

"The Deserted Village"

By Oliver Goldsmith

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THE
DESERTED VILLAGE,
A
POEM.

By Dr. Goldsmith

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MDCCLXX

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 don't pretend to inquire; but I know you will, object (and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur with the opinion) that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorder it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written; but I have taken all

- vi -

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 attempt to display. But this is not the place to enter into an inquiry, whether the country be depopulating, or not; a discussion will 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 one 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 friend, and ardent admirer,

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

- 7 -

THE

DESERTED VILLAGE

[Audio File], [Audio](#)

1 Sweet AUBURN, loveliest village of the plain,
2 Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain,
3 Where smiling Spring its earliest visit paid,
4 And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed;
5 Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
6 Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
7 How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
8 Where humble happiness endeared each scene;
9 How often have I paused on every charm,
10 The shelter'd cot, the cultivated farm,
11 The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
12 The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill;
13 The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
14 For talking age and whispering lovers made.

- 8 -

15 How often have I blest the coming day,
16 When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
17 And all the village train from labour free,
18 Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree;
19 While many a pastime circled in the shade,
20 The young contending as the old surveyed;
21 And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,
22 And flights of art and feats of strength went round:
23 And still as each repeated pleasure tired,
24 Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired;
25 The dancing pair that simply sought renown,
26 By holding out to tire each other down,
27 The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
28 While secret laughter tittered round the place,
29 The bashful virgin's side-long looks of love,
30 The matron's glance, that would those looks reprove.
31 These were thy charms, sweet village; sports like these,

32 With sweet succession, taught even toil to please;
33 These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed,
34 These were thy charms--But all these charms are fled.

35 Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
36 Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn:

- 9 -

37 Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
38 And desolation saddens all thy green:
39 One only master grasps the whole domain,
40 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain:
41 No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
42 But choaked with sedges, works its weedy way;
43 Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
44 The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;
45 Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
46 And tires their echoes with unvaried cries:
47 Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
48 And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall;
49 And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
50 Far, far away thy children leave the land.

51 Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
52 Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
53 Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
54 A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
55 But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
56 When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.

57 A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
58 When every rood of ground maintained its man;
59 For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
60 Just gave what life required, but gave no more:
61 His best companions, innocence and health;
62 And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

- 10 -

63 *But times are altered; trade's unfeeling train*
64 Usurp the land and disposses the swain;
65 Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,
66 Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose;
67 And every want to luxury allied,
68 And every pang that folly pays to pride.
69 Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
70 Those calm desires that asked but little room,

71 Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,
72 Lived in each look, and brighten'd all the green;
73 These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,
74 And rural mirth and manners are no more.

75 Sweet AUBURN! parent of the blissful hour,
76 Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power,
77 Here, as I take my solitary rounds,
78 Amidst thy tangling walks, and ruined grounds,
79 And, many a year elapsed, return to view
80 Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew-
81 Here, as with doubtful, pensive steps I range,
82 Trace every scene, and wonder at the change,
83 Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
84 Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

85 *In all my wanderings through this world of care,*
86 *In all my griefs-and God has given my share-*

- 11 -

87 I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
88 Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;
89 My anxious day to husband near the close,
90 And keep life's flame from wasting by repose:
91 I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
92 Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
93 Around my fire an evening group to draw,
94 And tell of all I felt, and all I saw:
95 And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
96 Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,
97 I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
98 Here to return--and die at home at last.

99 O blest retirement! friend to life's decline,
100 Retreats from care that never must be mine,
101 How blest is he who crowns in shades like these,
102 A youth of labour with an age of ease;
103 Who quits a world where strong temptations try,
104 And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly.
105 For him no wretches, born to work and weep,
106 Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep;
107 No surly porter stands in guilty state,
108 To spurn imploring famine from the gate:
109 But on he moves to meet his latter end,
110 Angels around befriending virtue's friend;
111 Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
112 While resignation gently slopes the way;

113 And all his prospects brightening to the last,
114 His Heaven commences ere the world be past!

115 Sweet was the sound, when oft, at evening's close,
116 Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;
117 There, as I pass'd with careless steps and slow,
118 The mingled notes came softened from below;
119 The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
120 The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
121 The noisy geese that gobbled o'er the pool,
122 The playful children just let loose from school;
123 The watch dog's voice that bay'd the whispering wind,
124 And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind:
125 These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
126 And filled each pause the nightingale had made.
127 But now the sounds of population fail,
128 No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale;
129 No busy steps the grass-grown foot-way tread,
130 But all the bloomy flush of life is fled;
131 All but yon widowed, solitary thing,
132 That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;
133 She, wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,
134 To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
135 To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
136 To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;

