

tiful and sublime; nor can I believe that He who pours upon the ear of the Mechanic, in his morning-walk, the murmur of the rill, or the bird's sweet note, holds him guilty of partaking of forbidden pleasures, when he cultivates a taste for music, and beguiles a life of hardship with the charms of poeey, or listens in the bosom of his family to a cheerful song.

[To be continued.]

A TALE OF GRASMERE.

Such is the solitude—so deep, so seventimes guarded, and so rich in miniature beauty—of Easedale; and in this solitude it was that George and Sarah Green, two poor hard-working peasants, dwelt with a numerous family of small children. It is a custom, and a very ancient one, in Westmoreland—that any sale by auction, whether of cattle, farming produce, farming stock, wood, or household furniture—and seldom a fortnight passes without something of the sort—forms an excuse for the good women, throughout the whole circumference of perhaps a dozen valleys, to assemble at the place of sale with a nominal purpose of aiding the sale, or of buying something they may happen to want. In 1802, a sale, except it were of the sort exclusively interesting to farming men, was a kind of general intimation to the country, from the owner of the property, that he would on that afternoon, be "at home" for all comers, and hoped to see as large an attendance as possible. Accordingly, it was the almost invariable custom—and often, too when the parties were far too poor for such an effort of hospitality—to make ample provision, not of eatables, but of liquor, for all who came. The main secret of attraction at these sales was the social rendezvous effected between parties so remote from each other, that, in fact, without some such common object, and oftentimes something like a bisection of the interval between them, they would not be likely to hear of each other for months, or actually to meet for years. Taken generally, these were the most picturesque and festal meetings which the manners of the country produced. There you saw all ages and both sexes assembled: there you saw old men whose heads would have been studied for Gaius; there you saw the most colossal and stately figures amongst the young men that England has to show; there the most beautiful young women. There—that the social benevolence, the grave wisdom, the innocent mirth and the neighbourly kindness of the people, most delightfully expanded and expressed themselves with the least reserve.

To such a scene it was, to a sale of domestic furniture at the house of some proprietor on the point of giving up housekeeping, perhaps in order to live with a married son or daughter, that George and Sarah Green set forward in the forenoon of a day fated to be their last on earth. The sale was to have taken place in Langdalehead; to which, from their cottage in Easedale, it was possible in daylight and supposing no mist upon the hills, to find out a short cut of not more than eight miles. By this route they went; and, notwithstanding the snow lay on the ground, they reached their destination in safety. The attendance at the sale must have been diminished by the rigorous state of the weather; but still the scene was a gay one as usual. Sarah Green, though a good and worthy woman in her maturer years, had been imprudent and—on the tender consideration of the country is apt to express it—"unfortunate" in her youth. She had an elder daughter, who was illegitimate; and I believe the father of this girl was dead. The girl herself was grown up; and the peculiar solicitude of poor Sarah's maternal heart was at this time called forth on her behalf; she wished to see her placed in a very respectable house, where the mistress was distinguished for her notable qualities and her success in forming good servants. The object, so important to Sarah Green in the narrow range of her views, as in a more exalted family it might to procure the promotion of a lieutenant, and get a ship for him; or to get him "pested"—occupied her throughout the sale. A doubtful answer had been given to her application; and Sarah was going about the crowd, and weaving her person in and out in order to lay hold of this or that intercessor who might have, or might seem to have, some weight with the principal person concerned.

This was the last occupation which is known to have stirred the pulses of her heart. An illegitimate child is everywhere, even in the indulgent society of Westmoreland dalesmen, under some shade of discountenance; so that Sarah Green might consider her duty to be the stronger towards the child of her "misfortune." And she probably had another reason for her anxiety—as some words dropped by her on this evening led people to presume—in her conscientious desire to introduce her daughter into a situation less perilous than that which had compassed her own youthful steps with snares. If so, it is painful to know that the virtuous wish, should not have been fulfilled. Her ardour and her impassioned manner draw attention to what she did; but after she ceased to challenge notice by the emphasis of her solicitations for her daughter, she ceased to be noticed at all; and nothing was recollected of her subsequent behaviour until the time arrived for general separation. This time was considerably after sunset; and the final recollections of the crowd will refer to George and Sarah Green, were, that, upon their departure being understood to retrace their morning path, and to

