

A T A L E.

By Mr. MERRICK.

IF Virtue prompt thy willing mind
 To actions gen'rous, good and kind;
 Fortune beyond thy hopes shall bless
 Thy toils, and crown them with success:
 But he whose bounties only rise
 From prospects of a future prize,
 With sorrow shall compute his gains,
 And reap repentance for his pains.

Precepts are often found to fail,
 So take instruction from my tale.

In ancient days there liv'd a priest,
 Inshrin'd within whose pious breast
 Fair Virtue shone; his open look
 Gave sanction to each word he spoke.
 Fix'd to no home, in mean array,
 From place to place he took his way,
 Instructing as he went along,
 And dealing blessings to the throng.
 The truth he labour'd to express,
 In language plain as was his dress;
 Yet all with secret rapture hung
 On every accent of his tongue:

A silent eloquence there ran
 Through all the actions of the man ;
 They mark'd his soul's unblemish'd frame,
 His precept and his life the same.

It chanc'd, as musing once he stray'd,
 Around him night's descending shade
 Unheeded stole ; through paths unknown
 With darkling steps he wander'd on,
 And wish'd to shroud his weary head
 Beneath some hospitable shed.

When through the gloom a sudden ray
 Sprung forth, and shot across the way.
 Led by the light, a cott he found :
 A pious dame the mansion own'd,
 Whose open heart, tho' small her store,
 Ne'er turn'd the stranger from her door.
 Think at the sight of such a guest,
 What transport rose within her breast :
 With joy the friendly board she spread,
 And plac'd him in her warmest bed.
 Deep sunk in sleep the trav'ler lay,
 Tir'd with the labours of the day.

'Tis best, as ablest critics deem,
 To suit your language to your theme ;
 Obsequious to their rules, the Muse
 In humbler strain her tale pursues.

The matron, while her thankful guest
 Had shar'd with her the slender feast,

With

With curious eye had view'd him o'er,
 Had mark'd the tatter'd garb he wore,
 And through the yawning frieze had seen
 No traces of a shirt within.

And now her hands with pious care
 A shirt of home-spun cloth prepare :
 'Twas coarse, but would the longer hold,
 And serve to fence him from the cold,
 The toil employ'd her all the night,
 And ended with the rising light.

The priest arose at break of day,
 And hasten'd to pursue his way ;
 With thanks he took the finish'd vest,
 The hospitable dame he bless'd,
 " And that thy charity, he said,
 " May fall with int'rest on thy head,
 " May thy first work, when I am gone,
 " Continue 'till the setting sun."

She heard ; but soon her household care
 Had banish'd from her thoughts the pray'r ;
 The remnant of her cloth she took,
 And measur'd out her little stock.
 Beneath her hands the length'ning piece
 Surpriz'd her with a vast increase ;
 Astonish'd at a sight so new,
 She measur'd still and still it grew.

As when in sleep, with winged pace
 O'er hills and plains we urge the race,

With eager hopes we onward bend,
 And think our labour near its end ;
 But mimick Fancy soon supplies
 New scenes to cheat our wond'ring eyes :
 Before our feet new plains extend,
 New vallies sink, new hills ascend,
 And still the goal, when these are o'er,
 Appears as distant as before.

In such a dream with such surprize,
 From morn to eve the woman plies
 Her task ; but when the setting ray
 Had clos'd her labour with the day,
 With joy the wond'rous heap survey'd,
 And saw her bounty well repay'd.

A neighb'ring dame, the story known,
 Much wish'd to make the case her own ;
 For tho' she ne'er was seen before
 To lodge the stranger or the poor,
 She wisely thought on one so good
 Her charity were well bestow'd.
 As by her door his journey lay,
 She stop'd the trav'ler on his way ;
 Beg'd him to enter and receive
 Such welcome as her house could give :
 The priest comply'd, and ent'ring found
 The board with various plenty crown'd ;
 On heaps of down he pass'd the night,
 And slumber'd 'till the morning light.

At break of day the dame address'd
 In friendly guise her rev'rend guest :
 Linen so coarse, she said, was ne'er
 Design'd for Christian backs to wear ;
 And as it griev'd her to survey
 Such virtue in so mean array,
 Herself had toil'd with sleepless eyes
 To furnish him with fresh supplies :
 Fine was the texture, such as comes
 From wealthy Holland's skilful looms.
 The priest accepts the proffer'd boon,
 He thanks her for her kindness shown,
 And grateful as he leaves her door,
 Repeats the pray'r he made before.

Just parted from the holy man,
 With eager haste the matron ran
 To reach her cloth, and had design'd
 To measure what was left behind ;
 But thinking first, that as the pray'r
 For the whole day had fix'd her care,
 One labour would employ it all,
 And leave no time for Nature's call,
 Ere to the destin'd work she goes,
 She deems it best to pluck a rose.

The hissing geese, as forth she went,
 Gave omens of the dire event ;
 The herds, that graz'd the neighb'ring plain,
 Look'd up, and snuff'd the coming rain ;

The

The bird that screams at midnight hours,
 (Diviner of approaching show'rs)
 Full on the left, with hideous croak,
 Stood flutt'ring on a blasted oak.

Amazement seiz'd the trembling dame,
 When first she saw the plenteous stream :
 She wonder'd much, and much she fear'd ;
 And think how Niobe appear'd,
 When chang'd into a rock she stood,
 And at her feet the headlong flood,
 With downward force impetuous ran,
 High foaming, o'er the delug'd plain ;
 So look'd the dame, when all around
 The torrent smoak'd upon the ground :
 Still spreading wider than before,
 It seem'd a sea without a shore.

Your bards that wrote in heathen days,
 Had such a theme employ'd their lays,
 Had tortur'd their inventive brain,
 With dire portents to fill the strain ;
 Had bid the neighb'ring river mourn
 His alter'd stream and tainted urn ;
 Or made the Naiads lift their heads,
 Astonish'd from their wat'ry beds,
 And, seated on the river's side,
 Squeeze from their locks the briny tide,
 But little skill'd in Pagan lore ;
 I pass such idle fancies o'er :

Truth is my care, whose lovely face
Shines brightest in the plainest dress.

At eve the torrent stopt its course;
Stung with vexation and remorse;
The dame laments her fruitless cost,
Her hopes deceiv'd, her labour lost.
Nor think that here her suff'rings end,
Reproach and infamy attend:
Surrounding boys, where-e'er she came,
With insults loud divulge her shame;
And farmers stop her with demands
Of recompence for damag'd lands.



The W I S H.

By the Same.

HOW short is life's uncertain space!
Alas! how quickly done!
How swift the wild precarious chace!
And yet how difficult the race!
How very hard to run!

Youth stops at first its wilful ears
To Wisdom's prudent voice;
Till now arriv'd to riper years,
Experienc'd age worn out with cares
Repents its earlier choice.

What