137 She only left of all the harmless train,
138 The sad historian of the pensive plain.

139 Near yonder copse, where once the garden smil'd,
140 And still where many a garden flower grows wild,
141 There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
142 The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
143 A man he was to all the country dear,
144 And passing rich with forty pounds a-year.
145 Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
146 Nor e'er had changed, nor wish'd to change, his place;
147 Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power
148 By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
149 Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
150 More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.
151 His house was known to all the vagrant train,
152 He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain:
153 The long-remembered beggar was his guest,

154 Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;
155 The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud,
156 Claim'd kindred there, and had his claims allowed;
157 The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
158 Sate by his fire, and talked the night away;-
159 Wept o'er his wounds, or tales of sorrow done,
160 Shouldered his crutch, and show'd how fields were won.

- 14 -

161 Pleased with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,
162 And quite forgot their vices in their woe;
163 Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
164 His pity gave ere charity began,

165 Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
166 And even his failings leaned to Virtue's side;
167 But in his duty prompt at every call,
168 He watch'd and wept, he prayed and felt, for all:
169 And, as a bird each fond endearment tries,
170 To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
171 He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
172 Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

173 Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
174 And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismayed,
175 The reverend champion stood. At his controul,
176 Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;
177 Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,
178 And his last faltering accents whispered praise.

179 At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
180 His looks adorned the venerable place;
181 Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
182 And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.

- 15 -

183 The service past, around the pious man
184 With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran;
185 Even children followed with endearing wile,
186 And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile;
187 His ready smile a parent's warmth exprest;
188 Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distrest;
189 To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
190 But all his serious thoughts had rest in Heaven.
191 As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
192 Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,

193 Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
194 Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

195 *Beside yon straggl'g fence that skirts the way,*
196 With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,
197 There, in his noisy mansion, skill'd to rule,
198 The village master taught his little school.
199 A man severe he was, and stern to view,
200 I knew him well, and every truant knew;
201 Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
202 The day's disasters in his morning face;
203 Full well they laugh'd with counterfeited glee
204 At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
205 Full well the busy whisper circling round,
206 Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frowned:
207 Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
208 The love he bore to learning was in fault.

- 16 -

209 The village all declared how much he knew;
210 'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too:
211 Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
212 And even the story ran that he could gauge.
213 In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,
214 For even tho' vanquished, he could argue still;
215 While words of learned length, and thundering sound,
216 Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
217 And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
218 That one small head could carry all he knew.
219 But past is all his fame. The very spot
220 Where many a time he triumphed, is forgot.

221 Near yonder thorn, that lifts its head on high,
222 Where once the sign-post caught the passing eye,
223 Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts inspired,
224 Where grey-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,
225 Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,
226 And news much older than their ale went round.
227 Imagination fondly stoops to trace
228 The parlour splendours of that festive place;
229 The white-washed wall, the nicely sanded floor,
230 The varnished clock that click'd behind the door,
231 The chest contrived a double debt to pay,
232 A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,

- 17 -

233 The pictures placed for ornament and use,
234 The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose;
235 The hearth, except when winter chill'd the day,
236 With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel, gay;
237 While broken tea-cups, wisely kept for shew,
238 Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

239 Vain transitory splendours! Could not all
240 Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall!
241 Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart
242 An hour's importance to the poor man's heart;
243 Thither no more the peasant shall repair,
244 To sweet oblivion of his daily care;
245 No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,
246 No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail;
247 No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,
248 Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear;
249 The host himself no longer shall be found
250 Careful to see the mantling bliss go round;
251 Nor the coy maid, half willing to be prest,
252 Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

253 Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
254 These simple blessings of the lowly train;
255 To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
256 One native charm, than all the gloss of art:
257 Spontaneous joys, where Nature has its play,
258 The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway;

- 18 -

259 Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,
260 Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.
261 But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,
262 With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed,
263 In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,
264 The toiling pleasure sickens into pain;
265 And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
266 The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy.

267 Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen who survey
268 The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,
269 'Tis yours to judge, how wide the limits stand
270 Between a splendid and an happy land.
271 Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,
272 And shouting folly hails them from her shore;
273 Hoards, even beyond the miser's wish, abound,
274 And rich men flock from all the world around.

275 Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name
276 That leaves our useful products still the same.
277 Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride
278 Takes up a space that many poor supplied:
279 Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds;
280 Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds:
281 The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth,
282 Has robb'd the neighbouring fields of half their growth;
283 His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
284 Indignant spurns the cottage from the green;

- 19 -

285 Around the world each needful product flies,
286 For all the luxuries the world supplies.
287 While thus the land adorned for pleasure all,
288 In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.

