

LEGEND OF THE FLOATING ISLET.

I must honestly tell you, gentlemen, that my story hath much the air of a romance, as well as much of love in it, and many of the other ingredients of such like vain and frivolous compositions—but you shall have the facts as told me by my much honoured father, who, being a well employed blacksmith, not many miles from the spot where we now are, may be said to have been the chronicler of the passing yevents of his day.

Awell you see it happened that a well-grown handsome proper looking young shepherd lad, called Robin Stuart, had possessed himself of the young affections of a bonny lassie, the daughter of Donald Rose, one of the better sort of tenants of these parts. Their love for one another had grown

up with them, they could not well say how. Its origin was lost in the innocent forgetfulness of their childhood, as the origin of a nation is buried in the fabulous history of its infancy,—but, however born, this they both felt, that it had grown in strength and vigour every day of their lives, until with Robin it began to ripen into that honest and ardent attachment natural to a manly young heart, which was responded to on the part of bonny Mary Rose by all the delicacy and softness that ought to characterize the modest young maiden's return of a first love. But however natural it was for the tender heart of the daughter to beat in unison, or, as I may say, to swing in equal arcs with that of her lover, just as if they had been two pendulums of like proportions and construction, it was equally *selon les règles*, as the modern men of Gaul would say, that the churlish and sordid old tyke of a father, who had been accustomed to estimate merit more by the rule of proportion than any thing else, exactly perhaps as he would have valued one of his own muttuns, according to the number of its pounds, should have stormed like a fury when he actually deteckit the *callant* Robin Stuart in the

very *ack* of making love to his daughter in his own house!

A desperate feud of some years' standing, had made Donald the declared enemy of Robin's father, old Harry *the herd of the Limekilns*, a cognomen which he had from the circumstance of his cottage being placed on the side of yonder hill of that name, so called from a prevailing tradition, that the lime used in the building of the castle of Loch-an-Dorbe was brought in the state of stone in creels on horses' backs from the quarries near to Grantown, and burned there. Old Harry was a poor man, and a herd, whilst Donald Rose was wealthy, and especially prided himself on being a *Duniwassel*, or small gentleman,—so that there thus existed three most active awgents, to wit—enmity, avarice, and pride, which combined to compel him to put an instantaneous stop to all such proceedings between Robin Stuart and his daughter Mary. Without one moment's delay, he thrust the young shepherd, head and shoulders, violently forth from his door, and smacking the palm of his hand significantly and with great force and birr on his dirk sheath, so as to cause the weepion to ring again—

“ I'll tell ye what it is, my young birkie,” said

he, in a voice like thunder, “ gif I catch ye again within haulf a mile o’ my dochter, ye sall ha’e a taste o’ sweetlips here !—An’ as for you, Mary, an’ ye daur to let siccan a beggarly chield as that come within a penny stane cast o’ ye, by my saul but I’ll turn ye out owr my door hauld wi’ as leetle ceremony as I ha’e done the same thing to Rab himsell yonder !”

But, as one of the ancient heathen poets bath it, love is a fire which no storm can extinguish—it feeds itself with hope, and only burns the brighter the more it is blown against by adverse blasts. You know, gentlemen, how Pyramus and Thisbe contrived to hold secret converse together. Though Robin and Mary had no crack in a wall through which to pour the stream of their mutual love,—nay, although their respective dwellings were some mile or two separate from each other, yet many were the private meetings which the youth and maiden contrived to obtain, during which they employed their time in fostering their mutual hopes, and in strengthening their belief that better and happier days were yet in store for them. And happy indeed would have been those days of their anticipation, if they could have proved happier

than were those stolen hours which they thus occasionally enjoyed together.

Now, it happened one beautiful day, in the beginning of summer, that Donald Rose rode off from his door to go to a distant market, whence there was no chance of his returning till late at night. The old saying hath it, that when the cat is away the mice will play. This was too favourable an opportunity to be lost by a pair of young-lovers so quick-sighted as Robin and Mary. It had been marked by both of them for some weeks before it came; and the farmer's long-tailed rough grey garron had no sooner borne his master's bulky body in safety along the ticklish and treacherous path that went by a short cut through the long moss, and over the distant rising ground, than Robin Stuart, true to his tryst, appeared to escort his bonny lassie on a ramble of love. No one was at home to spy out their intentions but old Mysie Morrison, the good-natured hireling woman of all work; and she was too much taken up with her household affairs to trouble her head about watching the young lad and lass. Indeed, if she had thoughts of them at all, she was too much attached to her young mistress, and too well acquainted

with her secret, and too shrewd to betray her either by design or by accident.

