

## THE TALE OF A RECLUSE.

BY W. P. C.

ONE lovely day in autumn, wearied with the confinement of my room, I threw aside books and papers, and whistling to my dog, sallied forth for a long walk across the fields, and through the woods. The sky was clear, the air balmy and serene; and as I passed quickly from stile to stile, I heartily enjoyed its invigorating freshness. Engaged in the most agreeable reflections on country life, I walked on, scarcely regarding the distance I had already traversed. At length, becoming somewhat fatigued with my exertions, I sought the shade of a wide-spreading elm that grew hard by, purposing to rest awhile, and then retrace my course. Ajax, less exhausted than his master, chased the nimble squirrels, that ever and anon flitting from fence to fence, and tree to tree, chirped forth defiance of his utmost efforts. While watching my noble follower's movements, I heeded not the sound of approaching footsteps, till the dog himself turned around barking fiercely. Presently the figure of a man emerged from the bushes at a little distance, and advanced towards me. Ajax had evidently a strong inclination to spring upon him, but, obeying my signal, he crouched at my feet quietly enough, though he continued to regard the intruder with looks of suspicion.

I knew him very well; he was one of the oldest inhabitants of the country, somewhat singular in his manners, and by no means prepossessing in appearance. His habitation was a hut, built some miles from every other abode of man. There he spent his days and nights alone, except when chance brought some weary hunter to his door, or when necessity compelled him to visit the nearest village, there to purchase, with the produce of his daily toil, the simple clothing that he needed. No one knew whence he came, but for many years he had dwelt thus, throwing around himself an air of mystery, that lent a kind of veneration to the respect that others paid him.

During one of his visits to our village, I had it in my power to render him some slight service. Thus commenced our acquaintance. I found him a man possessed of varied information, and of a disposition by no means so harsh or misanthropic as I had imagined. How he had acquired a love

for the solitary life he led, I much desired to learn, but all my interrogatories on that head were evaded, as if the subject were too painful to be dwelt upon. I had never yet visited his residence, but reflecting now that it could not be far away, I rose with the intention of accompanying him thither. He greeted me warmly, and when I asked the permission I desired, hesitated not a moment in giving it.

Our way lay across a strip of woodland, where the dense foliage effectually precluded the earth from receiving a single ray of the sun, even when at its meridian. Beyond this, in the midst of a clearance, some acres in extent, stood old Abram's home—a solitary, gloomy, and desolate place for a human being to live in. The interior, however, contained some volumes of very ancient date, the solace doubtless of the recluse's leisure hours. An object on the rude table at once attracted my attention. It was the miniature of a beautiful young girl. The colors still fresh and lively, exhibited to advantage the antiquated style of dress, rendering the piece particularly interesting from its contrast with the fashions of a later day.

"Permit me to ask," said I, "if my question be not obtrusive, of whom this is a likeness?"

Such curiosity, I myself, if placed in his situation, would probably have resented as impertinent. But, knowing well that the history of such a man must needs contain a lesson of wisdom, I had determined to gain some clue to it, or, if possible, draw himself into its narration.

He did not, however, seem offended at all. A sad smile stole over his expressive features as he answered:

"To others than yourself, I should probably be silent on so sorrowful a theme, yet, if you would listen to a tale of terror, whose remembrance I would fain banish forever from my mind, your wish shall be gratified.

I seated myself near him, and he thus began:

"Many years ago, in a remote section of the country, lived a man named Willson, who, by some means that I never was informed of, had acquired an amount of wealth, that would, if generally known, have endangered the life of its possessor; yet an apparent frugality on his part deceived those whose rapacity might otherwise