289 As some fair female, unadorned and plain,
290 Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,
291 Slights every borrowed charm that dress supplies,
292 Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes:
293 But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,
294 When time advances, and when lovers fail,
295 She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
296 In all the glaring impotence of dress.
297 Thus fares the land. by luxury betrayed;
298 In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed;
299 But verging to decline, its splendours rise,
300 Its vistas strike, its palaces surprize;
301 While scourged by famine from the smiling land,
302 The mournful peasant leads his humble band;
303 And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
304 The country blooms--a garden and a grave.

305 Where, then, ah, where shall poverty reside,
306 To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride?
307 If to some common's fenceless limits strayed,
308 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
309 Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
310 And even the bare-worn common is denied.

- 20 -

311 If to the city sped--What waits him there?
312 To see profusion that he must not share;
313 To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
314 To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;

315 To see each joy the sons of pleasure know,
316 Extorted from his fellow-creature's wo.
317 Here while the courtier glitters in brocade,
318 There the pale artist plies the sickly trade;
319 Here while the proud their long drawn pomp display,
320 There the black gibbet glooms beside the way:
321 The dome where pleasure holds her midnight reign,
322 Here richly deckt admits the gorgeous train;
323 Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,
324 The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare:
325 Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy!
326 Sure these denote one universal joy!
327 Are these thy serious thoughts?--Ah, turn thine eyes
328 Where the poor houseless shivering female lies:
329 She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest
330 Has wept at tales of innocence distrest;
331 Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
332 Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn:
333 Now lost to all, her friends, her virtue fled,
334 Near her betrayer's door she lays her head;
335 And, pinch'd with cold, and, shrinking from the shower,
336 With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,

- 21 -

337 When idly first, ambitious of the town,
338 She left her wheel, and robes of country brown.

339 Do thine, sweet AUBURN, thine, the loveliest train,
340 Do thy fair tribes participate her pain?
341 Even now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,
342 At proud men's doors they ask a little bread!

343 Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,
344 Where half the convex world intrudes between,
345 Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
346 Where wild Altama murmurs to their wo.
347 Far different there from all that charmed before,
348 The various terrors of that horrid shore;
349 Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,
350 And fiercely shed intolerable day;
351 Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,
352 But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;
353 Those poisonous fields, with rank luxuriance crowned,
354 Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
355 Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
356 The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;
357 Where crouching tygers wait their hapless prey,

358 And savage men more murderous still than they;
359 While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
360 Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.

- 22 -

361 Far different these from every former scene,
362 The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
363 The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
364 That only shelter'd thefts of harmless love.

365 Good Heaven! what sorrows gloomed that parting day,
366 That call'd them from their native walks away;
367 When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
368 Hung round their bowers, and fondly looked their last,
369 And took a long farewell, and wish'd in vain
370 For seats like these beyond the western main;
371 And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
372 Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.
373 The good old sire, the first prepared to go
374 To new-found worlds, and wept for others wo:
375 But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,
376 He only wished for worlds beyond the grave.
377 His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,
378 The fond companion of his helpless years,
379 Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,
380 And left a lover's for a father's arms.
381 With louder plaints the mother spoke her woes,
382 And blest the cot where every pleasure rose;
383 And kist her thoughtless babes with many a tear,
384 And clast them close, in sorrow doubly dear;

- 23 -

385 Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief
386 In all the silent manliness of grief.

387 O luxury! thou curst by Heaven's decree,
388 How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!
389 How do thy potions with insidious joy,
390 Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy!
391 Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,
392 Boast of a florid vigour not their own.
393 At every draught more large and large they grow,
394 A bloated mass of rank unwieldy wo;
395 Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,
396 Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.

397 Even now the devastation is begun,
398 And half the business of destruction done;
399 Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
400 I see the rural virtues leave the land.
401 Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail
402 That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
403 Downward they move a melancholy band,
404 Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
405 Contented toil, and hospitable dare,
406 And kind connubial tenderness are there;
407 And Piety with wishes placed above,
408 And steady Loyalty, and faithful Love.

409 And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid
410 Still first to fly where sensual joys invade;

- 24 -

411 Unfit, in these degenerate times of shame,
412 To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame;
413 Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
414 My shame in crowds, my solitary pride;
415 Thou source of all my bliss and all my woe,
416 That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;
417 Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,
418 Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well"
419 Farewel, and O where'er thy voice be tried,
420 On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side:
421 Whether where equinoctial fervours glow,
422 Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
423 Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
424 Redress the rigours of the inclement clime;
425 Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain;
426 Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;
427 Teach him that states of native strength possest,
428 Tho' very poor, may still be very blest;
429 That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,
430 As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away;
431 While self-dependent power can time defy
432 As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

Footnotes

Audio Librivox recording of "The Deserted Village"