As you may see, gentlemen, there was no great choice of pleasure walks in this bleak *destrick*, but the two young creatures were so taken up with each other, and so full of joy in each other's company, that the dreariest spot of it was as a rich and blooming garden in their delighted eyes. They tripped along merrily together, and bounded like roe deer over the heathery knolls, scarcely knowing, and not in the least caring, which way they went, until they found themselves by the side of the little *lochan* which we have but just left behind us. It was then the season when the wilderness of this upland country was clad in a mantle of wild flowers, and thereabouts especially they grew in so great variety and profusion that it seemed as if the goddess Flora had resolved to hold her court in that place. There, then, they resolved to rest a while; and Robin, producing the simple contents of a little wallet, which he carried under his plaid, they sat down together and feasted luxuriously.

When they had finished their meal, the lovers began to waste the hours in idle but innocent

sport. They roamed about here and there, gathering the gaudy flowering plants that grew around them ; and after filling their arms with these wildling treasures, they again seated themselves side by side, to employ their hands in arranging and plaiting them into rustic ornaments. Whilst thus occupied, they were too happy and too much taken up with their own pleasing prattle to think of the progress of the sun, who was all this time most industriously urging his ceaseless journey over their heads, without exciting any of their attention, except in so far as his beams might have lent a livelier hue to the gay garlands they were weaving for each other, or yielded a fresher glow to the cheeks, or a brighter sparkle to the eyes, of those who were to wear them.

Whilst they were thus so happily and so harmlessly occupied, they went on with all the innocent simplicity of rustic life, repeating over and over again to each other their solemn vows of eternal love and fidelity, as if they could never have been tired of these their sweet and soothfast asseverations, whilst, at the same time, they uttered them with a copiousness of phraseology, and a variety of dialogue, truly marvellous in such a muirland pair



Designed & Etched by William Dyce, R.S.A.

MARY ROSE AND ROBIN STUART.

see page 246, Vol. I.

as they were. It would have absolutely astonished all your writers of *novelles* to have overheard them, and it would have puzzled any of these fiction mongers to have invented the like.

“ Oh that your father was but as poor and as humble as mine, Mary !” exclaimed the youth at last, “ or, rich and proud as he is, that you could leave him, and content yoursel’ wi’ bein’ a poor man’s wife !”

“ Na, Robin !” replied she, shaking her head gravely, and then laying her hand upon his arm, and looking up wistfully into his eyes, “ you would never ask me, my father’s ae bairn, to leave him noo that he has grown auld, and that my dear mother has left us baith and gane to Heeven ! Gif, indeed, he could be but brought to look wi’ a kind ee on you—then—then”—continued she, with a faltering tongue, whilst she blushed deeply, and threw her eyes down amidst the heap of flowers that lay at her feet,—“ then, indeed, we might baith be his bairns.”

“ Oh ! I wish again that he were but a poor man !” cried Robin, enthusiastically, “ for then might thir twa arms o’ mine mak’ me as gude a match in his een as a’ the bit tocher he could gie’

might warrant him to look for. Weel and stoutly wad I work for sic a prize as you, Mary !”

“ An’ weel wad I be pleased that ye should ha’e it, Robin, little worth as it is !” said Mary, with an expression of undisguised fondness. “ Though I could na’ gie up my father, I could gie up a’ my father’s gowd, gif it wad but bring you hame to help him. And gif it warna for him,” added she, with a tear trembling in her eye, “ I trow I could gang wi’ you to the warld’s end, an’ I war never to see anither human face !”

“ Oh, Mary !” exclaimed Robin, in a transport, “ I could live wi’ you in a desert. I could live wi’ you in some wee uninhabited spot in the midds o’ the muckle ocean, aye, though it war nae bigger than the bit witches’ island there afore ye, aye, and as fond o’ flittin’ as it is too, and that we sould never leave its wee bit bounns.”

There was something so absurdly extravagant in the very idea of two people being confined together to a space of a few yards square, to live the sport of every varying breeze that might blow over the surface of the deep, that Mary’s gravity was fairly overcome, notwithstanding the high pitch of devoted feeling to which she had been wound up

at the moment. She could not control herself; and she gave way to loud peals of laughter, in which her lover as heartily joined her. "See!" cried she, the moment she could get her breath, whilst she pointed sportively to the little floating islet which was at that moment lying motionless, and almost in contact with the shore near to the spot where they were sitting, "see, see, Robby, how our wee bit fairy kingdom is waitin' yonder to bid us welcome!"

"Come, then, my queen, let us take possession o't then in baith our names!" cried Robin, in the same tone, and gaily and gallantly seizing her hand at the same time, he, with great pretended pomp and ceremony, led her, half laughing, and half afraid, towards the place where the island rested.

