and now we felt,  
Admonished thus, the sweet hour coming on.  
A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,  
A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

At distance heard, peopled the milder air.  
The old Man rose, and, with a sprightly mien  
Of hopeful preparation, grasped his staff;  
Together casting then a farewell look  
Upon those silent walls, we left the shade;  
And, ere the stars were visible, had reached  
A village-inn,—our evening resting-place.

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

IN days of yore how fortunately fared  
The Minstrel! wandering on from hall to hall,  
Baronial court or royal; cheered with gifts  
Munificent, and love, and ladies' praise;  
Now meeting on his road an armèd knight,  
Now resting with a pilgrim by the side  
Of a clear brook; beneath an abbey's roof  
One evening sumptuously lodged; the next  
Humbly in a religious hospital;  
Or with some merry outlaws of the wood;  
Or haply shrouded in a hermit's cell.  
Him, sleeping or awake, the robber spared;  
He walked protected from the sword of war,  
By virtue of that sacred instrument,  
His harp, suspended at the traveller's side:  
His dear companion wheresoe'er he went,  
Opening from land to land an easy way  
By melody, and by the charm of verse.  
Yet not the noblest of that honoured Race  
Drew happier, loftier, more impassioned thoughts



From his long journeyings and eventful life,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Than this obscure Itinerant (an obscure  
But a high-souled and tender-hearted man)  
Had skill to draw from many a ramble, far  
And wide protracted through the tamer ground  
Of these our unimagined days ;  
Both while he trod the earth in humblest guise  
Accoutred with his burthen and his staff ;  
And now, when free to move with lighter pace.

What wonder, then, if I, whose favourite school  
Hath been the fields, the roads, and rural lanes,  
Looked on this guide with reverential love !  
Each with the other pleased, we now pursued  
Our journey—beneath favourable skies.  
Turn wheresoe'er we would, he was a light  
Unfailing : not a hamlet could we pass,  
Rarely a house, which did not yield to him  
Remembrances ; or from his tongue call forth  
Some way-beguiling tale. Nor less regard  
Accompanied those strains of apt discourse,  
Which Nature's various objects might supply ;  
And in the silence of his face I read  
His overflowing spirit. Birds and beasts,



And the mute fish that glances in the stream,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And harmless reptile coiling in the sun,  
And gorgeous insect hovering in the air,  
The fowl domestic, and the household dog—  
In his capacious mind he loved them all :  
Their rights acknowledging, he felt for all.  
Oft was occasion given me to perceive  
How the calm pleasures of the pasturing herd  
To happy contemplation soothed his walk  
Along the field, and in the shady grove ;  
How the poor brute's condition, forced to run  
Its course of suffering in the public road,  
Sad contrast ! all too often smote his heart  
With unavailing pity. Rich in love  
And sweet humanity, he was, himself,  
To the degree that he desired, beloved.  
Greetings and smiles we met with all day long  
From faces that he knew ; we took our seats  
By many a cottage-hearth, where he received  
The welcome of an Inmate from afar.  
Nor was he loth to enter ragged huts,  
Wherein his charity was blessed ; his voice  
Heard as the voice of an experienced friend.  
And, sometimes—where the poor man held dispute

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

With his own mind, unable to subdue  
Impatience through inaptness to perceive  
General distress in his particular lot ;  
Or cherishing resentment, or in vain  
Struggling against it ; with a soul perplexed,  
And finding in itself no steady power  
To draw the line of comfort that divides  
Calamity, the chastisement of Heaven,  
From the injustice of our brother men—  
To him appeal was made as to a judge ;  
Who, with an understanding heart, allayed  
The perturbation ; listened to the plea ;  
Resolved the dubious point ; and sentence gave,  
So grounded, so applied, that it was heard  
With softened spirit, even when it condemned.

Such intercourse I witnessed, while we roved,  
Now as his choice directed, now as mine ;  
Or both, with equal readiness of will,  
Our course submitting to the changeful breeze  
Of accident. But when the rising sun  
Had three times called us to renew our walk,  
My Fellow-traveller said, with earnest voice,



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

As if the thought were but a moment old,  
That I must yield myself without reserve  
To his disposal. Glad was I of this.  
We started,—and he led me towards the hills ;  
Up through an ample vale, with higher hills  
Before us, mountains stern and desolate ;  
But in the majesty of distance now  
Set off, and to our ken appearing fair  
Of aspect, with aërial softness clad,  
And beautified with morning's purple beams.

The wealthy, the luxurious, by the stress  
Of business roused, or pleasure, ere their time,  
May roll in chariots, or provoke the hoofs  
Of the fleet coursers they bestride, to raise  
From earth the dust of morning, slow to rise ;  
And they, if blest with health and hearts at ease,  
Shall lack not their enjoyment : but how faint  
Compared with ours ! who, pacing side by side,  
Could, with an eye of leisure, look on all  
That we beheld ; and lend the listening sense  
To every grateful sound of earth and air ;  
Pausing at will—our spirits braced, our thoughts

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Pleasant as roses in the thickets blown,  
And pure as dew bathing their crimson leaves.

Mount slowly, sun! and may our journey lie  
Awhile within the shadow of this hill,  
This friendly hill, a shelter from thy beams!  
Such is the summer pilgrim's frequent wish;  
And as that wish, with prevalence of thanks  
For present good o'er fear of future ill,  
Stole in among the morning's blither thoughts,  
'Twas chased away, for towards the western side  
Of the broad vale, casting a casual glance,  
We saw a throng of people;—wherefore met?  
Blithe notes of music, suddenly let loose  
On the thrilled ear, did to the question yield  
Prompt answer; they proclaim the annual Wake,  
Which the bright season favours. Tabor and pipe  
In purpose joined to hasten and reprove  
The laggard Rustic; and repay with boons  
Of merriment a parti-coloured knot,  
Already formed upon the village-green.  
Beyond the limits of the shadow cast  
By the broad hill, glistened upon our sight

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

That gay assemblage. Round them and above,  
Glitter, with dark recesses interposed,  
Casement, and cottage roof, and stems of trees  
Half-veiled in vapoury cloud, the silver steam  
Of dews fast melting on their leafy boughs  
By the strong sunbeams smitten. Like a mast  
Of gold, the Maypole shines ; as if the rays  
Of morning, aided by exhaling dew,  
With gladsome influence could re-animate  
The faded garlands dangling from its sides.

