

*Selected for the Advocate.*

## INTEMPERANCE.

A TALE.

"Some, as thou saw'st, by violent stroke shall die,  
By fire, flood, famine,—by INTEMPERANCE more!"

MILTON.

As natural objects dwindle from our view in proportion as they are distant from us, so are our minds affected not so much by the magnitude as by the locality of events; the loss of twenty persons on our coast by shipwreck will affect us less than the death of one individual before our own door; the plague, in its reckless and desolating career, depopulating whole districts, and converting cities into charnel houses, on the other side of the Mediterranean, will be spoken of *by us* with more composure than would a fever on this;—and, not to multiply examples, events of common occurrence among our fellow subjects, the unhappy Irish, awaken but a feeling which, in comparison with that which would be called forth were this side of the channel their theatre, is mere indifference.

These reflections were suggested by an incident which recently occurred within my own immediate knowledge, and which, had I perused its particulars in a newspaper, as I have those of many similar ones, would probably not have excited any extraordinary degree of interest at the moment, nor have left any impression behind it.

It happened that I was spending a few weeks of the late autumn at a friend's residence, one of those sylvan retreats, which swallow-like, we flock to with so much avidity in the summer months, and are so ready to desert for a warmer atmosphere, when blustering winds, and sharp frosts proclaim the approach of winter—before it sweeps the majestic Thames, while two lesser streams branching off on each side and winding around it until they meet at the extremity of the little meadow in its rear, constitute it an Island.

One morning I was aroused from my repose to be informed that Mr. —, who inhabited the newly erected house at the extremity of the little domain, and which, besides my friend's, is the only one upon it, had gone from home in the early part of the previous evening, and had not returned; and, (which was the most alarming part of the intelligence,) that his hat had been found floating on the stream, along the borders of which his path lay. Alas! thought I, while I have been enjoying the refreshments of slumber, what distress have individuals so near to me endured—what are the feelings of the wife of the unfortunate man?—his nine children?—such of them at least as are old enough to be aware of their situation! I arose and walked forth to obtain further information.

The morning, like the evening which had preceded it, was shrouded in a damp misty fog, which obscured the surrounding objects, and produced upon the system the chilling effect which the contemplation of the probable fate of the absentee did on the heart. I arrived at his house, from which the bitter moaning of the mother and the sobs of the children were distinctly audible—I did

not enter it—grief is sacred; especially grief like theirs; and he alone has a right to break in upon it who is the bearer of consolation; I could offer none, and was not disposed to resort to those common-place arguments in favour of resignation, which mistaken, but it may be well meaning persons, adopt on such occasions, while they distress and harass the mind by holding out hopes which have no foundation, or by attempting to check the flow of natural grief instead of merely softening and soothing it as much as it will admit of with kindness and tenderness. How ingenious are they in contriving possibilities, not one of which the sufferers have any faith in, while they are perfectly aware that the inventor has none. O, this is a bitter mockery of a wounded spirit, and where it has any effect (beyond that of adding weight to an overburthened heart) can have but this—to agitate and weaken the mind by painful suspense, and thus render it incapable of sustaining the blow when it does fall.

I pursued my way along the path before mentioned, at the extremity of which I found persons preparing to drag for the body, and from them learnt that he left the friends with whom he had supped in a state of intoxication, a vice to which he was too prone; here then was the melancholy answer to those who had expressed surprise, that he could err in a road with which he was so well acquainted, and which he had so frequently traversed.

Returning, I beheld the youngest of the children, an infant but a few months old, in the arms of a friend, who had taken it from its mother, she being totally incapable of affording it her wonted protection; it was perhaps the happiest there—happy in the unconsciousness of its loss; yet there was something extremely affecting in the laughing joy with which it greeted the sad groups around it, innocent creature, dancing in its buoyant and bird-like glee! glæe undisturbed by the bitter knowledge of a calamity, which had made itself and its little weeping playfellows fatherless: a calamity, one of the subsequent effects of which, was to cast death's shadow on its own sunny features!

Hour after hour passed away, and the sullet waters "gave no sign;" the tide was now at the lowest, yet had nothing occurred to break the melancholy monotony, excepting indeed the occasional entanglement of the irons in the sedges and clay at the bottom of the stream. The length of time which had now elapsed without affording proof of the worst, had given birth to a hope, which although certainly not founded on probability, had at least possibility to cling to. Hope is a plant of hardy growth, like the lichen, it will take root where aught else would wither.

At length one of the instruments appeared to have embraced some heavy substance, and on the ropes being hauled up to the boat, a human head presented itself above the surface,—a shout from the persons assembled, announced that the lengthened search was over; it was answered by a shriek of more than one voice, from the house of the unfortunate; I was on the spot, and could readily recognise the face of him whom I had seen but the day before in the prime of manhood—full of health and strength, and I fancied I could read in its features