



THE DRUNKEN FATHER.

' Poor Ellen married Andrew Hall,
Who dwells beside the moor,
Where yonder rose-tree shades the wall,
And woodbines grace the door.

' Who does not know how blest, how loved,
Were her mild laughing eyes
By every youth!—but Andrew proved
Unworthy of his prize.

' In tipping was his whole delight,
Each sign-post barred his way;
He spent in muddy ale at night
The wages of the day.

' Though Ellen still had charms, was young,
And he in manhood's prime
She sat beside her cradle, sung,
And sigh'd away her time.

' One cold bleak night, the stars were hid,
In vain she wish'd him home;
Her children cried, half cheer'd half chid,
' O when will father come?'

' Till Caleb, nine years old, upsprung,
And kicked his stool aside,
And younger Mary round him clung,
' I'll go and you shall guide.'

' The children knew each inch of ground,
Yet Ellen had her fears;
Light from the lantern glimmered round,
And showed her falling tears.

' Go by the mill and down the lane;
Return the same way home:
Perhaps you'll meet him, give him light;
' O how I wish he'd come.

' Away they went, as close and true
As lovers in the shade,
And Caleb swung his father's staff
At every step he made.

The noisy mill-clack rattled on,
They saw the water flow
And leap in silvery foam along,
Deep murmuring below.

' " We'll soon be there," the hero said,
' Come on, 'tis but a mile.—
Here, where the cricket match was play'd,
And here's the shady stile."

' " How the light shines up every bough!
How strange the leaves appear!
Hark!—What was that?—'tis silent now!
Come, Mary, never fear,"

' The staring oxen breathed aloud,
But never dream'd of harm:
A meteor glanced along the cloud,
That hung o'er Wood-Hill Farm.

' Old Caesar barked and howled hard by,
All else was still as death,
But Caleb was ashamed to cry,
And Mary held her breath.

' At length they spied a distant light,
And heard a chorus brawl;
Wherever drunkards stopped at night,
Why there was Andrew Hall.

' The house was full, the landlord gay,
The bar maid shook her head,
And wished the boobies far away.
That kept her out of bed.

' There Caleb acted, firm, but mild,
And spoke in plaintive tone:—
' My mother could not leave the child,
So we have come alone.'

' E'en drunken Andrew felt the blow
That innocence can give,
When its resistless accents flow
' To bid affection live.

' " I'm coming, loves, I'm coming now,"—
Then shuffling o'er the floor,
Contrived to make his balance true,
And led them from the door.

' The plain broad path that brought him there
By day, though faultless then,
Was up and down and narrow grown,
Though wide enough for ten,

' The stiles were wretchedly contrived,
The stars were all at play,
And many a ditch had moved itself
Exactly in his way.

' But still conceit was uppermost,
That stupid kind of pride:—
' Dost think I cannot see a post?
Dost think I want a guide?'

' " Why, Mary how you twist and twirl!
Why dost not keep the track?
I'll carry thee home safe my girl,"—
Then swung her on his back.

' Poor Caleb muster'd all his wits
To bear the light ahead,
As Andrew reel'd and stopped by Es,
Or ran with thund'ring tread.

Exult, ye brutes, traduced and scorn'd,
Though true to nature's plan;
Exult, ye bristled and ye horned,
When infants govern man.

Down to the mill-pool's dangerous brink
The headlong party drove;
The boy alone had power to think,
While Mary screamed above.

' " Stop!" Caleb cried, " you've lost the path;
The water's close before;
I see it shine 'tis very deep—
Why, don't you hear it-roar?'"

' Onward he stepped the boy alert,
Calling his courage forth,
Hung like a log on Andrew's skirt,
And down he brought them both.

' The tumbling lantern reach'd the stream,
Its hissing light soon gone;
'Twas night, without a single gleam,
And terror reigned alone.

' A general scream the miller heard,
Then rubbed his eyes and ran,
And soon his welcome light appear'd,
As grumbling he began:—

' " What have we here, and whereabouts?
Why what a hideous squall!
Some drunken fool!—I thought as much—
'Tis only Andrew Hall!"

' " Poor children! tenderly he said,
' But now the danger's past,
They thank'd him for his light and aid,
And drew near home at last.

' But who upon the misty path
To meet them forward press'd!
'Twas Ellen, shivering, with her babe
Close folded to her breast.

' Said Andrew, " Now you're glad I know,
To see us come;—
But I have taken care of both,
And brought them bo-bo-both safe home."

' With Andrew vexed, of Mary proud,
But prouder of her boy,
She kiss'd them both, and sobbed aloud;—
The children cried for joy.

' But what a home at last they found!
Of comforts all bereft;
The fire quite out, the candle gone,
And not one penny left.

But Caleb quick as light'ning flew,
And raised a light instead;
And as the kindling brands he blew,
His father snor'd in bed.

Ellen was mild as April morn,
And Andrew loved her too:
She rose at daybreak though forlorn,
' To try what love would do.

' And as her waking husband groan'd
And roll'd his turning head,
She spoke with all the power of truth,
Down kneeling by his bed.

' " Dear Andrew hear me,—though distress'd,
Almost too much to speak,—
This infant starts upon my breast—
' To scold, I am too weak.

' " I work, I spin, I toil all day,
Then leave my work to cry,
And start with horror when I think
You wish to see me die.

' " But do you wish it? can that bring
More comfort or more joy?
Look round the house, how destitute!
Look at your ragged boy!"

' " That boy should make a father proud,
If any feeling can:
Then save your children, save your wife,
Your honour as a man.

' " Hear me, for God's sake, hear me now,
And act a father's part,
The culprit blessed her angel tongue,
And clasped her to his heart;

' And would have vow'd, & would have sworn,
But Ellen kiss'd him dumb,—
' Exert your mind, vow to yourself,
And better days will come.

' " I shall be well when you are kind,
And you'll be better too."
' " I'll drink no more," he quick rejoined,
' Be'th' poison if I do."

' From that bright day his plants, his flowers,
His crops began to thrive,
And for three years has Andrew been
The soberest man alive.