

the shepherd detected it. It was but one of a large flock, yet it was valued.

Preparations were at once made to rescue it. Three men set forth with strong ropes, and a long pole with a noose at the end of it. Our way at first was up the dale. The rugged peak of Sea Fell looked down on us from the right. The grassy slopes of Great Gable and Kirk Fell were in front. The Pillar Mountain was towards the left, and an amphitheatre of precipices, where even an Alpine climber might find not inglorious toil, and the lover of the sublime in nature an abundant feast. Towards these rocks we turned. Soon we began to climb. The path became steeper and narrower, and loose stones, dislodged by our feet, rolled far away into the valley below. The sheep was seen standing on a narrow ledge of rock, which it was impossible to reach.

How had the sheep got there? The history of its wandering was evident. There were similar ledges round about, tufted with the richest verdure, though that on which the sheep was standing was now brown and bare. That ledge had evidently been covered with similar herbage, and this had attracted the silly sheep. There were difficulties in the way; for the rocks were rough and steep, and it was marvellous how the sheep had clambered over them. Then, when the difficulty was mastered, there was a smooth rock, sloping at a very sharp angle. Down this rock the sheep had evidently slipped with ease. The ways of wandering, at first difficult, had become easy; and the progress of the wanderer, at first slow, had become at last rapid. Then the sheep, rejoicing in the prize it had won, began to crop the coveted pasture. Disregarding the toil, blind to the danger, reckless as to possible results, eager only for the tempting morsel, the poor sheep had won the prize, and exulted in the pleasure!

Poor, transitory pleasure! Very soon the herbage was plucked. It was bright, but there was little of it, and now only the bare rock was left. The sheep tried to escape, but could not. There was a precipice in front, and the poor sheep must be dashed to pieces if it advanced a single step beyond the narrow ledge on which it stood. It tried to return, but was unable. The rock down which it slid so quickly was too steep and too smooth for it to climb. It was so easy to descend, lured by the pretty pasture. It was so hard, so impossible to return! It tried and tried again, but always fell back, and was in danger of falling over to the bottom. And now there was nothing for it to eat, and the poor sheep must have perished had not the shepherd come to find it.

No time was to be lost. One of the shepherds fastened a strong rope round his body, and the other two men lowered him down over the top of the rock. There was some risk of limb or life, but he was willing to encounter it for the sake of the sheep. My brother and myself found a way to clamber to the bottom of the rocks, whence we watched the shepherd being lowered down till he came near to where the sheep was

standing. But as he could not reach it with his hand, he stretched out the long pole and tried to place the noose round the sheep's neck. I watched with interest the patience and perseverance of the shepherd. For two whole hours hanging over the precipice, he laboured to save the sheep.

But the sheep seemed resolved not to be saved. Just as the noose was about to fall over its head the sheep twisted suddenly round to avoid it. Then the shepherd had again to arrange and prepare his line. "Poor sheep! you do not know how good that shepherd is, and how he wants to save you! You think he has come to do you harm. You are frightened at your helper. You dislike the noose that has been prepared to rescue you. You do not see that such captivity will be freedom; that such a bondage will be safety." Thus for two hours the sheep continued to elude the shepherd's efforts. Moreover, in its fright, it was often in danger of throwing itself over the precipice. To prevent this, we shouted and threw stones. The sheep was frightened by these noises, which no doubt it regarded as coming from enemies, but which were merciful warnings and terrors kindly meant.

At length the noose was cast over the head of the sheep. The poor wanderer struggled hard; but the shepherd drew it towards him, in spite of all its resistance. The cord was tight round its neck, and no doubt gave it pain; but it was needful pain—pain only in the process of rescue—pain only till the sheep was brought quite close to the shepherd. Then he loosened the cord, as he held the sheep carefully in his arms. But there was more to be done yet. The shepherd asked us to act as helpers and under-shepherds to him. For as it would be easier and better to lower the sheep to the bottom amongst the safe pastures than to raise it to the top amongst the rocks, he tied the legs of the sheep together, and fastening the rope to them, lowered it down to us. Then we unfastened the string that bound its legs, and set it at liberty. We did not save it, but, as under-shepherds, we helped in the good work.

Oh, how glad the sheep was when it found it was safe and free! How it jumped and skipped, and frisked along the turf! Then how eagerly it began to browse the safe pasture, for it had been long without food!

And how glad was the shepherd when he saw the sheep was safe, and when he ascended again to the top of the rock and rejoined his companions! And with what delight they went back to the farm and said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep that was lost!"

These simple facts, which are related just as they occurred, are a parable needing no interpretation.

"All we like sheep have gone astray."

"Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep."