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by William Wordsworth

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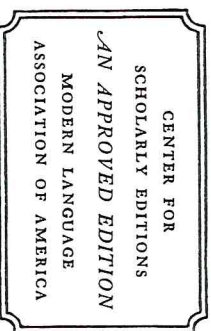
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DRAMMATIS PERSONAE.

MORTIMER. RIVERS. WALLACE. LAGY. LENNOX. NORWOOD. HERBERT.	} Of the Band of Borderers.	Host. Two Woodmen. Robert, a Cottager. Peasant, Pilgrims, &c.
WILFRED, Servant to MORTIMER.		MATIIDA. Female Beggar. MARGARET, Wife to ROBERT.

SCENE, *Borders of England and Scotland.*
TIME, *the reign of Henry III.*

DRAMMATIS PERSONAE.

MARMADUKE. OSWALD. WALLACE. LAGY. LENNOX. HERBERT.	} Of the Band of Borderers.	Host. Forester. ELDRRED, a Peasant. Peasant, Pilgrims, &c.
WILFRED, Servant to MARMADUKE.		IDONEA. Female Beggar. ELEANOR, Wife to ELDRRED.

SCENE, *Borders of England and Scotland.*
TIME, *the Reign of Henry III.*

READERS already acquainted with my Poems will recognise, in the following composition, some eight or ten lines, which I have not scrupled to retain in the places where they originally stood. It is proper however to add, that they would not have been used elsewhere, if I had foreseen the time when I might be induced to publish this Tragedy.

February 28,
1842.

A TRAGEDY

On human actions reason though you can,
It may be reason, but it is not man;
His principle of action once explore,
That instant 'tis his principle no more.
Popc.—

[Scene 1]

ACT I

SCENE, *Road in a Wood.*—

MORRIMER — WILFRED.

WILFRED

Be cautious, my dear Master!

THE BORDERERS:

A Tragedy.

ACT I.

SCENE, *road in a Wood.*

WALLAGE and LAGY.

LAGY.

The Troop will be impatient; let us hie
Back to our post, and strip the Scottish Foray
Of their rich Spoil, ere they recross the Border.
—Pity that our young Chief will have no part
In this good service.

WALLAGE.

Rather let us grieve
That, in the undertaking which has caused
His absence, he hath sought, whate'er his aim,
Companionship with One of crooked ways,
From whose perverted soul can come no good
To our confiding, open-hearted, Leader.

LAGY.

True; and, remembering how the Band have proved
That Oswald finds small favour in our sight,
Well may we wonder he has gained such power
Over our much-loved Captain.

WALLAGE.

I have heard
Of some dark deed to which in early life
His passion drove him—then a Voyager
Upon the midland Sea. You knew his bearing
In Palestine?

LAGY.

Where he despised alike
Mahommedan and Christian. But enough;
Let us begone—the Band may else be foiled.

Enter MARMADUKE and WILFRED.

WILFRED.

Be cautious, my dear Master!

[*Exeunt.*]

20

5

10

15

The epigraph is from Pope's *Moral Essays, Epistle 1* (to Cobham), "Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men," ll. 23–28. For the first word, MS. 2 incorrectly reads "Of"; the epigraph as quoted in DC MS. 27 correctly reads "On" (see p. 444, below).

MORTIMER (*smiling*)

I perceive

[21]

That fear is like a cloak which old men huddle
Around their love, as 'twere to keep it warm.

WILFRED

Nay, but my heart is sad
To part with you.—This Rivers—

MORTIMER

What of him?

WILFRED

You know that you have saved his life—

MORTIMER

I know it.

[27]

And that he hates you! (*seeing MORTIMER displeas'd*)

WILFRED

Pardon me, perhaps

That word was hasty.

MORTIMER

Fie! no more of this.

WILFRED

Dear Master! Gratitude's a heavy burthen
To a proud soul.—Nobody loves this Rivers;
Yourself you do not love him.

[30]

MORTIMER

I do more,

I honor him.

WILFRED

O, Sir!

MORTIMER

Peace, my good Wilfred.
Repair to Liddersdale, and tell the Band
I shall be with them in two days, at farthest.

[41]

MARMADUKE.

I perceive

That fear is like a cloak which old men huddle
About their love, as if to keep it warm.

WILFRED.

Nay, but I grieve that we should part. This Stranger,
For such he is—

MARMADUKE.

Your busy fancies, Wilfred,
Might tempt me to a smile; but what of him?

25

WILFRED.

You know that you have saved his life.

MARMADUKE.

I know it.

WILFRED.

And that he hates you!—Pardon me, perhaps
That word was hasty.

MARMADUKE.

Fy! no more of it.

WILFRED.

Dear Master! gratitude's a heavy burden
To a proud Soul.—Nobody loves this Oswald—
Yourself, you do not love him.

30

MARMADUKE.

I do more,

I honour him. Strong feelings to his heart
Are natural; and from no one can be learnt
More of man's thoughts and ways than his experience
Has given him power to teach: and then for courage
And enterprise—what perils hath he shunned?
What obstacles hath he failed to overcome?
Answer these questions, from our common knowledge,
And be at rest.

35

WILFRED.

Oh, Sir!

MARMADUKE.

Peace, my good Wilfred;
Repair to Liddersdale, and tell the Band
I shall be with them in two days, at farthest.

40

¹³ Liddersdale, also referred to as Liddisdale (see Liii.145) was the dale named from the Liddle River, which marked the boundary between Cumberland and Scotland. The dale was an outlaw stronghold throughout the period of the border troubles.

WILFRED
Farewell! and Heaven preserve you—

[Exit WILFRED.]

Enter RIVERS (with a bunch of plants in his hand).

RIVERS

This wood is rich in plants and curious simples.

[44]

MORTIMER (*looking at those in Rivers' hand*)

The wild rose, and the poppy, and the night-shade—
Which is your favourite, Rivers?

RIVERS

That which, while it is

Strong to destroy, is also strong to heal.

[*Looking forward, as to a distance.*]

Not yet in sight! We'll saunter here a while;

They cannot mount this hill unseen by us.

MORTIMER (*a letter in his hand*)

It is no common thing when men like you
Perform these little services, and therefore
I feel myself much bounden to you, Rivers.

[50]

'Tis a strange letter, this.—You saw her write it?

RIVERS

And saw the tears with which she blotted it.

MORTIMER

And nothing less would satisfy him?

RIVERS

No less.

[53]

For that another in his child's affection
Should hold a place, as if 'twere robbery,
He seemed to quarrel with the very thought.

Besides, I know not what strange prejudice
Seems rooted in his heart: this band of ours,

[60]

Which you've collected for the noblest ends,
Here on the savage confines of the Tweed

To guard the innocent, he calls us outlaws,

And for yourself, in plain terms he asserts

This garb was taken up that Indolence

[65]

Might want no cover, and rapaciousness

Be better fed.

WILFRED.
May He whose eye is over all protect you! [Exit.]

Enter OSWALD (*a bunch of plants in his hand*).

OSWALD.

This wood is rich in plants and curious simples.

MARMADUKE (*looking at them*).

The wild rose, and the poppy, and the nightshade:
Which is your favorite, Oswald?

45

OSWALD.

That which, while it is

Strong to destroy, is also strong to heal—

[*Looking forward.*]

Not yet in sight!—We'll saunter here awhile;

They cannot mount the hill, by us unseen.

MARMADUKE (*a letter in his hand*).

It is no common thing when one like you
Performs these delicate services, and therefore
I feel myself much bounden to you, Oswald;

50

'Tis a strange letter this!—You saw her write it?

OSWALD.

And saw the tears with which she blotted it.

MARMADUKE.

And nothing less would satisfy him?

OSWALD.

No less;

55

For that another in his Child's affection
Should hold a place, as if 'twere robbery,
He seemed to quarrel with the very thought.

Besides, I know not what strange prejudice

Is rooted in his mind; this Band of ours,

60

Which you've collected for the noblest ends,
Along the confines of the Esk and Tweed

To guard the Innocent—he calls us "Outlaws;"

And, for yourself, in plain terms he asserts

This garb was taken up that indolence

Might want no cover, and rapacity

65

Be better fed.

²³ Mortimer had used Rivers as a go-between while asking for Matilda's hand in marriage (much as Othello used Iago).

78 The Early Version (1797-99)

MORTIMER
Never may I own
The heart which cannot feel for one so helpless.

40 RIVERS
Thou knowest me for a man not easily moved,
But death! it stirs my very soul to think
Of what I witness'd. [69]

MORTIMER
Well! to day the truth
Shall end her wrongs.

