

fire o' his keep, an' brought ye his wife an' his son—wha are Armstrongs, soul and body o' them—to do wi' them as ye may judge proper."

"Tuts, man," replied Sir William, wad ye hae us to disgrace our royal commission by hangin' an auld wife an' a bairn? Gae awa, ye limmer, ye—gae awa wi' your bairn," he added, addressing Elspeth, "an' learn to live like honest folk—or if ye fa' in my way again ye shall dance by the crook frae a woodie."

"Where can I gang?" said she sorrowfully, as she withdrew. "O Archy! we hae neither house nor hauld—friend nor kindred! and wha will shelter the wife and bairn o' poor persecuted Sandy Armstrong!"

"Dinna fret, mother," said Archy—"tho' they hae burned Cleughfoot, the stanes are still left—and I can soon big a bit place to stop in; nor while there's a hare in Tarras wood, or a sheep on the Leadhills, shall ye ever want mother."

They returned in sorrow to the heap of ruins that had been their habitation; and, Elspeth, in the bitterness of her spirit, sat down upon the stones and wept. But after she had wept long, and the sound of her lamentation had howled across the desert, she arose, and assisted her son in constructing a hut from the ruins, in which they might lay their heads. In two days it was completed, but on the third day the disconsolate wife of the freebooter sank on her bed of rushes, and the sickness of death was in her heart.

"Oh, speak to me, mother!" cried Archy; "what—what can I do for ye?"

"Naethin', my bairn!—naethin'!" groaned the dying woman—"the sun's fa'in' dark on the een o' Elspeth Armstrong—but, oh, may the saunts o' heaven protect my poor Archy!"

She tried to repeat the only prayer she had ever learned—for religion was as little understood in the house of a freebooter as the eighth commandment. Poor Archy wrung his hands, and sobbed aloud.

"Dinna die, mother—oh! dinna die!" he exclaimed, "or what will become o' your Archy!" He rushed from the hut, and with a broken vessel which he had found among the ruins, he brought water from the rivulet—he applied it to her lips—he bathed her brow—"Oh mother! mother! dinna die!" he cried again, "and I will get you bread too!"

He again hurried from the hut, and bounded across the moss with the fleetness of a young deer. It was four long miles to the nearest habitation, and in it dwelt Ringan Scott, dependant of the Buccleuchs. There had never been friendship between his family and that of Sandy Armstrong, but in the agony of Archy's feelings, he stopped not to think of that, nor of aught but his dying mother; he rushed into the house—"Gie me bread!" he exclaimed wildly, "for the love o' heaven give me bread, for my mother is nearly perished!"

"Let her perish—and may ye a' perish!" said a young man, the son of Ringan, who stood by the fire with his right hand in a sling—"ye's get nae bread here."

"I maun, I shall," cried Archy vehemently: half of a coarse cake lay upon the table—he snatched it up, and rushed out of the house. They pursued him for a time, but affection and despair gave wings to his speed; breathless he reached the wretched hut, and on entering he cried—"Mother, here is bread I have gotten!" But his mother answered him not. "Speak, mother! O mother speak—here is bread now—eat it and ye'll be better!" but his mother was still silent. He took her hand in his—"Are ye sleepin' mother?" he added—"here is bread!" He shook her gently, but she stirred not: he placed his hand upon her face, it was cold as the rude walls of the hut, and her extended arms were stiff and motionless: he raised them and they fell heavy and lifeless. "Mother! mother!" screamed Archy—but his mother was dead! He rushed from the hut wildly, tearing his hair—he flung himself upon the ground—he called upon his father, and the glens of Tarras echoed the cry; but no father was near to answer: he flew back to the hut: he knelt by his mother's corpse—he rubbed her face and her bosom—he placed his lips to hers, and again he invoked her to speak. Night drew on, and as darkness fell over the ghastly features of the corpse, he fled with terror from the hut, and wandered weeping throughout the night upon the moss. At sunrise he returned, and again sat down and wept by the dead body of his mother: he became familiar with death, and his terror died away. Two nights more passed on, and the boy sat in the desolate hut in the wilderness, watching and mourning over the lifeless body of his mother. On the fourth day he took a