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THE KELP-GATHERER.

The stranger who wanders along the terrific masses of crag that overhang the green and foaming waters of the Atlantic, on the western coasts of Ireland, feels a melancholy interest excited in his mind, as he turns aside from the more impressive grandeurs of the scene, and gazes on the small stone heaps that are scattered over the moss on which he treads. They are the graves of the nameless few whose bodies have been from time to time ejected from the bosom of the ocean, and cast upon those lonely crags to startle the fisherman with their ghastly and disfigured bulk. Here they meet, at the hands of the pitying mountaineer, the last offices of Christian charity—a grave in the nearest soft earth, with no other ceremonial than the humble peasant's prayer. Here they lie, uncoffined, unlamented, unclaimed by mourning friends, startling like sudden spectres of death from the depths of the ocean, to excite a wild fear, a passing thought of pity, a vain inquiry in the hamlet, and then sink into the earth in mystery and in silence, to be no more remembered on its surface.

The obscurity which envelopes the history of those unhappy strangers affords a subject to the speculative traveller, on which he may give free play to the wings of his imagination. Few, indeed, can pass these deserted sepulchres without endeavouring for a moment to penetrate in fancy the darkness which enshrouds the fate of their mouldering tenants; without beholding the progress of the ruin that struck from beneath the voyager's feet, the firm and lofty fabric to which he had confidently trusted his existence, without hearing the shrieks

of the despairing crew, and the stern and horrid burst of roused-up ocean, as it dealt the last stroke upon the groaning timbers of the wreck, and scattered the whole pile far and wide, in countless atoms, upon the boiling surface of the deep. And again, without turning in thought to the far away homes, at which the tale of the wanderers was never told—to the pale young widow that dreamed herself still a wife, and lived on, from morn to morn, in the fever of a vain suspense—to the helpless parent, that still hoped for the offices of filial kindness from the hand that was now mouldering in a distant grove; and to the social fire-side, over whose evening pastimes the long silence of an absent friend had thrown a gloom, that the certainty of woe or gladness could never remove.

Among those nameless tombs, within the space of the last few years, the widow of a fisherman, named Reason, was observed to spend a great portion of her time. Her husband had died young, perishing in a sudden storm, which swept his canoe from the coast side into the waste of the sea beyond it; and his wife was left to inhabit a small cottage near the crags, and to support, by the labour of her hands, an only child, who was destined to inherit little more than the blessing, the virtue, and the affections of his parent. The poor widow endeavoured to procure a subsistence for her boy and for herself, by gathering the kelp which was thrown upon the crags, and which was burned, for the purpose of manufacturing soap from its ashes: while the youth employed his yet unformed strength in tilling the small garden, that was confined by a quickset hedge, at their cottage side. They were fondly attached, and toiled incessantly to obtain the means of comfort, rather for ease