

**OUR VILLAGE: SKETCHES
OF RURAL CHARACTER
AND SCENERY. VOL. II**

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Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery. Vol. II by Mary Russell Mitford

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MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

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OF
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BY
MARY RUSSELL MITFORD,
AUTHOR OF JULIAN, FOSCAER, AND DRAMATIC SCENES.

VOL. II.

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1828.

PREFACE.

THE indulgent reception given to her little book of *Our Village*, has encouraged the author to extend her work by putting forth a second volume on a similar plan ; consisting like the first of slight and simple delineations of country manners, blended with a few sketches drawn from a somewhat higher rank of society.

It is right also to say that of this, as of the former series, a part has already appeared in some of the most respectable periodical publications of the day.

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A WALK THROUGH THE VILLAGE.

WHEN I had the honour about two years ago of presenting our little Village to that multiform and most courteous personage the Public, I hinted I think that it had a trick of standing still, of remaining stationary, unchanged and unimproved in this most changeable and improving world. This habit, whether good or evil, it has retained so pertinaciously, that except that it is two years older, I cannot point out a single alteration which has occurred in our street. I was on the point of paying the inhabitants the same equivocal compliment—and really I almost may—for, setting aside the inevitable growth of the younger members of our community, and a few more gray hairs and wrinkles amongst the elder, I see little change. We are the same people, the same generation, neither richer, nor wiser, nor better, nor worse. Some, to be sure have migrated; and one or two have died; and some——But we had better step out into the village and look about us.

It is a pleasant lively scene this May morning, with the sun shining so gaily on the irregular rustic dwellings, intermixed with their pretty gardens; a cart and a waggon watering (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say *beering*) at the Rose; Dame Wheeler, with her basket and her brown

loaf, just coming from the bake-house ; the nymph of the shoe-shop feeding a large family of goslings at the open door—they are very late this year, those noisy little geese ; two or three women in high gossip dawdling up the street ; Charles North the gardener, with his blue apron and a ladder on his shoulder, walking rapidly by ; a cow and a donkey browsing the grass by the way-side ; my white greyhound, Mayflower, sitting majestically in front of her own stable ; and ducks, chickens, pigs, and children, scattered over all.

A pretty scene !—rather more lopping of trees, indeed, and clipping of hedges, along the high road, than one quite admires ; but then that identical turnpike road, my ancient despair, is now so perfect and so beautiful a specimen of Macadamization, that one even learns to like tree-logging and hedge-clipping for the sake of such smooth ways. It is simply the best road in England, so says our surveyor, and so say I. The three miles between us and B— are like a bowling-green. By the way, I ought perhaps to mention, as something like change in our outward position, that this little hamlet of ours is much nearer to that illustrious and worshipful town than it used to be. Not that our quiet street hath been guilty of the unbecoming friskiness of skipping from place to place, but that our ancient neighbour, whose suburbs are sprouting forth in all directions, hath made a particularly strong shoot towards us, and threatens some day or other to pay us a visit bodily. The good town has already pushed the turnpike gate half a mile nearer to us, and is in a fair way to overleap that boundary and build on, till the buildings join ours, as London has done by Hampstead or Kensington. What a strange figure our rude and rustical habitations would cut ranged by the

side of some staring red row of newly-erected houses, each as like the other as two drops of water, with courts before and behind, a row of poplars opposite and a fine new name. How different we should look in our countless variety of nooks and angles, our gardens, and arbours, and lime-trees, and pond! but this union of town and country will hardly happen in my time, let B— enlarge as it may. We shall certainly lend no assistance, for our boundaries still continue exactly the same.

The first cottage—Ah! here is the post-cart coming up the road at its most respectable rumble, that cart, or rather caravan, which so much resembles a house upon wheels, or a show of the smaller kind at a country fair. It is now crammed full of passengers, the driver just protruding his head and hands out of the vehicle, and the sharp clever boy, who in the occasional absence of his father officiates as deputy, perched like a monkey on the roof. "Any letters to day?" And that question, always so interesting, being unsatisfactorily answered, I am at leisure to return to our survey. The first cottage is that erst inhabited by Mr. and Mrs. H. the retired publican and his good wife. They are gone; I always thought we were too quiet for them; and his eyes being quite recovered, he felt the weariness of idleness more than ever. So they returned to W., where he has taken a comfortable lodging next door to their old and well-frequented Inn, the Pie and Parrot, where he has the pleasure every evening of reading the newspaper, and abusing the ministers amongst his old customers, himself a customer; as well as of lending his willing aid in waiting and entertaining on fair-days and market-days, at pink-feasts, and melon-feasts, to the great solace of mine host, and the no small perplexity of the guests, who puzzled he-

tween the old landlord and the new, hardly know to whom to pay their reckoning, or which to call to account for a bad tap:—a mistake, which our sometime neighbour, happier than he has been since he left the *Bar*, particularly enjoys. His successor here is an industrious person, by calling a seedman, as may be collected by the heaps of pea and bean seed, clover and vetches piled tier above tier against the window.

The little white cottage down the lane which stands so prettily, backed by a tall elm wood, has also lost its fair inmate, Sally Wheeler; who finding that Joel continued constant to our pretty Harriet, and was quite out of hope, was suddenly forsaken by the fit of dutifulness which brought her to keep her deaf grandmother company, and returned to service. Dame Wheeler has however a companion, in a widow of her own standing, appointed by the parish to live with, and take care of her. A nice tidy old woman is Dame Shearman;—pity that she looks so frumpish; her face seems fixed in one perpetual scold. It was not so when she lived with her sister on the *Lea*, then she was a light-hearted merry chatterer, whose tongue ran all day long—and that's the reason of her cross look now! Mrs. Wheeler is as deaf as a post, and poor Mrs. Shearman is pining of a suppression of speech. Fancy what it is for a woman, especially a talking woman, to live without a listener! forced either to hold her peace, or when that becomes impossible, to talk to one to whose sense words are as air! La Trappe is nothing to this tantalization;—besides the Trappists were men. No wonder that poor Dame Shearman looks cross.

The Blacksmith's! no change in that quarter, except a most astonishing growth amongst the