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Wordsworth's
Deserted
Cottage
ILLUSTRATED

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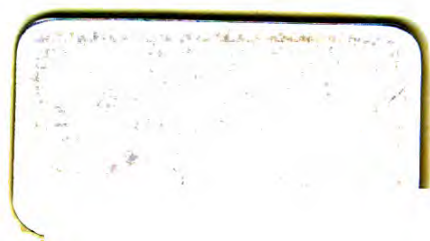
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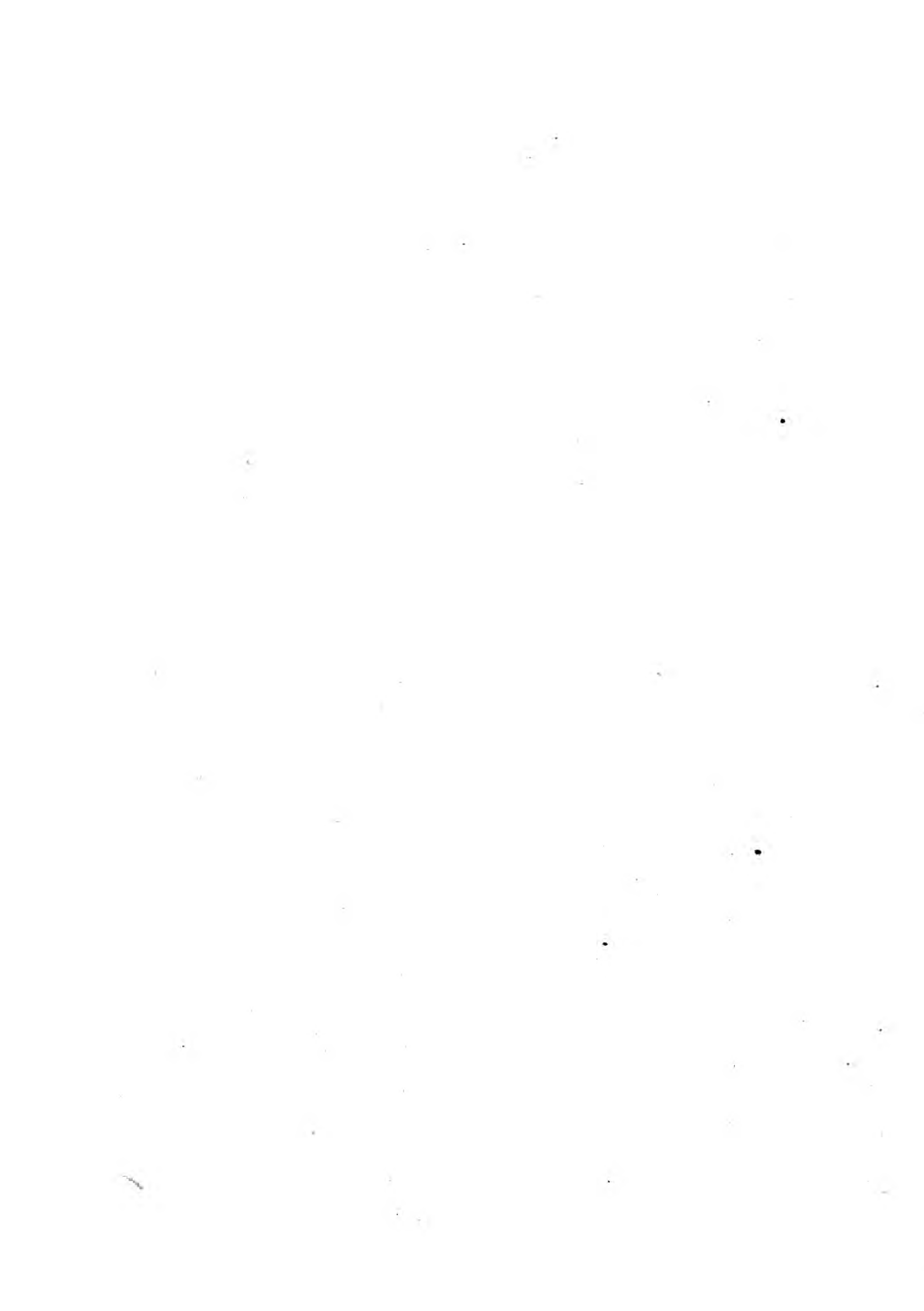
