

THE RUNAWAY.

AN ENGLISH TALE BY MISS MITFORD.

One of the most retired-looking spots in our thickly populated neighbourhood, is the pretty little nook called Sandleford Green; a small patch of green sward, formed by a casual receding of the fields, at a place where two narrow shady lanes cross each other, leaving just room enough in one angle for a clear pond, with glorious old thorns dipping into it from the surrounding hedges; whilst another pond enclosing a noble oak, occupies another corner; and a third is completely overshadowed by two large horse-chestnut trees, standing like sentinels on either side of a gate, which leads through a short deep lane to the only dwelling within sight or hearing. No spot is, apparently so entirely out of the way and out of the world, as Sandleford Green. And yet the well beaten foot-paths two or three of which striking in different directions across the fields, meet in this spot as a common centre, intimated that the little Green was a place of some resort—as indeed, it actually was—not so much as a thoroughfare, but from its own independent attraction. The one solitary and unostentatious tenement of which it boasted, being famous all through the country, for its home-brewed ale, the fine Sandleford beer, most emphatically called strong holding so high a rank amongst the consumers of that formidable beverage, the people sent for it far and near; and the liveried grooms of two or three neighbouring squires might often be seen galloping on their thorough-bred hunters to seek this only liquor worthy to wash down their master's Stilton; at the same moment that poor Dame Wheeler's little girl was crossing the style for her sick grandmother's half-pint; and half the rustics in the parish pouring in to enjoy in Joseph Dobson's own tap-room, or beneath his honeysuckled porch, their own less moderate potations. "First come, first served," was Joseph's motto, and although on the whole a man of impartiality, it is doubtful whether he had not some pleasure in keeping the lacqueys in attendance, and the grandees whom they served in expectation, whilst he administered to the wants of his humbler and more sociable customers.

A chuckling, bustling, merry knave was our landlord, and free spoken, had a vote for the county, which he regularly bestowed on the opposition candidate, be they what they might. Joseph thought that no honest man could ever vote for the ministry—that was his creed: owed no one a shilling, and was too confident in the power of his ale, to have any dread of the magistrates and the license act:—Old Sir Thomas can't finish his dinner without a glass of my beer thought Joseph and I may be as saucy and independent as I please.

Whatever might be the merits of the Sandleford ale, there could be no question as to the beauty and picturesqueness of Joseph's habitation. It was a high, narrow, tower-like house, with chimneys like turrets, and every sort of gable and inequality of which a building is capable, harmonised and enriched by an old vine, which, after creeping up one side of the house, nearly covered the roof, garlanding the very chimneys, and

wreathing its luxuriant abundance of leaf, and fruit, and tendril, wherever a shoot could find a place, until it fairly hung over on the other side—until its rich festoons nearly met the branchy honeysuckle, (Milton's "twisted eglantine,") which, climbing up, shaded a rude but fanciful and airy porch, such as is often seen in Wouverman's pictures, adding grace and lightness even to them. Nor was the garden, which reached, on one side, to a small meandering brook, the large garden, full of beds of vegetables and berry bushes, almost hidden by wide flower-borders, very nicely kept; or the long strip of beautiful green sward, the meadow, orchard or the pleasure-ground (for it might pass for either of these,) with its fine grove of old fruit-trees—pear, plum, cherry, and apple,—terminated by its smooth bowling-green and goodly arbour, not at all unworthy of the picturesque dwelling to which they were appended. The territory behind, a miniature farm-yard with stabling for two, cart-room for one, a commodious cow-shed, and pigsties, goose-houses, and hen-houses, out of number, its populous duck pond, and its abundance of noises, horses neighing, cows lowing, calves bleating, pigs grunting, ducks quacking, cocks crowing, hens cackling, and doves cooing—was also a lively stirring scene, especially when animated by the presence of mine host, portly, sturdy, and comely, an excellent representative of his own brown stout, with twenty pigeons fluttering about him, (for Joseph amongst other fancies, was a great pigeon fancier,) and two or three pet tumblers or fan-tails perched on his shoulder. In short, every thing about the place, from the two rosy smiling lasses, his daughters, down to the fat yard-dog, and sleek tabby-cat seemed emblems of rural plenty, and English independence; meet appendages to the sign of the Foaming Tankard which swung in creaking magnificence from a post in front of the dwelling.