45 RIVERS
But if the blind man's tale
Should yet be true?

MORTIMER
Would it were possible!
Did not the soldier tell thee that himself,
And others who survived the wreck, beheld
The Baron Herbert perish in the waves [75]
Upon the coast of Cyprus?

RIVERS
True, he did so;
And something of the kind—though where, I know not—
It seemed that I had heard before: and verily
The tale of this his quondam Barony [80]
Is cunningly devised, and on the back
Of his forlorn appearance could not fail
To make the proud and vain his tributaries
And stir the pulse of lazy charity.
The seignories of Herbert are in Cornwall;
We, neighbours of the Esk and Tweed: 'tis much [85]
The wily vagrant—

MORTIMER
Nay, be gentle with him;
Though I have never seen his face, methinks
There cannot be a time when I shall cease
To love him.—I remember, when a Boy [89]

MARMADUKE.
Ne'er may I own the heart
That cannot feel for one, helpless as he is.

OSWALD.
Thou know'st me for a Man not easily moved,
Yet was I grievously provoked to think
Of what I witnessed. 70

MARMADUKE.
This day will suffice
To end her wrongs.

OSWALD.
But if the blind Man's tale
Should *yet* be true?

MARMADUKE.
Would it were possible!
Did not the Soldier tell thee that himself,
And others who survived the wreck, beheld
The Baron Herbert perish in the waves 75
Upon the coast of Cyprus?

OSWALD.
Yes, even so,
And I had heard the like before: in sooth
The tale of this his quondam Barony
Is cunningly devised; and, on the back
Of his forlorn appearance, could not fail
To make the proud and vain his tributaries,
And stir the pulse of lazy charity.
The seignories of Herbert are in Devon;
We, neighbours of the Esk and Tweed: 'tis much
The Arch-impostor— 85

MARMADUKE.
Treat him gently, Oswald;
Though I have never seen his face, methinks,
There cannot come a day when I shall cease
To love him. I remember, when a Boy

⁴³ When Matilda is confronted with the "truth" that Herbert is not her father but an impostor, then she will be free to marry Mortimer.

Of six years' growth or younger, by the thorn
Which starts from the old church-yard wall of Lorton,
It was my joy to sit and hear Matilda
Repeat her father's terrible adventures
Till all the band of play-mates wept together,
And that was the beginning of my love.
And afterwards, when we conversed together
This old man's image still was present: chiefly
When I had been most happy.

RIVERS

Whence this paleness?

Two travellers!

MORTIMER (*points*)

The woman is Matilda.

RIVERS

And leading Herbert.

MORTIMER

We must let them pass—

This thicket will conceal us.

[*They retire.*]*Enter* MATILDA (*leading* HERBERT *blind*).

MATILDA

75 Dear Father, you sigh deeply; ever since
We left the willow shade, by the brook side,
Your natural breathing has been troubled.

HERBERT

Nay,

'Tis not so bad with me, and yet I know not,
Our last night's march—

MATILDA

Plague on that dismal heath!

80 In spite of all the larks that cheered our path

[109]

Of scarcely seven years' growth, beneath the Elm
That casts its shade over our village school,
'Twas my delight to sit and hear Idonea
Repeat her Father's terrible adventures,
Till all the band of play-mates wept together;
And that was the beginning of my love.
And, through all converse of our later years,
An image of this old Man still was present,
When I had been most happy. Pardon me
If this be idly spoken.

OSWALD.

See, they come,

Two Travellers!

MARMADUKE (*points*).

The female is Idonea.

OSWALD.

And leading Herbert.

MARMADUKE.

We must let them pass—

This thicket will conceal us. [*They step aside.*]*Enter* IDONEA, *leading* HERBERT *blind*.

IDONEA.

Dear Father, you sigh deeply; ever since
We left the willow shade by the brook-side,
Your natural breathing has been troubled.

HERBERT.

Nay,

You are too fearful; yet must I confess,
Our march of yesterday had better suited
A firmer step than mine.

IDONEA.

That dismal Moor—

80 In spite of all the larks that cheered our path,

105

63-64 The famous tree in the old churchyard at Lorton is actually a yew; see Wordsworth's *Tree-Trees*, *PW*, II, 209, and Wordsworth's comment on a similar confusion between thorn and sycamore in his Fenwick note to *Suggested by a View from an Eminence in Inglewood Forest*, quoted in *PW*, III, 534.
65-68 Cf. Othello's description of his wooing of Desdemona, *Othello*, I.iii.128-168.
75-109 The opening of *Sansón Agonistes* appears to be at the back of Wordsworth's mind throughout this episode, with slight verbal echoes, notably at l. 107. Herbert's depression is also reminiscent of the blind sailor's despair in *Gothic Tale*.

I ne'er shall love it more. How cheerfully
You paced along while the dim moonlight cloud
Mocked me with many a strange fantastic shape.

85 I thought the convent never would appear,
It seemed to move away from us; and yet,
That you are thus the fault is mine: for truly,

The air was warm, no dew was on the grass,
And midway on the heath, ere the night fell,
I spied a little hut built with green sods—

[117]

90 A miniature it was: and, as it seemed,
Some shepherd's boy had raised it, half in sport
To cheat the lazy time and half to screen him

From rain and the bleak wind—in that small hut
We might have made a bed of the dry heath
And lying down together rested safely

95 Wrapped in our cloaks, and with recruited strength
Have hailed the morning sun. But cheerly, Father!

[124]

That staff of yours, I could almost have heart
To fling't away from you; you make no use

100 Of me, or of my strength; come, let me feel
That you do press upon me. There.—Indeed,
You are quite exhausted.—Here is a green bank,

[129]

Let us repose a little.
HERBERT (*after some time*).
You are silent.

[*He sits down.*]

That is a silence which I know, Matilda!

MATTIDA

105 Wherefore thus reproach me?

[135]

When I beheld the ruins of that face,
Those eye-balls dark—dark beyond hope of light,

I never can forgive it: but how steadily
110 *You* paced along, when the bewildering moonlight

Mocked me with many a strange fantastic shape!—
I thought the Convent never would appear;
It seemed to move away from us: and yet,

115 That you are thus the fault is mine; for the air
Was soft and warm, no dew lay on the grass,
And midway on the waste ere night had fallen

I spied a Covert walled and roofed with sods—
A miniature; belike some Shepherd-boy,
Who might have found a nothing-doing hour

120 Heavier than work, raised it: within that hut
We might have made a kindly bed of heath,
And thankfully there rested side by side

Wrapped in our cloaks, and, with recruited strength,
Have hailed the morning sun. But cheerly, Father,—

125 That staff of yours, I could almost have heart
To fling't away from you: you make no use

Of me, or of my strength;—come, let me feel
That you do press upon me. There—indeed
You are quite exhausted. Let us rest awhile

130 On this green bank.
HERBERT (*after some time*).
Idonea, you are silent,

[*He sits down.*]

And I divine the cause.

IDONEA.

Do not reproach me:

I pondered patiently your wish and will
When I gave way to your request; and now,

135 When I beheld the ruins of that face,
Those eyeballs dark—dark beyond hope of light,

81-83 William Gilpin, in *Observations*... [on] *the High-lands of Scotland* (2 vols.; London, 1789), II, 9, warns the landscape artist to "avoid all shapes of animals, or other objects, into which clouds are sometimes apt to form themselves. I have seen a good picture spoiled from having the clouds formed in the shape of a swan. From this mischief Shakespeare may guard us." Gilpin then quotes *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.xiii.2-7:

Sometimes you see a cloud, that's dragonish;

A vapor sometimes like a bear, or lion;

A tow'rd citadel, a pendent rock;

A forked mountain; or blue promontory

With trees upon't, that nod, and mock the eye

With empty air:

And think that they were blasted for my sake,
The name of Morimer is blown away;
Father, I would not change this proud delight
For the best hopes of love.

HERBERT

Nay, be composed:

[141]

Few minutes gone a faintness overspread
My frame, and I bethought me of two things
I ne'er had heart to separate—my grave,
And thee, my child!

MATTIDA

Believe me, Sir,

[145]

'Tis weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods
Resound with music; could you see the sun,
And look upon the pleasant face of Nature—

HERBERT

I understand thee: I should be as cheerful
As if we two were twins; two songsters bred

[150]

In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.
Well, be it so—you have indulged me, child!
In many an old man's humour. Sitting here
I feel myself recovered. The bequest
Of thy kind patroness, which to receive
We have thus far adventured, will suffice
To save thee from the extreme of penury.
But when thy father must lie down and die,
How wilt thou stand alone?

MATTIDA (*earnestly*)

Is he not strong?

