

The wonderful discovery, a particular account of Peter Raeney, the maniac, of Woodseats, Norton, Derbyshire.

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THE
Wonderful
DISCOVERY,
A
PARTICULAR ACCOUNT OF
PETER RAENEY,
THE
Maniac,
OF
WOODSEATS, NORTON, DERBYSHIRE.

—•—
T. Smith, Printer, Eastgate, Louth.

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Wonders of

DISCOVERY

TO THE ACCOUNT OF

PETER RAINIER

THE

Monks

OF

WOODGATE, NORTON, DERBYSHIRE

T. Smith, Printer, Langate, South.

THE
Wonderful discovery.

TAKING a walk the other day in company with a friend, we agreed to call at the Freemasons' Arms Woodseats, to make enquiry where we should find the much talked-of maniac's dwelling; on mentioning our errand to the owner, he pointed it out through the casement. We accordingly left his house and followed the directions we had received. We proceeded towards Chesterfield about two or three hundred yards, where, on the right hand, the road opens, and bears the appearance of the beginning of the cross bridle way. Two or three hundred yards up this way, brought us to a few tenements beyond, but almost opposite, which we recognized by the description previously given, in a little croft, the miserable abode of the creature of whose wrongs or miseries we sought to enquire. It was one of those cabins which are so frequently found in those parts of the country, which offer stone merely for labour; originally a square enclosure, made in the primitive manner, of stones put one on the other, to protect the Lord's cattle from thieves and storms; afterwards abandoned and seized by the peasant, who year after year adds turf, a little lime to the inside, a cross piece of wood, and at harvest-time some straw, until he has converted it into a little homestead. Such was the house in which, we had been told, Peter Raeney had been confined fourteen years. After traversing the extent of the enclosure, which we had to do before we could reach the doorway, we stopped to listen if the inmates were stirring; no sound, however, reached us, and I tapped seriously against the broad low door. Upon a second application of my knuckles we heard the latch gently raised, and the

door giving way a few inches; I pressed against it rather strongly, and without ceremony, the interior of the hovel was at once presented to us. The first object we observed was sufficient to reprove the manner of our entry. It was an old woman, apparently about eighty, who seemed to regain, with great difficulty, the chair from which she had just risen. Our errand, however, appeared to be understood, and before a word was said, we were seated face to face on such chairs as the place afforded. "You have a son" said I, "a poor boy who is,"—the old woman stopped my inquiries, and her eyes running over with tears, (but whether they should rather be put to the account of the aged body, than the afflicted mind I know not) said—"is it that you want, God's will be done; yes I have, but I will let no one see him." This was said in a tone which impressed us at once with the conviction, that under the colour of demand, the old woman would surrender nothing either to our vision or information. Talking with her was now our business;—three fine young children were playing on the black stone floor;—Whose are these? said I. "my daughters," she replied, pointing to a young woman, washing in one corner, whom the gloom of the place, scarcely five yards square, had hidden from our sight. "You are a grandmother then; we had touched the sympathetic cord, the old dame's countenance brightened, and the streams of talk was let loose; my little note book and pencil were out in a moment, my friend filled up the few pauses which her failing memory, or many infirmities, made necessary, and added by a few simple interrogatories, we obtained the heart of her mystery. The following sentences, (how they were produced, and as it were eked out by my friend in the manner I have described, can be left to the dullest imagination) kept me in breathless attention for a quarter of an hour,—“Aye, my daughter's there—I have a son that's gotten fourteen, and all bonny, and one of the fourteen has got six—I am mother, and grandmother

and great grandmother to eighty on 'em—God's will be done—Job had trust, and so have I—but I have not been in bed since my husband died—he died ten years ago, God's will be done—I am a poorly woman—you see I am dropsical—yes, they heed me little—Miss Eliza--- of---, she has called and given us something, but she has never seen him—Peter, Peter my boy,—yes, if they do come—they come, but my boy shall not be taken from me while I live.—It is now fourteen years, they say it is fifteen, but I know it's only fourteen—God's will be done—he took to his bed through the loss—he did not speak for a month, and when he did speak, he said

“No greater grief, no meikle pain,
Than for to love and not be lov'd again.”

I shall never forget it—but God help you Gentlemen—he once fell down stairs in the night, but now he's stricken, he knows me, and calls me mother—no, my trust is in God.” At this moment something seemed to move about us, and as we turned our eyes to the blackened board which made the imperfect ceiling a moan, which we knew to be human, was heard, and losing all patience, I started from my seat, put my book in my pocket, and said, “I must see him.” My friend shewed more wisdom commiserating with the old woman, he offered her a few shillings, and said, that we were strangers in these parts, but being on our way to Derby, he hoped we should not be denied the sight of her poor son. She accepted the money, and without saying a word, the daughter pointed to a few crazy steps which led from the corner of the miserable dwelling to the loft above the ceiling, we had just observed. In six strides, a tall man might have encompassed the entire edifice, but to ascend these few steps was a work of some difficulty and danger, for the greater portion of the light we enjoyed came through a few wintry flaws, which the poverty or carelessness of the inmates had neglected. The fragile board, bending beneath our weight, and the slender railway giving way at our touch, our physical senses gave us the first

