

who sat at Mrs. Elliot's elbow at table, had shrunk into an obscure corner of the room.—Before her face she held a handkerchief wet with tears. Her bosom throbbed convulsively—and, as occasionally her broken sighs burst from their prison-house, a significant whisper passed among the younger part of the company.

Mrs. Elliot approached her, and taking her hand tenderly within both of hers—"O hinnie! hinnie!" said she, "yer sighs gae through my heart like a knife! An' what can I do to comfort ye? Come, Elizabeth, my bonny love, let us hope for the best. Ye see before ye a sorrowin' mother!—a mother that fondly hoped to see you an'—I canna say it!—an' am ill qualified to gie comfort, when my own heart is like a furnace! But, oh! let us try and remember the blessed portion, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth,' an' inwardly pray for strength to say, 'His will be done!'"

Time stole on towards midnight, and one by one the unsuccessful party returned. As foot after foot approached, every breath was held to listen. "No, no, no!" cried the mother, again and again, with increasing anguish, "it's no the foot o' my ain bairn;" while her keen gaze still remained riveted upon the door, and was not withdrawn, nor the hope of despair relinquished, till the individual entered, and, with a silent and ominous shake of his head, betokened his fruitless efforts. The clock had struck twelve; all had returned save the father. The wind howled more wildly; the rain poured upon the windows in ceaseless torrents; and the roaring of the mountain rivers gave a character of deeper ghastliness to their sepulchral silence; for they sat, each rapt in forebodings, listening to the storm; and no sounds were heard, save the groans of the mother, the weeping of her children, and the bitter and broken sobs of the bereaved maiden, who leaned her head upon her father's bosom, refusing to be comforted.

At length, the barking of the farm-dog announced footsteps at a distance. Every ear was raised to listen, every eye turned to the door; but, before the tread was yet audible to the listeners—"Oh, it is only Peter's foot!" said the miserable mother, and, weeping, arose to meet him.

"Janet! Janet!" he exclaimed, as he entered, and threw his arms around her neck, "what's this come upon us at last?"

He cast an inquisitive glance around his dwelling, and a convulsive shiver passed over his manly frame, as his eye again fell on the vacant chair, which no one had ventured to

occupy. Hour succeeded hour, but the company separated not; and low, sorrowful whispers mingled with the lamentations of the parents.

"Neighbours," said Adam Bell, "the morn is a new day, and we will wait to see what it may bring forth; but, in the meantime, let us read a portion o' the Divine word, an' kneel together in prayer, that, whether or not the day-dawn cause light to shine upon this singular bereavement, the Sun o' Righteousness may arise w' healing on his wings, upon the hearts o' this afflicted family, an' upon the hearts o' all present."

"Amen!" responded Peter, wringing his hands; and his friend, taking down the Holy Bible, read the chapter wherein it is written—"It is better to be in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting;" and again the portion which sayeth—"It is well for me that I have been afflicted, for, before I was afflicted, I went astray."

The morning came, but brought no tidings of the lost son. After a solemn farewell, all the visitants, save Adam Bell and his daughter, returned every one to their own house; and the disconsolate father, with his servants, again renewed their search among the hills and surrounding villages.

Days, weeks, months, and years, rolled on. Time had subdued the anguish of the parents into a holy calm—but their lost first-born was not forgotten, although no trace of his fate had been discovered. The general belief was, that he had perished on the breaking up of the snow; and the few in whose remembrance he still lived, merely spoke of his death as a "very extraordinary circumstance," remarking that—"he was a wild, venturesome sort o' lad."

Christmas had succeeded Christmas, and Peter Elliot still kept it in commemoration of the birthday of him who was not. For the first few years after the loss of their son, sadness and silence characterised the party who sat down to dinner at Marchlaw, and still at Peter's right hand was placed the vacant chair. But, as the younger branches of the family advanced in years, the remembrance of their brother became less poignant.—Christmas was, with all around them, a day of rejoicing, and they began to make merry with their friends; while their parents partook in their enjoyment, with a smile, half of approval and half of sorrow.

Twelve years had passed away; Christmas had again come. It was the counterpart of its fatal predecessor. The hills had not yet cast off their summer verdure; the sun, al-