[160]

Is he not valiant?

HERBERT

[

]

And think that they were blasted for my sake,
The name of Marnaduke is blown away:
Father, I would not change that sacred feeling
For all this world can give.

HERBERT.

Nay, be composed:

140

Few minutes gone a faintness overspread
My frame, and I bethought me of two things
I ne'er had heart to separate—my grave,
And thee, my Child!

IDONEA.

Believe me, honoured Sir!

145

'Tis weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods
Resound with music, could you see the sun,
And look upon the pleasant face of Nature—

HERBERT.

I comprehend thee—I should be as cheerful
As if we two were twins; two songsters bred

150

In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.
My fancies, fancies if they be, are such
As come, dear Child! from a far deeper source
Than bodily weariness. While here we sit
I feel my strength returning.—The bequest
Of thy kind Patroness, which to receive
We have thus far adventured, will suffice
To save thee from the extreme of penury;
But when thy Father must lie down and die,
How wilt thou stand alone?

IDONEA.

Is he not strong?

160

Is he not valiant?

HERBERT.

Am I then so soon

Forgotten? have my warnings passed so quickly
Out of thy mind! My dear, my only, Child;
Thou wouldst be leaning on a broken reed—
This Marnaduke—

120-122 Cf. "We two alone will sing like birds" the cage" (*King Lear*, V.iii.9) and the union of youth and age in the "Matthew" poems, *The Two April Mornings* and *The Fountain*.
131-132 The gap perhaps reflects the "sad incorrect state" of the manuscript from which Mary Hutchinson copied the text of the play (see Introduction, p. 6. Space was left for a line and two half lines.

MATILDA
O could you hear his voice— [165]

135 Alas! you do not know him. He is one
(I guess not what bad tongue has wronged him with you),
All gentleness and love. His face bespeaks
A deep and simple meekness; and that soul,
Which with the motion of a glorious act
Flashes a terror-mingled look of sweetness,
Is, after conflict, silent as the ocean
140 By a miraculous finger stilled at once. [173]

HERBERT
Unhappy woman!

MATILDA
Nay, it was my duty

Thus much to speak.
But think not, think not, father, I forget
The history of that lamentable night
145 When, Antioch blazing to her topmost towers,
You rushed into the murderous flames, returned
Blind as the grave, but, as you oft have told me,
You clasped your infant daughter to your heart. [178]

HERBERT

150 Thy mother too—scarce had I gained the door—
I caught her voice, she threw herself upon me,
I felt thy infant brother in her arms,
She saw my blasted face—a tide of soldiers [185]
That instant rushed between us, and I heard
Her last death-shriek, distinct among a thousand.

133-141 The description of Mortimer evokes a Christlike figure and concludes with a specific allusion to Christ's calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:26-27).

143-177 The conversation between Herbert and Matilda echoes the recapitulation of previous events in Prospero's conversation with Miranda in *The Tempest*, I.ii.

144-155 De Selincourt suggests that the phrase "topmost towers" is an echo from Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*: "And burnt the topless towers of Ilium" (Scene 18). Information on the siege of Antioch may have come from Thomas Fuller's *Historie of the Holy Warre* (4th ed.; Cambridge, 1651), which he used almost verbatim at some points in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. The siege mentioned in *The Borders* would seem to involve a fusion of two separate accounts in Fuller, that of the great siege that ended in June 3, 1098, when "the Christians issuing in, and exasperated with the length of the siege, so remembered what they had suffered, that they forgot what they had to do, killing promiscuously Christian citizens with Turks" (p. 26), and that of the loss of the city to the Mameluke prince in 1268: "The cite of Joppa he took and burned; and then wome Antioch, slaying therein twenty thousand, and carrying away captive an hundred thousand Christians" (p. 214). The whole dialogue of II. 145-155 is reminiscent of Vergil's description of Aeneas losing his wife while escaping from burning Troy.

IDONEA.
O could you hear his voice: [165]

165 Alas! you do not know him. He is one
(I wot not what ill tongue has wronged him with you)
All gentleness and love. His face bespeaks
A deep and simple meekness: and that Soul,
Which with the motion of a virtuous act
Flashes a look of terror upon guilt,
Is, after conflict, quiet as the ocean,
By a miraculous finger, stilled at once. [170]

HERBERT.
Unhappy Woman!

IDONEA.
Nay, it was my duty

Thus much to speak; but think not I forget—
Dear Father! how *could* I forget and live—
You and the story of that doleful night
175 When, Antioch blazing to her topmost towers,
You rushed into the murderous flames, returned
Blind as the grave, but, as you oft have told me,
Clasping your infant Daughter to your heart. [180]

HERBERT.

185 Thy Mother too!—scarce had I gained the door,
I caught her voice; she threw herself upon me,
I felt thy infant brother in her arms;
She saw my blasted face—a tide of soldiers
That instant rushed between us, and I heard
Her last death-shriek, distinct among a thousand.

MATILDA
Nay, father, stop not, let me hear it all:
'Twill do me good.

HERBERT
Dear daughter, dearest love—

[190]

For my old age it doth remain with thee
To make it what thou wilt.—Thou hast been told
That when, on our return from Palestine,
I found that my domains had been usurped,
I took thee in my arms, and we began
Our wanderings together. Providence

[195]

At length conducted us to Rossland. There
Our melancholy story moved a stranger
To take thee to her home; and for myself,
Soon after, the good abbot of Saint Cuthbert's
Supplied my helplessness with food and raiment,
And, as thou knowest, gave me that little cottage

[200]

170 Where now I dwell.—For many years I bore
Thy absence, 'till old age and fresh infirmities,
Now six months gone, exacted thy return.
I did not think that during that long absence
My child, forgetful of the name of Herbert,
Had given her love to a base freebooter
Who here, upon the borders of the Tweed,
Doth prey alike on two distracted countries,
Traitor to both.

[205]

MATILDA
Oh could you hear his voice!

[210]

180 I will not call on heaven to vouch for me,
But let this kiss speak what is in my heart.

Enter a Peasant.

PEASANT

Good morrow to you, lady!
I guess that you are strangers; if you need
One better skill'd—

IDONEA.

Nay, Father, stop not; let me hear it all.

HERBERT.

Dear Daughter! precious relic of that time—
For my old age, it doth remain with thee
To make it what thou wilt. Thou hast been told,
That when, on our return from Palestine,
I found how my domains had been usurped,
I took thee in my arms, and we began
Our wanderings together. Providence

190

At length conducted us to Rossland,—there,
Our melancholy story moved a Stranger
To take thee to her home—and for myself,
Soon after, the good Abbot of St. Cuthbert's
Supplied my helplessness with food and raiment,
And, as thou know'st, gave me that humble Cot
Where now we dwell.—For many years I bore
Thy absence, till old age and fresh infirmities
Exactd thy return, and our reunion.
I did not think that, during that long absence,
My Child, forgetful of the name of Herbert,
Had given her love to a wild Freebooter,
Who here, upon the borders of the Tweed,
Doth prey alike on two distracted Countries,
Traitor to both.

195

IDONEA.

Oh, could you hear his voice!

210

I will not call on Heaven to vouch for me,
But let this kiss speak what is in my heart.

Enter a Peasant.

PEASANT.

Good morrow, Strangers! If you want a Guide,
Let me have leave to serve you!

167 The 'good abbot of St. Cuthbert's' who gave Herbert a cottage is possibly connected not with the geographical location of a particular abbey but rather with the saint himself, an association picked up from James Clarke's *Survey of the Lakes* . . . (London, 1787), p. 84, where Clarke mistakenly asserts that St. Cuthbert gave St. Herbert his hermitage on Derwentwater.
173-178 Herbert's unsympathetic view of Mortimer's band as mere outlaws echoes that expressed throughout eighteenth-century histories and guidebooks; but see II.iii.330-334n.

MATILDA
The sight of inn or cottage
Would be most welcome to us.

PEASANT
You on white hawthorn gained, [216]

185 You will look down into a dell, and there
[Will] see an ash from which a sign-board hangs;
The house is hidden by the shade.—Old man,
You seem worn out with travel—shall I support you? [220]

HERBERT

I thank you, but our resting-place so near

190 "Twere wrong to trouble you—

PEASANT
God speed you both! [Exit Peasant.]

You cannot miss the place.

HERBERT

Matilda, we must part!

MATILDA

Part!

HERBERT

Be not alarmed—

"Tis but for a few days—a thought has struck me. [224]

MATILDA

That I should leave you at this house, and thence

Proceed alone? It shall be so; I feel

195 You are quite exhausted—
[Exit HERBERT supported by MATILDA.]

Re-enter MORTIMER and RIVERS.

