

# The Hermit of Mont-Blanc

By Mrs. Mary Robinson

High, on the Solitude of Alpine Hills,  
O'er-topping the grand imag'ry of Nature,  
Where one eternal winter seem'd to reign,  
An HERMIT'S threshold, carpetted with moss,  
Diversified the Scene. Above the flakes  
Of silv'ry snow, full many a modest flow'r  
Peep'd through its icy veil, and blushing ope'd  
Its variegated hues; The ORCHISs sweet,  
The bloomy CISTUS, and the fragrant branch  
Of glossy MYRTLE. In his rushy cell,  
The lonely ANCHORET consum'd his days,  
Unnotic'd, and unblest. In early youth,  
Cross'd in the fond affections of his soul  
By false Ambition, from his parent home  
He, solitary, wander'd; while the Maid  
Whose peerless beauty won his yielding heart  
Pined in monastic horrors! Near his sill  
A little cross he rear'd, where, prostrate low  
At day's pale glimpse, or when the setting Sun  
Tissued the western sky with streamy gold,  
His Orisons he pour'd, for her, whose hours  
Were wasted in oblivion. Winters pass'd  
And Summers faded, slow, uncheerly all  
To the lone HERMIT'S sorrows: For, still, Love  
A dark, though unpolluted altar, rear'd  
On the white waste of wonders!

From the peak  
Which mark'd his neighb'ring Hut, his humid Eye  
Oft wander'd o'er the rich expanse below;  
Oft trac'd the glow of vegetating Spring,  
The full-blown Summer spkndours, and the hue  
Of tawny scenes Autumnal: Vineyards vast,  
Clothing the upland scene, and spreading wide  
The promised tide nectareous; while for him  
The liquid lapse of the slow brook was seen  
Flashing amid the trees, its silv'ry wave!  
Far distant, the blue mist of waters rose  
Veiling the ridgy outline, faintly grey,  
Blended with clouds, and shutting out the Sun.  
The Seasons still revolv'd, and still was he  
By all forgotten, save by her, whose breast

Sigh'd in responsive sadness to the gale  
That swept her prison turrets. Five long years,  
Had seen his graces wither ere his Spring  
Of life was wasted. From the social scenes  
Of human energy an alien driv'n,  
He almost had forgot the face of Man.—  
No voice had met his ear, save, when perchance  
The Pilgrim wand'rer, or the Goatherd Swain,  
Bewilder'd in the starless midnight hour  
Implored the HERMIT'S aid, the HERMIT'S pray'rs;  
And nothing loath by pity or by pray'r,  
Was he, to save the wretched. On the top  
Of his low rushy Dome, a tinkling bell  
Oft told the weary Trav'ler to approach  
Fearless of danger. The small silver sound  
In quick vibrations echo'd down the dell  
To the dim valley's quiet, while the breeze  
Slept on the glassy LEMAN. That he past  
His melancholy days, an alien Man  
From all the joys of social intercourse,  
Alone, unpitied, by the world forgot!

His Scrip each morning bore the day's repast  
Gather'd on summits, mingling with the clouds,  
From whose bleak altitude the Eye look'd down  
While fast the giddy brain was rock'd by fear.  
Oft would he start from visionary rest  
When roaming wolves their midnight chorus howl'd,  
Or blasts infuriate shatter'd the white cliffs,  
While the huge fragments, rifled by the storm,  
Plung'd to the dell below. Oft would he sit  
In silent sadness on the jutting block  
Of snow-encrusted ice, and, shudd'ring mark  
(Amid the wonders of the frozen world)  
Dissolving pyramids, and threatening peaks,  
Hang o'er his hovel, terribly Sublime.

And oft, when Summer breath'd ambrosial gales,  
Soft sailing o'er the waste of printless dew  
Or twilight gossamer, his pensive gaze  
Trac'd the swift storm advancing, whose broad wing  
Blacken'd the rushy dome of his low Hut;  
While the pale lightning smote the pathless top  
Of tow'ring CENIS, scatt'ring high and wide  
A mist of fleecy Snow. Then would he hear,  
(While MEM'RY brought to view his happier days)

The tumbling torrent, bursting wildly forth  
From its thaw'd prison, sweep the shaggy cliff  
Vast and Stupendous! strength'ning as it fell,  
And delving, 'mid the snow, a cavern rude!  
So liv'd the HERMIT, like an hardy Tree  
Plac'd on a mountain's solitary brow,  
And destin'd, thro' the Seasons, to endure  
Their wond'rous changes. To behold the face  
Of ever-varying Nature, and to mark  
In each grand lineament, the work of GOD!  
And happier he, in total Solitude  
Than the poor toil-worn wretch, whose ardent Soul  
That GOD has nobly organiz'd, but taught,  
For purposes unknown, to bear the scourge  
Of sharp adversity, and vulgar pride.  
Happier, O! happier far, than those who feel,  
Yet live amongst the unfeeling! feeding still  
The throbbing heart, with anguish, or with Scorn.

