

**FATED TO BE FREE.  
THREE VOLS. VOL. I**

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**JEAN INGELOW**

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By JEAN INGELow

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## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A WATCHER OF LILIES . . . . .	1
II. THE LESSON . . . . .	25
III. GOLD, THE INCORRUPTIBLE WITNESS . . . . .	41
IV. SWARMS OF CHILDREN . . . . .	62
V. OF A FINE MAN AND SOME FOOLISH WOMEN . . . . .	84
VI. THE SHADOW OF A SHADE . . . . .	100
VII. AN OLD MAN DIGS A WELL . . . . .	116
VIII. THEY MEET AN AUTHOR . . . . .	136
IX. SIGNED "DANIEL MORTIMER,"—CANADA . . . . .	165
X. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES . . . . .	187
XI. WANTED A DESERT ISLAND . . . . .	209
XII. VALENTINE . . . . .	228
XIII. VENERABLE ANCIENTRY . . . . .	250

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## CHAPTER I.

### A WATCHER OF LILIES.

"Unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."—*Collect, English Communion Service.*

IN one of the south-western counties of England, some years ago, and in a deep, well-wooded valley where men made perry and cider, wandered little and read less, there was a hamlet with neither farm nor cottage in it, that had not stood two hundred and fifty years, and just beyond there was a church nearly double that age, and there were the mighty wrecks of two great oak-trees, said to be more ancient still.

Between them, winding like a long red rut, went the narrow road, and was so deeply cut into the soil that a horseman passing down it could see nothing of its bordering fields; but about fifty yards from the first great oak the land suddenly dipped, and showed on the left a steep cup-like glen, choked with trees, and

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only divided from the road by a few dilapidated stakes and palings, and a wooden gate, orange with the rust of lichens, and held together with ropes and bands.

A carriage-drive was visible on the other side of the gate, but its boundaries were half obliterated by the grass and weeds that had grown over it, and as it wound down into the glen it was lost among the trees. Nature, before it has been touched by man, is almost always beautiful, strong, and cheerful in man's eyes; but nature, when he has once given it his culture and then forsaken it, has usually an air of sorrow and helplessness. He has made it live the more by laying his hand upon it, and touching it with his life. It has come to relish of his humanity, and it is so flavoured with his thoughts, and ordered and permeated by his spirit, that if the stimulus of his presence is withdrawn it cannot for a long while do without him, and live for itself as fully and as well as it did before.

There was nothing to prevent a stranger from entering this place, and if he did so, its meaning very soon took hold of him; he perceived that he had walked into the world of some who were courting oblivion, steeping themselves in solitude, tempting

their very woods to encroach upon them, and so swathe them as in a mantle of secrecy which might cover their misfortunes, and win forgetfulness both for their faults and for their decline.

The glen was about three hundred yards across, and the trees which crowded it, and overflowed its steep side encroaching over the flat ground beyond, were chiefly maples and sycamores. Every sunbeam that shot in served to show its desolation. The place was encumbered with fallen branches, tangled brushwood, dead ferns; and wherever the little stream had spread itself there was a boggy hollow, rank with bulrushes, and glorious with the starry marsh marigold. But here and there dead trees stood upright, gaunt and white in their places, great swathes of bark hanging loose from their limbs, while crowds of young saplings, sickly for want of space and light, thrust up their heads towards the sunshine, and were tied together and cumbered in their struggle by climbing ropes of ivy, and long banners of the wild black vine.

The ring of woodland was not deep, the domain was soon traversed, and then stepping out into a space covered with rank meadow grass, one might see the house which should have been its heart.