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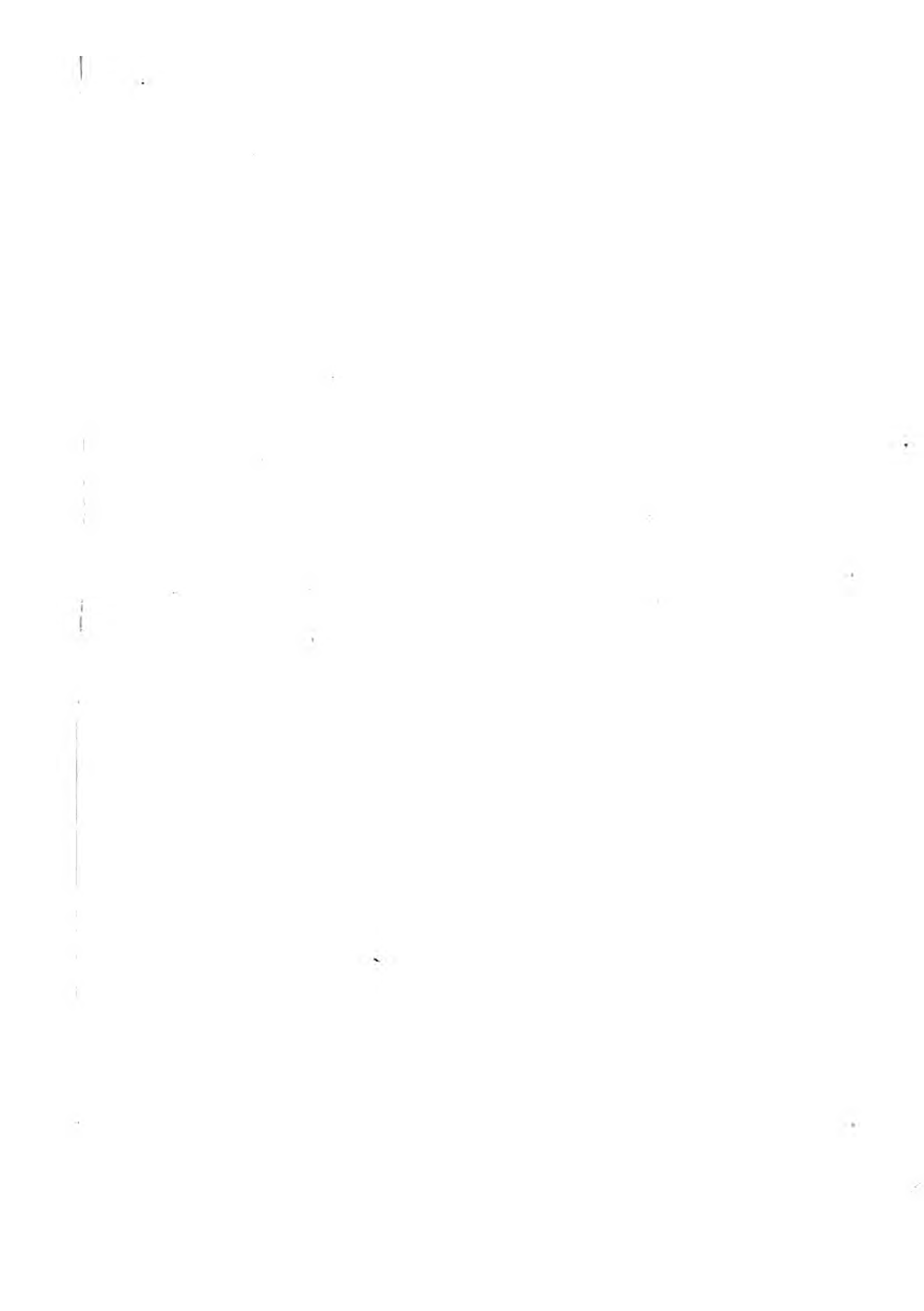
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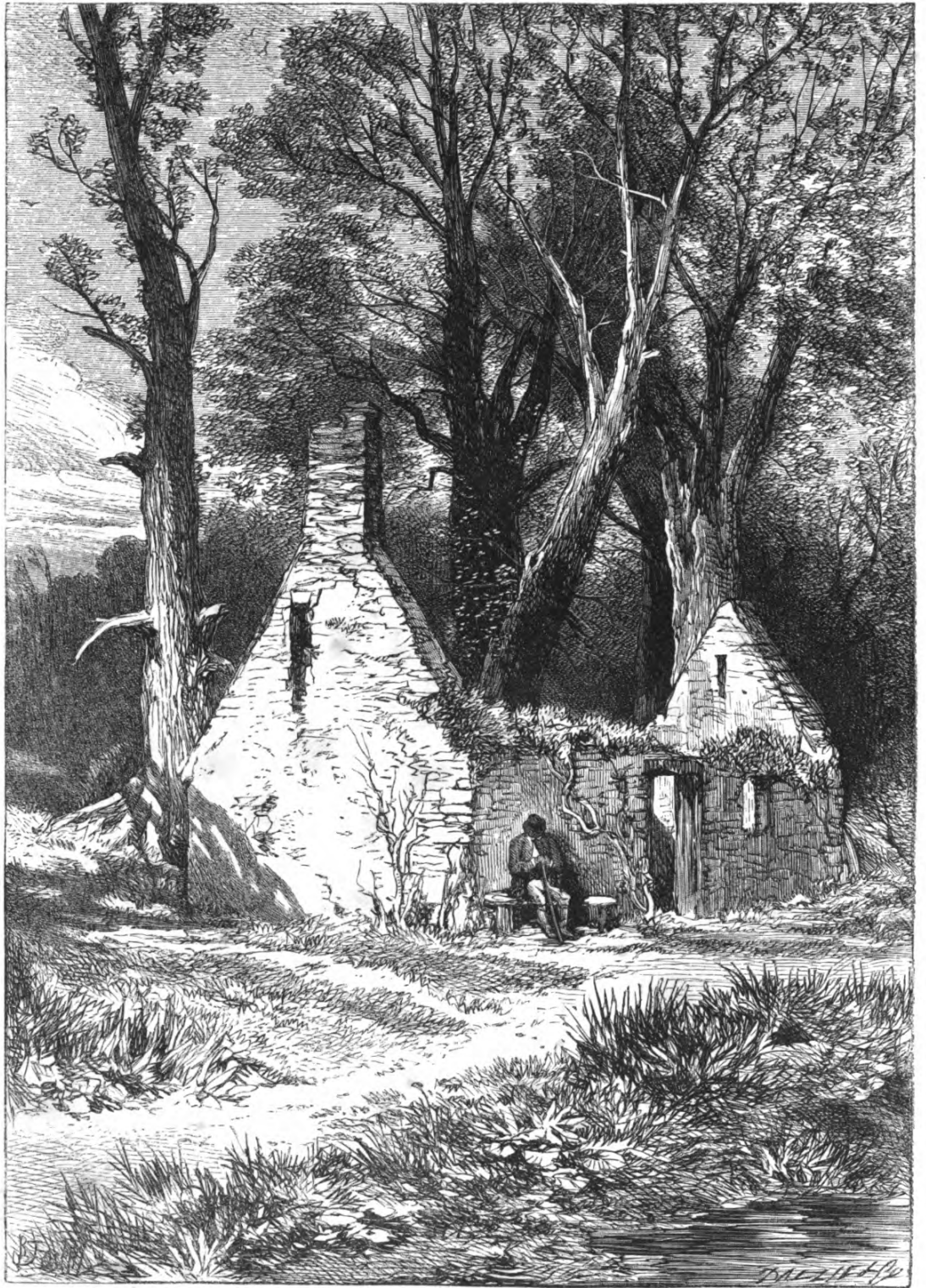
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Amid the gloom
Spread by a brotherhood of lofty elms,
Appeared a roofless Hut.

