

avoid taking more particular notice of his personal appearance. He was tall, gigantically tall—upwards, I should say, of five feet seven. Broad shoulders, which seemed adapted to support the weight of mightiest monarchies, suspending from them brawny arms, furnished at the extremities with hands of prodigious size; legs of extremely muscular appearance, which would have been eminently handsome had it not been that the knees, through some unaccountable sympathy with each other, had accustomed themselves to the very closest proximity which is compatible with the power of progression; and all surmounted by a head whose thick curling locks, now grizzled with the first snows of time, hung in wild profusion over the collar of what had at one time evidently been a coat, completed the *tout ensemble* of a figure at once lordly and attractive, at once homely and sublime!

Deeper and deeper did we advance into the sylvan wilderness—higher and higher rose my expectation of a “feast of tears.” I could guess, with the clear-sighted certainty of a sympathetic soul, that my companion was no ordinary man; that his innermost being had been harassed by the most intolerable of woes; and that in silence, in solitude, and in secret, in the depths of caves, and the umbrageousness of woods, he nursed the recollections of the severest anguish, the bitterest distress. Nor was I mistaken in these expectations. The stranger suddenly paused and said—

“Here is the home which my miseries have left me enter, and may such sorrows as I have encountered never lay their weighty burdens on the wild boundings of your young and gallant bosom.”

“Stranger!” I replied, “my eyes are surely blinded with the streams of sympathy, for I see not your home.”

“Not see my home! Seest thou not this stone indented with the pressure of my aching head? That is my pillow. Seest thou not this mossy bank, where the rank herbage has spread its wild luxuriance? That is my couch.—Mark’st thou not those Patagonian toad-stools stretching their vast longitude to the morning sun? These are the furniture of my chamber. This well—thou seest it—bubbling in perpetual freshness from the bosom of the rock? That, oh, stranger! is my cellar and my wash-hand basin.”

“Simple furniture!” I exclaimed—“admirable apartments! Here no intruding landlord interrupts the continuity of your sorrows, by tendering his weekly bill; no roof to require new slating; no floor to be repaired. If thou, oh stranger, wilt allow me I shall be happy to be your neighbor, and to establish myself in similar lodgings to these, upon the same melancholy and economical terms.”

“Try it not,” replied the stranger; “unless your woe is equal in intensity to mine, your enjoyment in such a scene as this would be temporary as the morning dew.”

“My woe,” said I, “is pretty considerable.”

“But what is your woe to mine?” Here the venerable recluse paused, and after groaning deeply three times, proceeded in a more collected tone of voice—“Your woe, whatever it may be, is as dust weighed against a mountain—as a gossamer, which weaves its filmy web from bush to bush, placed in the oppo-

site scale to the hugest whale that soothes the fever of his blood by rubbing its prodigious back upon an iceberg in the Polar Sea, when placed in competition with mine! What is the loss of friends, if death has taken them in the ordinary way?—What even the falsehood of a beloved one, if for her fickleness you have not to blame yourself? What are these—what is all—what is any thing compared to the unpronounceable and unfathomable distress which it has been mine for many a long year to endure?”

“I confess,” I replied, “the superiority of your woes; but suffer me to enjoy the narrative of your distress, that I may refresh myself this sultry morning with a torrent of tears.”

“Tears!” exclaimed the old man, jumping many feet into the air, for his activity was the most wonderful I ever saw—“There!—there!—how darest thou recall to the palpitating bosom the cause of all my misery? but pardon me, young soldier, for, from your noble bearing, I perceive you must have been at least a lieutenant, if not even a captain in the gory field. Pardon me—you know not what a pang you have shot through my heart!”

He took from his pocket a handkerchief, which, like many a matron reduced, alas! to poverty, bore evident marks of having seen better days; and having spread it on his knees, as if to be ready when he required it, he made preparations to commence his narrative. With handkerchief in hand I set myself to listen and such an hour of sorrowing exultation, and exhilarating distress, it has rarely been my lot to enjoy, or suffer.

“My name is Gribble,” he began—“my christian appellation, Timothy—my country, England—my county, Devon—”

“A countryman!” I exclaimed—“I, too, was born on Tamar’s flowery banks.”

“From earliest youth of a melancholy and musing disposition, I shunned the usual enjoyments of my years, and lived in a world of my own, which was peopled with all that was beautiful and heroic, delicious and divine. The library was my chief delight—my study, romance—my enjoyment, sorrow—to laugh was horror—paradise to weep! This went on for many years. What was it to me that people wondered at my manner of life! What though my father scowled on me, and wished me to employ my talents in the hardware line, instead of snivelling, as he basely called it, over fictitious woe! He little knew the ardor of my soul. Rather than be deprived of my rapturous power of tears—rather, far rather, would I have had the demand for pokers, tongs, gridirons and sauce-pans entirely to have ceased. Rather would I have had no customer visit the paternal shop, than forego for one hour the pleasure of indulging my feelings over some narrative of distress! As time passed on, although I could not conceal from myself that the vain and frivolous, as well as the considerate and solemn, disapproved of this manner of passing my youth, I found that, for this preference of the miserable over and gladsome, I was not alone. No!—the loveliest of her sex was as fond of the indulgence of her grief as I was; and such a congeniality of disposition drew so close between us the bonds of admiration, that in the earliest flush of manhood, e’er I had numbered three-and-thirty summers, I