The Deserted Village

by Oliver Goldsmith

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DESERTED VILLAGE ***

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

By Oliver Goldsmith

Illustrated by the Etching Club

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MDCCCLVII

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0008

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THE DESERTED VILLAGE

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THE DESERTED VILLAGE

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,

Where health and plenty cheer'd the labouring swain,

Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd.
0017
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loiter'd o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endear'd each scene!
How often have I paused on every charm,
The shelter'd cot, the cultivated farm,
0020
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made!
How often have I blest the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train, from labour free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree;
0021
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending as the old survey'd;
And many a gambol frolick'd o'er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round;
And still, as each repeated pleasure tired,

Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired:
The dancing pair that simply sought renown,
By holding out to tire each other down;
The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter titter'd round the place;
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,
The matron's glance that would those looks reprove;
These were thy charms, sweet village! sports like these,
With sweet succession, taught e'en toil to please;
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed,
These were thy charms—but all these charms are fled.
Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn!
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
And desolation saddens all thy green:
One only master grasps the whole domain,
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain:
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
But choked with sedges works its weedy way;
Along thy glades a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.
0025

Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall;
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away thy children leave the land.
Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.
A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintain'd its man;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.
But times are alter'd; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain;
Along the lawn, where scatter'd hamlets rose,
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose;
And every want to luxury allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.
Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
Those calm desires that ask'd but little room,

Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,

Lived in each look, and brighten'd all the green;

These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,

And rural mirth and manners are no more.

0027

Sweet Auburn! parent of the blissful hour,

Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.

Here, as I take my solitary rounds

Amidst thy tangling walks and ruin'd grounds,

And, many a year elapsed, return to view

Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,

Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,

Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

In all my wanderings round this world of care,

In all my griefs—and God has given my share—

0030

To husband out life's taper at the close,

And keep the flame from wasting by repose:

I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown, Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;

I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,

Amidst the swains to show my book-learn'd skill,

Around my fire an evening group to draw,

And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;

And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
0031
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return—and die at home at last.
O blest retirement, friend to life's decline,
Retreats from care, that never must be mine:
How blest is he who crowns, in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease;
Who quits a world where strong temptations try,
And since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly!
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep;
0034
No surly porter stands, in guilty state,
To spurn imploring famine from the gate—
But on he moves to meet his latter end,
Angels around befriending virtue's friend;
Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
While resignation gently slopes the way;
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past.
0035
Sweet was the sound, when oft, at evening's close,

Up yonder hill the village murmur rose:
There, as I pass'd with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came soften'd from below;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that low'd to meet their young;
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school;
The watch-dog's voice that bay'd the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind;
0038
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And fill'd each pause the nightingale had made.
But now the sounds of population fail:
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,
But all the bloomy flush of life is fled;
All but yon widow'd solitary thing,
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring:
She, wretched matron, forced in age, for bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread
0039
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed and weep till morn;
She only left of all the harmless train,

The sad historian of the pensive plain.

Near yonder copse, where once the garden smiled,

And still where many a garden flower grows wild,

0042

There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,

The village preacher's modest mansion rose.

A man he was to all the country dear,

And passing rich with forty pounds a year;

Remote from towns he ran his godly race,

Nor e'er had changed, nor wish'd to change his place

0043

Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power,

By doctrines fashion'd to the varying hour;

Far other aims his heart had learn'd to prize,

More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.

His house was known to all the vagrant train;

He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain:

0046

The long remember'd beggar was his guest,

Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;

The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud,

Claim'd kindred there, and had his claims allow'd;

The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,

Sate by his fire, and talk'd the night away;

Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shoulder'd his crutch, and show'd how fields were won.
Pleased with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.
Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings lean'd to virtue's side;
But in his duty prompt, at every call,
He watch'd and wept, he pray'd and felt for all:
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.
Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismay'd,
The reverend champion stood. At his control,
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,
And his last faltering accents whisper'd praise.
0050
At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorn'd the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,

And fools, who came to scoff, remain'd to pray.

The service past, around the pious man,

With ready zeal each honest rustic ran:

E'en children follow'd with endearing wile,

And pluck'd his gown, to share the good man's smile

0051

His ready smile a parent's warmth express'd,

Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distress'd

To them his heart, his love, his griefs, were given,

But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.

As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,

Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,

Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,

Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

0054

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way

With blossom'd furze, unprofitably gay,

There, in his noisy mansion, skill'd to rule,

The village master taught his little school:

A man severe he was, and stern to view;

I knew him well, and every truant knew:

0055

Full well they laugh'd with counterfeited glee At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;

Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face:
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd;
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault:
The village all declared how much he knew;
'Twas certain he could write and cipher too:
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge:
0058
In arguing too the parson own'd his skill,
For e'en though vanquish'd, he could argue still;
While words of learned length, and thundering sound,
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew.
But past is all his fame: the very spot,
Where many a time he triumph'd, is forgot.
0059
Near yonder thorn that lifts its head on high,
Where once the sign-post caught the passing eye,
Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts inspired,
Where grey-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,

Where village statesmen talk'd with looks profound,

And news much older than their ale went round.