At the time my story speaks of, the borders of the loch were less encroached upon by weeds and rushes than you have seen that they now are, and the island lay, as if it had been moored, as mariners would say, in deep water close to the shore. It was, therefore, but a short step to reach it, and Robin easily handed the trembling Mary into it, with as much natural grace, I'll warrant me, as the

pious Eneas himself could have handed Queen Dido. The lassie's light foot hardly made its grassy surface quiver as it reached it,—but, full of his own frolic, and altogether forgetful for that moment of the precarious and kittle nature of the ground he had to deal with, he sprang in after her with a degree of force which was far from being required to effect his purpose, and so great was the impetus which he thus communicated to the floating islet, that it was at once pushed several yards away from the shore. With one joint exclamation of terror, both stood appalled, and they silently beheld the small fragment of ground that supported them moving, almost insensibly, yet farther and farther towards the middle of the loch, so long as any of the force which Robin had so unfortunately applied to it remained, and then it settled on the motionless bosom of the deep and black looking waters, at such a distance even from the bank which they had just left, as to forbid all hope of escape to those who could not swim.

Fled, indeed, gentlemen, was now all the mirth of this unlucky pair. Poor Mary was at once possessed by a thousand fears; and even the firmer

mind of her companion, though sufficiently occupied with its anxiety for her, was not without its full share of those individual superstitious apprehensions, naturally produced by the place where they were, and which secretly affected both of them. Neither of them could resist the belief, that supernatural interference had had some share in producing their present distress. But whatever Robin's private thoughts may have been, he was too manly to allow them to become apparent to Mary. Plucking up some long grass and sedges, therefore, and making them into a large bundle, he took off his jacket, threw it over it, and by this means made a dry seat for her in the very middle of the quivering and spongy surface of the islet. Then casting his red plaid over his shoulder, he stood beside her, now bending over her to whisper words of comfort and encouragement into her ear, and by and by stretching his neck erect, that his eyes might have the better vantage to sweep around the whole circuit of the dull and monotonous surface of the surrounding wastes. How mixed, yet how antagonist to each other were the ideas which now passed rapidly through his mind! At one moment he felt a strange and indescribable rap-

ture as the mere thought crossed him that this small floating spot of earth did indeed contain no other human being but himself, and her whom he would wish to sever from all the world besides, that she might be the more perfectly dependant on himself alone, and therefore the more indissolubly bound to him ; and then would he utter some endearing words to Mary. Then again the shivering conviction would strike him, that although there was no *human* being but themselves there, there might yet be other unknown and unseen beings in their company that neither of them wist of, and he looked fearfully around him, scanning with suspicious eye, not only the whole surface of the lake, but every little nook and crevice of the shore. And then bethinking him of night, he lifted up his eyes with anxious solicitude from time to time, to note the position of the sun, whose progress he and his fair companion had previously so much disregarded ; and great was his internal vexation when he perceived how rapidly his car was now rolling downwards, not, as the auncient poets would say, in his haste to lay himself in the lap of Thetis, but as if he had been eager to escape be-

hind yon great lump of a muirland-hill yonder to the westward.

But a yet more trying discovery soon began to force itself upon his attention. The islet on which they stood, seemed, as he narrowly measured it with his eye, to have sunk some inches into the water ! Already in idea he felt its bubbling wave-lets closing over his own head, and the dear head of her whom he so much loved ! His heart grew sick at the very thought. Summoning up courage, however, he contrived to allow no outward sign to betray his feelings to Mary ; and taking certain marks with his eye, he set himself to watch them with an anxiety so intense, and with a look so fixed, that he was unable rationally to reply, either by word or sign, to any thing that the poor lassie said to him, so that she began at length to entertain new apprehensions at the wild expression which his countenance exhibited. By degrees, however, she became more assured, for, after long and accurate observation had led him to believe that at least no very rapid change was taking place, his features gradually relaxed, and hers were for the time relieved by that very sympathy which had so enchained them.

And now the sun was fast approaching the horizon, and Robin's eyes were eagerly employed in endeavouring to penetrate even the most distant shadows that were rapidly settling down upon the hills, behind which he was about to disappear, whence they began to spread themselves over the wide extent of brown moors and black mosses that stretched every where around them. As the light passed away, his glances flew more hastily in every direction, in the vain search for some human being. Above all, he earnestly surveyed the road where he for some time sanguinely hoped that he might discover some one returning from the market, who might yet lend them an aid, though he felt that it quite defied him to form any rational conception as to what the nature of that aid could be. Again, he would most inconsistently shrink back, and instinctively shut his eyes, as if that could have concealed his person, from very dread that Donald Rose might come home that way and discover them in this their distressing and dangerous situation, for he was fully aware, that he had but little chance of rising in the old man's estimation by having thus had the misfortune to bring the life of his only child into so great peril. As he thus ru-

minated, he remembered that although this was not old Donald's shortest way home, yet it was that which he was most likely to take towards night, as being the best. And he moreover distinctly perceived, that if he did come that way before it was dark, he could not fail to discover them. For as the rugged and irregular muirland road wound round nearly one-third of the whole margin of the little loch, by reason of its having to cross the bit brook that issues from its western extremity, it was self-evident that no one could travel that way without having his eyes intently fixed, for a considerable time, in a direction that must compel him to survey the whole surface of the sheet of water, so that not a duck or a dabchick could yescape them. And what if the farmer did not come! Might they not be discovered by some other hard-hearted person, who, instead of assisting them, might be so wicked as to carry the news of their situation directl to old Rose, whose rage, he felt persuaded, would be enough to burn up the waters of the loch. Such a finis to the adventure was the least misfortune they could look for from the malice of those evil spirits of the islet, by whom he believed that he and Mary had