One dreary night when Winter's icy breath  
Half petrified the scene, when not a star  
Gleam'd o'er the black infinity of space,  
Sudden, the HERMIT started from his couch  
Fear-struck and trembling! Ev'ry limb was shook  
With painful agitation. On his cheek  
The blanch'd interpreter of horror mute  
Sat terribly impressive! In his breast  
The ruddy fount of life convulsive flow'd  
And his broad eyes, fix'd motionless as death,  
Gaz'd vacantly aghast! His feeble lamp  
Was wasting rapidly; the biting gale  
Pierc'd the thin texture of his narrow cell;  
And Silence, like a fearful centinel  
Marking the peril which awaited near,  
Conspir'd with sullen Night, to wrap the scene  
In tenfold horrors. Thrice he rose; and thrice  
His feet recoil'd; and still the livid flame  
Lengthen'd and quiver'd as the moaning wind  
Pass'd thro' the rushy crevice, while his heart  
Beat, like the death-watch, in his shudd'ring breast.

Like the pale Image of Despair he sat,  
The cold drops pacing down his hollow cheek,  
When a deep groan assail'd his startled ear,  
And rous'd him into action. To the sill  
Of his low hovel he rush'd forth, (for fear

Will sometimes take the shape of fortitude,  
And force men into bravery) and soon  
The wicker bolt unfasten'd; The swift blast,  
Now unrestrain'd, flew by; and in its course  
The quiv'ring lamp extinguish'd, and again  
His soul was thrill'd with terror. On he went,  
E'en to the snow-fring'd margin of the cragg,  
Which to his citadel a platform made  
Slipp'ry and perilous! 'Twas darkness, all!  
All, solitary gloom!—The concave vast  
Of Heav'n frown'd chaos; for all varied things  
Of air, and earth, and waters, blended, lost  
Their forms, in blank oblivion! Yet not long  
Did Nature wear her sable panoply,  
For, while the HERMIT listen'd, from below  
A stream of light ascended; spreading round  
A partial view of trackless solitudes;  
And mingling voices seem'd, with busy hum,  
To break the spell of horrors. Down the steep  
The HERMIT hasten'd, when a shriek of death  
Re-echoed to the valley. As he flew,  
(The treach'rous pathway yielding to his speed,)  
Half hoping, half despairing, to the scene  
Of wonder-waking anguish, suddenly  
The torches were extinct; and second night  
Came doubly hideous, while the hollow tongues  
Of cavern'd winds, with melancholy sound  
Increas'd the HERMIT's fears. Four freezing hours  
He watch'd and pray'd: and now the glimm'ring dawn  
Peer'd on the Eastern Summits; (the blue light  
Shedding cold lustre on the colder brows  
Of Alpine desarts;) while the filmy wing  
Of weeping Twilight, swept the naked plains  
Of the Lombardian landscape.

On his knees  
The ANCHORET blest Heav'n, that he had 'scap'd  
The many perilous and fearful falls  
Of waters wild and foamy, tumbling fast  
From the shagg'd altitude. But, ere his pray'rs  
Rose to their destin'd Heav'n, another sight,  
Than all preceding far more terrible,  
Palsied devotion's ardour. On the Snow,  
Dappled with ruby drops, a track was made  
By steps precipitate; a rugged path  
Down the steep frozen chasm had mark'd the fate  
Of some night traveller, whose bleeding form

Had toppled from the Summit. Lower still  
The ANCHORET descended, 'till arrived  
At the first ridge of silv'ry battlements,  
Where, lifeless, ghastly, paler than the snow  
On which her cheek reposd, his darling Maid  
Slept in the dream of Death! Frantic and wild  
He clasp'd her stiff'ning form, and bath'd with tears  
The lilies of her bosom,—icy cold— Yet beautiful and spotless.

Now, afar

The wond'ring HERMIT heard the clang of arms  
Re-echoing from the valley: the white cliffs  
Trembled as though an Earthquake shook their base  
With terrible concussion! Thund'ring peals  
From warfare's brazen throat, proclaim'd th' approach  
Of conquering legions: onward they extend  
Their dauntless columns! In the foremost group  
A Ruffian met the HERMIT'S startled Eyes  
Like Hell's worst Demon! For his murd'rous hands  
Were smear'd with gore; and on his daring breast  
A golden cross, suspended, bore the name  
Of his ill-fated Victim!—ANCHORET!  
Thy VESTAL Saint, by his unhallow'd hands  
Torn from RELIGION'S Altar, had been made  
The sport of a dark Fiend, whose recreant Soul  
Had sham'd the cause of Valour! To his cell  
The Soul-struck Exile turn'd his trembling feet,  
And after three lone weeks, of pain and pray'r,  
Shrunk from the scene of Solitude—and DIED!