

COMPLIMENTARY CRITICISM.

DOMINIE.—'Pon my word, Mr. Clifford, you have given us good measure indeed ; and of ane excellent *faybric*, too. As I shall answer, we are well on with the small hours.

GRANT, (pulling out his watch.)—Is it possible ? I declare I thought that it had been only about ten o'clock. Why, it is a good hour and a half after midnight.

CLIFFORD.—I was resolved to reel you out a a good long line, while I was about it. I thought that it was but fair to give Mr. Macpherson an opportunity of being even with me, by enjoying as good a slumber as I had last night, but his politeness was proof against the soporific influence of my tale.

DOMINIE.—Your tale would have been as good as an *umberella* against all the drowsy drops that ever were shaken from the bough of Morpheus himself.

AUTHOR.—Perhaps it might ; but now that the umbrella is taken down, the dewy balm of the god begins to descend very heavily upon my eyelids.

GRANT.—Come, then, let us to bed.

The next morning's sun found us all later in bed than usual. After breakfast we left the village, and winding down through the forest of tall pines that lies between it and the river, and crossing the ancient bridge, we left the Spey behind us, and climbed the old military mountain road that leads towards Tomantoul.

CLIFFORD, (stopping and looking back over the valley.)—What a grand Highland prospect !

GRANT.—How proudly the grim old castle domineers over the extended forests, and the country of which it is the lord paramount ! Let us sit down on this green bank of velvet grass, and enjoy the view. See how happily that single touch of bright light falls on the Cumins' tower.

CLIFFORD.—Well thought of. Talking of the Cumins, we must not allow you to leave us, Mr.

Macpherson, without telling us the story of Gibbon More, to which you alluded at Castle Grant.

DOMINIE.—I must tell it to you now then, gentlemen; for I grieve to say that I must part from you at the top of the hill a little way farther on. So, if you have a mind to sit down and enjoy this refreshing breeze for a little time, I shall give you the legend in as few words as I can.

LEGEND OF GIBBON MORE CUMIN AND HIS
DAUGHTER BIGLA.

IF you will be pleased to remember, gentlemen, I already told you, that previous to the fourteenth century the whole of Strathspey was subject to that great clan or nation the Cumins. It was about that period, as I informed you, that the Grants, from Glen Urquhart, were, by royal favour, enabled to possess themselves of Freuchie,—a place of strength, so called from a certain heathery hillock near to which it stood. The Cumins' tower was probably part of that original building which, in the course of generations, has grown up into that great baronial pile which we now behold yonder. It is natural to imagine that the Cumins could not possibly regard this alienation of the property of their clan without its begetting their hatred against

those who benefited by it, though they dared not always to show it by open deeds of violence. Their submission, however, was by no means owing to their weakness, for, notwithstanding that the Grants thus got a footing in this country, so powerful did the Cumins continue for a while, that many were the strangers that came from other clans to reside among them for protection, as was not uncommon in that olden time of trouble ; these fugitives changed their own names for that of the people among whom they had thus found a safe retreat. But they were never admitted to a full participation in all the rights of the clan Cuminich, without submitting to undergo a very odd sort of an irreverential baptism, altogether worthy of the iron age in which it was practeesed.

Gilbert Cumin, Lord of Glenchearnich, as that country, watered by the river Dulnan, was denominated, was usually called Gibbon More, from his enormous size and strength. His chief residence was at Kincherdie, on the north western bank of the Spey, on the brink of the river, just where there is now a ferry across to Gartenmore, the vurra place, sir, where, as you have recorded in your book of " The Floods," the worthy Mrs. Came-

ron made her miraculous voyage upon a brander. The old chronicler tells us, that the house stood on a green moat, fenced by a ditch, the vestiges of which are yet to be seen. A current tradition beareth, that at night a salmon net was cast into the pool below the wall of the house, and a small rope, tied to the net, and brought in at the window, had a bell hung at it, which rung when a salmon came in and shook the net, so that the beast was quickly transferred from the river to the pot. What think ye of that, Mr. Clifford?

CLIFFORD.—Very Ingenious!—but foul poaching.

Well, whilst Gibbon More Cumin flourished, the ceremony of Cumin-making was always performed by his own hands. At the door of his castle there stood a huge stone, which I have often myself seen when I was a boy, and which, for ought I know, may be still in existence. It was hollowed out in the middle like an ancient baptismal font, and, indeed, it is by no means unlikely that it had been originally formed as such. Be this as it may, however, Gibbon More had it always filled with water for the refreshment of his fowls. But, besides its uniform devotion to the

truly ignoble purposes of his poutry, it was also employed by him in the unseemly rites to which I have referred. When any of the strangers of whom I have spoken had a desire to be metamorphosed into a Cumin, he was brought incontinently to Kincherdie. There the gigantic Lord of Glenchearnich, with the observance of very great and decorous form, lifted him up, and having slowly and solemnly reversed the natural perpendicular position of the poor sinner, he held him up by the heels, as Thetis did her infant boy Achilles, and having dipped his head three times amid the pullatory potation, as I may call the hen's water that filled the hollow stone, he set him, gasping and gaunting, upright on his legs again, telling him, in a stately tone, henceforward *to live and do like a Cumin as he now was*. But, notwithstanding this cantrip of Gibbon More's, there was a marked distinction still preserved between those who were Cumins by blood and those who were thus manufactured by him by virtue of the chuckies' water, for these children of adoption and their descendants had always the degrading addition given to them of *Cuminich clach-nan-cearc*, or *Cumins of the hen-trough*.

It happened, about the time I am speaking of, that young Sir John Grant, son and heir of Sir Patrick Grant of Stratherrock, now the laird of Freuchie, did one evening thus hold converse with a curious misformed waggish boy, who had no father, and who went by the familiar name of Archy *Abhach*, or Archy the Dwarf. Kicked and cuffed as the youth had been about the castle, Sir John had taken compassion on him, and had made him his page; and the boy's gratitude and attachment were consequently great.

"Why look ye so sad, sir?" demanded the boy, gently approaching his master, as he sat one evening on the battlement of the bartizan, looking towards the setting sun, with his head resting on the basket-hilt of his claymore, and his legs swinging about, as if he cared not whether he should swing himself over the wall or not. "Can poor Archy do nothing to rid thee of thy melancholy mood?"

"Nay, boy," said the knight, kindly taking his hand, "I doubt thy powers can scarcely reach my malady."

"As yet thou knowest not the extent of my powers," said the boy gravely, "nor can I show thee my remedy till thou makest me to know thy

disease. Yet, methinks, my skill is such that I might dare shrewdly to guess at it. Hast thou not ta'en a heart-wound from a pair of bright eyes?"

"So far I must needs say, that, judging from this first effort of thine, thy skill in divining is not to be questioned," said the knight.

"I will adventure farther then, and say, that the slanting beams of yonder declining sun are now gilding the casement of thy lady-love," said the boy Archy.

"Oh, Archy, Archy!" cried the knight, giving full way to his feelings, "I have never enjoyed a moment's peace since I beheld her at Whitsuntide at the church of Inverallan. She is an angel."

"Granting that she be so," said the boy, "for such they tell me must, reason or none, be yielded to all lovers—yea though the fair cause of their madness should be little less than a devil—granting, I say, that she be an angel, surely that should be no reason why thou should'st thus mope and pine, Sir Knight."

"Thou forgettest, boy, that the hatred naturally born between a Cumin and a Grant forbids all hope on my part," said Sir John despondingly.

