

Lives with him, near the waterfall,
Upon the village common. 40

Beside their moss-grown hut of clay,
Not twenty paces from the door,
A scrap of land they have, but they
Are poorest of the poor.
This scrap of land he from the heath 45
Enclosed when he was stronger;
But what avails the land to them
Which he can till no longer?

Oft, working by her husband's side,
Ruth does what Simon cannot do; 50
For she, with scanty cause for pride,
Is stouter of the two.
And though you with your utmost skill
From labour could not wean them,
'Tis little, very little, all 55
That they can do between them.

Few months of life has he in store
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell. 60
My gentle Reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And now I fear that you expect
Some tale will be related.

O Reader! had you in your mind 65
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it. 70
It is no tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

One summer day I chanced to see
This old man doing all he could
To unearth the root of an old tree, 75
A stump of rotten wood.
The mattock totter'd in his hand;
So vain was his endeavour
That at the root of the old tree

He might have work'd for ever. 80

"You're overtask'd, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool," to him I said;
And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffer'd aid.
I struck, and with a single blow 85
The tangled root I sever'd,
At which the poor old man so long
And vainly had endeavour'd.

The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seem'd to run 90
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done.—
I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men 95
Has oftener left me mourning.