been thus entrapped. Anxious as he had at first been to descry some one, he now longed for night to fall down on them and render them invisible. Then the utter hopelessness of eventual concealment occurred to him, for he reflected that the farmer must return home at some hour during the night ; that when he did so return, he must find his daughter absent, and that his ungovernable fury would not be diminished by the tormenting suspense in which he would be kept regarding her until next day, when they should certainly be discovered. Robin's mind was tossed to and fro among such unpleasant thoughts as these, till they were all put to flight by the overwhelming force of that superstitious dread which taught him to believe that night would soon give an uncontrolled power to those evil beings, who had thus so cruelly used them.

“ Oh, for a breeze of wind !” cried poor Robin in his agony, as a thousand formidable and ghastly shapes began to dance before his disturbed fancy. And—

“ Oh, for a breeze !” sighed the soft and tremulous voice of Mary Rose, whose mind had all this while been silently following the same irregular

train of thought, and sympathetically participating in the distressing emotions which had been agitating her lover.

And now the sun went down in a blaze of glory beyond the western hills, and his last beams took leave of the surface of the water, after having shed a radiance over it, as well as a cheerful glow over the countenances of the two lovers, that but ill assorted with the misery of soul which they were enduring. By degrees a soft summer exhalation began to arise from the bosom of the loch, as well as from all the neighbouring pools, peatpots, and marshes. But balmy, and cheering, and invigorating as it was to all the parched offspring of nature that grew in this desert, which opened their bosoms to receive it, and gratefully exhaled their richest perfumes, it chilled the very hearts of the lovers, as night fell darkly and dismally around them.

“Robin,” said Mary in a voice that quivered from the effects of the chilling damp, combined with those secret terrors which were every instant taking more and more powerful possession of her, in spite of all her reason and resolution to resist them.

“Robin, put on your jacket, you will starve.”

“Mair need for me, Mary, to gie ye this plaid

o' mine," replied he in a tender tone. "Here, tak' it about ye, my dearest lassie, and keep up a gude heart."

"Na, I'll no tak' nae mair aff ye," said Mary gently, refusing to allow him to throw the plaid over her.

"Let me—let me gie ye haulf o't then," said he, with a modest hesitation.

After some little farther discussion, the matter was at last arranged, for Mary stood up by Robin's side, and the ample plaid having been thrown over both of them, somewhat in the manner of a tent, the edges of it were held together by her lover's nervous arm, so as in a great measure to exclude the cold damp air. If it was not altogether shut out, Robin at least for some time felt none of its influence, for, finding himself thus the sole protector of his beloved Mary, his heart burned within him with love and pride, and all thoughts of evil spirits were banished for a time.

Things had not been long accommodated in this manner, when Mary complained that her feet began to grow cold and wet, and the change in Robin's thoughts may be conceived when he too became convinced that the water was certainly some-

how or other gaining upon them. The darkness was now such as to render it impossible for him to make any such minute observation as he had done before. He could only now guess vaguely, and his whole frame shivered with horror as the suspicion crossed him, that the unusual weight which the islet now bore having pressed it downwards, the upper and more porous parts of it, which were formerly comparatively dry, had imbibed a greater quantity of water than usual, and the specific gravity of the whole being thus encreased, it was gradually sinking, and must soon be altogether submerged. I say not that the poor lad reasoned thus upon pheelosophical principles, but, nevertheless, he did come to the conclusion that this treacherous bit of ground was sinking fast. How long or how short a time it might possibly take before the awful catastrophe should arrive, was more than he had any means of determining. He had nothing now left but to nerve himself with resolution to enable him to conceal his fears and his horrors from Mary, though, at the same time, he could not help clinging to her with an earnestness and a wildness of manner that did any thing but allay her terrors. Dark as the night was, all those

superstitious fancies which had disturbed their minds were banished by the overpowering conviction of speedily approaching dissolution which individually possessed them in secret. The black gulph by which they were environed, seemed, in the mind's eye of each of them, to be yawning to swallow them up ; and the thought that they should die in each others arms, was the only consolation that visited their afflicted souls in that awful moment.

