

The Settlers at Home - Harriet Martineau



A passage from the book... This swamp was long a very dismal place. Fish, and water-birds, and rats inhabited it: and here and there stood the hut of a fowler; or a peat-stack raised by the people who lived on the hills round, and who obtained their fuel from the peat-lands in the swamp. There were also, sprinkled over the district, a few very small houses-cells belonging to the Abbey of Saint Mary, at York. To these cells some of the monks from Saint Marys had been fond of retiring, in old times, for meditation and prayer, and doing good in the district round; but when the soil became so swampy as to give them the ague as often as they paid a visit to these cells, the monks left off their practice of retiring hither; and their little dwellings stood empty, to be gradually overgrown with green moss and lank weeds, which no hand cleared away. At last a Dutchman, having seen what wonders were done in his own country by good draining, thought he could render this district fit to be inhabited and cultivated; and he made a bargain with the king about it. After spending much money, and taking great pains, he succeeded. He drew the waters off into new channels, and kept them there by sluices, and by carefully watching the embankments he had raised. The land which was left dry was manured and cultivated, till, instead of a reedy and mossy swamp, there were fields of clover and of corn, and meadows of the finest grass, with cattle and sheep grazing in large numbers. The dwellings that were still standing were made into farm-houses, and new farmhouses were built. A church here, and a chapel there was cleaned, and warmed, and painted, and opened for worship; and good roads crossed the district into all the counties near.

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