

William Ellery Channing

THE LONELY ROAD.



No track had worn the lone deserted road,
Save where the Fox had leapt from wall to wall ;
There were the swelling, glittering piles of snow,
Up even with the walls, and save the Crow
Who lately had been pecking Barberries,
No other signs of life beyond ourselves.
We strayed along, beneath our feet the lane
Creaked at each pace, and soon we stood content
Where the old cellar of the house had been,
Out of which now a fruit-tree wags its top.
Some scraggy orchards hem the landscape round,
A forest of sad Apple-trees unpruned,
And then a newer orchard pet of him,
Who in his dotage kept this lonely place.

THE LONELY ROAD.

In this wild scene, and shut-in Orchard dell,
Men like ourselves, once dwelt by roaring fires,
Loved this still spot, nor had a further wish.
A little wall half falling bounds a square
Where choicer fruit-trees showed the Garden's pride,
Now crimsoned by the Sumach, whose red cones
Displace the colors of the cultured growth.
I know not how it is, that in these scenes
There is a desolation so complete,
It tarries with me after I have passed,
And the dense growth of woodland, or a sight
Of distant Cottages or landscapes wide,
Cannot obscure the dreary, cheerless thought.
But why should I remember those once there,
And think of childish voices, or that kind
Caressing hands of tender parents gone,
Have twined themselves in that soft golden hair,
All fled, and silent as an unlit Cave.
Why should I stand and muse upon their lives,
Who for me truly never had more life,
Than in the glancing mind's eye ; or in Fancy
Wear this irrelative form, thus fleeting.

THE LONELY ROAD.

I people the void scene with Fancy's eye,
Her children do not live too long for me,
They vibrate in the house whose walls I rear,
The mansion as themselves, the fugitives
Of my Intent in this soft Winter day.
Nor will I scatter these faint images,
Idle as shadows that the tall reeds cast
Over the silent ice, beneath the moon,
For in these lonely haunts where Fancy dwells,
And evermore creating weaves a veil
In which all this that we call life abides,
There must be deep retirement from the day,
And in these shadowy vistas we shall meet,
Sometime the very Phantom of ourselves. —
A long Farewell, thou dim and silent spot,
Where serious Winter sleeps, or the soft hour,
Of some half dreamy Autumn afternoon ;
And may no idle feet tread thy domain,
But only men to Contemplation vowed,
Still as ourselves, creators of the Past.
