



A STORY OF PROVIDENCE.

THE year 1798 will always be memorable in the history of Ireland. The spirit of insurrection had overspread the country. The "rebellion" was at length suppressed by the strong arm of military force, but not without great bloodshed, and much social and domestic misery.

Among the fugitives was a man named Dalton. His youth had been marked by profligacy. He had induced Elizabeth Hardy, the subject of our present sketch, to consent to be his wife. Their union was alike brief and unhappy. Joining in the rebellion, when the authorities triumphed, he became a marked man, and with difficulty escaped to America.

Dalton's wife, virtually a widow, and destined never to see his face again, returned to her native district in Tyrone. Here she resumed her maiden name, lived for a time with a widowed sister, but ultimately she rented a farm of two or three acres, with a small cabin, where she went to live.

The crisis of her spiritual history was now at hand. Up to this period she had been living in carelessness and unbelief. But her new residence lay near to that of a Christian farmer. To his house, as well as to other families in the district, the Presbyterian minister was wont to come once a year. Elizabeth Hardy, hearing that Mr. M. was about to visit at the farmer's house, asked leave to be present, and her request was readily granted.

The minister came—a grave and godly man; his conversation rich with the savour of Divine things, his counsels weighty, his appeals to the conscience faithful, and the prayers with which he crowned and closed his visit full of unction and fervour.

What Betty Hardy (her familiar name among her peasant friends) that day heard, appeared to be specially a message from God, and produced most important and lasting results. Without delay, she formed the resolution of leaving the place of her residence, casting herself on the care of God to provide for her, in order that she might enjoy Gospel ordinances.

Elizabeth Hardy, having been afflicted with lameness from childhood, had, by reason of distance, been deprived hitherto of the opportunity of repairing to the house of God on the Lord's day. She had indeed been taught to read, and possessed a Bible; but up to the day of the minister's visit at the farmer's house,

she had never heard from the lips of one of God's messengers of the way of life.

Becoming, for the reasons just stated, a resident in the market town, she took a small house in a back lane, and occupied it for three years. Here she managed what is called in Ireland a little "huckstery," a shop requiring no licence, in which she supplied travellers coming to market with oaten cake, butter, eggs, and tea. All this while she was a constant attendant at the sanctuary, and was early received into church fellowship, on the most satisfactory evidence of her genuine piety.

While residing in her solitary apartment, she was on one occasion robbed and almost murdered. Three men called one winter night and asked for refreshment. When asked to pay for the provisions supplied them, one of the villains grasped her throat with such violence that she fell on the floor to all appearance dead. The party thereupon put more eggs on the fire, to eat before their departure.

While sitting around the embers, they heard from the adjacent room, where the poor woman lay upon the floor, a "fetch," or long-drawn sigh. One of them rose, with a candle in his hand, and stooped over her. Opening her eyes, and seeing the wretch, she gave an involuntary shriek; and alarmed, but not without carrying off a considerable amount of plunder, they fled.

Providence thus protected the "lone woman." But her perils were not over. She took a niece to live with her for greater security. A rumour, however, spread abroad that she knew the robbers; and they, fearing prosecution, came back to complete their dark and cruel designs.

One of them first drove in the back window, a leaden one, with his shoulder; and the next moment two outside thrust him in upon the bed. It was three o'clock in the morning, and Elizabeth Hardy, with her niece at her side, was buried in profound slumber.

The robber instantly grasped her throat, in order to strangle her. Finding there were two persons to be dealt with, he applied a hand to the neck of each. They were, however, enabled to prevent the accomplishment of his fell purpose, and raised a cry of "Murder!"

Instantly a shout of aid and rescue was heard from without; the robbers decamped, and were never more heard of.