“ Methinks I could bring thee an instance where this hatred hath been exchanged for love,” said the boy.

“ Where? when? with whom?” cried the knight eagerly.

“ Here—now—and with Sir John Grant towards Matilda, or Bigla Cumin, as she is called in the country here, daughter and heiress of the big Lord of Glenchearnich,” replied the boy laughing.

“ Pshaw !” cried the knight, with a disappointed air.

“ Nay, dear master,” said the boy; “ and if thou hast been able to get over this natural-born antipathy, why may not Bigla Cumin have been equally blessed by heaven ?”

“ Ah !” cried the knight again, “ would it might be so.”

“ Wilt thou but give me leave to go to try what may be done ?” demanded the boy. “ Be assured I shall be better than most mediciners, for if I do no good, I shall take especial care to do no harm.”

“ Kind boy, thou mayest e’en do thy best,” said the knight. “ I well know thy zeal for thy master’s good; but were thy powers somewhat

more equal to thy zeal, I should count more on the success of thine efforts."

"Such as my poor powers may be, they shall be used to the utmost in thy service, Sir Knight," said the boy. "Good night, then, so please thee; and farewell, it may be for some time, for I go on mine errand by to-morrow's dawn, and the better I prosper, the longer, perchance, may be mine absence."

"Go, and may the Blessed Virgin guide thee, and give thee luck," said the knight. "But see, boy, that thou bringest thine own person into no peril."

"Trust me for that," said Archy, as he disappeared from the bartizan.

The sun of next morning had scarcely well risen, and Gibbon More had just issued from his door to take a look at its face, that he might judge of the coming weather, when he descried an ill-formed dwarfish youth approaching, whose countenance, though ill-favoured, had a certain prepossessing expression in it.

"Whence comest thou, little man?" demanded the Lord of Glenehearnich.

"I come from the east," said the boy readily—

“ my name is Archy—other name have I none—and I would fain be a Cumin.”

“ Ha! ha! ha!—a Cumin, wouldst thou?” said Gibbon, laughing, “ By St. Mary, but our clan will be invincible when it shall be strengthened by such a powerful graff as thou!—Tell me what wouldst thou be good for, boy?”

“ I could draw a bow at a pinch,” said the boy. “ But I must needs confess that I were better for the service of some gentle lady’s bower. I’d willingly be thy fair daughter the Lady Matilda’s page—and I’d serve her right faithfully.”

“ If Bigla should fancy thy ugly face, I care not if she should have thee,” said Gibbon More, “ for though thy countenance be homely, it would seem to be honest.”

“ Make me a Cumin and the lady shall have no cause to complain of me,” replied the boy.

“ Thou shalt have thy wish then, boy, without farther delay,” said Gibbon More—and he straightway lifted up the youth—and, with more than ordinary gentleness, he performed the ceremony of the threefold ablution on him.

Archy Abhach, now converted into Archy Cumin, was speedily installed in his new office as

page to the Lady Bigla, and, in his very first interview, he contrived to establish himself very firmly in the good graces of his fair mistress. But what might have been considered more wonderful, he made a no less favourable impression upon her handmaiden, a matter which jealousy might have rendered more difficult with any attendant of a less amiable disposition than the attached Agnes possessed.

“ There is something more than usually interesting about that poor friendless boy,” said the lady to Agnes, after her new page had been dismissed from her presence for a short time.

“ A most interesting youth, notwithstanding the niggardly way in which dame Nature seems to have treated him,” said Agnes archly ; “ but as to his being friendless, I shrewdly suspect that he is a rogue for making that pretence.”

“ What mean you, Agnes ?” demanded Bigla.

“ I mean that the varlet had no need to have come to Kincherdie to look for protection, seeing that he hath long been the favourite of one of the bravest young knights in all the country round,” said Agnes.

“ Of whom do you speak ?” demanded Bigla.

“ Of a certain Sir John Grant, son and heir of old Sir Patrick Grant of Freuchie,” replied Agnes, with an air of mock gravity ; “ but, perhaps, you have never heard or seen the man.”

“ Oh Agnes !” cried Bigla, energetically clasping her hands, and throwing down her eyes and blushing deeply.

“ You have heard of him then, lady ?” said Agnes.

“ A truce to your raillery,” said Bigla seriously, “ and tell me quickly all you know or guess of this matter.”

“ Why, all I know of the matter is simply this,” said Agnes, in the same tone, “ last Whitsuntide, the Lady Bigla Cumin saw, for the first time, the handsome young knight, Sir John Grant of Freuchie at the church of Inverallan. The knight, with becoming gallantry, stepped gracefully forward and lifted the lady to her saddle, sighing deeply as he resigned the precious load to her prancing palfrey. The lady’s bower damsel, the quick-sighted Agnes Cumin, soon perceived that the said knight and lady had made a mutual impression on each other—with her wonted acuteness and ingenuity, the said damsel soon extracted

the truth from the said lady—and seeing that a misformed imp of a page, then in attendance on the said knight, hath now, without any apparent cause, left so good a master in order to undergo the ceremony of being baptised as a Cumin in the nauseous hentrough, the said acute damsel ventures readily to pronounce that the flame burns as brightly and warmly at Freuchie as it does in my lady's bower at Kincherdie—that is all.”

“ But what *can* Sir John Grant mean by all this?” demanded Bigla, blushing more deeply than ever.

“ To seek and secure an interview to be sure,” replied Agnes, “ but I shall soon know what he would be at,” continued she.—“ I shall soon be at the bottom of it all.”

Without giving the Lady Bigla time to reply, the prompt and decided Agnes hurried away to hold converse with the page. Meeting, as they did, like two sharp flints, they were not long in striking fire enough to throw light upon the matter. Having mutually made one another fully aware of the position of affairs on both sides, they, without farther hesitation, proceeded, like two able plenipotentiaries, to arrange plans for the

future ; and it was finally agreed between them, without farther ceremony, that the high contracting parties should meet in person, on the ensuing evening, in the bourtree bower, at the lower end of the garden, beyond the rampart, and the page was forthwith dispatched on a secret mission to the knight to inform him immediately of this so happy an arrangement.

“ Blessed Virgin, what hast thou done, Agnes !” cried Bigla Cumin, ere she had well heard her maid to an end ; and hiding her crimsoned face with both her hands,—“ What *will* Sir John Grant think of me ?”

“ He will call you an angel, as Archy tells me he has already done,” said Agnes coolly.

“ Nay, nay, but this must not be !” said Bigla, starting from her chair.—“ Run, Agnes, and stop the boy from going on this most foolish and imprudent errand.”

“ Stop him,” said Agnes. “ You might as well ask me to stop Black Peter’s arrow, after it has left his bow-string. The boy is half way to Freuchie by this time. He knows too well how warmly his news will be received to allow the grass to grow at his heels.”

“What will my father say to this strange arrangement, if it should come to his knowledge?” cried Bigla, “to meet as a lover the son of the head of the very house with which we have ever held so great enmity.”

“In the first place, your father, good man, must know nothing about this meeting,” said Agnes. “It concerns him not; secondly, if there hath been ill blood for so long between the two clans, the sooner peace and friendship is re-established the better, especially after two of the principal persons have met together in a Christian church, as you and Sir John have done.”