MORTIMER

This instant will we stop him—a father, too!

RIVERS

200 Nay, Mortimer, I prithee be not hasty,
For sometimes, in despite of my conviction,
He tempted me to think the story true; [230]

IDONEA.
My Companion
Hath need of rest; the sight of Hut or Hostel
Would be most welcome. 215

PEASANT.

You on white hawthorn gained,

You will look down into a dell, and there
Will see an ash from which a sign-board hangs;
The house is hidden by the shade. Old Man,
You seem worn out with travel—shall I support you? 220

HERBERT.

I thank you; but, a resting-place so near,

"Twere wrong to trouble you.

PEASANT.

God speed you both.

[Exit Peasant.]

HERBERT.

Idonea, we must part. Be not alarmed—

"Tis but for a few days—a thought has struck me.

IDONEA.

225 That I should leave you at this house, and thence
Proceed alone. It shall be so; for strength
Would fail you ere our journey's end be reached.

[Exit HERBERT supported by IDONEA.]

Re-enter MARMADUKE and OSWALD.

MARMADUKE.

This instant will we stop him—

OSWALD.

230 Be not hasty,
For, sometimes, in despite of my conviction,
He tempted me to think the Story true;

186 MS. 2 reads "We," an apparent error corrected in pencil to "Will."
197-225 The Rough Notebook, 26^r to 27^v, contains an earlier draft of these lines; earlier
than the draft equivalent to ll. 197-225 are the Rough Notebook drafts for the deception, 38^r,
40^r-42^v, which reveal that at that stage Wordsworth intended Mortimer to have reached a state
at which he does not reach in the early version until l. iii. 157 (see 42^v).

205 'Tis plain he loves the girl, and what he said
That savoured of aversion to thy name
Appeared the genuine colour of his soul,
Anxiety lest any harm should reach her
After his death.

MORTIMER

I have been much deceived.

[235]

RIVERS

But sure, he loves the girl; and never love
Could find delight to nurse itself so strangely,
And thus to plague her with *intentions*! Death!
There must be truth in this—

MORTIMER

False! False as hell—

210 Truth in the story! Had the thing been true
He must have felt it then, known what it was,
And thus to prey upon her heart had been
A tenfold cruelty—

[240]

RIVERS

What strange pleasures

215 Do we poor mortals cater for ourselves!
To see him thus provoke her tenderness
With tales of symptoms and infirmities—and yet
I'd wager on his life for twenty years.

[246]

MORTIMER

We will not waste an hour in such a cause.

RIVERS

Why, this is noble! shake her off at once.

MORTIMER

220 Matilda has a heart.—It is her virtues
Of which he makes his instruments.—A man
Who has so practiced on the world's cold sense
May well deceive his child—what, leave her thus,
A prey to such a traitor?—No—no—no—
225 'Tis but a word, and then—

[250]

RIVERS

More than we see, or whence this strange aversion?
Mortimer! I suspect unworthy tales
Have reached his ear—you have had enemies.

[255]

'Tis plain he loves the Maid, and what he said
That savoured of aversion to thy name
Appeared the genuine colour of his soul—
Anxiety lest mischief should befall her
After his death.

MARMADUKE.

I have been much deceived.

235

OSWALD.

But sure he loves the Maiden, and never love
Could find delight to nurse itself so strangely,
Thus to torment her with *intentions*!—death—
There must be truth in this.

MARMADUKE.

Truth in his story!

He must have felt it then, known what it was,
And in such wise to rack her gentle heart
Had been a tenfold cruelty.

240

OSWALD.

Strange pleasures

Do we poor mortals cater for ourselves!
To see him thus provoke her tenderness
With tales of weakness and infirmity!
I'd wager on his life for twenty years.

245

MARMADUKE.

We will not waste an hour in such a cause.

OSWALD.

Why, this is noble! shake her off at once.

MARMADUKE.

Her virtues are his instruments.—A Man
Who has so practised on the world's cold sense,
May well deceive his Child—what! leave her thus,
A prey to a deceiver?—no—no—no—
250 'Tis but a word and then—

250

OSWALD.

Something is here
More than we see, or whence this strong aversion?
Marmaduke! I suspect unworthy tales
Have reached his ear—you have had enemies.

255

MORTIMER
Away! I tell thee they are his own coinage.

230 RIVERS
But wherefore should his love exclude a rival?
To one so helpless, it should seem the safeguard
Of such a man as thee should be most welcome.
I do not like this—

MORTIMER
Like it! for my part—

RIVERS
But there is something here—

MORTIMER
What hast thou seen?

235 RIVERS
No, no, there is no mystery in this;
As you have said, he coins himself the slander
With which he taints her ear.—For a plain reason:
He dreads the presence of a virtuous man
Like you, he knows your eye would search his heart,
Your justice stamp upon his evil deeds
240 The punishment they merit.—All is plain:
It cannot be—

MORTIMER
What cannot be?

RIVERS
Yet that a father
Should torture thus the heart of his own child—
MORTIMER
Nay, you abuse my friendship!

245 RIVERS
Heaven forbid!
There was a trifling circumstance; indeed,
Though at the time it struck me, I believe
I never should have thought of it again
But for the scene which we just now have witnessed.
MORTIMER
What do you mean?

RIVERS
In truth, I think I saw—
250 'Twas at a distance and he was disguised—

MARMADUKE.
Enemies!—of his own coinage.

OSWALD.
That may be,
But wherefore slight protection such as you
Have power to yield? Perhaps he looks elsewhere—
I am perplexed.

MARMADUKE.
What hast thou heard or seen? 260

OSWALD.
No—no—the thing stands clear of mystery;
(As you have said) he coins himself the slander
With which he taints her ear;—for a plain reason;
He dreads the presence of a virtuous man
Like you; he knows your eye would search his heart,
Your justice stamp upon his evil deeds
265 The punishment they merit. All is plain:
It cannot be—

MARMADUKE.
What cannot be?

OSWALD.
Yet that a Father
Should in his love admit no rivalry,
And torture thus the heart of his own Child— 270

MARMADUKE.
Nay, you abuse my friendship!
OSWALD.
Heaven forbid!

There was a circumstance, trifling indeed—
It struck me at the time—yet I believe
I never should have thought of it again
But for the scene which we by chance have witnessed.
275 MARMADUKE.
What is your meaning?

OSWALD.
Two days gone I saw,
Though at a distance and he was disguised,

Hovering round Herbert's door, a man whose figure
 Resembled much that cold voluptuary
 The villain Clifford.—He hates you, and he knows
 Where he can stab you deepest.

[280]

MORTIMER

Clifford never

255 Would stoop to hover round a blind man's door—
 It could not be—

RIVERS

And yet I now remember

[284]

260 That when your praise was warm upon my tongue,
 And I began to tell how you had rescued
 A maiden from the ruffian violence
 Of this same Clifford, Herbert grew impatient
 And would not hear me—

MORTIMER

No, it cannot be—

[289]

I dare not trust myself with such a thought—
 Yet whence this strong aversion? You are a man
 Not used to rash conjectures—

RIVERS

If you deem it

[291]

265 A thing worth further notice, it befits us
 To deal with caution, we must sift him artfully.
 [Exeunt MORTIMER and RIVERS.]

[Scene 2] SCENE changes to the door of an inn.

HERBERT, MATILDA and HOST.

HERBERT (seated)

As I am dear to you, remember, child,
 This last request—

MATILDA

You know me, Sir! Farewell!

[295]

HERBERT

5 And are you going, then? Come, come, Matilda,
 We must not part—I have measured many a league
 When these old limbs had need of rest.—No, no,
 I will not play the sluggard.

Hovering round Herbert's door, a man whose figure
 Resembled much that cold voluptuary,
 The villain, Clifford. He hates you, and he knows
 Where he can stab you deepest.

280

MARMADUKE.

Clifford never

Would stoop to skulk about a Cottage door—
 It could not be.

OSWALD.

And yet I now remember,

285 That, when your praise was warm upon my tongue,
 And the blind Man was told how you had rescued
 A maiden from the ruffian violence
 Of this same Clifford, he became impatient
 And would not hear me.

MARMADUKE.

No—it cannot be—

I dare not trust myself with such a thought—
 Yet whence this strange aversion? You are a man
 Not used to rash conjectures—

290

OSWALD.

If you deem it

A thing worth further notice, we must act
 With caution, sift the matter artfully.

[Exeunt MARMADUKE and OSWALD.]

SCENE, the door of the Hostel.

HERBERT, IDONEA, and Host.

HERBERT (seated).

As I am dear to you, remember, Child!
 This last request.

