

# *Renascence Editions*

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## **The Deserted Village.**

**Oliver Goldsmith.**

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## THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

*A Poem.*

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MDCCLXX.  
4<sup>o</sup>.

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TO SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

Dear Sir,—

I can have no expectations, in an address of this kind, either to add to your reputation or to establish my own. You can gain nothing from my admiration, as I am ignorant of that art in which you are said to excel; and I may lose much by the severity of your judgment, as few have a juster taste in poetry than you. Setting interest, therefore, aside, to which I never paid much attention, I must be indulged at present in following my affections. The only dedication I ever made was to my brother, because I loved him better than most other men. He is since dead. Permit me to inscribe this poem to you.

How far you may be pleased with the versification and mere mechanical parts of this attempt, I do not pretend to inquire; but I know you will object (and, indeed, several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion) that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarcely make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written: that I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege; and that all my views and inquiries have led me to believe those miseries real which I here attempt to display. But this is not the place to enter into an inquiry whether the country be depopulating or not; the discussion would take up much room, and I should prove myself, at best, an indifferent politician to tire the reader with a long preface when I want his unfatigued attention to a long poem.

In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries; and here also I expect the shout of modern politicians against me. For twenty or thirty years past, it has been the fashion to consider luxury as of the greatest national advantages; and all the wisdom of antiquity in that particular as erroneous. Still, however, I must remain a professed ancient on that head, and continue to think those luxuries prejudicial to states by which so many vices are introduced and so many kingdoms have been undone. Indeed, so much has been poured out of late on the other side of the question that merely for the sake of novelty and variety, one would sometimes wish to be in the right.

I am, dear sir,

Your sincere and ardent admirer,

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

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## THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

SWEET AUBURN! Loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheer'd the laboring swain,  
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,

And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd;  
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 paus'd on every charm,—  
The shelter'd cot, the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topt the neighboring 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 labor free,  
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree;  
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 tir'd,  
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspir'd;  
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 even 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, chok'd 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.

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 labor spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life requir'd, 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 opulence 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 grac'd the peaceful scene,  
Liv'd in each look, and brighten'd all the green[.]  
These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,  
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

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 elaps'd, 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—

I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,  
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;  
To husband out life's taper at the close,  
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.  
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,  
Amidst the swains to show my book-learn'd skill,  
Around my fire and 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,  
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 happy he who crowns, in shades like these,  
A youth of labor 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;  
Nor 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;  
Bends to the grave with unperceiv'd decay,  
While Resignation gently slopes the way;  
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,  
His heaven commences ere the world be past.

Sweet was the sound when oft, at evening's close,  
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;  
There, as I past with careless steps and slow,  
The mingling notes came soften'd from below:  
The swain responsive as the milkmaid 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—  
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,  
For 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—forc'd in age, for bread,  
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
To pick her wintry fagot 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 smil'd,  
And where still many a garden flower grows wild;  
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 chang'd, nor wish'd to change, his place;  
Unpractis'd 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 skill'd to raise the wretched than to rise.  
His house was known to all the vagrant train,  
He chid their wanderings, but reliev'd their pain;  
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,  
Sat 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.  
Pleas'd 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 even 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-fledg'd offspring to the skies,  
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,  
Allur'd 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.

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 steady zeal, each honest rustic ran;  
Even children follow'd with endearing wile,  
And pluck'd his gown, to share the good man's smile.  
His ready smile a parent's warmth express'd,  
Their welfare pleas'd 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.

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:  
Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
Full well they laugh'd with counterfeited glee  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
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 declar'd how much he knew;  
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;  
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,  
And even the story ran—that he could guage:  
In arguing, too, the parson own'd his skill,  
For even though vanquish'd, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amaz'd the gazing rustics rang'd around;  
And still they gaz'd, 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.  
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 inspir'd,  
Where graybeard mirth and smiling toil retir'd,  
Where village statesmen talk'd with looks profound,  
And news much older than their ale went round.  
Imagination fondly stoops to trace  
The parlor splendors of that festive place:  
The whitewash'd wall, the nicely sanded floor  
The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door;  
The chest contriv'd a double debt to pay—  
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;  
The pictures plac'd 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 teacups, wisely kept for show,  
Rang'd o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain, transitory splendors! could not all  
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall?  
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 sweeten oblivion of his daily care;  
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,  
No more the woodman's ballads 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 his 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 the first-born sway;  
Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,  
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.  
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 toiling pleasure sickens into pain:  
And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,  
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy.

Ye friends to truth, ye statemen 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.  
Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,  
And shouting Folly hails them from her shore;  
Hoards even 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 products 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 neighboring 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 splendor feebly waits the fall.

As some fair female, unadorn'd and plain,

Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,  
Slight's 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 spendors rise,  
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;  
While, scourg'd 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?  
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 even 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 combin'd  
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;  
To see those joys the sons of pleasure know,  
Extorted from his fellow-creatures' woe.  
Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,  
There the pale artist plies the sickly trade;  
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomps 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;

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?  
Even 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;  
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 ravag'd lanscape 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 sheltered thefts of harmless love.

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 prepar'd 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,  
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 blest 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.

O Luxury! thou curst by Heaven's decree,  
How ill exchang'd 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 vigor 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.

Even now the devastation is begun,  
And half the business of destruction done;  
Even 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,  
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 pity with wishes plac'd 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,  
Thou found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;  
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 rigors 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 possess,  
Though very poor, may still be very blest;  
That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,  
As ocean sweeps the labor'd mole away;  
While self-dependent power can time defy,  
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

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"Dr. Johnson favored me, at the same time, by marking the lines which he furnished to Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,' which are only the last four."—Boswell.

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Renascence Editions