

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF
POLITICAL ECONOMY.
NO. II. THE HILL
AND THE VALLEY. A TALE**

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Illustrations of Political Economy. No. II. The Hill and the Valley. A Tale by Harriet Martineau

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HARRIET MARTINEAU

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No. II.

THE HILL AND THE VALLEY.

A TALE.

BY HARRIET MMARTINEAU,
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YEARS OF YOUTH,' &c.

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T H E
HILL AND THE VALLEY.

CHAPTER I.

EVERY MAN HIS WHIM.

AMONG the hills, in a wild district of South Wales, stood a dwelling, known to few and avoided by most of those whose curiosity had led them to inquire concerning the inmates. This cottage was too humble in its appearance to attract frequent notice, and there was so much difficulty in reaching it, that no call but that of business was likely to bring any stranger to its threshold. A narrow path led up the hills to the foot of a steep flight of steps, made of rude stones, placed not very securely. At the top of a slippery bank above these

steps, was a gate, too high to be easily climbed, and too well tethered to be quickly opened. When one or the other difficulty, however, was overcome, the path lay direct to the porch of the cottage, on the bench of which lay sometimes a newspaper or a tobacco-pipe, and sometimes a ricketty work-basket, full of undarned stockings, according as the master or mistress of the cottage had been sitting there to enjoy the air. No place could be more retired than this porch, for it was nearly surrounded by garden and orchard ground, and was screened by a thick hedge of elder on the side where the gate was placed.

The master of this abode was John Armstrong, a hale man of seventy-nine. Its mistress was Margaret Blake, his housekeeper, a middle-aged woman, but as old-fashioned in her habits and appearance as her venerable companion. They were both very strange people in the eyes of every body who knew them, being not only unsociable with strangers,

but preserving, as it appeared, an almost perpetual silence towards each other. They never sat in the same room, except at meal-times. Old Armstrong avoided the porch unless Margaret was busy within ; and she looked out to see that he was gardening, before she brought her work-basket out into the sunshine. It was reported by the only person who had the opportunity by invitation of witnessing their domestic habits, that Armstrong always read the newspaper at breakfast, mused at dinner-time, and studied the Farmer's Journal at supper ; so that Margaret did not forget her own language was a wonder to every body ; especially as it was known that she had parted with her parrot because Armstrong had as great a dislike to tame birds as to dogs and cats. There was music enough, however, to break the silence which Margaret's own voice seldom disturbed. The little orchard was full of singing-birds, whose notes were far pleasanter than those of any chattering parrot.