IDONEA.

You know me, Sir; farewell!

295

HERBERT.

And are you going then? Come, come, Idonea,
 We must not part,—I have measured many a league
 When these old limbs had need of rest,—and now
 I will not play the sluggard.

MATILDA

Nay, sit down.

[Turning to the Host.

[300]

Good Host, such tendance as you would expect
From your own children, if yourself were sick,
Let this old man find at your hands—poor []
We soon shall meet again.—If thou neglect thy charge

Then ill befall thee!

[305]

The little fool is loth to stay behind.
Sir Host! by all the love you bear to courtesy,
Take care of him—and feed the truant well.

HOST

15 Fear not, I will obey you; but one so young,
And one so fair, in truth it is a pity

[310]

That you should travel unattended, Lady!
I have a palfrey and a groom. The lad
Shall squire you—(To HERBERT) would it not be better, Sir?—
And for less fee than I would let him run

20 For any lady I have seen this twelvemonth.

MATILDA

[315]

You know, Sir, I have been too long your guard
Not to have learnt to laugh at foolish fears.
Why, if a wolf should leap from out a thicket
A look of mine would send him scouring back,
Unless I differ from the thing I am
When you are by my side.

HERBERT

Matilda! Wolves

[320]

Are not the enemies that move my fears.

MATILDA

30 No more of this.—Three days at farthest
Will bring me back to you.—Farewell! farewell!
[Exit MATILDA.

HOST

"Tis never drought with us—St. Mary and her pilgrims,
Thanks to them! are a stream of comfort to us:

[325]

IDONEA.

Nay, sit down.

[Turning to Host.

300

Good Host, such tendance as you would expect
From your own Children, if yourself were sick,
Let this old Man find at your hands; poor Leader,

[Looking at the Dog.

We soon shall meet again. If thou neglect

This charge of thine, then ill befall thee!—Look,
The little fool is loth to stay behind.

305 Sir Host! by all the love you bear to courtesy,
Take care of him, and feed the truant well.

HOST.

Fear not, I will obey you;—but One so young,
And One so fair, it goes against my heart

310

That you should travel unattended, Lady!—
I have a palfrey and a groom: the lad
Shall squire you, (would it not be better, Sir?)
And for less fee than I would let him run
For any lady I have seen this twelvemonth.

IDONEA.

315

You know, Sir, I have been too long your guard
Not to have learnt to laugh at little fears.
Why, if a wolf should leap from out a thicket,
A look of mine would send him scouring back,
Unless I differ from the thing I am
When you are by my side.

HERBERT.

Idonea, wolves

320

Are not the enemies that move my fears.

IDONEA.

No more, I pray, of this. Three days at farthest
Will bring me back—protect him, Saints—farewell!
[Exit IDONEA.

[Exit IDONEA.

HOST.

"Tis never drought with us—St. Cuthbert and his Pilgrims,
Thanks to them, are to us a stream of comfort:

325

9 The dog's name, Tray, was added to fill the blank, probably in 1841. Tray was also the name used in the Rough Notebook draft for the scene.

25 "To scour" meant "to run with great eagerness and swiftness; to scamper" (Johnson).

31 The pilgrims are perhaps on their way to St. Mary's, Carlisle.

Pity the maiden did not wait a little;
She could not, Sir, have failed of company.

35 Now she is gone I fain would call her back again.
HERBERT
HOST (*calling MATILDA*)

Holla!

HERBERT
No, no, the business must be done.
But what is all this noise? (*A noise heard*)

HOST
The villagers
Are flocking in.—A wedding festival,
That's all—

[331]

Enter MORTIMER and RIVERS.
(*To them*) God save you, Sirs!

40 Hal as I live, the Baron Herbert.
RIVERS
HOST

For Heaven's sake!
—Mercy, Sir, I did not know your Lordship—

RIVERS
So far into your journey! on my life,
You are a lusty traveller.—But how fare you?

[335]

HERBERT
Well as an old man can expect.—And you, Sir?
RIVERS

45 I do not see Matilda.

HERBERT
The good creature
Is gone before, to spare my weariness.
But what has brought you hither?

[338]

RIVERS
A little business
That will be soon dispatched.

HERBERT
There was a letter
Which we entrusted to you?

RIVERS
Be at peace.

You'll hear no more of him—

Pity the Maiden did not wait a while;
She could not, Sir, have failed of company.

HERBERT
Now she is gone, I fain would call her back.

HOST (*calling*).
Holla!

HERBERT
No, no, the business must be done.—
What means this riotous noise?

HOST.
The villagers
Are flocking in—a wedding festival—
That's all—God save you, Sir.

330

Enter OSWALD.
OSWALD.

Hal as I live,
The Baron Herbert.
HOST.

Mercy, the Baron Herbert!
OSWALD.

So far into your journey! on my life,
You are a lusty Traveller. But how fare you?

335

HERBERT.
Well as the wreck I am permits. And you, Sir?
OSWALD.
I do not see Idonea.

HERBERT.
Dutiful Girl,
She is gone before, to spare my weariness.
But what has brought you hither?

OSWALD.
A slight affair,
That will be soon despatched.

HERBERT.
Did Marmaduke
Receive that letter?

340

OSWALD.
Be at peace.—The tie
Is broken, you will hear no more of him.

HERBERT
Well, this is comfort.

[345]

55 That noise! would I had gone with her as far
As the Lord Clifford's mansion: I have heard
That in his milder moods he has express'd
Compassion for me—he has great influence
With Henry, our good King. I might have restored them,
Perhaps he would have heard my suit—no matter,
I do not like the man. (*Noise again*) This noise, alas!
I shall have neither sleep nor rest—the convent
Will give me quiet lodging—you have a boy, good Host,
And he must lead me back.

RIVERS
This is most lucky,

[354]

Our journey lies that way; my friend and I
Will be your guides.

HERBERT
Alas! I creep so slowly,

A wearisome companion!

RIVERS
Never fear,

We'll not complain of that.

HERBERT
My limbs are stiff,

[359]

65 I must repose. You cannot wait an hour?

RIVERS

O certainly! come, let me lead you in,
And while you rest yourself, my friend and I
Will stroll into the wood.

[RIVERS conducts HERBERT into the house. Various villagers crowd
in. RIVERS returns to MORTIMER, and they go out together. More
villagers, and among them a rustic musician.

HERBERT.

This is true comfort, thanks a thousand times!—
That noise!—would I had gone with her as far
As the Lord Clifford's Castle: I have heard
That, in his milder moods, he has expressed
Compassion for me. His influence is great
With Henry, our good King;—the Baron might
Have heard my suit, and urged my plea at Court.
No matter—he's a dangerous Man.—That noise!—
'Tis too disorderly for sleep or rest.
Idonea would have fears for me,—the Convent
Will give me quiet lodging. You have a boy, good Host,
And he must lead me back.

350

OSWALD.

You are most lucky;
I have been waiting in the wood hard by

355

For a companion—here he comes; our journey

[Enter MARMADUKE.

Lies on your way; accept us as your Guides.

HERBERT.

Alas! I creep so slowly.

OSWALD.

Never fear;

We'll not complain of that.

HERBERT.

My limbs are stiff

And need repose. Could you but wait an hour?

360

OSWALD.

Most willingly!—Come, let me lead you in,
And, while you take your rest, think not of us;
We'll stroll into the wood; lean on my arm.

[Conducts HERBERT into the house. Exit MARMADUKE.

Enter Villagers.

OSWALD (*to himself coming out of the Hostel*).

I have prepared a most apt Instrument—
The Vagrant must, no doubt, be loitering somewhere
About this ground; she hath a tongue well skilled,
By mingling natural matter of her own
With all the daring fictions I have taught her,
To win belief, such as my plot requires. [Exit OSWALD.

365

Enter more Villagers, a Musician among them.

104
 INTO THE COURT, MY FRIEND! AND PERCH YOURSELF
 Aloft upon the elm-tree. Pretty maids!
 70 Garlands, and flowers, and cakes, and merry thoughts
 Are here to send the sun into the west.—

[Scene 3] SCENE changes to the wood adjoining the Inn,
 MORTIMER and RIVERS entering.

MORTIMER [375]
 I would fain hope that we deceive ourselves:
 When I beheld him sitting there, alone,
 It struck upon my heart—I know not how.

