

I don't usually mind walking in rain, but on this occasion the rain was coming down in torrents and I still had ten miles to go. That was why I stopped at the first house, a house about a mile from the village ahead of me, and looked over the garden gate. The house didn't look promising, for I saw at once that it was empty. All the windows were shut, and not one of them had a blind or a curtain. Through one on the ground floor I saw bare walls, a bare mantelpiece, and an empty grate. The garden too was wild, the beds full of weeds: you would hardly have known it for a garden but for the fence, the vestiges of straight paths, and the lilac-bushes which were in full bloom and sent showers of water to the grass every time the wind tossed them.

You can imagine, then, that I was surprised when a man strolled out from the lilacs and came slowly towards me down the path. What was surprising was not merely that he was there, but that he was strolling aimlessly about, bare-headed and without a mackintosh, in the drenching rain.

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