“Agnes, Agnes!” cried the lady, with emotions of vexation not altogether unmingled, it must be confessed, with certain tinglings of a more agreeable nature, “Agnes, Agnes!—thy precipitation in this matter hath brought me into a most distressing state of perplexity. I know not what to do.”

But before the morning's sun had well risen, the page appeared in the lady's presence, with a perfumed billet, sealed with a flame-coloured silk ribbon, and filled with such professions of love on the part of Sir John Grant, as brought tenfold

blushes into the lovely face of Bigla; and so touched her young heart as to leave her without a chance of withstanding the powerful arguments of her handmaiden Agnes, backed up as they were by the warm descriptions of his master's sufferings, and the earnest solicitations for her compassion on him, which were so eloquently urged by the clever page. The result was, that, attended by Agnes, she did go tremblingly to the trysting place at the appointed hour—listened with a pleasure she had never felt before to all the knight's fervent vows—and both were made so happy by their mutual confessions, that the prudential suggestions of Agnes and Archy were repeatedly required, ere the tender separation could be effected. So well, however, was that and several other interviews of a similar nature planned and brought about by the two able auxiliaries, that for a long time the easy Gibbon More had no suspicion that anything of the sort was going on. But at length it did happen, that as Sir John Grant was returning from one of these meetings, he was rather unluckily encountered, not far from the house of Kincherdie, by Hector, the confidential servant of Gibbon More. The man's suspicions were so awakened by the cir-

cumstance of the knight being on foot, that he scrupled not to follow him at a distance, until he saw him join an attendant who held a couple of horses in a grove about a mile off. Full of his discovery, Hector went directly to Gibbon More; and there is no saying what the consequences might have been had not the Lord of Glenchearnich been a person of a temperament almost miraculously apathetical. So wonderful was his disposition in this respect, indeed, that it was only after his patience had been assailed and battered, as it were, by repeated and most provoking attacks, that he ever could be excited at all. But then, indeed, when he was once roused, he became on the sudden like a raging lion, and his enormous strength and fearless courage being brought tremendously into action by his fury, the effects were quite terrific.

“ So you think, Hector, that the young Strath-errock stripling has been here to look after Bigla,” said Gibbon, after hearing his man’s story to an end. “ Hum,—ha ! I did perceive that the maiden caught his eye at the church of Inverallan on Whitsuntide.—Ha, ha, ha !—to think of a Grant being mated with her, is too ridiculous. But, for all

that, I cannot blame the boy for bowing before the shrine of my daughter's beauty. I'll warrant the young goose came over here to try to get another peep, were it only of her robe, as it might chance to sweep by her casement. Wiser folks than he have done as foolish things—I've done as much myself in my youth. But Bigla can know nought of this, so there is no harm done."

Whether Hector's renewed cautions did or did not succeed in making his master think something more of this matter than he was thus at first disposed to do, I cannot say; but certain it is, that the Lord of Glenchearnich was somewhat suddenly seized with the resolution of going some weeks earlier than he was wont, to spend the summer months on his hill-grazing property of Delnahaitnich, near the source of the river Dulnan. This was a most untoward event for the lovers, not only because the distance between them was thus immensely increased, but because Gibbon More's residence there was a small cottage, which might be called little better than a mere *shealing*,* in

* A dwelling only occupied in summer whilst feeding the cattle on the highest hill grazings. The same word as the Swiss *chalet*.

or about which it would be next to impossible for them to meet without observation. And accordingly, after this move was made, some weeks were vainly expended in fruitless attempts on the part of Archy Abhach to procure for his master, Sir John, even the gratification of such a distant view of the Lady Bigla's robe, as her father described in his conversation with Hector. Yet Sir John often hovered about the place, and lay for many a night wrapped up in his plaid among the heather of the neighbouring forest, with no other shelter but a projecting rock, and the thick foliage of the firs that grew over it. Archy Abhach was almost as much disappointed as Sir John himself at being so baulked. His ingenuity was put to the very rack, but all without effect; because it somehow or other happened that Gibbon More never went from home, and so his daughter was never left for one moment out of his sight. The knight had thus no comfort but in the frequent letters and messages which Archy contrived to carry between the lovers, and which they were fain to employ for want of those more interesting interviews, of which they were now altogether deprived.

It happened that Archy Abhach was one night

sent with one of those letters towards the place where his master Sir John Grant was lying hid in the upper part of the forest of Dulnan, which then spread much higher over the hills than it now does. The moon was not yet risen, and the dense foliage overhead very much increased the darkness and the difficulty of his way. As he was scrambling along past the narrow mouth of a small ravine that opened on the course of the stream he was following, he came suddenly upon two men who were seated beside the dying embers of a fire which they seemed to have used for some purpose of rude and hasty cookery. Curiosity led him involuntarily to stop for a moment to observe them ; but becoming instantly aware of his imprudence in doing so, he moved quickly away, and began to run as hard as he could. But the consequences which he dreaded were already incurred, and he had not gone many paces when he heard footsteps hurrying after him. He fled as fast as his legs could carry him, but the darkness was such that he tripped and fell, and his neck was instantly in the grasp of a powerful hand.

“ I have him fast,” said a rough voice, in Gaelic ;

“ it is but a very small boy, after all—Shall I whittle his craig with my skian-dhu ?”

“ Not for thy life,” replied another voice, in the same language.—“ Bring him along with thee, that we may see what he is. Why would'st thou hurt the creature till we know something more about him ?”

The man who had seized Archy now threw him over his shoulder as he would have done a dead hare, and groped his way back with him to the ravine, where, a blaze being produced by a dry bush of heather, the boy was set down between them for examination. Archy, on his part, was not slow in using his eyes also, and in a much less time than I can tell it to you, he ran them over the bulky rough figure of the individual who had seized him, and then as hastily surveyed the compact well put-together active-looking person, and intelligent countenance of the other, who seemed in every respect to be the superior. This last was by no means strange to him, and, to the surprise of the man himself, he immediately addressed him by his name.

“ Corrie MacDonald !” said he, “ sure I am

that thou wilt never hurt any man belonging to Sir Patrick Grant of Stratherrock ?”

But I must now tell you that this same Corrie MacDonald was a certain hero who flourished in those days in Lochaber, and who made himself dreaded all through Moray-land and its neighbouring districts by the periodical visits of plunder which he paid to them. Amongst other tracts of country, Strathspey and its tributary vallies were wont to be a prominent object of his attention. He had always a large band of followers at his command, who were equally expert in driving away herds of cattle, and brave in beating off the owners when they pursued with the hope of recovering them. Corrie was a reaver of no ordinary character ; for, robber though he was, he had a natural fund of liberality and generosity about him ; and he had so great a stock of native humour in him, that he was ever ready to indulge his waggish disposition at any expense ; and no predatory expedition had ever half so great a relish for him, as that in which he could contrive to mix up a bit of a frolic. Many a cow and ox had Corrie MacDonald carried away from the extensive possessions of the Lord of Glenchearnich. But

these trifling depredations never disturbed the good temper or overcame the patience of that most extraordinary man, the effect of whose unparalleled forbearance was to awaken in the inquiring mind of Corrie MacDonald a certain philosophic curiosity to ascertain by experiment to what extent it was capable of being stretched; and he had long panted for a favourable opportunity of bringing this investigation to a fair trial.

“Corrie MacDonald,” cried Archy Abhach, in a whining tone, “sure I am that thou who hast never had quarrel with Sir Patrick Grant of Strath-errock wilt never hurt any man belonging to him.”