RIVERS
 5 Let us dismiss the business from our thoughts;
 To day will clear up all.—You marked a cottage,
 That ragged dwelling close beneath a rock
 By the brook side; it is the abode of one,
 A maid, who fell a prey to the Lord Clifford,
 10 And he grew weary of her, but alas!
 What she had seen and suffered—the poor wretch,
 It turned her brain—and now she lives alone,
 Nor moves her hands to any needful work.
 She eats the food which every day the peasants
 Bring to her hut, and so the wretch has lived [385]

5-22 Perhaps the cottage is connected with Julian's bower; see above, p. 18. The description of the maid places her in an eighteenth-century tradition of mad maidens; compare Cowper's "Crazed Kate" in *The Task* (I, 534-566). This and other sources for the motif are identified by Jonathan Wordsworth in *M of H*, pp. 60-62.
 10-23 Cf. *A Ballad* (*PW*, I, 265-266):

She saw—and wept—her father frown'd,
 Her heart began to break;
 And oft the live-long day she sat
 And word would never speak . . .
 Reflected once in Mary's face
 The village saw a mind more fair;
 Now every charm was all o'erhanging
 By woe and black despair.
 And oft she roan'd at dark midnight
 Among the silent graves;
 Or sat on steep Winander's rock
 To hear the weltering waves.

Cf. also *Dirge* (*PW*, I, 269):

By frequent feet the grass around
 His grave shall all be worn away.

HOST (to them).
 INTO THE COURT, MY FRIEND, AND PERCH YOURSELF
 Aloft upon the elm-tree. Pretty Maids,
 Garlands and flowers, and cakes and merry thoughts,
 Are here, to send the sun into the west
 More speedily than you belike would wish.

SCENE changes to the Wood adjoining the Hostel—
 MARMADUKE and OSWALD entering.

MARMADUKE.
 I would fain hope that we deceive ourselves:
 When first I saw him sitting there, alone,
 It struck upon my heart I know not how.

OSWALD.
 To-day will clear up all.—You marked a Cottage,
 That ragged Dwelling, close beneath a rock
 By the brook-side: it is the abode of One,
 A Maiden innocent till ensnared by Clifford,
 Who soon grew weary of her; but, alas!
 What she had seen and suffered turned her brain.
 Cast off by her Betrayer, she dwells alone,
 Nor moves her hands to any needful work:
 She eats her food which every day the peasants
 Bring to her hut; and so the Wretch has lived 385

15 Ten years; and no one ever heard her voice.
But every night at the first stroke of twelve

[390]

She quits her house, and in the neighbouring church-yard

Upon the self-same spot, in rain or storm,

20 She paces out the hour 'twixt twelve and one,
She paces round and round, still round and round,

[395]

And in the church-yard sod her feet have worn
A hollow ring; they say it is knee-deep—

Ha! what is here?

[A female Beggar rises up, rubbing her eyes as if waking from
sleep—a child in her arms.]

BEGGAR

Oh! Gentlemen, I thank you;

I've had the saddest dream that ever troubled

The heart of living creature.—My poor babe

Was crying, as I thought, crying for bread

When I had none to give him, whereupon

I put a slip of foxglove in his hand,

Which pleased him so that he was hushed at once;

[400]

30 When into one of those same spotted bells
A Bee came darting, which the child with joy
Imprisoned there, and held it to his ear—
And suddenly grew black as he would die.

16 The clock here, and in II.i.27–28, is an anachronism; see also II.iii.90n.

23 Rivers's use of the Beggarwoman is equivalent to Iago's use of the handkerchief as a piece of false circumstantial evidence.

24–42 The Beggarwoman's two dreams are placed in a setting derived from *An Evening Walk* (1793), II.242–278. But whereas the natural objects that quiet the children in *An Evening Walk* are friendly, in *The Beggars* they turn out to be treacherous and vicious. The bee from which one expects sweetness and receives a sting and the carnivorous dog are both traditional figures; Paul Christian records their traditional meanings in *The History and Practice of Magic* (1870), trans. James Kirkup and Julian Shaw (2 vols.; New York, 1992), II, 378, 381. On the bee that poisons the pleased child in the car compare *Hamlet*, IV.v.89–90:

Reeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear . . .

On the dog compare the spectral hunt of the hounds in the Edge of a Heath Scene (II.5–8), tradition familiar in the folklore of northern England, thought to portend death.

25–29 Cf. *An Evening Walk* (1793), II.257–260:

I see her now, deny'd to lay her head,
On cold blue nights, in hut or straw-built shed;
Turn to a silent smile their sleepy cry,
By pointing to a shooting star on high.

Ten years; and no one ever heard her voice;

But every night at the first stroke of twelve

She quits her house, and, in the neighbouring Churchyard

Upon the self-same spot, in rain or storm,

She paces out the hour 'twixt twelve and one—

She paces round and round an Infant's grave,

And in the churchyard sod her feet have worn

A hollow ring; they say it is knee-deep—

Ha! what is here?

[A female Beggar rises up, rubbing her eyes as if in sleep—
a Child in her arms.]

BEGGAR.

Oh! Gentlemen, I thank you;

I've had the saddest dream that ever troubled

The heart of living creature.—My poor Babe

Was crying, as I thought, crying for bread

When I had none to give him; whereupon,

I put a slip of foxglove in his hand,

Which pleased him so, that he was hushed at once;

When, into one of those same spotted bells

A bee came darting, which the Child with joy

Imprisoned there, and held it to his ear,

And suddenly grew black, as he would die.

405

MORTIMER (*to RIVERS*)

We have no time for this.

(To the Beggar) My babbling gossip,Here's what will comfort you. [*Gives her money.*]

35

BEGGAR (*to MORTIMER*)

The Saints reward you

For this good work.—Well Sirs, this passed away;

And afterwards I fancied a strange dog

Trotting alone, along a beaten road,

Came to the child as by my side he slept

And fondling licked his face, then on a sudden

Snapped fierce to make a morsel of his head.

But here he is! (*Kissing the child*) It must have been a dream.

40

[415]

RIVERS

When next inclined to sleep, take my advice,

And put your head, good Woman! under cover.

BEGGAR

Oh Sir! you would not talk thus if you knew

What life is this of ours, how sleep will master

The weary-worn.—You gentlefolks have got

Warm chambers to your wish—I'd rather be

A Stone than what I am—but two nights gone

The darkness overtook me, wind and rain

Beat hard upon my head—and yet I saw

A glow-worm through the covert of the furze

Shine [] as if nothing aided the sky

At which I half-accused the God in heaven—

You must forgive me, Sirs—

50

[425]

RIVERS

Well, well—today

Has made amends.

55

49-55 Compare the following lines from "The road extended o'er a heath," a fragment related to the *Salisbury Plain* poems entered in DC MS. 2, a reading text of which is given in *SPP*, p. 289:

I saw safe sheltered by the viewless furze
The tiny glowworm, lowliest child of earth,
From his green lodge with undiminished light
Shine through the rain, and strange comparison
Of Envy linked with pity touched my heart
And such reproach of heavenly ordonnance
As shall not need forgiveness.

MARMADUKE.

We have no time for this, my babbling Gossip;

Here's what will comfort you. [*Gives her money.*]

BEGGAR.

The Saints reward you

For this good deed!—Well, Sirs, this passed away;

And afterwards I fancied, a strange dog,

Trotting alone along the beaten road,

Came to my child as by my side he slept

And, fondling, licked his face, then on a sudden

Snapped fierce to make a morsel of his head:

But here he is, (*kissing the Child*) it must have been a dream.

410

OSWALD.

When next inclined to sleep, take my advice,

And put your head, good Woman, under cover.

BEGGAR.

Oh, sir, you would not talk thus, if you knew

What life is this of ours, how sleep will master

The weary-worn.—You gentlefolk have got

Warm chambers to your wish. I'd rather be

A stone than what I am.—But two nights gone,

The darkness overtook me—wind and rain

Beat hard upon my head—and yet I saw

A glow-worm, through the covert of the furze,

Shine calmly as if nothing aided the sky:

At which I half-accused the God in Heaven.—

You must forgive me.

420

425

OSWALD.

Ay, and if you think

The Fairies are to blame, and you should chide

Your favourite saint—no matter—this good day

Has made amends.

430

BEGGAR
Thanks to you—but oh! Sir!
[431]

60 How would you like to travel on whole hours
As I have done, my eyes upon the ground,
Expecting still, I knew not how, to find
A piece of money glittering through the dust.
[435]

MORTIMER
This woman is a prater.—Pray, good Lady,
Do you tell fortunes?

BEGGAR
Oh! Sir! you are like the rest.

65 This little one—it cuts me to the heart—
Well! they might turn a beggar from their door,
But there are mothers who can see the babe
Here at my breast and ask me where I bought it:
This they can do and look upon my face.
—But you, Sir, should be kinder.
[440]

MORTIMER
Come here ye fathers,

And learn of this poor wretch.