“ Let us pray to the Lord ! ” said Mary, solemnly, “ for our death hour is come ! ”

Robert, who would now have deemed it to be a sinful ack to speak to her of hope, which he had himself so utterly abandoned, immediately obeyed her command. You know, gentlemen, that it is the glorious preevilege of our Scottish peasantry to receive education from the pious and well conducted teachers of our parochial schools. Even the youngest men are thereby exercesed in prayer, so that it becomes so much of a habit with them, that they are at all times prepared to pour out their souls in extemporaneous offerings to the Deevine Being. You can easily understand, therefore, that at such a moment, when convinced

that he himself, and she whom he loved beyond all yearthly things, were about to be summoned to the footstool of their Creator, his prayer was solemn, yearnest, simple and sublime. So certain did the sealing of their doom now appear, that he put up few petitions for present help in this world. The whole force of his supplication was directed to their salvation through the merits of a Saviour, in that on which they were so soon to enter, and Mary clung closer to him as he spoke, and continued to follow all his expressions, now internally and now audibly, with a fervour that sufficiently proved the intensity of her faith and hope.

Whilst the poor creatures were thus employed, a dim gleam of light from the eastern horizon seemed as if struggling through the dense fog that hung over the loch, and soon afterwards a gentle passing breath of air was distinctly felt by both of them. It murmured around them, and fanned them, as it were, for a moment, and found its way even within the hollow of the plaid. Its voice was to them as the voice of their guardian angel, and it refreshed their drooping souls, although they knew not very well how it did so. In a very few minutes afterwards, however, the mist being broken

up by the influence of a full moon that had just risen, began to collect itself into distinct spiral columns, which dissipated themselves one after another, as if they had been so many spirits melting into air. The long wished for breeze then at length came singing most musically as it skimmed over the surface of the perfumed heath. And it had not long curled the hitherto still surface of the loch, till Robin and Mary began to perceive that the half drowned island was sensibly encreasing its distance from the shore whence they had taken their departure. There was something very fearful in this, and the poor lassie clung closer to her lover. But with all their fears it now seemed as if Hope was sitting beckoning to them on the opposite shore, towards which the breeze was so evidently though so slowly propelling them.

The moon now shone forth in full radiance, and speedily dissipated the broken fragments of the fog that yet remained. One mass only, denser than the rest, still hung poised over their heads, naturally maintained in that position by the attraction of the damp floating earth they stood on. To their great joy they perceived that the breeze was

encreasing, and that their motion was gradually accelerating.

“ Mary, my dear,” cried Robin, “ keep a gude heart ; I’m thinking that we’ll maybe mak out yet. Let’s hoize up the plaid till it catches mair o’ the wund.”

And, accordingly, they raised their arms and kept the plaid high over their heads, till it was bellyed out by the breeze like the lug-sail of a her-ring buss, and their velocity was tripled.

They were thus moving gallantly onwards, in anxious expectation that a very few minutes more would moor them in safety to the shore, so that there might yet be time for Mary to hurry home before her father should arrive to question her absence, when they suddenly perceived a horseman riding along the road which *sweep’t* around the end of the loch they were now nearing so fast. What think ye, gentlemen, was the astonishment, dread and mortification of the poor lassie and her lad when they beheld the moonbeams reflected from a face as broad and as pale as the disk of the luminary from which they had been last projected ? It was Donald Rose himself !—As their supporting bit of earth drifted onwards with them, they

stood together for a moment petrified with surprise and fear, whilst they beheld him check his horse, and turn his head towards the loch, as if to gaze at them; and then—with one shriek from Mary, and a deep groan from Robin, which might have made a good treble and bass for the psalmody of the martyrs, both the two of them, by one simultaneous movement, sank down together among the rank grass and water-weeds in which they were standing, and the folds of the plaid collapsing around them, both were completely shrouded beneath it. There they lay, abandoning themselves to their perverse fate, and fearing to move or speak, until, in a very few seconds, they were drifted to the very spot where they too well knew that the enraged farmer must be already standing like a roaring lion ready to devour them; and they were thus prostrated, as it were, at the very feet of him whose ungovernable rage they had so much reason to wish to have avoided.

The floating island had touched the terra firma for some seconds, but still the conscious pair dared not to peep from beneath the covering that enveloped them. They lay, as I might say, as quiet as two mice in a bag of meal. They uttered not

a word. They hardly even dared to breathe. But, tremblingly in need of support under circumstances so very trying, the poor lassie Mary clasped her Robin about the waist with an energy equal to the terror she was moved by. It was the feeling of this her utter dependence upon him for support and defence that first subdued Robert's own fears, and awakened him to a sense of his own dignity as a man.

“An' ye'll hae but a thoughty o' patience, Maister Rose, I'll tell ye a' about it,” said he, commencing his peroration from beneath the plaid, somewhat *sotto voce*, as the degenerate modern Romans would say. But gaining greater boldness as he heard the sound of his own voice, and that his words remained as yet unanswered, he went on to speak, gradually raising his tone as he did so, and at the same time erecting his person by slow degrees from his abject attitude, though without unveiling himself.