Said I, "The music and the sprightly scene  
Invite us ; shall we quit our road, and join  
These festive matins ?" He replied, "Not loth  
Here would I linger, and with you partake,  
Not one hour merely, but till evening's close,  
The simple pastimes of the day and place.  
By the fleet Racers, ere the sun be set,  
The turf of yon large pasture will be skimmed ;  
There, too, the lusty Wrestlers will contend ;  
But know we not that he who intermits  
Th' appointed task and duties of the day,  
Untunes full oft the pleasures of the day,



Checking the finer spirits that refuse  
To flow, when purposes are lightly changed?  
We must proceed; a length of journey yet  
Remains untraced." Then, pointing with his staff

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Towards those craggy summits, his intent  
He thus imparted:—

“In a spot that lies  
Among yon mountain fastnesses concealed,  
You will receive, before the hour of noon,  
Good recompense, I hope, for this day’s toil,  
From sight of One who lives secluded there,  
Lonesome and lost: of whom, and whose past life  
(Not to forestall such knowledge as may be  
More faithfully collected from himself),  
This brief communication shall suffice.

“Though now sojourning there, he, like myself,  
Sprang from a stock of lowly parentage  
Among the wilds of Scotland; in a tract  
Where many a sheltered and well-tended plant,  
Upon the humblest ground of social life,  
Doth at this day, I trust, the blossoms bear  
Of piety and simple innocence.  
Such grateful promises his youth displayed;  
And, as he showed in study forward zeal,  
All helps were sought, all measures strained, that he,  
By due scholastic discipline prepared,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Might to the Ministry be called; which done,  
Partly through lack of better hopes—and part,  
Perhaps, incited by a curious mind,  
In early life he undertook the charge  
Of Chaplain to a military troop,  
Cheered by the Highland bagpipe, as they marched  
In plaided vest—his fellow-countrymen.  
This office filling, and by native power,  
And force of native inclination, made  
An intellectual ruler in the haunts  
Of social vanity, he walked the world,  
Gay, and affecting graceful gaiety;  
Lax, buoyant—less a pastor with his flock  
Than a soldier among soldiers—lived and roamed  
Where Fortune led: and Fortune, who oft proves  
The careless wanderer's friend, to him made known  
A blooming Lady—a conspicuous flower,  
Admired for beauty, for her sweetness praised,  
Whom he had sensibility to love,  
Ambition to attempt, and skill to win.

“For this fair Bride, most rich in gifts of mind,  
Nor sparingly endowed with worldly wealth,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

His office he relinquished ; and retired  
From the world's notice to a rural home.  
Youth's season yet with him was scarcely past,  
And she was in youth's prime. How full their joy!—  
How free their love!—nor did their love decay,  
Nor joy abate, till,—pitiable doom!  
In the short course of one undreaded year  
Death blasted all. Death suddenly o'erthrew  
Two lovely children—all that they possessed!  
The mother followed : miserably bare  
The one survivor stood ; he wept, he prayed  
For his dismissal, day and night—compelled  
By pain to turn his thoughts towards the grave,  
And face the regions of Eternity.  
An uncomplaining apathy displaced  
This anguish ; and, indifferent to delight,  
To aim and purpose, he consumed his days,  
To private interest dead, and public care.  
So lived he ; so he might have died.

“ But now,

To the wide world's astonishment, appeared  
The glorious opening, the unlooked-for dawn,  
That promised everlasting joy to France !



## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

That sudden light had power to pierce the gloom  
In which his spirit, friendless upon earth,  
In separation dwelt, and solitude.  
The voice of social transport reached even him!  
He broke from his contracted bounds, repaired  
To the great City, an emporium then  
Of golden expectations, and receiving  
Freights, every day, from a new world of hope.  
Thither his popular talents he transferred!  
And, from the pulpit, zealously maintained  
The cause of Christ and civil liberty,  
As one, and moving to one glorious end.  
Intoxicating service! I might say  
A happy service; for he was sincere  
As vanity and fondness for applause,  
And new and shapeless wishes, would allow.

“That righteous cause of freedom did, we know,  
Combine for one hostility, as friends,  
Ethereal natures and the worst of slaves;  
Was served by rival advocates that came  
From regions opposite as heaven and hell.  
One courage seemed to animate them all

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And, from the dazzling conquests daily gained  
By their united efforts, there arose  
A proud and most presumptuous confidence  
In the transcendent wisdom of the age,  
And its discernment; not alone in rights,  
And in the origin and bounds of power  
Social and temporal; but in laws divine,  
Deduced by reason, or to faith revealed.  
An overweening trust was raised; and fear  
Cast out, alike of person and of thing.  
Plague from this union spread, whose subtle bane  
The strongest did not easily escape;  
And he, what wonder! took a mortal taint.  
How shall I trace the change, how bear to tell  
That he broke faith with them whom he had laid  
In earth's dark chambers, with a Christian's hope!  
An infidel contempt of Holy Writ  
Stole by degrees upon his mind; and hence  
Life, like that Roman Janus, double-faced;  
Vilest hypocrisy, the laughing, gay  
Hypocrisy, not leagued with fear, but pride.  
Smooth words he had to wheedle simple souls  
But, for disciples of the inner school,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Old freedom was old servitude, and they  
The wisest whose opinions stooped the least  
To known restraints ; and who most boldly drew  
Hopeful prognostications from a creed,  
Which, in the light of false philosophy,  
Spread like a halo round a misty moon,  
Widening its circle as the storms advance.