70 Aye, Sir, there's nobody that feels for us.
Why now—but yesterday I overtook
A blind old grey-beard and accosted him—
T'uh name of all the saints and by the mass
He should have used me better!—Charity!
If you can melt a rock he is your man.
But I'll be even with him—here again
Have I been waiting for him.
[445]

RIVERS
Well! but softly,
Who is it that has wronged you?
[450]

57-58 Cf. *The Old Cumberland Beggar* (1800), ll. 45-47:
On the ground

His eyes are turn'd, and, as he moves along,
They move along the ground.
77-90 In the Rough Notebook draft for these lines the Beggarwoman herself drops the name
of Herbert, and at the end of her speech is questioned: "Well but softly / Who is it that has
wronged you?" (18").

BEGGAR.
Thanks to you both; but, O Sir!

How would you like to travel on whole hours
As I have done, my eyes upon the ground,
Expecting still, I knew not how, to find
A piece of money glittering through the dust.
435

MARMADUKE.
This woman is a prater. Pray, good Lady!
Do you tell fortunes?

BEGGAR.
Oh Sir, you are like the rest.

This Little-one—it cuts me to the heart—
Well! they might turn a beggar from their doors,
But there are Mothers who can see the Babe
Here at my breast, and ask me where I bought it:
This they can do, and look upon my face—
But you, Sir, should be kinder.
440

MARMADUKE.

Come hither, Fathers,
And learn what nature is from this poor Wretch!

BEGGAR.

Ay, Sir, there's nobody that feels for us.
Why now—but yesterday I overtook
A blind old Greybeard and accosted him,
T'uh name of all the Saints, and by the Mass
He should have used me better!—Charity!
If you can melt a rock, he is your man;
But I'll be even with him—here again
Have I been waiting for him.
445

OSWALD.

Well, but softly,
Who is it that hath wronged you?
450

431 Sir.] *1842, 1845* Sir! (*MS. 3 and 4*), 1846-

BEGGAR

Mark you me:

I'll point him out—a maiden is his guide,

Lovely as any rose, a little dog

Tied by a woolen cord moves on before

With look as sad as he were dumb, the cur.

I owe him no ill will, but in good sooth

He does his master credit.

MORTIMER

As I live,

'Tis Herbert and no other!

BEGGAR

Aye, gentlemen, it is a feast to see him:

Lank as a ghost and tall—his shoulders bent

And his beard white with age—yet evermore,

As if he were the only saint on earth

He turns his face to heaven.

RIVERS

But why so violent

Against this poor old gentleman?

BEGGAR

I'll tell you:

He has the very hardest heart on earth.

I had as lief turn to the friars' school

And knock for entrance in mid-holiday.

MORTIMER

But to your story.

BEGGAR

As I was saying, Sir,

Well—he has often used me like a dog,

But yesterday was worse than all—at last,

And after trudging many a weary mile,

I overtook him, Sirs, my boy and I.

'Twas on the middle of the heath, and so

BEGGAR.

Mark you me;

I'll point him out;—a Maiden is his guide,

Lovely as Spring's first rose; a little dog,

Tied by a woollen cord, moves on before

With look as sad as he were dumb; the cur,

I owe him no ill will, but in good sooth

He does his Master credit.

MARMADUKE.

As I live,

'Tis Herbert and no other!

BEGGAR.

'Tis a feast to see him,

Lank as a ghost and tall, his shoulders bent,

And long beard white with age—yet evermore,

As if he were the only Saint on earth,

He turns his face to heaven.

OSWALD.

But why so violent

Against this venerable Man?

BEGGAR.

I'll tell you:

He has the very hardest heart on earth;

I had as lief turn to the Friar's school

And knock for entrance, in mid holiday.

MARMADUKE.

But to your story.

BEGGAR.

I was saying, Sir—

Well!—he has often spurned me like a toad,

But yesterday was worse than all;—at last

I overtook him, Sirs, my Babe and I,

86 Cf. *The Discharged Soldier* (reading text in *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth [Ithaca, 1970], pp. 433-437), ll. 41-43:

He was in stature tall,
A foot above man's common measure tall,
And lank, and upright.

94 The "holiday" would be a holy day, when the friars are fasting or praying.

I begged a little aid for charity,
 But he was snappish as a cottage cur.
 Well then, says I—I'll out with it, at which
 I cast a look upon the girl and felt
 As if my heart would burst, and so I left him.

[475]

RIVERS

I think, good woman! you are the very person
 Whom, but some few days past, I saw in [?]
 At Herbert's door.

BEGGAR

Aye, and if truth were known
 I have good business there.

[480]

RIVERS

I met you at the threshold, and it seemed
 That he was angry.

BEGGAR

Angry! well he might;
 And long as I can stir I'll dog him—yesterday
 To serve me so, and knowing that he owes
 The best of all he has to me and mine.
 But 'tis all over now.—That good old Lady
 Has left a power of riches, and I say it,
 If there's a lawyer in the land, the rogue
 Shall give me half.

[485]

RIVERS

I fear, good woman!
 You have been insolent—

BEGGAR

Aye, Sir, and there's a Lord—
 I spied him skulking in his peasant's dress.

[491]

RIVERS

How say you? In disguise?

MORTIMER

What's your business
 With Herbert or his daughter?

And begged a little aid for charity:
 But he was snappish as a cottage cur.
 Well then, says I—I'll out with it; at which
 I cast a look upon the Girl, and felt
 As if my heart would burst; and so I left him.

475

OSWALD.

I think, good Woman, you are the very person
 Whom, but some few days past, I saw in Eskdale,
 At Herbert's door.

BEGGAR.

Ay; and if truth were known
 I have good business there.

480

OSWALD.

I met you at the threshold,
 And he seemed angry.

BEGGAR.

Angry! well he might;
 And long as I can stir I'll dog him.—Yesterday,
 To serve me so, and knowing that he owes
 The best of all he has to me and mine.
 But 'tis all over now.—That good old Lady
 Has left a power of riches; and I say it,
 If there's a lawyer in the land, the knave
 Shall give me half.

485

OSWALD.

What's this?—I fear, good Woman,
 You have been insolent.

BEGGAR.

And there's the Baron,
 I spied him skulking in his peasant's dress.

490

OSWALD.

How say you? in disguise?—

MARMADUKE.

But what's your business
 With Herbert or his Daughter?

107 The original place name was obliterated by the overwriting of "Eskdale" in 1841.
 115 "The" was revised to "That" in 1799.
 115-156 The Rough Notebook contains drafts for these lines, 31'-33'.
 119-121 There is no reference to the "lord" in the Rough Notebook drafts.

BEGGAR
 Daughter! truly!—
 But how's the day? I fear, my little boy,
 We've overslept ourselves. Sirs, have you seen him?
 [*Offers to go.*]

[495]

MORTIMER
 I must have more of this—you shall not stir
 An inch till I am answered. Know you aught
 That doth concern this Herbert?

BEGGAR
 You are angry,

And will misuse me, Sir!

MORTIMER
 No trifling, woman!

RIVERS

130 You are as safe as in a sanctuary;
 Speak.

[500]

Speak.

MORTIMER

BEGGAR
 He is a most hard-hearted man.

MORTIMER

Your life is at my mercy.

BEGGAR

Do not harm me,
 And I will tell you all—you know not, Sir,
 What strong temptations press upon the poor—

RIVERS

Speak out!

BEGGAR

Oh! Sir! I've been a wicked woman—

[505]

MORTIMER

135 Nay, speak out, speak out—

BEGGAR

He flattered me and said
 What harvest it would bring us both, and so
 I parted with the child.

BEGGAR.
 Daughter! truly—
 But how's the day?—I fear, my little Boy,
 We've overslept ourselves.—Sirs, have you seen him?
 [*Offers to go.*]

495

MARMADUKE.
 I must have more of this;— you shall not stir
 An inch, till I am answered. Know you aught
 That doth concern this Herbert?

BEGGAR.

You are provoked,

And will misuse me, Sir!

MARMADUKE.

No trifling, Woman!—

OSWALD.

You are as safe as in a sanctuary;
 Speak.

500

MARMADUKE.

Speak!

BEGGAR.

He is a most hard-hearted Man.

MARMADUKE.

Your life is at my mercy.

BEGGAR.

Do not harm me,
 And I will tell you all!—You know not, Sir,
 What strong temptations press upon the Poor.

OSWALD.

Speak out.

BEGGAR.

Oh Sir, I've been a wicked Woman.

505

OSWALD.

Nay, but speak out!

BEGGAR.