“Ye may think as ye like, Maister Rose, but I canna' help lovin' Miss Mary; I maun love her spite o' mysell, an' gin ye wad hae me no to love her nae mair, ye maun just dirk me here at aince. But for the sake o' a' that's good!” continued he,

blubbing from very emotion, “dinna offer to hurt ae hair o’ *her* bonny head,—for by my troth an ye do, Maister Rose!—”

These last words were uttered in so loud and impassioned a key, that it sufficiently indicated the nature as well as the resolute determination of the threat that was intended to follow, even if the furious action of the uplifted arm and clenched fist had not left it quite unequivocal. So violent was the effect, that the plaid which had risen along with the speaker, and which had up to this point continued to muffle his head and eyes, was suddenly thrown off.

“Gude keep hus a’ he’s gane!” cried Robin with a stare of horror,—“As I’m a leevin’ man!—as I houp and believe I am”—continued he, pinching his own arms and thighs as he said so, to convince himself of the fact that he really was alive,—“it was your father’s wraith we saw, Mary!”

Half fainting from the effect of the complication of terrors which had surrounded her, Mary Rose was hardly conscious of what Robin had said, and he for his part having gained that self-command of which the sudden nature of his alarm had for a

moment deprived him, now bit his lip and studiously avoided uttering one word that might convey to her the least inkling of that conviction which had just then flashed upon him, or that might distress her mind with any share of that superstitious dread which at this moment so completely filled his own.

“ He’s gane indeed, dear Mary,” said he as he gently assisted her to rise ; “ let’s be thankful that we’re safe on dry land, and let me help you hame to your ain house as fast as I can, and may the Lord be about us !”

Adjusting his plaid over her, and placing his arm around her slender waist to support her tottering steps, he guided her homewards by the light of the moon through the rugged moor by a short path. Often as they went, did each of them secretly remember how auspiciously the morning sun had shone upon them as they had danced lightly together over the blooming heather ! But they were both too much sunk by the unfortunate issue of their day’s adventures, believing as they, poor things, foolishly did, that the powers of Evil themselves had combined to thwart them,—they were too much sunk, I say, to be able to utter much more

than monosyllables to each other, or such words at least as were expressive of gratitude to Heaven for having permitted them to yescape with life, whilst an indefinite dread of the fate that awaited them hung secretly lowering over each of their minds.

Lights blazed within the white-washed windows of Donald Rose's cottage, as it appeared on a knoll before Mary's dizzy eyes. Whether these might indicate her father's presence or not, she could not daur to guess. The poor lassie was so feared, that she hesitated to approach the door herself, yet she felt that there was still greater danger there for Robin, and, with a delicate pressure of the young lad's hand, she bade him tenderly farewell.

"Robin, haste ye hame to the Limekilns," said she. "Ye maunna face my father. Leave me to face him mysell."

"No !" said Robin boldly and with peculiar emphasis, "I ha'e noo faced *mair* than your father, Mary ; and sae I'm no ga'in' to flee your father himsell, though he does wear a durk. Gif he *be* comed hame, ye may the mair want my help to meet him."

Fearfully alarmed for the consequences, and

still more apprehensive for her father's wrath against him than against herself, she endeavoured to argue with him on the folly of his rashness, and whilst they were both engaged in an animated, and somewhat imprudently loud discussion on this subject, they were startled by the voice of Mysie Morrison, who came suddenly upon them from the cottage.

"Bless ye, my bairns, is that you?" exclaimed this good domestic, "What i' the warld has keepit ye sae lang oot daffin? An' is that the end o' a' your courtin' after a', that you're to come hame an end it that gate wi' a collyshangy?"

"Has my father come back frae the market yet, Mysie?" tremblingly demanded Mary.

"Na, he's no come hame yet," replied the old woman, "and I'm thinkin' that he'll no be comin' hame the night noo. I'se warrant he's been weel set wi' some drouthy customer, an he'll hae staid whar he wuz. But come ye're ways in, my bairns, an' get some meat; I trow ye maun be clean starvin'."

With Robin's recollection of the spectre which he had beheld riding by the loch-side, he had little heart, at that hour, to cross the wide muir that lay

between Donald Rose's house, where he then was, and his father's cottage on the hill of the Limekilns. He much preferred the risk of meeting Donald's substantial body of flesh and blood, dirk, and fury and all, within the four walls of a well-lighted up room, to having his moonlight path crossed upon the heath by the terrific simulacrum or wraith which had already blasted his sight. In addition, therefore, to the seducing attractions which Mary's society held out to him, coupled with those urgent admonitions which he was receiving at that moment from hunger and thirst, he had thus some vurra strong and powerful secret reasons for preferring to remain, to which he did not choose to give utterance. Mary, for her part, was sorely buffeted between her wishes and her fears. She had every desire to do that hospitality to her lover, which her own faintness began to remind her must now be so highly necessary to him. On the other hand, she had the strongest apprehension that her father might suddenly return, in spite of all that Mysie had said to the contrary, and she thus hung for a moment in dootful equilibrio, as a body may say, between the two opposing forces which were thus operating on her.