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:
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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
Traditional 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 stragglng 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 wares 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 plumy 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 seemed 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.

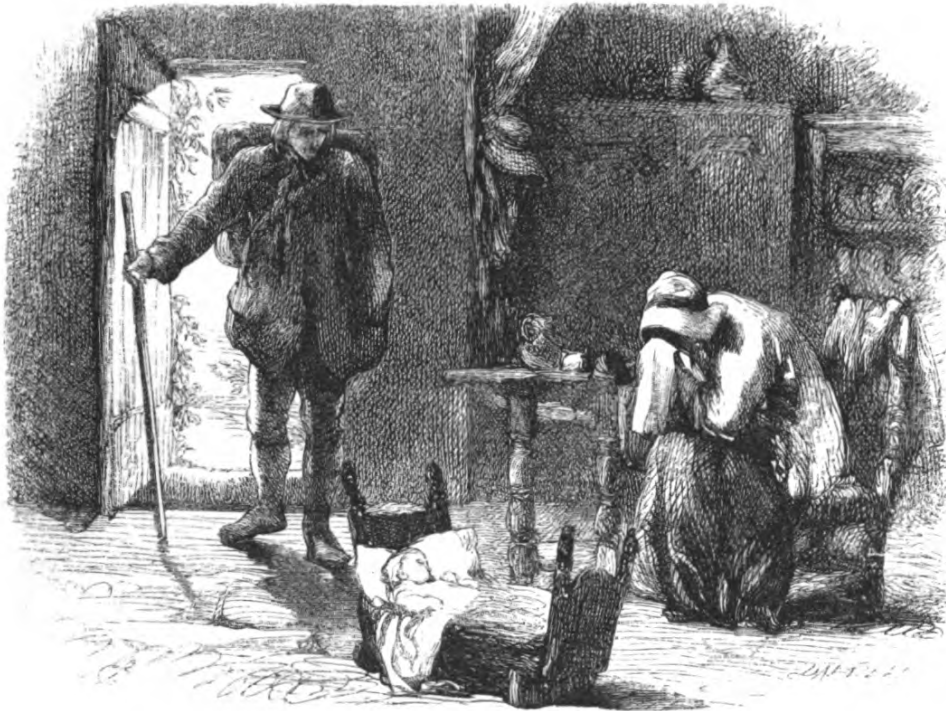
“ While thus it fared with them,
To whom this Cottage, till those hapless years,
Had been a blessèd home, it was my chance
To travel in a country far remote;
And glad I was, when, halting by yon gate
That leads from the green lane, once more I saw
These lofty elm-trees. Long I did not rest:
With many 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,