“Thou art right,” replied Corrie. “Not only shall I respect the safety of every man belonging to Sir Patrick Grant, but I will even respect thee, who art but a mannikin, if thou canst prove thyself to be his. I have had peaceable passage to and fro through his grounds on Loch Ness Side for too many years to do otherwise.”

“Then look ye here,” said Archy, plucking from his bosom the letter of which he was the bearer, and straightway showing the address, which was,—*To the honourable and gallant*

knicht, Sir John Grant of Freuchie, these, with speed.

“ That is all well,” said Corrie. “ But me-thinks, mannikin, that this is anything but the road to Freuchie, if I know aught of this country side.”

“ My master is up in the forest, a little bit above this, waiting for my tidings,” said Archy.

“ Aha !” cried Corrie, relaxing his features into a smile, “ some love adventure, I warrant me. A well ! I am the last man to put hindrance in the way of any such matter, especially where Sir John Grant is concerned. Nay, I would willingly go a good way out of my road to help him on.”

“ Sayest thou so, Corrie MacDonald !” cried the urchin. “ Then could I tell thee how thou mightest lend my master thy most effectual aid, and yet keep thine own road still, and that to thine own most abundant profit.”

“ How may that be, my small man ?” demanded Corrie. “ If thou canst make thy plans clear to my conviction, thou shalt find me ready, zealous, prompt, and decisive.”

“ Thou knowest Gibbon More Cumin, lord

of these broad lands of Glenchearnich," said Archy.

"Know him?" said Corrie with a grin. "Well do I that."

"He is living here hard by at Delnahaitnich," continued the page. "He keeps home so close, that no one can even have a sight of his daughter, far less have speech of her. Couldst thou not carry away his cattle from the forest here, so as to furnish him with a reasonably rational object for travelling for a season?"

"By Saint Comb, but thou hast a wit larger than the tiny proportions of thy body might teach one to look for!" said Corrie. "The notion is excellent. I have long wished to work that lump of dough into a ferment. And, by Saint Mary, as the *creach* will be carried off from under his very nose, I shall stir up his temper now, if it is to be stirred up at all by mortal man. So speed to thy master, and keep him advised to watch his time; and if I don't by and bye clear the way for him, by giving Gibbon More and his people a chase of a day or two through the hills after me and my men, I shall wonder of it."

“Master, master,” cried Gibbon More’s man, Hector, as he came running in to him next morning quite out of breath, “Corrie MacDonald has been in the forest last night, and he has carried away every stot he could find on this part of your lands.”

“Has the rascal taken the cows too?” demanded Gibbon, coolly.

“No—sure enough—he has not taken a single cow,” replied Hector, “I counted the cow-beasts myself and they are all safe.”

“There was some civility in that, however,” said Gibbon laughing. “The fellow is a thief of some consideration; for if he hath left us the cows, thou knowest, Hector, that we shall have plenty of stot-beasts by and bye.”

“Ou aye, surely, sir,” said Hector, as he retired, very much disappointed by the manner in which his intelligence had been received.

Corrie was not without his spies; and the oxen were hardly well so far over the hill, on their way to Lochaber, as to be fairly considered beyond all reach of recovery, when he returned with some of his people to prowl about Delnahaitnich. There

he soon learned from Archy Abhach the manner and speech with which Gibbon More had received the news of his loss.

“ I’ll try him again,” said Corrie. “ The fellow must be the dullest stirk that ever was calved.”

“ The cows are all gone now, master !” cried the same ill-omened messenger, as he entered Gibbon More’s apartment next morning before he was out of bed.

“ A plague upon the plundering thief,” cried Gibbon More, “ has he taken the young beasts too ?”

“ No !” said the man, who was much disappointed to find that this, his second piece of bad news, was just as unsuccessful in rousing his master’s ire as his first had been. “ He has not ta’en a single young beast, but, on my conscience, I’m thinking he has ta’en enough.”

“ The villain robs by rule, I see,” said Gibbon ; “ but since the young beasts are safe, Hector, we shall have plenty of both cows and stots again, anon, you know.”

Corrie MacDonald, who was curious to find out how this second loss was to affect Gibbon, was absolutely piqued beyond endurance when he heard

of the quiet manner in which he had taken it. Withdrawing a handful of his people from the large body of them who were then in charge of the second prey he had taken, he lay in ambush for a third night.

“We’re altogether harried now then!” cried Hector, as he appeared the third morning with a face like a ghost. “Every young beast upon the place is gone.”

“What!” cried Gibbon More, starting up to hurry on his clothes in a state of the fiercest excitement, “does the caitiff make a butt of me?—I can bear to lose my bestial, but to be played on thus by a thieving scoundrel is more than man’s patience can suffer. I’ll teach these ruffians to crack their jokes upon me! Where is my two-handed sword?”

“Father, father! dear father, where are ye running to?” cried his daughter Bigla, as she met him raging out at the door like a roaring lion. “Where are you running without your bonnet!”

“I have no time to speak now,” replied the infuriated Gibbon. “I’ll tell you all about it when I come back.”

“I fear he has gone on some rash and danger-

ous enterprise," said Bigla, "run, run Hector and gather the people, and be after him with help as fast as you may."

Hector was not slow; but he must have been active indeed, if he could have caught Gibbon More at the pace he was going. He rushed up the steep hill in front of his dwelling, and was soon out of sight.

Gibbon had no sooner reached the summit, than, throwing his eyes abroad, he espied his young cattle feeding on the south side of the hill called the *Geal-charn*, or the Hoary Hill; and from the smoke which he observed curling up from a ravine at a short distance from the spot where the animals were scattered about, he at once conjectured that the robbers had chosen that concealment as a fit place for cooking their morning meal. He was right in this supposition; for, judging from his former apathy, Corrie MacDonald had not quite calculated that this third act of depredation would lead to so speedy a pursuit.

"What a pity it is that Gibbon More Cumin has no more beasts left in Delnahaitnich," said Corrie MacDonald to his people, with an ironical laugh, as they sat in a circle round the fire, de-

vouring one of the young beasts they had killed.

“ We need not come back here for a while, till he sends up some more stock from Kincherdie,” said one of his men.

“ We have done not that much amiss in these three turns,” said another. “ I’m thinking we may be content to free him of *black mail* for a season.”

“ By the beard of St. Barnabas, but we’ll come back again and again, until we drive away every beast the cowardly loon has between this and Spey,” said Corrie. “ What should we do with such a lump of butter, but keep melting at it as long as it will run.”

“ Surely, surely,” replied several of them.

“ It will make our broth all the fatter,” said Corrie, laughing again.

“ Villains, do ye dare to laugh at me, at the very moment when you are feeding at my cost ?” cried Gibbon More, rushing suddenly and unexpectedly among them, like a raging wolf into a flock of penned sheep. “ I’ll teach you to make a fool of me.”

The immense blade of his two-handed sword gleamed like a meteor in the air, flashed in the

sun, and shed lightnings into their terrified eyes. Each of them tried to scramble to his feet as he best could; and one or two were shorn of their heads, ere they could rise from the ground. Bonnets with heads in them fell to right and left, as I have seen ripe apples scattered from their parent bough by a violent gust of wind, or by the inroad of some thieving schoolboy. No one thought of any thing else but flight; and the actions of all were as quick as their thoughts. But Gibbon More's enormous double-edged weapon was quicker in the repetition of its sweeping cuts than even thought itself. On he went, slashing right and left after them as they fled, till he had strewed the ravine and the hill-side with about a dozen of their carcasses, and then, breathless and overcome with rage, haste, and toil, he sat himself down to rest on the heather. The remainder of the robbers were thus allowed to escape; and as he did not know the boasting Corrie MacDonald personally, that hero contrived to get safe away among the rest, and went home to Lochaber, somewhat less disposed to try experiments on the temper of Gibbon More Cumin, than he had declared himself to be before this his terrible and unlooked for onslaught.