By far the most interesting inmate of this small village hostelry, was one, whose whole appearance formed the strongest possible contrast to the rest of that flourishing establishment. Mary Walker, the only child of the good landlord's only sister, was a tall thin young woman, with a pale, mild, serious countenance, great simplicity of dress and manner, and general delicacy both of look and demeanour, belonging partly, perhaps, to ill health, but so much connected with a natural elegance of mind, that it hushed even her boisterous uncle and his boisterous customers into something like gentleness; just as the presence of a born gentlewoman might have done, if it were possible to fancy a born gentlewoman seated in the tap-room of the Foaming Tankard.

To say the truth, the tap-room was a place that Mary seldom visited. The noise, the talking, the singing, the smell of tobacco, or even the odour of the Sandleford beer, would have kept her from that well frequented resort of the thirsty souls of that village, even if the dread of encountering some of her many lovers, had not been sufficient to hinder her from putting her foot across the threshold.

The cause of Mary Walker's many conquests might be found perhaps, (at least she thought so,) in the circumstance of her be-

ing a rustic heiress, having just as many hundred pounds as made her a great match in her own degree; the cause of her being at two-and-twenty unwedded, and unlikely to wed, will take rather more telling, although the story is short enough, and common enough too.

Joseph Dobson had a son called William, as unlike his father as possible; a gay, lively mercurial spirit, too quick, or, as his poor mother used to say, too clever to learn—too ready at many trades, to stick steadily to one, and so full of varying schemes and changeable resources, that everybody, except his doating mother, was convinced that in spite of William's acknowledged talent, his destiny would prove unprosperous.

The only chance of its being otherwise, lay in his strong affection for his fair cousin, Mary Walker. Her influence over him, especially after the death of his fond, but misjudging mother, who had fostered his wild and expensive habits, by supplying him with money for their indulgence, formed the only counteraction to his natural and acquired unsteadiness of character. Even his father, although knowing him best, and fearing him most, looked forward with some degree of hope, to the period when he should be quietly married to Mary; and she herself—(how strange it is, that the mildest and most reflective woman should be carried off her feet so often, by the giddiest wild-goose of a man!) she herself idolized him; overturned all the disinterested objections of her uncle and guardian, to risking her money and her happiness with so flighty a swain; and even laid aside much of her own timidity, to hasten as far as her natural modesty would permit, the proposed union.

On the very evening before the intended marriage, William, who amongst his other caprices, was frequently subject to the fury of jealousy, was seized with a violent fit of that amiable passion; the object being no other than George Bailey, my Lord's game-keeper, as good-natured a fellow as ever lived, and a constant visitor at the Foaming Tankard. He had brought two tame pheasants, a cock and a hen, as a present to Mary, who was known to be fond of pet poultry; "a wedding present," as he had whispered at parting, and Mary, unluckily admired the beauty of the birds.

"You like the birds for the sake of the giver, Mary," said William, chafed at the warmth with which George had shaken hands with her in the moment of departure, and the mingled blush and smile with which she had received his whispered farewell; "you are thinking of the master's good looks, of his gay plumage, and not of the birds."

"The master thinks little of me, or I of him. You are quite mistaken as to both of us," replied Mary.

"You admire the beauty of the donor," pursued William pertinaciously; "you talk of the pheasants, but you are thinking of him."

"Not I indeed!" exclaimed Mary.

"But you are I say, Madam," resumed William with increasing violence. "George Bailey is the beau of the parish, as you are the belle; we all know that, and for my poor