“ His sacred function was at length renounced,  
And every day and every place enjoyed  
The unshackled layman’s natural liberty ;  
Speech, manners, morals, all without disguise.  
I do not wish to wrong him ; though the course  
Of private life licentiously displayed  
Unhallowed actions—planted like a crown  
Upon the insolent aspiring brow  
Of spurious notions—worn as open signs  
Of prejudice subdued—he still retained,  
'Mid much abasement, what he had received  
From nature—an intense and glowing mind.  
Wherefore, when humble Liberty grew weak,  
And mortal sickness on her face appeared,  
He coloured objects to his own desire

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

As with a lover's passion. Yet his moods  
Of pain were keen as those of better men,  
Nay keener, as his fortitude was less :  
And he continued, when worse days were come,  
To deal about his sparkling eloquence,  
Struggling against the strange reverse with zeal  
That showed like happiness ; but, in despite  
Of all this outside bravery, within  
He neither felt encouragement nor hope :  
For moral dignity and strength of mind  
Were wanting, and simplicity of life,  
And reverence for himself ; and, last and best,  
Confiding thoughts, through love and fear of Him,  
Before whose sight the troubles of this world  
Are vain as billows in a tossing sea.

“The glory of the times fading away—  
The splendour, which had given a festal air  
To self-importance, hallowed it, and veiled  
From his own sight—this gone, therewith he lost  
All joy in human nature ; was consumed,  
And vexed, and chafed, by levity and scorn,  
And fruitless indignation ; galled by pride ;

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Made desperate by contempt of men who throve  
Before his sight in power or fame, and won,  
Without desert, what he desired ; weak men,  
Too weak even for his envy or his hate !  
And thus beset, and finding in himself  
Nor pleasure nor tranquillity, at last,  
After a wandering course of discontent  
In foreign lands, and inwardly oppressed  
With malady—in part, I fear, provoked  
By weariness of life – he fixed his home,  
Or, rather say, sate down by very chance,  
Among these rugged hills ; where now he dwells,  
And wastes the sad remainder of his hours  
In self-indulging spleen, that doth not want  
Its own voluptuousness ;—on this resolved,  
With this content—that he will live and die  
Forgotten,—at safe distance from ‘ a world  
Not moving to his mind.’ ”

These serious words

Closed the preparatory notices  
With which my fellow-traveller had beguiled  
The way, while we advanced up that wide vale.  
Now, suddenly diverging, he began

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

To climb, upon its western side, a ridge,  
Pathless and smooth, a long and steep ascent ;  
As if the object of his quest had been  
Some secret of the mountains, cavern, fall  
Of water, or some boastful eminence,  
Renowned for splendid prospect far and wide.  
We clomb without a track to guide our steps,  
And, on the summit, reached a healthy plain,  
With a tumultuous waste of huge hill-tops  
Before us ; savage region ! and I walked  
In weariness ; when, all at once, behold !  
Beneath our feet, a little lowly vale,  
A lowly vale, and yet uplifted high  
Among the mountains ; even as if the spot  
Had been, from eldest time, by wish of theirs  
So placed—to be shut out from all the world !  
Urn-like it was in shape, deep as an urn ;  
With rocks encompassed, save that to the south  
Was one small opening, where a heath-clad ridge  
Supplied a boundary less abrupt and close :  
A quiet treeless nook, with two green fields,  
A liquid pool that glittered in the sun,  
And one bare dwelling ; one abode, no more !



It seemed the home of poverty and toil,



## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Though not of want: the little fields, made green  
By husbandry of many thrifty years,  
Paid cheerful tribute to the moorland house.  
There crows the cock, single in his domain:  
The small birds find in spring no thicket there  
To shroud them; only from the neighbouring vales  
The cuckoo, straggling up to the hill-tops,  
Shouteth faint tidings of some gladder place.

“Ah! what a sweet recess,” thought I, “is here!”  
Instantly throwing down my limbs at ease  
Upon a bed of heath,—“full many a spot  
Of hidden beauty have I chanced t’ espy  
Among the mountains; never one like this;  
So lonesome, and so perfectly secure:  
Not melancholy—no, for it is green,  
And bright, and fertile, furnished in itself  
With the few needful things that life requires.  
In rugged arms how soft it seems to lie,  
How tenderly protected! Far and near  
We have an image of the pristine earth,  
The planet in its nakedness; were this  
Man’s only dwelling, sole appointed seat,

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

First, last, and single, in the breathing world,  
It could not be more quiet : peace is here  
Or nowhere ; days unruffled by the gale  
Of public news or private ; years that pass  
Forgetfully ; uncalled upon to pay  
The common penalties of mortal life,  
Sickness, or accident, or grief, or pain.”

On these and other kindred thoughts intent,  
In silence by my Comrade's side I lay,  
He also silent : when, from out the heart  
Of that profound abyss, a solemn voice,  
Or several voices in one solemn sound,  
Was heard ascending ; mournful, deep, and slow  
The cadence, as of psalms—a funeral dirge !  
We listened, looking down towards the hut,  
But seeing no one : meanwhile from below  
The strain continued, spiritual as before ;  
And now distinctly could I recognise  
These words :—“ *Shall in the grave thy love be known,  
In death thy faithfulness ?* ” “ God rest his soul ! ”  
The Wanderer cried, abruptly breaking silence ;  
“ He is departed, and finds peace at last ! ”

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

This scarcely spoken, and those holy strains  
Not ceasing, forth appeared in view a band  
Of rustic persons from behind the hut,  
Bearing a coffin in the midst, with which  
They shaped their course along the sloping side  
Of that small valley, singing as they moved ;  
A sober company and few, the men  
Bareheaded, and all decently attired.  
Some steps when they had thus advanced, the dirge  
Ended ; and, from the stillness that ensued  
Recovering, to my Friend I said, “ You spake,  
Methought, with apprehension that these rites  
Are paid to him upon whose shy retreat  
This day we purposed to intrude.” “ I did ;  
But let us hence, that we may learn the truth.  
Perhaps it is not he, but some one else,  
For whom this pious service is performed ;  
Some other tenant of the solitude.”

