

CHAPTER V.

HERMIT OF THE FALLS—HIS ARRIVAL AT NIAGARA—EFFECT OF THE SCENERY—HIS HABITS, MANNERS, AND ENDOWMENTS—RESIDENCE AND DEATH—OTHER PARTICULARS.

“But soon he knew himself the most unfit
Of men, to herd with Man; with whom he held
Little in common; untaught to submit
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quelled
In youth, by his own thoughts; still, uncompelled,
He would not yield dominion of his mind
To spirits against whom his own rebelled;
Proud, though in desolation; which could find
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.”



RANCIS ABBOTT—the Hermit of the Falls, whose unsocial life, and untimely fate, have made a deep impression upon the public mind, may justly claim the courtesy of a notice, far more lengthy than our limits will permit—we must be brief. There is a charm in every mystery that attracts observation, and excites curiosity. His character is a sealed volume—his life scarcely less so—both are inexplicable. The written pages of his heart and mind are open to the All-Seeing alone.

In humble guise, he came to Niagara in 1829, to remain, perhaps, for a week. He grew

enamoured of the place. The glorious scenery wooed his melancholy spirit by its sublime grandeur. His visit was prolonged,—month after month rolled away, and still he lingered upon its sounding shores. Shunning all society but the companionship of nature; with her only, could his soul stoop to be intimate. The darkest seclusions, the most dangerous paths, and the most august scenes, alone seemed to possess charms for his idiosyncrasy of mind.

Learned, accomplished, travelled, gifted with personal beauty, conventional elegance, and singular powers of pleasing, why should he withdraw from communion with his kind, and choose Nature and Solitude for his only ministers? Music and letters were the only luxuries in which he indulged:—his music was hushed when a step approached,—whatever he wrote, was destroyed almost as soon as written.

Sometimes, but rarely, he would converse, and eloquence seemed to sit upon his tongue—more frequently, he would indulge in moody silence, repelling every attempt to engage him in discourse. He was not misanthropic, for he did not hate or despise, but only avoid, his fellow-men. He was imbued with a deep sense of religion,—and led a blameless life.

He asked permission to build a hut on one of the Three Sisters, which he desired to isolate by a draw-bridge, but was refused. He lived on Iris Island about twenty months, in an old house, yet standing; and when driven from that, by the intrusion of a family, he erected a hut on the brow of the bank, below, but near Prospect Point, in which he resided till his death, which occurred in June, 1831. He went into the river, below the Falls, to bathe, according to his usual custom, and was shortly missed by the ferryman. His body was found at Fort Niagara, ten days after his decease, and removed to the Falls for burial. His age was about twenty-eight years.

An allowance, ample for his maintenance, was furnished by his friends in England,—his father is rector of a parish in that country. Little else is known of his history, than we have here related. His unsocial and other eccentricities, have given him the title of 'Hermit of the Falls,' and much curiosity is manifested by visitors, as to his character and habits. He sleeps in death, by the scenes he loved while living,—peace to his repose!

