

A Mother Deserted by her own Children.

'All day long the patient oxen had drawn the wagon over a sandy plain, with the burning sun beating down upon them. The men too, had toiled on in the heat without having had a drop of water; and when night overtook them, they were compelled to lie down without having found a pool at which to quench their raging thirst.

'Mr. Moffat arose very early in the morning, for he could not sleep, and leaving the rest of the party to follow with the wagon, went forward with one man to try and find water. After passing some hills, and walking a long weary way over the plain, they saw in the distance smoke curling upwards from among the bushes.

'How welcome was the sight! Where there was smoke, there must be fire; where there was fire, there must be some one to kindle it; where there was a human creature, there must be surely water; perhaps, even, there was a kraal built near some pleasant pool.

'Mr. Moffat and his companion hopefully quickened their steps, thinking thankfully of the water they should shortly drink. As they approached the bushes, they were startled to see, by the foot-prints on the sand, that lions had been there but a very short time before. Their guns were quietly lying far behind in the waggon. They felt almost afraid to venture further, but there in front was the peaceful smoke still rising, and without water they must die; so on they went.

'The smoke was reached in safety. No village was near, not even a hut or a man; but, crouching down on the ground by the fire whose smoke had been seen so far off, was an old woman—a woman so old, and so very thin and weak, that, when she saw the strangers coming, she tried in vain to rise. She appeared extremely frightened, too, especially at Mr. Moffat's white face and strange dress. He spoke kindly and soothingly to her in her own language, and said, "My mother, fear not; we are friends; we will do you no harm." For a while the poor creature seemed too much afraid to speak; but after he had talked to her for a time, and shown her by his behaviour that there was no cause for alarm, Mr. Moffat asked her who she was, and how she came to be in so desolate a place alone, with no one to be kind or attentive to her.

'She answered, "I am a woman; I have been here four days! My children have left me here to die!"

"Your children?" exclaimed Mr. Moffat.

"Yes," she said; "my own children: my three sons and two daughters. They

have gone away to yonder blue mountain, and have left me here to die."

"And, pray, why did they leave you?" asked Mr. Moffat.

'Spreading out her bony hands, she answered, "I am old, you see; and therefore I am no longer able to serve them when they kill game. I am too feeble to help in carrying the flesh; I am not able to gather wood for their fires; and I can no longer carry their children on my back as I used to do."

'Does this sad account make you sad?—It is all true; and Mr. Moffat wept as he gazed upon this deserted mother, and listened to what she told him.

'He asked her again, if she was not afraid of the lions, and said he was surprised they had not devoured her, so close had he seen their footprints.

"She was so thin," she replied, "that there was nothing on her bones for the lions to eat, and they did not take the trouble to touch her."

'Just then the wagon, which had followed Mr. Moffat, came in sight, and the poor creature was greatly alarmed, fancying it was some dreadful animal. Mr. Moffat assured her it was not alive, and could do her no harm, and said, as he could not bear to leave her alone, he would put her in and take care of her.

'Upon hearing this, she became so terrified that Mr. Moffat was afraid she would die, and did not know what to do. It was evident they could not take her with them in the wagon, and, as Mr. Moffat and his companions were becoming delirious for want of water, it was as evident that they could not stay. They collected wood to replenish her fire, gave her some dried meat, some tobacco, a knife and a few other things, and telling her to keep a good fire, lest the lions should attempt to steal her meat, they went away, promising to come again on their return.

'On the way back Mr. Moffat remembered his promise, and looked for the old woman. She was nowhere to be seen; and, months afterwards, he heard, from a man who visited the missionary station, that the woman's sons had noticed the waggon near the spot, and had gone to see what the people in the waggon had done to their mother. Finding the strangers had given her food, and hearing from her of the white man that was one of them, they fancied Mr. Moffat must be a great chief, who would come and punish them for treating their mother so cruelly; therefore they carried her home again, and took care of her for the remainder of her life.

'Is not this a shocking story? How differently you treat your mother! Your willing little feet run to fetch whatever she