So, to a steep and difficult descent  
Trusting ourselves, we wound from crag to crag,  
Where passage could be won ; and, as the last  
Of the mute train upon the heathy top

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Of that off-sloping outlet disappeared,  
I, more impatient in the course I took,  
Had landed upon easy ground, and there  
Stood waiting for my Comrade. When, behold  
An object that enticed my steps aside !  
It was an entry, narrow as a door,  
A passage whose brief windings opened out  
Into a platform, that lay, sheepfold-wise,  
Inclosed between a single mass of rock  
And one old moss-grown wall ; a cool recess,  
And fanciful ! For, where the rock and wall  
Met in an angle, hung a tiny roof,  
Or penthouse, which most quaintly had been framed  
By thrusting two rude sticks into the wall  
And overlaying them with mountain sods ;  
To weather-fend a little turf-built seat,  
Whereon a full-grown man might rest, nor dread  
The burning sunshine, or a transient shower ;  
But the whole plainly wrought by children's hands !  
Whose simple skill had thronged the grassy floor  
With work of frame less solid, a proud show  
Of baby-houses, curiously arranged ;  
Nor wanting ornament of walks between,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

With mimic trees inserted in the turf,  
And gardens interposed. Pleased with the sight,  
I could not choose but beckon to my guide,  
Who, having entered, carelessly looked round,  
And now would have passed on, when I exclaimed,  
“Lo! what is here?” and, stooping down, drew forth  
A book, that, in the midst of stones and moss,  
And wreck of parti-coloured earthenware,  
Aptly disposed, had lent its help to raise  
One of those petty structures. “Gracious Heaven!”  
The Wanderer cried, “it cannot but be his,  
And he is gone!” The book, which in my hand  
Had opened of itself (for it was swoln  
With searching damp, and seemingly had lain  
To the injurious elements exposed  
From week to week), I found to be a work  
In the French tongue, a novel of Voltaire,  
His famous “Optimist.” “Unhappy man!”  
Exclaimed my friend; “here, then, has been to him  
Retreat within retreat, a sheltering-place  
Within how deep a shelter! He had fits,  
Even to the last, of genuine tenderness,  
And loved the haunts of children; here, no doubt,

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

He sometimes played with them ; and here hath sate  
Far oft'ner by himself. This book, I guess,  
Hath been forgotten in his careless way,  
Left here when he was occupied in mind,  
And by the cottage children has been found.  
Heaven bless them, and their inconsiderate work :  
To what odd purpose have the darlings turned  
This sad memorial of their hapless friend !”

“ Me,” said I, “ most doth it surprise, to find  
Such book in such a place !” “ A book it is,”  
He answered, “ to the person suited well,  
Though little suited to surrounding things ;  
Nor, with the knowledge which my mind possessed,  
Could I behold it undisturbed : ’t is strange,  
I grant, and stranger still had been to see  
The man who was its owner, dwelling here  
With one poor shepherd, far from all the world !  
Now, if our errand hath been thrown away,  
As from these intimations I forbode,  
Grieved shall I be—less for my sake than yours,  
And least of all for him who is no more.”

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

By this, the book was in the old Man's hand ;  
And he continued, glancing on the leaves  
An eye of scorn :—" The lover," said he, " doomed  
To love when hope hath failed him, whom no depth  
Of privacy is deep enough to hide,  
Hath yet his bracelet or his lock of hair,  
And that his joy to him. When change of times  
Hath summoned kings to scaffolds, do but give  
The faithful servant, who must hide his head  
Henceforth in whatsoever nook he may,  
A kerchief sprinkled with his master's blood,  
And he too hath his comforter. How poor  
Beyond all poverty, how destitute,  
Must that man have been left, who, hither driven,  
Flying or seeking, could yet bring with him  
No dearer relique, and no better stay,  
Than this dull product of a scoffer's pen,  
Impure conceits discharging from a heart  
Hardened by impious pride ! I did not fear  
To tax you with this journey," mildly said  
My venerable Friend, as forth we stepped  
Into the presence of the cheerful light ;  
" For I have knowledge that you do not shrink





From moving spectacles ; but let us on."

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

So speaking, on he went, and at the word  
I followed, till he made a sudden stand ;  
For full in view, approaching through the gate,  
That opened from the inclosure of green fields  
Into the rough uncultivated ground,  
Behold the Man whom he had fancied dead !  
I knew, from the appearance and the dress,  
That it could be no other : a pale face,  
A tall and meagre person, in a garb  
Not rustic,—dull and faded like himself !  
He saw us not, though distant but few steps ;  
For he was busy dealing from a store,  
Which on a leaf he carried in his hand,  
Strings of ripe currants ; gift by which he strove,  
With intermixture of endearing words,  
To soothe a child who walked beside him, weeping  
As if disconsolate. “ They to the grave  
Are bearing him, my Little-one,” he said—  
“ To the dark pit, but he will feel no pain ;  
His body is at rest, his soul in heaven.”

Glad was my Comrade now, though he at first,  
I doubt not, had been more surprised than glad.

