

during which the clergyman of the place corresponded regarding the missing fisherman with all the lower parts of the Frith, but they had disappeared, as it seemed, for ever.

CHAPTER II.

HELEN'S VISION.

WHERE the northern Sutor sinks into the low sandy tract that nearly fronts the town of Cromarty, there is a narrow grassy terrace raised but a few yards over the level of the beach. It is sheltered behind by a steep, undulating bank; for, though the rock here and there juts out, it is too rich in vegetation to be termed a precipice. It is a sweet little spot, with its grassy slopes, that recline towards the sun, partially covered with thickets of wild rose and honeysuckle, and studded in their season with violets and daisies and the delicate rock geranium. Towards its eastern extremity, with the bank rising immediately behind, and an open space in front, which seemed to have been cultivated at one time as a garden, there stood a picturesque little cottage. It was that of the widow of William Beth. Five years had now elapsed since the disappearance of her son and husband, and the cottage bore the marks of neglect and decay. The door and window, bleached white by the sea-winds, shook loosely to every breeze; clusters of chickweed luxuriated in the hollows of the thatch, or mantled over the eaves; and a honeysuckle, that had twisted itself round the chimney, lay withering in a tangled mass at the foot of the wall.

But the progress of decay was more marked in the widow