

THE WIDOW AND HER SON.

To us there are few things that appear more melancholy or more affecting than the ruins of a deserted dwelling house, which the hand of time has unroofed and laid prostrate. There is, we think, something impressive, sadly impressive, in its cold, desolate apartments, now exposed to the rain and the fogs of heaven, its eyeless windows, and its dilapidated doorway—nay, there is an interest excited even by the traces of the fastenings of the clapboard on the wall, and of the willow fire in the chill, gaping, and ruinous chimney. All, all, speak forcibly of decay, and tell of the transitoriness of the things of this ephemeral world:

In contemplating such scenes as this—and once, perhaps, the feelings we have alluded to—the imagination sets to work, and paints all sorts of the happy groups that once assembled around the then cheerful, but now cold and desolate hearth, or recalls the joyous laugh of the deserted mansion's young inmates, with all the hilarious din and bustle of a numerous and happy family; or, mayhap, it may dwell on the hopes and fears of their elders, now both terminated for ever. And the reverie is wound up by the sad inquiry—"Where are they all now?" And the query is answered by a gust of wind rushing, with a melancholy sound, through the deserted apartments, and waving in its progress, the tall grass and nettles with which they are overgrown.

Nor are we sure that these feelings and associations are confined to the ruins of houses of note alone, to the deserted mansions of the great or the wealthy. In our own country, at any rate, we are certain they are not; we have felt them all and with equal force, when contemplating the ruins of a cottage; and on no occasion were we more under their influence, than when viewing the remains of a humble domicile as that we recalled to, in the course of an excursion, last summer, through the wilds of Nithsdale. But, then, we must confess, there was, nay, an affecting one, connected with the lonely dwelling, which might, nay, which we have added to the interest with which we contemplated its ruins. These ruins, consisting of one gable, and a small portion of the side walls, together with the remains of a low, loose stone dyke, that once formed the boundary of the little garden or 'kail yard,'

which was attached to the house, are situated in a remote sequestered spot in the district above named.

At the period of the story we are now about to relate to our readers, the little cottage of which we have spoken, was inhabited by a widow woman of the name of Riddel, and an only child, a son, of about thirteen years of age.

Mrs. Riddel's husband who was now dead several years, was a poor but most industrious and pious man, who wrought at such country work as the neighborhood afforded. His gains were, it will readily be believed, but moderate; yet a frugal, abstemious, and exceedingly temperate life, enabled him to purchase the cottage he inhabited, with the garden attached to it; and, in time, to add to these possessions a cow. But, beyond this, the poor man was not permitted to increase his store. Death cut short his days, and left the widow and her son to reap the benefit of his prudence and industry; and no small matter was this found, when there was none other to assist them. The cow, the cottage, and the garden, were to them great riches. And thankful to her God was the widow, for the mercies He had bestowed on her; not the least of which was the happiness she found in her boy, who was, to her, all that she could wish. James was, indeed, such a son as a mother might be proud of. He was mild, dutiful, yet bold and active, and gave promise of being more than usually handsome. He loved his mother with the most sincere and devoted affection; and though only in his thirteenth year, earned nearly the wages of a full grown man; and, any who had seen the delight and exultation expressed in his eye, as he poured his weekly wages into his mother's, they would have felt assured that these were the happiest moments of his life.

Thus, what with the little property she possessed, and the earnings of her son, Widow Riddel's lonely cottage presented as pleasing a picture of comfort, in humble way, as might anywhere be seen; nor could two happier beings be found within the county—we might extend it to the kingdom—than the worthy widow and her son. But inscrutable are the ways of Providence—dark and inscrutable, indeed, since they permitted all