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

But now, recovered from the shock, and calm,  
He soberly advanced, and to the Man  
Gave cordial greeting. Vivid was the light  
Which flashed at this from out the other's eyes ;  
He was all fire : the sickness from his face  
Passed like a fancy that is swept away.  
Hands joined he with his Visitant,—a grasp,  
An eager grasp ; and, many moments' space,  
When the first glow of pleasure was no more,  
And much of what had vanished was returned,  
An amicable smile retained the life,  
Which it had unexpectedly received,  
Upon his hollow cheek. "How kind," he said ;  
"Nor could your coming have been better timed ;  
For this, you see, is in our narrow world  
A day of sorrow. I have here a charge"—  
And, speaking thus, he patted tenderly  
The sunburnt forehead of the weeping child—  
"A little mourner, whom it is my task  
To comfort ; but how came ye ? If yon track  
(Which doth at once befriend us and betray)  
Conducted hither your most welcome feet,  
Ye could not miss the funeral train ; they yet

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Have scarcely disappeared." "This blooming child,"  
Said the old Man, "is of an age to weep  
At any grave or solemn spectacle ;  
Inly distressed, or overpowered with awe,  
He knows not why ; but he, perchance, this day  
Is shedding orphan's tears ; and you yourself  
Must have sustained a loss." "The hand of Death,"  
He answered, "has been here ; but could not well  
Have fallen more lightly, if it had not fallen  
Upon myself." The other left these words  
Unnoticed, thus continuing :—

“ From yon crag,  
Down whose steep sides we dropped into the vale,  
We heard the hymn they sang—a solemn sound  
Heard anywhere, but in a place like this  
’Tis more than human ! Many precious rites  
And customs of our rural ancestry  
Are gone, or stealing from us ; this, I hope,  
Will last for ever. Often have I stopped  
When on my way, I could not choose but stop,  
So much I felt the awfulness of life,  
In that one moment when the corse is lifted

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

In silence, with a hush of decency ;  
Then from the threshold moves with song of peace,  
And confidential yearnings, to its home,  
Its final home in earth. What traveller—who—  
(How far soe'er a stranger) does not own  
The bond of brotherhood, when he sees them go,  
A mute procession on the houseless road,  
Or passing by some single tenement  
Or clustered dwellings, where again they raise  
The monitory voice? But most of all  
It touches, it confirms, and elevates,  
Then, when the body, soon to be consigned  
Ashes to ashes, dust bequeathed to dust,  
Is raised from the church-aisle, and forward borne  
Upon the shoulders of the next in love,  
The nearest in affection or in blood ;  
Yea, by the very mourners who had knelt  
Beside the coffin, resting on its lid  
In silent grief their unuplifted heads,  
And heard meanwhile the Psalmist's mournful plaint,  
And that most awful Scripture which declares  
We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed!  
Have I not seen—ye likewise may have seen—

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Son, husband, brothers—brothers side by side,  
And son and father, also side by side,  
Rise from that posture ; and in concert move,  
On the green turf following the vested priest,  
Four dear supporters of one senseless weight,  
From which they do not shrink, and under which  
They faint not, but advance towards the grave  
Step after step—together, with their firm  
Unhidden faces ; he that suffers most,  
He outwardly, and inwardly perhaps,  
The most serene, with most undaunted eye !  
Oh ! blest are they who live and die like these,  
Loved with such love, and with such sorrow mourned !”

“ That poor man taken hence to-day,” replied  
The Solitary, with a faint sarcastic smile  
Which did not please me, “ must be deemed, I fear,  
Of the unblest ; for he will surely sink  
Into his mother earth without such pomp  
Of grief, depart without occasion given  
By him for such array of fortitude.  
Full seventy winters hath he lived—and mark !  
This simple child will mourn his one short hour,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And I shall miss him ; scanty tribute ! yet,  
This wanting, he would leave the sight of men,  
If love were his sole claim upon their care,  
Like a ripe date which in the desert falls  
Without a hand to gather it." At this  
I interposed, though loth to speak, and said,  
" Can it be thus, among so small a band  
As ye must needs be here ? In such a place  
I would not willingly, methinks, lose sight  
Of a departing cloud." "'Twas not for love,"  
Answered the sick Man, with a careless voice,  
" That I came hither ; neither have I found  
Among associates who have power of speech,  
Nor in such other converse as is here,  
Temptation so prevailing as to change  
That mood, or undermine my first resolve."  
Then speaking in like careless sort, he said  
To my benign Companion,—“ Pity 't is  
That Fortune did not guide you to this house  
A few days earlier ; then would you have seen  
What stuff the dwellers in this solitude  
(That seems by Nature framed to be the seat  
And very bosom of pure innocence)



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Are made of ; an ungracious matter this !  
Which, for truth's sake, yet in remembrance too  
Of past discussions with this zealous friend  
And advocate of humble life, I now  
Will force upon his notice ; undeterred  
By the example of his own pure course,  
And that respect and deference which a soul  
May fairly claim, by niggard age enriched  
In what it values most—the love of God  
And his frail creature Man ; but ye shall hear.  
I talk—and ye are standing in the sun  
Without refreshment ! ”

Saying this, he led  
Toward the Cottage : homely was the spot,  
And to my feeling, ere we reached the door,  
Had almost a forbidding nakedness ;  
Less fair, I grant, even painfully less fair,  
Than it appeared when from the valley's brink  
We had looked down upon it. All within,  
As left by the departed company,  
Was silent ; and the solitary clock  
Ticked, as I thought, with melancholy sound.  
Following our Guide, we clomb the cottage stairs

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And reached a small apartment dark and low,  
Which was no sooner entered than our Host  
Said gaily, "This is my domain, my cell,  
My hermitage, my cabin—what you will:  
I love it better than a snail his house.  
But now ye shall be feasted with our best."  
So, with more ardour than an unripe girl  
Left one day mistress of her mother's stores,  
He went about his hospitable task.  
My eyes were busy, and my thoughts no less ;  
And pleased I looked upon my grey-haired friend,  
As if to thank him ; he returned that look,  
Cheered plainly, and yet serious. What a wreck  
We had around us ! scattered was the floor,  
And, in like sort, chair, window-seat, and shelf,  
With books, maps, fossils, withered plants and flowers,  
And tufts of mountain moss ; and here and there,  
Lay, intermixed with these, mechanic tools,  
And scraps of paper,—some I could perceive  
Scribbled with verse : a broken angling-rod  
And shattered telescope, together linked  
By cobwebs, stood within a dusty nook ;  
And instruments of music, some half-made,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Some in disgrace, hung dangling from the walls.  
But speedily the promise was fulfilled ;  
A feast before us, and a courteous Host  
Inviting us in glee to sit and eat.  
A napkin, white as foam of that rough brook  
By which it had been bleached, o'erspread the board ;  
And was itself half-covered with a load  
Of dainties,—oaten bread, curds, cheese, and cream ;  
And cakes of butter curiously embossed,  
Butter that had imbibed a golden tinge,  
A hue like that of yellow meadow-flowers  
Faintly reflected in a silent pool.  
Nor lacked, for more delight on that warm day,  
Our table small parade of garden fruits,  
And whortle-berries from the mountain-sides.  
The child, who long ere this had stilled his sobs,  
Was now a help to his late comforter,  
And moved, a willing page, as he was bid,  
Ministering to our need.