Gibbon More's people, with Hector at their head, arrived too late to share with him in the glory of his victory. But they were useful in burying the slain. A few tumuli, which are still to be seen raising their green heads among the heather, on the southern declivity of the *Geal-charn*, were thrown up by them over the dead bodies; and they then had the satisfaction of driving home their master's young cattle in safety to their native pasture, where the animals afterwards grew to be cows and oxen, entirely free from any farther alarm from Corrie MacDonald.

I need not say that the sharp-witted page took good care that his master should profit by the temporary absence of Gibbon More. Sir John Grant was at the cottage immediately after the Lord of Glenchearnich had left it. But the knight had little advantage after all from an adventure which had cost Corrie MacDonald so dear. He had indeed, the satisfaction of again beholding and conversing with Bigla; but, filled as she was at the time with alarm and anxiety about her father's safety, she could talk about or listen to no other subject. The time of the Lord of Glenchearnich's absence fled like a short dream. His anticipated

travel of a few days had, by his own extraordinary activity and courage, been reduced to a few short hours, and the wary and watchful page had barely time to warn his master away, ere Gibbon More's voice was heard calling to his people, as he returned to the house begrimed with the blood and soil of his recent conflict.

But Sir John's more frequent opportunities of meeting with Bigla were soon afterwards again happily renewed by the return of Gibbon More to Kincherdie; and, by the ingenuity of the page, these stolen interviews passed over undiscovered even by the lynx-eyed Hector, whose energies were by this time somewhat diverted from their wonted watchfulness, by a certain newborn affection which had recently possessed his bosom for the fair maid Agnes.

It happened on one occasion that Gibbon More chanced to go to a fair or market at Inverness. The streets were crowded with people, as well as with horses, cows, and oxen of all sorts. There might have been observed the eagle-winged bonnet of the chief, followed by his tail of clansmen and dependants,—and chieftains were seen promiscuously mingled with cattle-boys, gillies, and

serfs of every degree and denomination, thronging the public way. Many were the friendly salutations, and many the flashes of hostile defiance that passed among the various personages, who, coming from distant parts of the country, chanced on that day to meet each other. Often was the authority of the provost, the bailies, the sheriff, and other officials called into operation to quell embryo quarrels, and sometimes it was all that the united forces of these public functionaries could do to keep the restless and blood-thirsty dirks and claymores in their sheaths. Rarely did the mantled and well wimpled damsels venture forth amidst the complication of dangers that were to be encountered at every step from the prevalence of those quarrels, as well as from the horns of the cattle and the heels of the horses. They contented themselves with saluting their friends from their open lattices,—and many were the warm though distant acknowledgments that took place between the young and the fair ladies, who, whilst they were ostensibly occupied in gazing at the marvels in the street,—at the jesters and mummers who jingled their bells, or grinned with their painted faces, and trolled their rude and threadbare rhymes

to ditties as unpolished, the pretty creatures were in reality altogether overlooking these vulgar absurdities, and were holding interesting conversations by signals, only known to themselves, with their handsome Highland lovers in the street.

Bigla Cumin was an heiress of consequence, but she was moreover very beautiful, so that many were the eyes that sought her as she sat at a lofty balcony in the house of a burgher friend of her father's, and not a few were those who endeavoured, and endeavoured in vain, to obtain one glance of recognition from her. I do not mean to say, however, that the lass was haughty, but she bore herself with the modesty befitting her years and her sex. There was but one on whom she did vouchsafe to look with an eye of yespecial favour, and that was Sir John Grant. Her heart beat in double time when he and his father Sir Patrick the Lord of Stratherrock passed by in their gay red and green tartan, which, except in its broad blue *lysts* and in its want of those pure white *sprainges* which enliven that of the Cumin, had so general a resemblance to it, that at a little distance they might have been easily mistaken for each other. When the rays from her bright eyes shot across

the street in a condescending smile in return for the more than merely courteous reverence which he made to her, their sunshine was concentrated, if I may so express myself, as if it had been met by the burning glasses of that most wonderful man Archimedes, and it was returned to her in one melting focus of adoration.

“ Angel that she is !” said Sir John to his father.

“ She is an angel, indeed, boy !” replied the elder knight ; “ and, moreover, there be angels enow in her father’s coffers, not to mention those broad acres of his which would give to the Grants so pretty a little principality in Strathspey. Stick to her, boy ! She is well worth the winning.”

“ Would I could but have an interview with her, freed from all chance of interruption from her old father !” said Sir John in a tone of vexation.

“ Trust to me, dear master,” said Archy Abhach, in a whisper, as at that moment he plucked the knight’s sleeve. “ Watch well thy time. I have seen some one in the town here to-day who will be right willing to lend thee a helping hand.”

Gibbon More was not wont to go without the following of a chieftain on such occasions as this ; and

he generally bore his portly person over the crown of the causeway with a dignity which, when at home, he laid aside with his best bonnet, doublet, and plaid. The recognition between him and his new neighbour, as he called him, was remarkably warm and friendly on the part of Sir Patrick Grant, and very stately and condescending on his own side. His eyes were offended at the sight of the two Grants and their followers, and he sought relief from them in looking at a beautiful black palfrey which a West Highland gilly was leading down the street. The prancing, the caracolling, and the menage of the animal shewed that it had been bred of the gentlest Arabian blood in some far away English pasture.

“Ho!” cried Gibbon, stopping the man. “Who is the owner of that beautiful creature?”

“I am the owner, sir,” replied a sharp eyed little man, right well accoutred both as to his arms and garb, but having no remarkable signs of any great rank about him.

“Are you for parting with the pretty creature?” enquired Gibbon More.

“I should not care much to part with him to a good customer,” replied the other.

“ Is he young, gentle, sound, and sure-footed ?” demanded Gibbon.

“ I’ll answer all your questions by and bye,” replied the West Highlander, “ if you will only do me the favour to satisfy me as to one point.”

“ What is that ?” asked Gibbon More.

“ Will you tell me what part of the country you come from ?”

“ From Strathspey, to be sure,” replied Gibbon.

“ I guessed as much,” said the other. “ I see, moreover, from the set of your tartan that you are a Cumin, and by your attire, bearing, and following, I can guess that you are a gentleman of some note. Do you happen to know Gibbon More Cumin of your country ?”

“ Know Gibbon More Cumin !” cried he, laughing good humouredly ; “ if I know any one, I should know him, seeing that he always lives in the house with me, and that we never eat a meal asunder. I love him better than a brother. But not to keep you any longer in doubt—I am Gibbon More Cumin !”

“ I am truly glad to see you,” said the West Highlander, seizing his hand and shaking it heart-

ily. "You are the man, of all others alive, to whom I am most obliged."

"Ha, friend!" replied Gibbon, looking hard and seriously at him, "I cannot say that I recollect having ever seen you before; how then have I happened so to have obliged you?"

"Well!" said the other, "if you cannot remember that you ever saw me before, the greater was your kindness to me—unsight, unseen, as we say. It is not every man that keeps such an easy reckoning as you do of the benefits for which his friends are indebted to him."