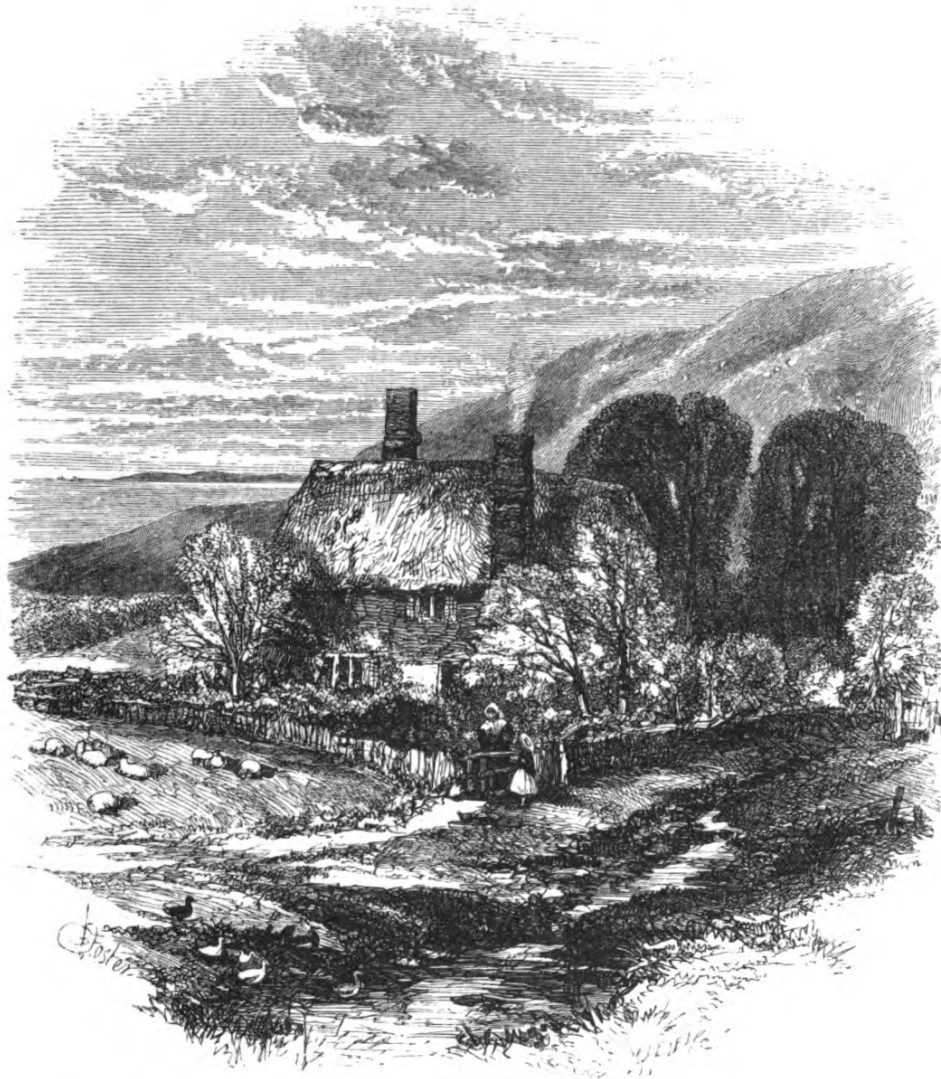
Drooping or blithe of heart, as might befall ;