In genial mood,  
While at our pastoral banquet thus we sate  
Fronting the window of that little cell,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

I could not ever and anon forbear  
To glance an upward look on two huge Peaks,  
That from some other vale peered into this.  
“Those lusty twins, on which your eyes are cast,”  
Exclaimed our Host, “if here you dwelt, would be  
Your prized companions. Many are the notes  
Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth  
From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths, and dashing shores ;  
And well those lofty brethren bear their part  
In the wild concert—chiefly when the storm  
Rides high ; then all the upper air they fill  
With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow  
Like smoke along the level of the blast,  
In mighty current ; theirs, too, is the song  
Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails ;  
And, in the grim and breathless hour of noon,  
Methinks that I have heard them echo back  
The thunder’s greeting : nor have Nature’s laws  
Left them ungifted with a power to yield  
Music of finer tone ; a harmony,  
So do I call it, though it be the hand  
Of silence,—though there be no voice ; the clouds,  
The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Motions of moonlight, all come thither—touch,  
And have an answer—thither come, and shape  
A language not unwelcome to sick hearts  
And idle spirits: there the sun himself,  
At the calm close of summer's longest day,  
Rests his substantial orb; between those heights,  
And on the top of either pinnacle,  
More keenly than elsewhere in night's blue vault,  
Sparkle the stars, as of their station proud.  
Thoughts are not busier in the mind of man  
Than the mute agents stirring there:—alone  
Here do I sit and watch.”

With brightening face  
The Wanderer heard him speaking thus, and said,  
“Now for the tale with which you threatened us!”  
“In truth the threat escaped me unawares,  
And was forgotten. Let this challenge stand  
For my excuse, if what I shall relate  
Tire your attention. Outcast and cut off  
As we seem here, and must have seemed to you  
When ye looked down upon us from the crag,  
Islanders of a stormy mountain sea,

### THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

We are not so; perpetually we touch  
Upon the vulgar ordinance of the world;  
And he, whom this our cottage hath to-day  
Relinquished, was dependent for his bread  
Upon the laws of public charity.  
The Housewife, tempted by such slender gains  
As might from that occasion be distilled,  
Opened, as she before had done for me,  
Her doors t' admit this homeless Pensioner;  
The portion gave of coarse but wholesome fare  
Which appetite required—a blind dull nook,  
Such as she had, the *kennel* of his rest!  
This, in itself not ill, would yet have been  
Ill borne in earlier life: but his was now  
The still contentedness of seventy years.  
Calm did he sit beneath the wide-spread tree  
Of his old age; and yet less calm and meek,  
Winningly meek or venerably calm,  
Than slow and torpid; paying in this wise  
A penalty, if penalty it were,  
For spendthrift feats, excesses of his prime.  
I loved the old man, for I pitied him.  
A task it was, I own, to hold discourse

## THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

With one so slow in gathering up his thoughts,  
But he was a cheap pleasure to my eyes ;  
Mild, inoffensive, ready in *his* way,  
And useful to his utmost power : and there  
Our Housewife knew full well what she possessed !  
He was her vassal of all labour, tilled  
Her garden, from the pasture fetched her kine ;  
And, one among the orderly array  
Of haymakers, beneath the burning sun  
Maintained his place ; or heedfully pursued  
His course, on errands bound to other vales,  
Leading sometimes an inexperienced child,  
Too young for any profitable task.  
So moved he like a shadow that performed  
Substantial service. Mark me now, and learn  
For what reward. The moon her monthly round  
Hath not completed since our dame, the queen  
Of this one cottage and this lonely dale,  
Into my little sanctuary rushed,—  
Voice to a rueful treble humanized,  
And features in deplorable dismay :  
I treat the matter lightly, but alas !  
It is most serious. From mid-noon the rain



Had fallen in torrents; all the mountain-tops  
Were hidden, and black vapours coursed their sides;  
This had I seen, and saw; but, till she spake,  
Was wholly ignorant that my ancient friend—



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Who at her bidding, early and alone,  
Had clomb aloft to delve the moorland turf  
For winter fuel—to his noontide meal  
Came not, and now perchance upon the heights  
Lay at the mercy of this raging storm.  
'Inhuman!' said I, 'was an old man's life  
Not worth the trouble of a thought?—alas!  
This notice comes too late.' With joy I saw  
Her husband enter, from a distant vale.  
We sallied forth together; found the tools  
Which the neglected veteran had dropped,  
But through all quarters looked for him in vain.  
We shouted—but no answer! Darkness fell  
Without remission of the blast or shower,  
And fears for our own safety drove us home.  
I, who weep little, did, I will confess,  
The moment I was seated here alone,  
Honour my little cell with some few tears  
Which anger and resentment could not dry.  
All night the storm endured; and, soon as help  
Had been collected from the neighbouring vale,  
With morning we renewed our quest: the wind  
Was fallen, the rain abated, but the hills