"But what benefit have you had from me?" demanded Gibbon.

"I'll tell you that," said the West Highlander. "I'll tell you that in a moment. You see I have no less than three strapping lasses of daughters. I have married all the three, and to each one of them I gave a tocher which you provided."

"Tut!" cried Gibbon, laughing, "the man is demented. When did I ever give a tocher to daughter of yours? By St. Mungo, I have a strapping lass of a daughter of my own to portion. I have little ado therefore to portion those of other people."

“ What I say is nevertheless true,” replied the other. “ And so sensible am I of the obligations I owe to you, that by way of a small return, and to shew my gratitude, I must ask of you, as a favour, to accept of this horse of mine as a present for your daughter ; and if you will go to the inn with me, I shall be happy to give you a pint of French Claret, if such be to be had in the town, to drink good luck to the young lady and her new palfrey.”

“ As I am a Cumin you are an honest fellow !” cried Gibbon More, shaking him again heartily by the hand,—“ But I prythee explain—I cannot accept either your present or your wine till you tell me who you are, and until you expound your riddle to me.”

“ I am not sure how far I am safe to do that,” said the other archly, “ especially here, on the High Street of Inverness ; and you standing there with so many pretty men at your back.”

“ If I have done you kindnesses heretofore,” said Gibbon, “ what fear can you have of me now, stand where I will, or let me be backed as I may ?”

“ Why, then, you see,” said the other with a certain degree of comical hesitation, “ I must confess that I did, on one occasion, presume somewhat too

far on your liberality, and in your anger you gave me such a fright, that I am not sure that I have just altogether got the better of it yet."

"Ha! ha! ha! why you give me more riddles every time you open your mouth," replied Gibbon. "When did I ever give you a fright?"

"Ou! troth sudden and terrible was the fright you gave me!" said the man, "and surely after tochering off three daughters, each of them with twelve beautiful milch cows and a bull, all of which came from your pastures, I should have been contented. But I'm thinking that if I was a small thing over greedy, the fright I got from Gibbon More's two-handed sword, as it flashed behind me on the Geal Charn, was enough to put all greed out of my head, so far at least as he was concerned."

"Hoo!" exclaimed Gibbon with a long whistle,—"ha! ha! ha! Corrie MacDonald! as I am a Cumin, you are a most merry conditioned rogue as ever I met with! Your hand again! I accept your handsome present, and I will go drink your pot of wine with you, with all my heart, to my daughter's health, and to a better acquaintance between you and me. Ha! ha! ha! By St. Mary, but I am sorry now that I killed your men and so

grievously frightened yourself. But, though the poor fellows are past all hope of recovery now, I am resolved that your dread of me shall be drowned in your own flaggon. Lead on then, my brave fellow, to your hostel."

Gibbon More had too much enjoyment in this unexpected meeting and merry-making to allow it to terminate very soon, but Bigla Cumin was in some degree recompensed for the tedious time she had to tarry for her father, by the long interview which she enjoyed with Sir John Grant, as well as by the sight of the beautiful prancing palfrey, which was led out for her to ride home upon.

It was not very long after this occurrence, that poor Gibbon More Cumin was seized with a sudden malady, of which he died after a few days' illness, and he was carried by his friends and dependants to be laid to sleep in the tomb of his fathers. Jealous of the Grants, even in his dying moments, he left Bigla, his orphan daughter and heiress, under the guardianship of some of the chieftains of his own clan, with earnest injunctions above all things to "keep her out of the *fremyt** hands of Freuchie."

* Strange.

There was no one more anxious to fulfil this dying order of Gibbon's than one of the Cumin's, who at that time possessed Logie, which, in later times became the patrimonial property of that more recent branch whence proceeded the worthy family, which is now so designated. This gentleman had been for some time one of Bigla's suitors; and his pretensions had been always favourably looked upon by her father. The days of mourning for the old man were not yet expired, when Logie came to Kincherdie, gaily apparelled, and well appointed and attended, and urging the authority of a father's dying wish, he signified to Bigla his desire of taking her with him on the ensuing day to his residence on the banks of the river Findhorn, where, as his guest, and under the protection of his aged mother, she should find a safe and comfortable asylum. Though satisfied that there was more of the warmth of the lover in the language in which this invitation was conveyed, than altogether befitted the character of a guardian, yet the young maiden, in her present lonely state, could not well find any reasonable excuse for refusal, and accordingly she was compelled, however unwilling-

ly, to accept his offer, and she issued orders to her people to prepare for the journey.

The prospect of so soon leaving that home, where she had spent her whole life under the fostering care of her doting father, filled her heart with a double portion of sorrow; and after artlessly communicating her feelings to Logie and his friends, she craved their pardon—entreated them to entertain one another, and to make themselves at home—and then she sought the retirement of her chamber, where she spent the remainder of the day, and the greater part of the evening, in giving way to that affliction which had more than one exciting cause.

“ My dear mistress,” said her faithful maid Agnes Cumin, breaking in upon her as she sat in silent abstraction, with her moist cheek resting upon her hand, “ Why should you cry your eyes out thus. The night is soft and balmy—a little fresh air would do you good. Do let me throw this plaid over you, and be persuaded to step out a little, were it only as far beyond the walls as the bourtree bower at the lower end of the garden.”

“ I cannot, my good Aggy,” replied Bigla, with a fresh flood of tears; “ in sooth I have no heart.”

“Come! be persuaded to try the air,” said Agnes, “Who knows what sighs and tears may be at this moment idly fanning the leaves and watering the rosebuds of your own bonny bower.”

“What say you?” cried Bigla, starting up with a suddenly acquired energy; “What say you, Aggy? is *he* in the *arbour*?”

“Hush, my lady!” said the cautious girl, “he *is* there; and from his tears and sighs I should judge that his heart is well atuned to thine at this moment.”

“Let me fly to him!” exclaimed Bigla, “the moments are most precious;” and throwing her plaid hastily around her, she stole out beyond the barbican; and, having reached the garden, she ran on tiptoe to the simple elder-bush bower at the farther end of it, leaving Archy Abhach to keep watch against intrusion.

The scene between Bigla and her lover was tender and melting. For a time they did little else than weep and sigh together.

“Aggy tells me that you go with Logie to-morrow,” said Sir John at last. “How could you suffer yourself to be persuaded to agree to any such arrangement?”

“ It was with no good will that I did so,” replied Bigla ; “ but as Logie was armed with my dear departed father’s delegated authority, and as his proposal was backed by a parent’s dying wish, I could not withstand his request.”

“ Holy Mother, then art thou lost to me for ever !” cried Sir John passionately. “ Canst thou thus coolly resolve, even for such a cause, to throw thyself into the very jaws of those from whom I can never hope to reclaim thee but by force of arms !”

“ Force of arms !” said Bigla. “ I question much whether any force of arms from the Grants could prevail against the men of my clan, who will have the keeping of me. But fear not, for the time is not far distant when the law will give me guidance of mine own affairs ; then mayest thou reclaim me from myself with full assurance of a ready compliance on my part.”

“ But what if these clansmen of thine should basely coerce thee to a hated union with one of themselves ?—with Logie, for instance, who is old enough to be thy father !”

“ I have no such fears,” replied Bigla.

“ By the rood, but I have !” cried Sir John

hurriedly. "You forget the old saying,—*Whilst there are leaves in the forest there a—a—a—*."