But Mysie, who was much less timorous, having done all she could to assure her that there was no danger of a surprise, she at length hushed her fears and tacitly yielded to her wishes. She and Robin, therefore, were soon seated over some comfortable viands, by a blazing hearth, whilst Mysie, with a judgment and prudence that might have well befitted an attendant of Queen Dido herself when she took refuge from the storm with the Trojan king in the cave, retired, to make security doubly sure, by setting herself to watch at the window of the neighbouring apartment, where, by the light of the moon, she might see her master return, so that she might give *timeous* notice to Robin Stuart to yescape by the back-door, whilst old Rose was occupied in putting his horse into the stable.

This was well enough arranged in the old woman, gentlemen. Caius Julius Cæsar himself could not have made better dispositions to have prevented a night surprise. But, as our immortal bard, William Shakspeare, hath it, in the words which he hath put into the mouth of the lively Rosalind, time goes at different paces with different individuals. Upon this occasion it certainly went fast enough with Robin Stuart and Mary Rose. For,

though their minds were for a short time crossed occasionally by very fearful visions of the past, of some of which they dared hardly to speak to each other, yet these were soon banished altogether by their mutual smiles, and by the ardent and endearing expressions which they went on interchanging together. Swift flew the minutes, and their conversation was still waxing more and more interesting. They were seated close together; and, as their tender dialogue became more intensely moving, Robin's arm had unconsciously found its way around Mary's waist, whilst hers had fallen carelessly over his shoulder, and had accidentally carried with it the folds of his plaid, which she had not yet thrown off. The cheerful gleam from the blazing moss-fir faggots, threw a strong effect of light from the ample chimney over their figures. They indeed believed, from their inaccurate calculation, that this their felicity had endured for some short half hour only, whilst, by the drowsy account of old Mysie, who had sat nodding, and every now and then catching her head up to save it, if she possibly could, from dropping irrecoverably into the lap of Morpheus, the god of sleep, four good hours had gone by. As the truth

probably lay between, I shall take the mean of these two extremes, and therefore I may say, with some degree of confidence, that about two hours had yelapsed when she at last yielded to the soporific influence, and fell into a sleep so profound, that ere it had endured for ten minutes, ten canons or ten claps of thunder could hardly have awakened her; and whilst matters were in this state, the door of the apartment where Robin and Mary were so comfortably seated as I have just described them to be,—the door of the apartment was suddenly opened, and Donald Rose himself, covered with mud from neck to heel, and with a countenance pale and haggard as death, entered,—followed, gentlemen, still stranger to tell, by—Harry Stuart, the herd of the Limekilns!—The surprise by which the lovers were thus taken was perfectly complete. Their presence of mind was altogether gone. They started up together at once, without even attempting to unfold or withdraw their arms from the different positions which they had respectively assumed, whilst the drapery of the plaid hung over both of them, mingled with the garlands which they still wore. They stood as if they had been converted into statues.

Gude keep us a' frae evil!" cried Donald Rose the moment he entered, whilst, to their utter astonishment, he started back as he said so, his eyes glaring at them with a ghastly look of fear and horror, that was much too natural not to be perfectly genuine. "Gude keep us frae a' evil, are ye wraiths or are ye real? The same plaid!—the same garlands! and the same guise! Speak!—speak!—what are ye?—But I see," continued he, after a pause, during which he recovered himself a little; "I see, Gude be thankit! that ye *are* baith flesh and bluid."

"Aye flesh and bluid we are," said Robin Stuart, summoning up all his resolution and speaking in a determined tone. "We are flesh and bluid truly, and I trust that we shall soon be one flesh and one bluid too! Our souls are already as one!—sae let not ane auld man's avarice rend asunder twa leal hearts already joined by Heeven!"

"Joined by Heeven, indeed, Rabby!" replied old Rose, with a solemn and mysterious air; "and Heeven forbid that sic a miserable vratch as I am sould daur to interfere. What Heeven hath joined let not man put asunder! Oh, bairns! bairns!" continued he, as he swopped himself

down into his great oaken elbow chair, as if quite overcome with fatigue, both of body and mind ;
“ Och, bairns ! bairns ! what ane awfu’ gliff I hae gotten this blessed night ! As I was on my road hame frae the market,—an’ at a decent hour too,—for the drover an’ me had but three half mutchkins a-piece, whan we pairted at Grantown,—whan I was on my road hame, as I was sayin’, an’ just as I was gaein’ to pass round this end o’ the Witches’ Loch, to cross at the bit fuirdy yonder, what does I see, it gars my very flesh a’ creep again to think on’t,—what does I see, I say, but your twa figures, as plain as I see ye baith at this precious moment, in thay very garments ye hae on, an’ wi’ thay very garlands about your necks, an’ shouthers, an’ breasts, an’ baith claspit thegither, as ye war just yeno, whan I came in. I say, I saw ye baith in that very guise, an’ in that very pouster, comin’ skimmin’ o’er the surface o’ the deep water o’ the loch, wi’ that very red plaid aboon ye baith for a sail. But, Gude proteck us a’ !—What think ye ?—The full moon was just risen in the east, an’ her very light was shinin’ through the twa spirits, an’ about them there was a kind o’ a glory, just like unto the mony coloured brugh that ye hae nae doot aften

seen about the moon hersel. Och me, it wuz a grusome sight! I wish I may e'er won ower wi't!"