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

Lay shrouded in impenetrable mist ;  
And long and hopelessly we sought in vain,  
Till, chancing on that lofty ridge to pass  
A heap of ruin, almost without walls  
And wholly without roof (in ancient time  
It was a chapel, a small edifice,  
In which the peasants of these lonely dells  
For worship met upon that central height)—  
Chancing to pass this wreck of stones, we there  
Espied at last the object of our search,  
Couched in a nook, and seemingly alive.  
It would have moved you, had you seen the guise  
In which he occupied his chosen bed,  
Lying full three parts buried among tufts  
Of heath-plant under and above him strown,  
To baffle, as he might, the watery storm :  
And there we found him breathing peaceably,  
Snug as a child that hides itself in sport  
'Mid a green haycock in a sunny field.  
We spake—he made reply, but would not stir  
At our entreaty ; less from want of power  
Than apprehension and bewildering thoughts.  
So was he lifted gently from the ground,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And with their freight the shepherds homeward moved  
Through the dull mist, I following—when a step,  
A single step, that freed me from the skirts  
Of the blind vapour, opened to my view  
Glory beyond all glory ever seen  
By waking sense, or by the dreaming soul!  
Though I am conscious that no power of words  
Can body forth, no hues of speech can paint  
That gorgeous spectacle—too bright and fair  
Even for remembrance; yet the attempt may give  
Collateral interest to this homely tale.  
The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,  
Was of a mighty city—boldly say  
A wilderness of building—sinking far  
And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth,  
Far sinking into splendour—without end!  
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,  
With alabaster domes and silver spires;  
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high  
Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright,  
In avenues disposed; there, towers begirt  
With battlements, that on their restless fronts  
Bore stars—illumination of all gems!



THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

By earthly nature had the effect been wrought  
Upon the dark materials of the storm  
Now pacified ; on them, and on the coves  
And mountain-steeps and summits, whereunto  
The vapours had receded, taking there  
Their station under a cerulean sky.  
O, 't was an unimaginable sight !  
Clouds, mists, streams, watery rocks, and emerald turf,  
Clouds of all tincture, rocks and sapphire sky,  
Confused, commingled, mutually inflamed,  
Molten together, and composing thus,  
Each lost in each, that marvellous array  
Of temple, palace, citadel, and huge  
Fantastic pomp of structure without name,  
In fleecy folds voluminous enwrapped.  
Right in the midst, where interspace appeared  
Of open court, an object like a throne  
Under a shining canopy of state  
Stood fixed ; and fixed resemblances were seen  
To implements of ordinary use,  
But vast in size, in substance glorified ;  
Such as by Hebrew Prophets were beheld  
In vision—forms uncouth of mightiest power,

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

For admiration and mysterious awe.  
Below me was the earth; this little vale  
Lay low beneath my feet; 'twas visible—  
I saw not, but I felt, that it was there.  
That which I *saw* was the revealed abode  
Of Spirits in beatitude: my heart  
Swelled in my breast. 'I have been dead,' I cried,  
'And now I live! Oh! wherefore do I live?'  
And with that pang I prayed to be no more!  
But I forget our charge—as utterly  
I then forgot him—there I stood and gazed;  
The apparition faded not away,  
And I descended. Having reached the house,  
I found its rescued inmate safely lodged,  
And in serene possession of himself,  
Beside a genial fire that seemed to spread  
A gleam of comfort o'er his pallid face.  
Great show of joy the Housewife made, and truly  
Was glad to find her conscience set at ease;  
And not less glad, for sake of her good name,  
That the poor sufferer had escaped with life.  
But, though he seemed at first to have received  
No harm, and uncomplaining as before



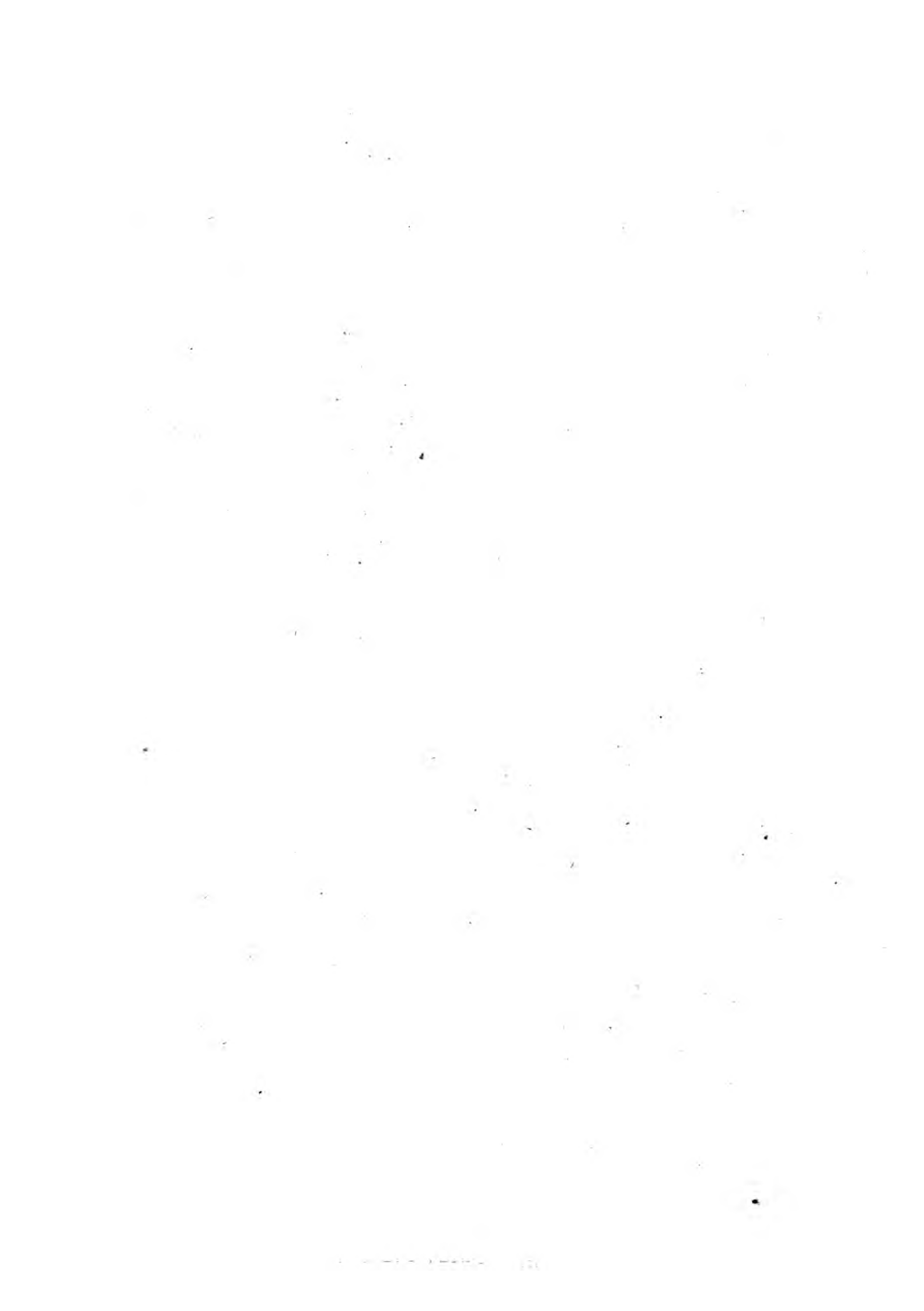
Went through his usual tasks, a silent change  
Soon showed itself; he lingered three short weeks;  
And from the Cottage hath been borne to-day.