"Nay," said Bigla, playfully, "do finish your proverb, Sir Knight,—*Whilst there are leaves in the forest there will be guile in a Cumin*. Did your worship mean that as a compliment to me, or do you forget that I, too, am a Cumin."

"Nay, nay, nay! my dearest Bigla, you are truth itself," replied Sir John, eagerly. "Pardon me, my love, for quoting this old saw; but, seriously, you are too valuable, too tempting a prize to be risked in any hands but—but—but—"

"But *yours*, as I presume thou wouldst say, good Sir Knight," replied Bigla, interrupting him in the same playful tone.

"Thou hast said it, angel of my life!" exclaimed Sir John, rapturously kissing her hand. "I can and will resign thee to no one! Thou art my pledged, mine affianced bride!"

"I am, I am, indeed I am," said Bigla, tenderly.

"Then why shouldst thou put our mutual happiness to peril?" cried Sir John. "Why not secure it by flying with me this moment? My

horses and people are within a whistle of where we now are, and in half an hour's riding or so we shall be safe within the walls of Castle Grant."

"No, no, no!" replied she, "a stolen marriage would neither be for the credit of Sir John Grant nor for that of Bigla Cumin. Besides, I should be but a poor offering at Castle Grant were my broad lands not well buckled to my back."

"I care not for thy lands," said Sir John, "'tis thyself I would wed, and not thine estates. And if that be all, let us to horse forthwith. Better for me to secure thy precious self, though with the chance of losing thy lands, than lose thee in trying to save thy lands."

"'Tis gallantly resolved of thee, Sir John," said Bigla; "but I cannot allow thy chivalrous ardour to do us both so serious an injury. All I ask of thee, then, is to trust every thing to my discretion and resolution, and, depend upon it, thou hast nothing to fear."

The parting between the two lovers was tender and prolonged, and it was only at length finally effected by the interference of Agnes and the page, who came running to tell them that the revellers

in the hall were breaking up. And what he told them was true, for Bigla found that she required the exertion of some degree of ingenuity to effect her retreat to her chamber unnoticed.

An early hour of the next day beheld the cavalcade, formed by the united trains of Bigla Cumin and her kinsman the Laird of Logie, winding away from her paternal mansion, amidst the mingled lamentations and benedictions of her people. Bigla was mounted on her favourite palfrey, the beautiful and fleet courser of Arabian blood, which was presented to her by Corrie MacDonald. Her maid Agnes rode by her side on an animal of metal little short of that which carried her mistress. Logie and his friends, all well armed, surrounded both in a sort of irregular phalanx, which Bigla could not help thinking had more the appearance of a guard to prevent the escape of a prisoner, than that which might do her honour or give her protection. Her own followers were but few, and they were mixed up with those of the Laird of Logie. In the midst of them was the faithful page Archy, to whose care was committed the charge of a small iron-bound oaken chest, which contained her family charters, and other important documents.

This Logie had especially insisted that she should carry with her, in order to secure its safety. The strange misformed urchin sat like an ape, mounted on a very remarkable milk-white steed, of noble courage and beautiful proportions, and whose action was in no degree inferior to his beauty. As this fine animal had been accustomed to carry Gibbon More himself for some years before his death, it was not wonderful that Bigla should have ridden up to caress him ere the march began, and whilst she did so she contrived to give some secret orders to the rider, which did not appear to have been poured into a deaf ear.

The sun was nearly in the meridian before the party reached that point on the edge of the high plain, immediately over the double valley of the rivers Findhorn and Divie. There, as you know, a grand and extensive view of these romantic twin glens is to be enjoyed, together with the broad, rich, and beautiful vale that is formed by their union, with the majestic combined stream winding away through it, between its rocky, irregular, and wooded banks, till it is lost amidst the vast extent of forest stretching widely along both sides of it, as it proceeds on its course towards the fertile

plains of the low country of Moray, and its distant firth, the whole being bounded by the blue mountains of the north. Bigla had seen this glorious prospect more than once before, but she was an enthusiastic lover of nature, and, consequently, she was not sorry when she heard the Laird of Logie propose that they should alight for a few moments to rest themselves, and that they might enjoy it, at greater leisure, and with more ease to themselves. Logie did not make this proposal without private reasons of his own. Having contrived to seat himself apart with Bigla, he began to urge his passion with an energy which he had never ventured to employ before, and after using every argument that he thought might be most likely to prevail on her to yield to his suit, he seated her again on her palfrey, and as he rode down the wooded steeps by her side, he continued to press her eagerly on the same subject, without taking the trouble to use the delicacy of speaking in a tone which might have rendered their conversation private from those with whom they travelled.

“ If you will only consent to be mine, fair Bigla,” said he, “ I will make you mistress of as much of

the bonny land of Moray as your bright eyes can reach over."

"I knew not that thy patrimony had been so ample," said Bigla, coldly.

"Put your fate and mine upon the peril of this condition then," said Logie eagerly.

"I trow I might safely do so, were I to bar all trick," replied Bigla.

"Nay, then, thou art pledged to stand to the bargain," said Logie.

"I am pledged to nothing," replied Bigla haughtily.

"Ha, look there now, gentlemen!" cried Logie.

"My fair ward and kinswoman Bigla Cumin here hath pledged her own pretty person to me, on condition that I shall make her mistress of as much of bonny Moray-land as her beauteous eyes can reach over. Now—how say you? Let her cast her eyes forward, and you will all bear me witness, my friends, that she can now see nothing of which I am not the undoubted owner."

By this time, you must know the cavalcade had descended from the high grounds through the winding hollows of the steep wooded braes, till all the

distant and more extended part of the landscape was lost by the rise of the opposite high grounds, and certainly from the umbrageous recess where they now stood, nothing was to be seen before them but the lands of Logie.

"The joke is very well," said Bigla, "not a little piqued and reddening considerably at the liberty which had been thus taken with her before the men-at-arms who followed them, "But though Morayland was all thine own from Ness to Spey, I would not have thee if thou wouldst lay it all at my feet."

"Talk not so proudly, mistress!" said Logie, very much nettled. "There are many maidens more than thy marrows, who would be happy to mate with me, though I had nothing but this good claymore for my portion."

"I doubt it not," replied Bigla; "but as I am not one of these, it may be as well perhaps that we talk not again on any such subject."

"A little less haughtiness would have better become thee," said Logie. "You forget that you are not now on Dulnan side; and, moreover, you forget that I am your guardian."

"Nay, it is you who forget that you are my guardian," replied Bigla. "I do feel, indeed,

that I can never forget that thou art so; and, moreover, that there is a cruel difference between an unfeeling guardian and a fond father."

"I am armed with thy father's authority," said Logie, hastily; "and I will exert it."

"By basely taking advantage of it to proffer thine own vile suit," said Bigla.

"To see, at least, that Freuchie's son proffers no more suit to thee, replied Logie. If he took leave of thee last night beyond the barbican, I trow it shall be his last leave-taking of thee."

"Last night!" said Bigla, with surprise.

"Aye, last night," said Logie, bitterly. "Dost think I have not found out your secret meeting?—Had I caught the caitiff his blood should have paid for his impudence."

"'Tis well to boast now, fair sir!" said Bigla, "now that thou hast no chance of any such encounter. Oh, would I were on my bonny Dulnan side again! but I trust that my foot shall soon be on its flowery turf."