He flattered me, and said
 What harvest it would bring us both; and so,
 I parted with the Child.

MORTIMER
With whom you parted?

BEGGAR
Matilda, as he calls her, but the girl
Is mine.

MORTIMER
Yours! Woman! are you Herbert's wife?

[510]

140
BEGGAR
Wife, Sir! his wife! not I; my husband, Sir,
Was of Kirkoswald—many a snowy winter
We've weathered out together.—Aye, poor Gilfrid!
He has been two years in his grave.

MORTIMER
Enough!

[514]

RIVERS
We've solved the riddle—hellish miscreant!

145
MORTIMER
Do you, good dame, repair to Liddisdale
And wait for my return; I'll meet you there.
You shall have justice.—Herbert is gone by,
But leave the rest to me.

RIVERS
A lucky woman!
Depart and think that you have done good service.

150
MORTIMER (*to himself*)
Eternal praises to the power that saved her!

[519]

RIVERS (*gives the Beggar money*)
Here's for your little boy—and when you christen him
I'll be his God-father.

BEGGAR
Oh Sir, you are merry with me.
In grange or farm this hundred scarcely owns
A dog that does not know me.—These good people,
For love of God I must not pass their doors.
But I will be back with my best speed; for you—
God bless and thank you, masters!

[525]

[Exit Beggar.]

MARMADUKE.
With whom you parted?

BEGGAR.
Idonea, as he calls her; but the Girl
Is mine.

MARMADUKE.
Yours, Woman! are you Herbert's wife?

510.

BEGGAR.
Wife, Sir! his wife—not I; my husband, Sir,
Was of Kirkoswald—many a snowy winter
We've weathered out together. My poor Gilfrid!
He has been two years in his grave.

MARMADUKE.
Enough.

OSWALD.
We've solved the riddle—Miscreant!

MARMADUKE.
Do you,
Good Dame, repair to Liddesdale and wait
For my return; be sure you shall have justice.

515

OSWALD.
A lucky woman!—go, you have done good service.

[Aside.]

MARMADUKE (*to himself*).
Eternal praises on the power that saved her!—

OSWALD (*gives her money*).
Here's for your little Boy—and when you christen him
I'll be his Godfather.

520

BEGGAR.
Oh Sir, you are merry with me.
In grange or farm this Hundred scarcely owns
A dog that does not know me.—These good Folks,
For love of God, I must not pass their doors;
But I'll be back with my best speed: for you—
God bless and thank you both, my gentle Masters.

525

[Exit Beggar.]

145 MH revised "repair good dame" to "good dame, repair" in 1799. In the Rough Note-book draft (32^v) Wordsworth seems to have had special difficulty in determining an appropriate meeting place for Mortimer and the Beggar. The base text gives Ravensburgh, and the alternatives considered are Delavale, Emildon, and Liddisdale on 32^v, as well as Merley on 33^r.

508 With whom you parted? Parted with whom? 1849
520 Boy! boy 1845-

MORRIMER (*after some time*)
Sinking, sinking,
And feel that I am sinking—would this body
Were quietly given back unto the earth
From whence the burthen came.

RIVERS (*aside*)
Pierced to the heart!

MORRIMER (*to himself*)
The cruel viper!—oh thou poor Matilda,
Now I *do* love thee.

RIVERS
Faith! I am thunderstruck.

MORRIMER
Where is she? holla! [*Calling the Beggar. She returns.*
(*Looking at her steadfastly in the face*)
You are Matilda's mother?

165 Nay, be not terrified—it does me good
To look upon you.

[1330]

RIVERS (*interposing*)
In a peasant's dress

You saw, who was it?

BEGGAR
Nay, I dare not speak—
He is a man—if it should come to his ears
I never shall be heard of more.

RIVERS
Lord Clifford—

BEGGAR
170 What can I do? Believe me, gentle Sirs!
I love her, though I dare not call her daughter.

[1335]

RIVERS
Lord Clifford! did you see him talk with Herbert?
BEGGAR
Yes, to my sorrow—under the great beech
At Herbert's door, and when he stood by the side

MARMADUKE (*to himself*).
The cruel Viper!—Poor devoted Maid,
Now I *do* love thee.

OSWALD.
I am thunderstruck.

MARMADUKE.
Where is she—holla!

[*Calling to the Beggar, who returns; he looks at her steadfastly.*
You are Idonea's Mother?—
Nay, be not terrified—it does me good
To look upon you.

530

OSWALD (*interrupting*).
In a peasant's dress

You saw, who was it?

BEGGAR.
Nay, I dare not speak;
He is a man, if it should come to his ears
I never shall be heard of more.

OSWALD.
Lord Clifford?

BEGGAR.
What can I do? believe me, gentle Sirs,
I love her, though I dare not call her daughter.

535

OSWALD.
Lord Clifford—did you see him talk with Herbert?

BEGGAR.
Yes, to my sorrow—under the great oak
At Herbert's door—and when he stood beside

158-160 These lines also appear in the Rough Notebook drafts for the deception, 41^v-42^r;
Morrimer returns to the same imagery on 42^v.
160 MH revised "it" to "the burthen" in 1799.
161-162 Cf. "Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee!" (*Osella*,
III.iii.90-91).

175 Of the blind man, he looked at the poor girl
With such a look—it makes me tremble, Sir,
To think of it—

[541]

RIVERS

Enough! you may depart.

MORTIMER (*to himself*)

180 Father! To God himself we cannot give
An holier name, and under such a mask
To lead a spirit spotless as the blessed
To that abhorred den of brutal vice!
The firm foundation of my life appears
To sink from under me. This business, Rivers,
Will be my ruin.—

[545]

ACT II

[Scene 1] *A Chamber in the Inn—RIVERS alone, rising from a
Table, as if he had been writing.*

RIVERS

They chose him for their chief!—I had a gnawing
More of contempt than hatred!—Shame on me,
‘Twas a dull spark—a most unnatural [?fire].
—It died the moment the air breathed upon it.
—These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
That haunt some barren island of the north,
Where if a famishing man stretch forth his hand
They think it is to feed them.—I have left him

[557]

[561]

181-183 Cf. the base text of the drafts for the deception in the Rough Notebook (42^y).
Two plot sketches in the Rough Notebook include events related to those that occur in Act
II. The early plot sketch for Act III (14^y) includes an early equivalent to II.ii. The revised
synopsis for the second act (18^y) indicates that Wordsworth had the eventual shape of Act II
firmly in mind by the time he made that entry, though the equivalent of II.ii is sketched out as
“Matilda and old Soldier.”

1-2 Compare Spiegelberg’s hostility to Karl Moor in Schiller’s play *The Robbers* (which
Wordsworth probably read in the translation by A. F. Tytler [London, 1792]) and Iago’s envy
of Cassio after Cassio’s promotion in *Othello*. Similar tensions are present among the thieves who
waylay and then adopt Caleb Williams (vol. III, chap. 1, and following): the villainous Gines
represents the naive generosity of the chivalrous Mr. Raymond. In this episode of *Caleb Williams*
Godwin’s source may well be Schiller.

3 The original reading was obscured by overwriting in 1841.
5-8 These lines combine two recurrent motifs, that of the bird-loving saint on an island
(St. Cuthbert, friend of St. Herbert of Derwentwater, and often linked with Herbert in the
play) and that of the famishing man (see especially III.v.165-167, IV.ii.63, and V.iii.255). The
image of the famishing man hoping, like Elijah, for sustenance from the skies first appears in
Wordsworth’s poetry in the description of the freezing farmer, *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), ll.
400-408; see II.iii.124-126 and III.iii.104-113.

The blind Man—at the silent Girl he looked
With such a look—it makes me tremble, Sir,
To think of it.

540

OSWALD.

Enough! you may depart.

MARMADUKE (*to himself*).

Father!—to God himself we cannot give
A holier name; and, under such a mask,
To lead a Spirit, spotless as the blessed,
To that abhorred den of brutish vice!—
Oswald, the firm foundation of my life
Is going from under me; these strange discoveries—
Looked at from every point of fear or hope,
Duty, or love—involvement, I feel, my ruin.

545

550

END OF FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE, *A Chamber in the Hostel—OSWALD alone, rising from a
Table on which he had been writing.*

OSWALD.

They chose *him* for their Chief!—what covert part
He, in the preference, modest Youth, might take,
I neither know nor care. The insult bred
More of contempt than hatred; both are flown;
That either e’er existed is my shame:
‘Twas a dull spark—a most unnatural fire
That died the moment the air breathed upon it.
—These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
That haunt some barren island of the north,
Where, if a famishing man stretch forth his hand,
They think it is to feed them. I have left him

555

560