

his humble happiness to be blighted in an instant, and ruin and desolation to overtake its unoffending possessors.

It was on a fine summer afternoon, in the year 1746, about two months after the battle of Culloden, that Widow Riddel, as she sat knitting stockings on the little rustic seat in the garden, which her son had made for her accommodation; and while the former was busily employed beside her putting some seeds into the ground, happening to look down into the little strath or valley that lay almost immediately below the cottage, saw what was to her a very unusual and alarming sight. This was a party of dragoons.—She had heard much of the cruelties and atrocities that had been perpetrated by the government troops, on the persons and properties of the insurgents, whose hopes had been laid prostrate at Culloden; and she was not ignorant of the military despotism which generally prevailed over the kingdom in consequence of that victory. But she had yet to learn, and the lesson was now to be taught her by fearful experience, how indiscriminating was the vengeance of the ruthless and sanguinary ruffians, to whom the power of inflicting chastisement had been intrusted.

On observing the soldiers, Widow Riddel immediately called her son's attention to them, and wondered where they could be going to. This was soon made plain enough. In a moment after, she herself exclaimed—

“Mercy on us, Jamie! they're comin here: What in a' the earth can they be wantin?”

Next minute, the dragoons were in front of the cottage; when one of them dismounted and advancing towards the widow, inquired if there were any rebels skulking thereabouts.

“Oh, no, sir, no,” replied the terrified woman, “there's naeboddy o' that kind in this quarter, I assure you.

“Well, well, so much the better, good woman for both you and them; but, I say, we're starving of hunger, can ye let's have something to eat?”

“Blithely, sir, blithely,” rejoined poor Mrs. Riddel, delighted to find matters taking so amicable a turn. I haena muckle, sirs, ye're welcome to what I hae. And she bustled into the cottage, and, with the assistance of her son, brought out a quantity of oaten cakes,

cheese, and sweet milk, on which the soldiers made a hearty meal.

Now, after this kindness of the widow's, or even without it, into whose head or heart but that of an incarnate fiend, or monster human shape, could it have entered to her a mischief? Yet such a wretch was amongst the troopers who now surround her humble dwelling, and had partaken of her hospitality. Just before the party started, the ruffian who first addressed Mrs. Riddel, asked her, with an affected air of kindness, how she lived.

“Indeed, sir,” replied the unsuspecting widow, “the bit cow there,” pointing to the animal which was grazing at a little distance, “an' the bit garden, wi' what the de can earn, is a' that I hae to depend upon, but, wi' God's blessing, it's eneuch, an' are sincerely thankin'.”

To this affecting detail of her humble resources, the villain made no reply, but drew a pistol from his holster, and, riding up to the poor woman's cow, discharged it through her head, when the animal instantly fell down dead. Not satisfied with this heartless act, the ruffian leaped the garden wall, with his horse and deliberately trode down every growing thing it contained; and those things the feet of his charger could not reach, destroyed with his sabre.

Having committed this unnameable villainy, the monster rejoined his comrades, laughing and shouting out as he went, in exultation at the deed.

“There, you old devil,” he exclaimed, “that will put it out of your power to harry any rascally rebels, or, if you do, they may strave.”

In an instant afterwards, the party rode laughing heartily at the mischief done by their comrade, of which they all seemed to approve.

It would be a vain task to attempt to depict the distress and misery of the bereaved widow, when she found herself thus suddenly deprived of her all. This scene is better to the imagination of the reader. Wringing her hands in bitter agony, she rushed into her house flung herself on her bed, where she gave way to the sorrow that overwhelmed her. From that bed she never arose. A silent illness, the consequence of dreadful excited and agitated feelings, seized her, and terminated her existence.