attempt the perilous task of dropping down into Easedale from the mountains above Langdale Head, a sound of remonstrance arose from many quarters. However, at a moment when everybody was in the hurry of departure—and, to persons of their mature age, the opposition could not be very obstinate—party after party rode off; the meeting melted away, and, at length, nobody was left of any weight that could pretend to influence the decision of elderly people. They quitted the scene, professing to obey some advice or other upon the choice of roads; but, at as early a point as they could do so unobserved, began to ascend the hills, everywhere open from the rude carriage way. After this, they were seen no more. They had disappeared into the cloud of death. Voices were heard, some hours afterwards, from the mountains—voices, as some thought, of alarm; others said, no—that it was only the voices of jovial people. The result was, that no attention was paid to the sounds.

That night, in little peaceful Easedale, six children sat by a peat fire, expecting the return of their parents, upon whom they depended for their daily bread. Let a day pass, and they were starved. Every sound was heard with anxiety—Every sound, every echo amongst the hills was listened to for five hours—from seven to twelve. At length, the eldest girl of the family—about nine years old—told her little brothers and sisters to go to bed. They had been taught obedience; and all of them, at the voice of their eldest sister, went off fearfully to their beds. What should be their fears, it is difficult to say; they had no knowledge to instruct them in the dangers of the hills; but the eldest sister always averred that they had a deep solicitude, as she herself had, about their parents. Doubtless she had communicated her fears to them. Late and after midnight—the moon arose and shed a torrent of light upon the Langdale Falls, which had already, long hours before, witnessed in darkness the death of their parents.

That night and the following morning, came a further and a heavier fall of snow; in consequence of which the poor children were completely imprisoned, and cut off from all possibility of communicating with their next neighbours. The brook was too much for them to leap; and the little, crazy, wooden bridge could not be crossed or even approached with safety, from the drifting of the snow having made it impossible to ascertain the exact situation of some treacherous hole in its timbers, which, if trod upon, would have let a small child drop through into the rapid waters. Their parents did not return. For some hours of the morning the children clung to the hope that the extreme severity of the night had tempted them to sleep in Langdale; but this hope forsook them as the day wore away. Their father, George Green, had served as a soldier, and was an active man, of ready resources, who would not, under any circumstances, have failed to force a road back to his family, had he been still living; and this reflection, or rather semi-conscious feeling, which the awfulness of their situation forced upon the minds of all but the mere infants, taught them to feel the extremity of their danger. Wonderful it is to see the effect of sudden misery, sudden grief, or sudden fear, where they do not utterly upset the faculties, in sharpening the intellectual perceptions. Instances must have fallen in the way of most of us. And I have noticed frequently that even sudden and intense bodily pain is part of the machinery employed by nature for quickening the development of the mind. The poor desolate children of Bientarn Ghyll, hourly becoming more ruefully convinced that they were orphans, gave many evidences of this awakening power, as lodged, by a providential arrangement, in situations of trial that most require it. They huddled together, in the evening, round their hearth-fire of peats, and held their little councils upon what was to be done towards any chance—if chance remained—of yet giving aid to their parents; for a slender hope had sprung up that some hovel or sheepfold might have furnished them a screen, against the weather quarter of the storm, in which hovel they might be lying disabled or snowed up; and, secondly, as regarded themselves, in what way they were to make known their situation, in case the snow should continue or increase; for starvation stared them in the face, if they should be confined for many days to their house. Meantime, the eldest sister, little Agnes, though sadly alarmed, and feeling the sensation of dreariness as twilight came on, and she looked out from the cottage door to the dreadful fells, on which, too probably, her parents were lying corpaes, possibly not many hundred yards from their own threshold—yet exerted herself to take all the measures which their own prospects made prudent. She told Miss Wordsworth, that, in the midst of the oppression on her little spirit, from vague ghostly terrors, she did not fail to draw some comfort from the consideration, that the very same causes which produced their danger in one direction, sheltered them from danger of another kind—such dangers as she knew, from books that she had read, would have threatened a little desolate flock of children in other parts of England; that, if they could not get out into Grasmere, on the other hand, bad men, and wild sea-faring foreigners, who sometimes passed along the high road in that vale, could not get to them; and that, as to their neighbours, so far from having anything to fear in that quarter, their greatest apprehension was lest they might not be able