"That shall be when thou hast my permission," said Logie, allowing his passion to get the better of him.

"What! am I so in restraint then?" said

Bigla, taking a scarf from her neck, and waving it behind her head in such a way, that it was hardly perceived to be a signal by any one but Archy Abhach. He no sooner observed it, however, than he began to rein his steed backwards, until he fell behind the line of march.

“Aye, bold girl, thou shalt obey me ere long as thy husband as well as thy guardian!” continued Logie.

“Sayest thou so?” said Bigla, putting on her Arabian to a gentle canter over the meadow towards the ford of the Divie, whither they were then going, so as to rid herself in some degree of the throng by which she had been surrounded. Then turning in her saddle, she shouted aloud—
“Ride, Archy, for thy life, man! Ride! ride! Men of Glenchearnich, follow your mistress.—Come, Aggy, spur with me, and may Saint Mary be our guide!”

And with these words she and her maid boldly dashed their steeds, breast deep, into the ford, and quickly stemmed the stream of the Divie, whilst the well-tutored Archy Abhach wheeled his horse suddenly round at her word, and, drawing his dirk, he pricked his milk-white sides till the red blood

sprung from them, and the noble animal darted off, with his flea-bite of a burden, towards those wooded braes, down which they had so recently come. The Laird of Logie and his followers stood for some moments astounded on the mead, before they could determine what to do. On the one hand fled the lady; and on the other hand, the charters of her lands—her bonds—and her wadsets were already winging their way upwards through the woods; and the question was, which of the two objects of pursuit was the most important. Even after he had gathered his scattered recollection, Logie stood in doubt for a time. At length, seeing that Bigla Cumin had taken the direction of the house of Logie, so that he was still left, as he reckoned, between her and her own country, he quickly made his selection.

“After that miscreated devil on the white horse!” cried he. “Take the caitiff and the *kist* he carries!—take him dead or alive!—but, at all hazards, take the kist!”

Off went the laird and his people helter-skelter after Archy Abhach, whilst the followers of Bigla Cumin were left at liberty to become her followers indeed. The waters of the Divie frothed and

foamed again as they dashed through after her. I need not tell *you*, gentlemen, who know the *carte de pays* so well, that although Bigla rode off at first in the very direction in which the laird had wished her to go, I mean towards his own house, she had no sooner forced her way up the steep narrow path leading from the ford, than she found herself in a position where she had it in her power to choose between two ways—one stretching straight onwards towards the house of Logie, and the other leading directly back over the hills to the eastward of the Divie towards her own country, by a route different from that which she had travelled in the morning. There she stood for some moments on a conspicuous point, overlooking the valley. But you may easily guess that she stopped not from any doubt that possessed her as to which of the two ways she should take—she only waited till her panting followers had clustered around her,—for they had no sooner gathered than she waved her scarf again, and, amidst the shouts of her men-at-arms, she turned her horse's head to the hill, and began to breast it most vigorously. Logie beheld her manœuvre, and it shook his purpose for an instant. He gave hurried and contra-

dictory orders, which only had the effect of slackening the pursuit after the urchin page, and Bigla had the satisfaction of seeing that faithful creature shooting far up among the bowery braes ere any final decision had been taken by the laird. At length, a small clump of horsemen were sent off towards the ford to pursue Bigla, whilst the remainder, with Logie at their head, renewed their chase after Archy Abhach and his precious casket.

“ Who is he, think you, that rides hither with so much haste from the pass of Craigbey ? ” demanded Sir John Grant to the man-at-arms on watch, as he stalked along the bartizan of his castle to take a look over the country, about the time that the sun was hastening downwards to hide himself below the western horizon. “ If mortal man it be who looks so like a speck on the saddle, he either rides with hot news to spur him on, or he has some enemy after him, ” replied the man.

“ By'r, lady, but you have guessed right well, ” said Sir John ; “ for see ! there comes a straggling line of some dozen of horsemen rattling like thunder through the pass. ”

“Methinks that the elf who flies bears some strange burden behind him,” said the man-at-arms.

“He doth so, indeed,” said Sir John.

“Some common thief, I’ll warrant me, who hath carried away a booty from some usurious burgher of Forres,” said the man-at-arms.

“Be he what he may, his white horse is no carrion,” said Sir John. “How the noble animal devours the ground !”

“He is as like old Gibbon More’s favourite horse as one egg is to another,” said the man-at-arms as he drew nearer.

“Gibbon More’s, saidst thou ?” exclaimed Sir John ; “and, by all that is good, he that rides is like my faithful page—but see, he turns this way. Let’s to the barbican,” and, taking three steps down the narrow stair at each stride, he was at the barbican in a few moments.

“What, ho !” cried Sir John, as the horse came galloping up to the gate. “What, ho ! Archy Abhach, is it you ? What news of thy mistress ?”

“I have neither time nor breath to speak of her at present,” cried Archy, leaping from his horse,

and hastily unbuckling the little charter-chest from behind the saddle of his reeking horse; “but here!—catch!—there you have her charters and titles, being that which I reckon some of the people who are after me would think the best part of herself.—There, catch, I say!” and, with that, he threw the precious box clean over the top of the wall.

“Soh!”—continued Archy, taking a long breath—“I have done my lady’s bidding like a true Cumin, and now I must draw to defend mine own head, like a true Grant, for the knaves will be upon me.”

“Thou shalt not long lack help my brave little fellow!” cried Sir John,—and, in a moment, a party of armed Grants came crowding out from the gate at the heels of their young chief. And, as Archy’s pursuers came up one by one, they collected into a knot on the top of the heathery hillock, and then filed off without ever daring to come within bow-shot of the walls.

“Now, tell me what has befallen the Lady Bigla?” cried Sir John Grant, impatiently addressing the page.

The faithful Archy Abhach gave him a brief outline of all he knew.

“To horse! to horse!” cried Sir John, hardly waiting till he had finished; “Holy St. Mary! she may be lost if we tarry.”

A very few minutes only were expended ere Sir John and his troop were mounted and away. They galloped after the retiring Cumins, but they could see nothing of them any where. He had got to the side of the hill of Craigbey, and was stretching his eyes in all directions, when the distant clash of conflict came up through the woods that sloped away into the glen to the right. Sir John gave the spur to his horse, and dashed down through the thicket, calling to his men to follow him. In a grassy holm, by the side of a small stream, he found Bigla Cumin surrounded by her faithful but small band of followers, who were bravely defending her against a superior body of assailants. His sudden appearance immediately dispersed her enemies, and, overpowered by the fatigue occasioned by her long wearisome and rapid flight, as well as by the alarm which she had endured—she slipped from her palfrey, and sank exhausted on the ground. Sir John Grant was

soon on his knees beside her, to support her weakness, and to calm her agitation. She had owed her escape, in the first place, to the swiftness and endurance of her favourite Arabian blooded palfrey, together with her own wonderful hardihood as a horsewoman, which, much surpassing that of the Lady Juliana Berners herself, had carried her over mountain and moss, through bog and stream, in a manner altogether inconceivable; and, secondly, to the appearance of Sir John Grant, just as she had been attacked by a quickly formed ambush of the retreating Cumins, whose onset had given time to those who pursued her to come up, by which means she and her people being hemmed in on all sides, would have been speedily overcome.

Ere the evening closed in, Bigla Cumin found herself safely housed within the walls of Castle Grant; and the very next day the priest's blessing gave to Sir John Grant her fair hand, and with it her fair lands too.