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
Bespake 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 unimaginative 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 is 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." "'T was 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



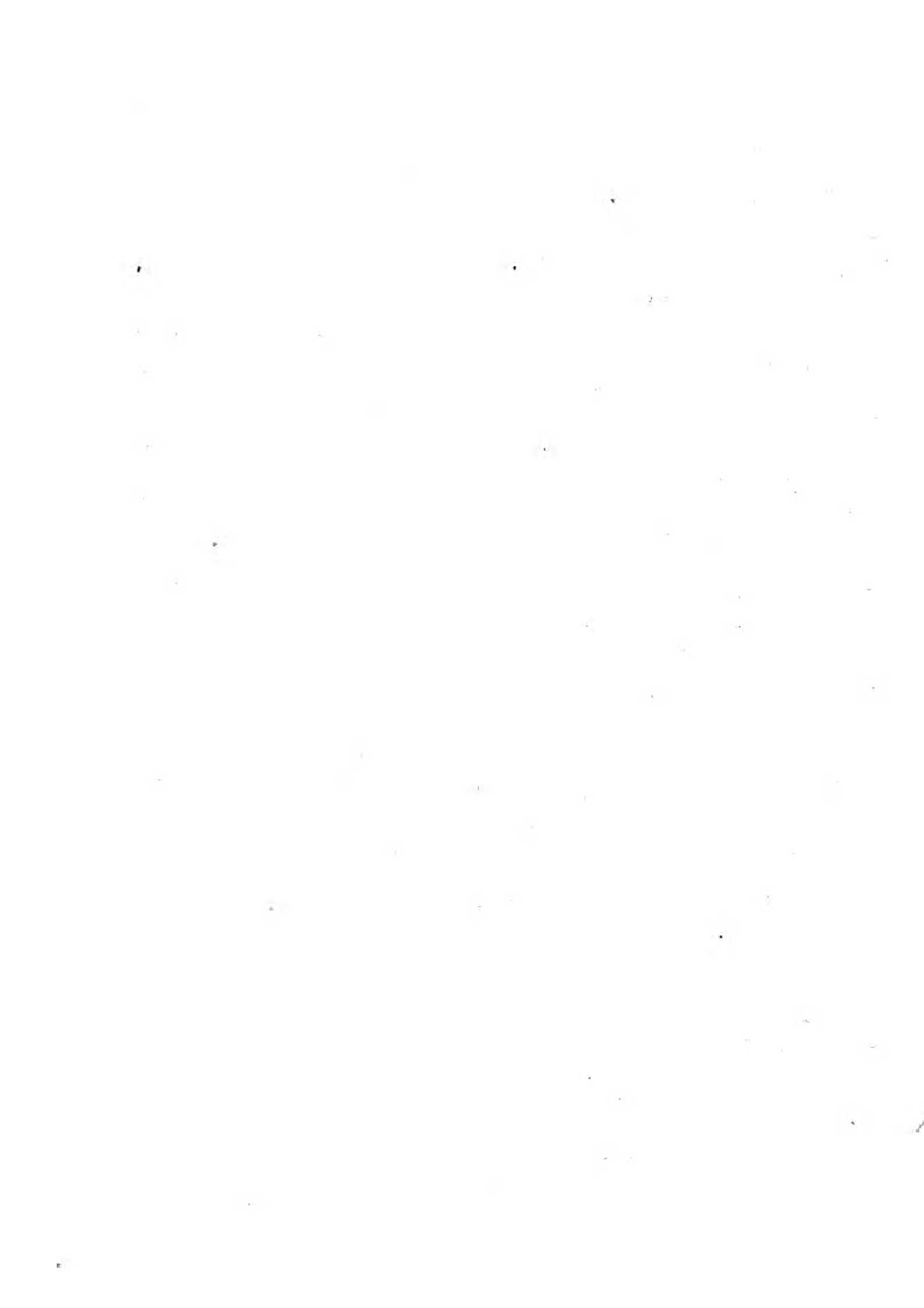
Went through his usual tasks, a silent change
Soon showed itself; he lingered three short weeks;
And from the Cottage hath been borne to-day.

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

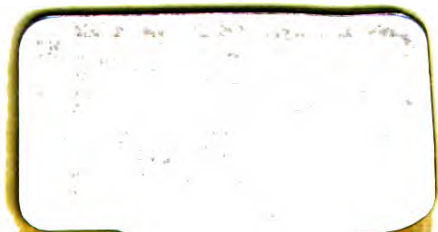
THE DESERTED COTTAGE.

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
Cottage
ILLUSTRATED