Robin and Mary exchanged intelligent glances with each other during this part of old Rose's narrative; but he was too much overpowered with what he had seen, and too full of his subject, to observe what passed between them.

Tak a wee drap o' this, father;" said Mary, handing him a brimming cuach, "you will be muckle the better o't."

"Thank ye, thank ye, my bonny bairn!" said the farmer, giving her back the empty cuach, and kindly patting her head as he did so. "I'm sure, my dauty, it was ill my pairt to cross ye as I did. But, stay!—whaur was I?—Weel, ye see, just as the twa speerits war comin' *whush* athort the loch upon me far faster than ony wild-duke could flee,—the very dumb brute that I was on started back wi' fear, whurled aboot in a moment, an' whuppit me awa' back o'er the moss in spite o' mysel', regairdless o' ony road; and I trow I never stoppit till I wuz on the t'ither side o' Craig Bey, whar, by good luck, I forgathered wi' Harry o' the Limekilns there;—fear, like death, will pit oot the fire o' the suldest fued,—an' whan Harry

heard the cause o' my flight,—for whan he met me I was fleein' like a muir-cock down the wund,— I say, whan Harry heard o' what an a sight I had seen, an' he bein', as it were, in some degree, connectit wi' it, as wee'l as mysel', I trow he wuz as glad to hae me wi' him as I wuz to hae him wi' me, wi' the houp o' keepin' aff waur company. Harry had nae better wull to gae by the Witches' Loch than I had, and sae we cam' ower by the short cut through the lang moss thegither.—A bonny road, truly, for sic an afu' late hour o' the night, for a' that we had the moon, as ye may see well enough by the dabbled state o' my trews.— I'm sure my puir beast 'ill no be able to crawl the morn after a' the gliffin', an' galloppin', aye, an' I may say soomin' too that he has had, for I hae some doots gif there be ae moss hole atween Craig Bey an' this hoose that he has na' had to swatter through."

" Let me get dry stockins for ye, father," said Mary. " Na, my dauty, its no worth while for a' the time !" replied Donald, " An' noo, Harry, man," continued he, turning to his companion, who had been all this while standing near the door, " cum ben, man, an' sit doon ; what for dinna ye

sit doon? An' noo, I say, although ye *are* but a poor man, Harry, an' no just sae weel come by descent as I am, wha, as ye are maybe awaur, am come o' a cousin sax times removed of the Laird of Kilravock himself, which a' the warld kens to be ane o' the maist auncientest families in Scotland. I say, though ye are no just descended frae siccan honorable forebears, yet ye are ane honest man."

"I trust that I am sae, neebour," said Harry, modestly, but with his head yereck, as ane honest man's always should be.

"Aweel, aweel!" cried old Rose, impatiently, "as I was gaein' to say, wee's just owerlook a' thae things, an' souther up a' oonkindness that may hae been atween us, an' sae wee'l mak' the best o't, an' hae your laddie an' my lassie buckled thegither as soon as the minister can mak' them ane.—Come, man, gie's your hand on't!"

"Wi' a' my heart!" replied Harry Stuart, with a good-natured chuckle; "an' I'll tell ye what it is, Carl, maybe ye'll find after a' that the son o' Harry the herd o' the Limekilns is no just sae bare a bargain as ye wad hae yemagined. The herdin' trade, gif it maks little it spends less;

an' I hae na been at it for better nor fifty years without layin' by a wee bit pose o' my ain; an' gif a gude bein bit hill farmie can be gotten for the twa, I'se no say but I may come doon wi' as muckle as may buy the best end o' the plenishen an' stockin."

"That's my hearty cock!" exclaimed old Rose, slapping Harry soundly on the back. "Mary, my dauty! I was sae muckle the better o' the wee drap ye gied me yon time, that I think neither Harry nor me wad be the waur o' anither tasse."

It would be yequally vain and unnecessar, gentlemen, for me to attempt to describe the happiness of the two lovers, or the general joy of that night. If Homer or Maro were alive, and here present, they would fail to do justice to such a theme. I may shortly conclude by simply telling you, however, that Mysie's slumbers were rudely broken by the stentorian voice of her master,—that she was speedily put to work at her yespecial occupation in the kitchen,—that the rustic feast was quickly spread,—that the bowl circulated, or, rather, to speak with a due regard to fact, that it passed backwards and forwards very frequently from lip to lip of the two thirsty seniors,—that the

young couple were in Elysium,—that the old men were garrulously joyous,—that Mysie was frantic, and danced about like a daft woman, and that the sun peeped in upon them from the distant eastern hills ere they even began to think of terminating their revels.