“So ends my dolorous tale, and glad I am  
That it is ended.” At these words he turned—

THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

And, with blithe air of open fellowship,  
Brought from the cupboard wine and stouter cheer,  
Like one who would be merry. Seeing this,  
My grey-haired Friend said courteously—"Nay, nay,  
You have regaled us as a hermit ought;  
Now let us forth into the sun!" Our Host  
Rose, though reluctantly, and forth we went.



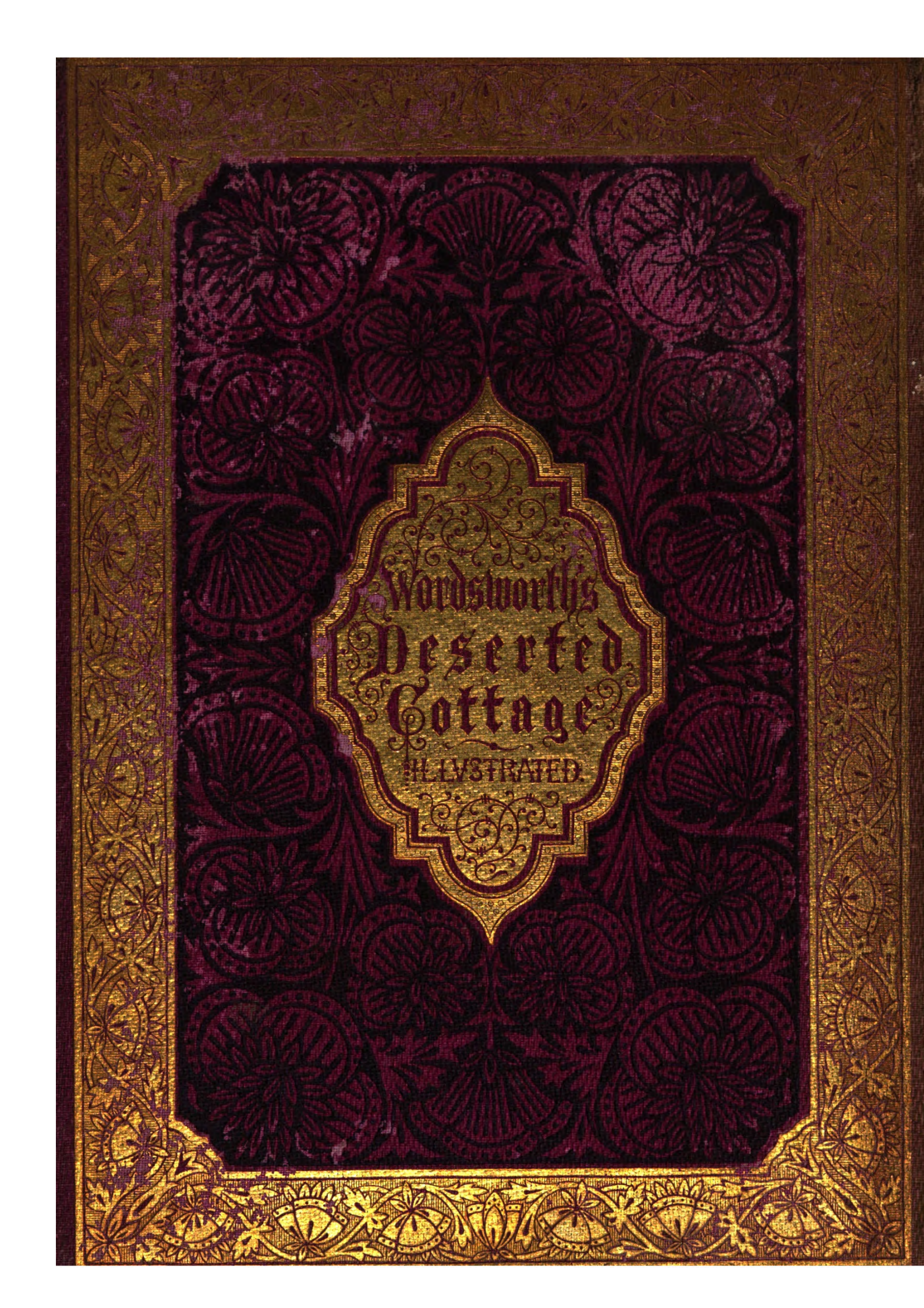












Wordsworth's  
Deserted  
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