to acquaint them with their situation; but that, if that could be accomplished, the very sternest amongst them were kindhearted people, that would contend with each other for the privilege of assisting them. Somewhat cheered with these thoughts, and having caused all her brothers and sisters—except the two little things not yet of a fit age—to kneel down and say the prayers which they had been taught, this admirable little maiden turned herself to every household task that could have proved useful to them in a long captivity. First of all, upon some recollection that the clock was nearly going down, she wound it up. Next, she took all the milk which remained from what her mother had provided for the children's consumption during her absence, and for the breakfast of the following morning—this luckily was still in sufficient plenty for two days' consumption, skimmed or "blue" milk being only one half-penny a quart, and the quart a most redundant one, in Grasmere—this she took and scalded, so as to save it from turning sour. That done, she next examined the meal chest; made the common oatmeal porridge of the country, but put all of the children, except the two youngest, on short allowance; and, by way of reconciling them in some measure to this stinted meal, she found out a little hoard of flour, part of which she baked for them upon the hearth into little cakes; and this unusual delicacy persuaded them to think that they had been celebrating a feast. Next, before night coming on should make it too trying to her own feelings, or before fresh snow coming on might make it impossible, she issued out of doors. There her first task was, with the assistance of two younger brothers, to carry in from the peatstack as many peats as might serve them for a week's consumption. That done, in the second place, she examined the potatoes buried in withered fern: these were not many; and she thought it better to leave them where they were, excepting as many as would make a single meal, under a fear that the heat of their cottage would spoil them if removed. Having thus made all the provision in her power for supporting their own lives, she turned her attention to the cow. Her she milked; but, unfortunately the milk she gave, either from being badly fed, or from some other cause, was too trifling to be of much consideration towards the wants of a large family. Here, however, her chief anxiety was to get down the hay for the cow's food from a loft above the outhouse; and in this she succeeded but imperfectly, from want of strength and size to cope with the difficulties of the case; besides that the increasing darkness by this time, together with the gloom of the place, made it a matter of great self-conquest for her to work at all; and, as respected one night at any rate, she placed the cow in a situation of luxurious warmth and comfort. Then retreating into the warm house, and "barring" the door, she sat down to undress the two youngest of the children: them she laid carefully and cozily in their little nests up stairs, and sang them to sleep. The rest she kept up to bear her company until the clock should tell them it was midnight; up to which time she had still a lingering hope that some welcome shout from the hills above, which they were all to strain their ears to catch, might yet assure them that they were not wholly orphans, even though one parent should have perished. No shout, it may be supposed, was ever heard; nor could a shout, in any case, have been heard, for the night was one of turbulent wind. And though amidst its ravings, sometimes they fancied a sound of voices, still, in the dead falls that now and then succeeded, they heard nothing to confirm their hopes. As last services to what she might now have called her own little family, Agnes took precautions against the drifting of the snow within the door and the imperfect window, which had caused them some discomfort on the preceding day; and, finally, she adopted the most systematic and elaborate plans of preventing the possibility of their fire being extinguished, which, in the event of their being thrown upon the ultimate resource of their potatoes, would be absolutely indispensable to their existence.

The night slipped away, and another morning came, bringing with it no better hopes of any kind. Change there had been none, but for the worse. The snow had greatly increased in quantity; and the drifts seemed far more formidable. A second day passed like the first; little Agnes still keeping all her flock quiet, and tolerably comfortable; and still calling on all the elders in succession to say their prayers, morning and night.

A third day came; and whether it was on that or on the fourth, I do not now recollect; but on one or other there came a welcome gleam of hope. The arrangement of the snow drifts had shifted during the night; and though the wooden bridge was still impracticable, a low wall had been exposed, over which, by a very considerable circuit, and crossing the low shoulder of a hill, it seemed possible that a road might be found into Grasmere. In some walls it was necessary to force gaps; but this was effected without much difficulty. The little boys accompanied their sister until she came to the other side of the hill, which lying more sheltered from the weather, and to windward, offered a path onwards comparatively easy. Here they parted; and little Agnes pursued her solitary mission to the nearest house she could find accessible in Grasmere.

No house could have proved a wrong one in such a case. And I can hardly describe the description renewed, of the horror which, in an instant, displaced the smile of hospitable greeting, when little