intimation that we were near the object of our search, "There,"—said the daughter,—where—I can distinguish nothing."—"Look nearer." I stooped lower, (I was already stooping, being within four feet only of the ancient drooping roof,) and shuddering while I put my hand upon a mass of human hair, the face of one of my fellow creatures suddenly presented itself : after the first shock so strange a sight must have caused the least superstitious or the least pitiful, I set about examining the lost being before me with the same feeling which the anatomist owns, when he plunges his scientific knife into the dead mass which lies upon the table. The face of course, attracted my first notice, I brought my own almost close to his, but I could discover none of the usual physionomical marks of mere physical insanity. The forehead and nose were rather finely marked, and the eyes, which appeared to me (in the imperfect light) a deep black, were large, and, though they betrayed the restless motion of insanity, were totally without what may be termed the gazeless look of mere idiotcy. The lower part of the face was buried in hair, and even the orifice of the mouth appeared shut up in the growth of years. The next thing which attracted my attention was the lower part of his body ; the space which he occupied was sufficient only for the trunk of an ordinary man, and my curiosity was painfully excited to discover how he had disposed of his thighs and legs. While he was eyeing me with the greatest intensity, I drew away part of the sheet which was upon him, and I saw the points of his shoulders and the caps of his knees drawn closely together, allowing only a little room for his arms which were between them, leaving his hands upwards. The whole body was in the attitude of an ape sitting, and then the body was turned on one side, without that attitude having been destroyed. Upon closer examination, it appeared that the particular position I found him in must have been assumed at an early period of his mental disease, for I discovered that he was perfectly sinew bound, and could not in the smallest degree re-

lax or alter the position of a single joint. Consequently the only change of attitude of which he was capable, was rolling from side to side, or balancing himself on the centre. His state of health I am not competent to judge of, but I can assert that he exhibited most of the popular signs of convalescence ; a clear full eye, and a sound skin, though the latter had evidently taken a hue foreign to its nature. I looked round the miserable loft, which for so many years had been his resting-place, and it literally contained nothing but the naked body of the poor maniac, and the dirty sheet I have spoken of, myself, my friend, and the woman who conducted us. In spite of my appetite for information, I grew physically as well as mentally sick ; when, to my surprise, and almost horror, the poor wretch, who had kept his wild looks almost continually upon us, turned his face towards the floor, and said in a tone which smote the heart, " I am baun to sleep." We hurried down the dangerous stairs, and in a moment we were breathing the fresh air ;--after we had recovered the surprise which the sound of the maniac's voice had produced, (for imagination had nothing to do with our emotion, he whom we looked upon as lower than the brute spoke our language, with a tone and pathos deeper than those of the most gifted actors,) we thought we could converse with the madman's sister, who might supply us with that portion of the poor man's tale which had escaped the old woman's garrulity.

Her story is the following ;—" Fourteen years ago my brother was about twenty years old, and as fine a young man, about six feet high, as you would see any where. He courted one Mary Jones, whose father owned a bit of land just yonder opposite us. It was at last settled they should be married at dronfield Church ; my brother was ready at the time appointed, but Mary Jones, without giving any notice, on the same day, at a Church in a different part of the country, married one W_____ of Sheffield. It was too much for Peter, who doated upon her. He returned home, and going into the loft which you have seen, (it then had a bed, a chair, and a table in it) he merely said he would never leave it, and he went to bed. We took him food, but he would not speak ; we left the door open at night time, and after a while he would creep down when it was dark, and nearly bury himself in the earth of the garden or roll in any pool he

could find. Many a time has his father wheeled his barrow over his naked body, when he was lying in his gait early in the morning, and he could not see him. At last he refused to go out any more, and pulled his bed all to pieces; every thing which has since been given him for bedding or clothing he destroys, and the hole you saw in the loft, through which the light and air is let in, he tore with his hands. He afterwards put himself in the position you saw him in, and years many have gone by, since he has moved a foot from the spot you saw him in." We enquired if he had ever before his intended marriage shewn symptoms of insanity, or, during any lucid interval, he had spoken of his fatal disappointment. She said that he had never mentioned any thing about the matter, excepting the following words which her mother had previously mentioned.

"No greater grief, no meikle pain,
Than for to love and not be lov'd again."

And that before he fell in love he was the smartest young man of the place. She added, that he was inoffensive in his manner, excepting that he sometimes cried out dreadfully in the night time, but that on such occasions he always exclaimed "Mother! Mother!" and was instantly pacified as soon as she had hobbled up the loft and he saw her.

During our return, as may be supposed, we were ruminating on the frightful sight to which we had been witnesses. The first idea was that of surprise, that the Maniac's parents and family should have so kept the secret of his miserable existence, that scarcely one of the neighbouring cottagers knew any thing more than that there was something strange to see in Raeney's house, but they knew not what. In Sheffield, and as we may charitably suppose, at Norton, (especially to the parish officers of fourteen successive years) the existence, and, as it may be termed, the horrid imprisonment of the pauper lunatic has not been known, or doubtless, the magistracy would have committed his care, and possible cure, to the great asylums, which the public maintains out of its own purse. The possibility that this poor son of humanity may yet be returned to the world, of which he is insensible he forms a part, I think merits attention. His physical powers can never be restored, but it is impossible to suppose that the poor wretch who could, with a manner and tone not to be mistaken, distinctly say, "I am baun to sleep," is irretrievably fallen to the state of the lowest animal, yet is his treatment and his lodging inferior to that of the ox or the ass.

The cause of his malady is highly interesting;—mentally he has died for love.

"In our boyhood we thought this possible, nay likely;—in youth, we doubted if it could happen:—in our manhood we laughed at the mere idea." SHAKESPEARE.

Men have died, and worms have eaten them ere now--but not for love.

Alas! we must go back to our juvenile faith, for it cannot be doubted that the falsehood of Mary Jones broke the heart of Peter Raeney.