0062

Imagination fondly stoops to trace

The parlour splendours of that festive place;

The white-wash'd wall, the nicely-sanded floor,

The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door;

The chest contrived a double debt to pay,

A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;

The pictures placed for ornament and use,

The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose

The hearth, except when winter chill'd the day,

With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel gay

While broken tea-cups, wisely kept for show,

Ranged o'er the chimney, glisten'd in a row.

Vain, transitory splendours! could not all

Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall I

Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart

An hour's importance to the poor man's heart:

Thither no more the peasant shall repair

To sweet oblivion of his daily care:

No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,

No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail;

No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,

Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear;
The host himself no longer shall be found
Careful to see the mantling bliss go round;
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be prest,
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.
Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
These simple blessings of the lowly train:
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm, than all the gloss of art;
Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway;
Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.
0066
But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,
With all the freaks of wanton wealth array'd,
In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,
The toilsome pleasure sickens into pain;
And, e'en while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy?
Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land.

0067

Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,
And shouting Folly hails them from her shore;
Hoards e'en beyond the miser's wish abound,
And rich men flock from all the world around.
Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name
That leaves our useful product still the same.
Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds;
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth
Has robb'd the neighbouring fields of half their growth;
His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;
Around the world each needful product flies,
For all the luxuries the world supplies:
While thus the land, adorn'd for pleasure all,
In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.
As some fair female, unadorn'd and plain,
Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,
Slights every borrow'd charm that dress supplies,
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes;
But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,

When time advances, and when lovers fail,
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
In all the glaring impotence of dress;
Thus fares the land, by luxury betray'd,
In nature's simplest charms at first array'd;
But verging to decline, its splendours rise,
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;
While, scourged by famine, from the smiling land
The mournful peasant leads his humble band;
And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
The country blooms—a garden and a grave!
Where then, ah! where shall poverty reside,
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride?
0071
If to some common's fenceless limits stray'd,
He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
And e'en the bare-worn common is denied.
If to the city sped—What waits him there?
To see profusion, that he must not share;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;
To see each joy the sons of pleasure know,
Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.

0074

Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,
There the pale artist plies the sickly trade;
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomp display,
There the black gibbet glooms beside the way;
The dome where pleasure holds her midnight reign,
Here, richly deck'd, admits the gorgeous train;
Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy!
Sure these denote one universal joy!
Are these thy serious thoughts? Ah, turn thine eyes
Where the poor houseless shivering female lies:
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,
Has wept at tales of innocence distrest;

0075

Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;
Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,
And, pinch'd with cold, and shrinking from the shower,
With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour
When idly first, ambitious of the town,
She left her wheel and robes of country brown.

Do thine, sweet Auburn, thine, the loveliest train,
Do thy fair tribes participate her pain?
E'en now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread!
Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,
Where half the convex world intrudes between,
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe.
Far different there from all that charm'd before,
The various terrors of that horrid shore;
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,
And fiercely shed intolerable day;
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,
But silent-bats in drowsy clusters cling;
Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;
0079
Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey,
And savage men more murderous still than they;
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.
Far different these from every former scene,

The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
That only shelter'd thefts of harmless love.

0082

Good Heaven! what sorrows gloom'd that parting day,
That call'd them from their native walks away!
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly look'd their last,
And took a long farewell, and wish'd in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main;
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Return'd and wept, and still return'd to weep.
The good old sire the first prepared to go
To new-found worlds, and wept for others' woe;
But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,
He only wish'd for worlds beyond the grave.
His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,
The fond companion of his helpless years,

0083

Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,
And left a lover's for her father's arms.
With louder plaints the mother spoke her woes,
And bless'd the cot where every pleasure rose;
And kiss'd her thoughtless babes with many a tear,

And clasp'd them close, in sorrow doubly dear;
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief,
In all the silent manliness of grief.

0086

O luxury! thou curst by Heaven's decree,
How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!
How do thy potions, with insidious joy,
Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!
Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,
Boast of a florid vigour not their own:
At every draught more large and large they grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe;
Till, sapp'd their strength, and every part unsound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.
E'en now the devastation is begun,
And half the business of destruction done;
E'en now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,
That idly waiting flaps with every gale;

0087

Downward they move, a melancholy band,
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
Contented toil, and hospitable care,

And kind connubial tenderness, are there;
And piety, with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty, and faithful love.
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade,
Unfit, in these degenerate times of shame,
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride;
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;
0090
Thou guide, by which the nobler arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well!
Farewell! and oh! where'er thy voice be tried,
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,
Whether where equinoctial fervors glow,
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
Redress the rigours of the inclement clime.
Aid slighted Truth with thy persuasive strain:
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;
Teach him, that states of native strength possest,
Though very poor, may still be very blest;

That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,

As ocean sweeps the labour'd mole away;

While self-dependent power can time defy,

As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

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