

THE LEGEND OF JOHN MACPHERSON OF
INVERESHIE.

THE John Macpherson of whom I speak, lived in the very beginning of the seventeenth century. He was the same laird who is well known as having got the crown-charter of the lands of Invereshie. He was a tall handsome Highlander, with a somewhat melancholy cast of countenance. His manners were simple and unassuming, and though untaught by any instructor but nature, they were so much the reverse of vulgar, that they might have even been called elegant. He was warm in his affections, kind in his intercourse with all around him, extremely bold and determined in any difficult or desperate juncture, and resolute and stern in his purpose, when suddenly called on to deal with a matter of deep or stirring moment,

and farther,—though that belonged to him less as any thing peculiar, than as a characteristic of the time he lived in,—he was superstitiously alive to all those incidents or appearances that might chance to wear the semblance of ominous or fatal portent ; and such as these did not unfrequently present themselves in days when the fables of Highland demonology reigned over the strongest minds with an absolute despotism.

Living, as Macpherson did, almost entirely among his native mountains, his time was very happily as well as prudently divided between the chase of the red-deer, in which he particularly delighted, and those attentions which he found it necessary to bestow on the concerns of his landed territory ; in looking to the well-being of his people, and the health, prosperity, and multiplication of those large herds of cattle which spread themselves over the broad sides of his hills, and brushed through the ancient fir-forests or the birchen groves that shaded his glens. In this way his worldly means so increased, that he became an object of no inconsiderable solicitude to such of the neighbouring lairds and ladies as happened to have unmarried daughters ; and so many were the fair

parties presented to his choice, that being attracted in all directions, he remained hanging, like a bunch of ripe grapes, in the fluctuating breezes of doubt and indecision, that threatened in time to dry and shrivel him up into an old bachelor.

Whilst Macpherson was still in this negative condition, he happened to visit the castle of a certain chief. The company were assembling in the great hall to wait for the banquet, and he stood ensconced within the deep recess of one of its antique windows, where he had vainly endeavoured to retreat from the assaults of some three or four most agreeable spinsters, who, being of a certain age, less scrupulously adopted measures which were much too bold for their younger rivals to have ventured upon. Having brought him to bay in a place whence he could not retreat without rudeness, each commenced the discharge of her own independent fire against him, whilst, at the same time, little spiteful shots of malice, both from their tongues and their eyes, were every now and then interchanged from one fair competitor to another. This scene was going on, much to the amusement of the spectators, but very much to the annoyance of the victim of this persecution, when a sudden buzz from

the company, directed Macpherson's attention to the door of the hall, where entered a lady of surprising beauty and grace of mien. By a natural impulse, which he could neither explain nor command, Macpherson burst unceremoniously from among his tormentors, and stepped forward to gaze upon her as she moved easily up the hall. The intelligent eyes of the lovely stranger fell upon him, and fixed themselves upon him with a species of fascination which touched him to the soul. He was sensibly conscious of the resistless power of this influence, but at the same time he felt that it was a fascination of much too agreeable a nature for him to allow himself to struggle against it. He at once abandoned his heart to all its ecstasies, as a thirsty fly would yield itself up to the delicious temptation of quaffing the nectar from the cup of some beauteous and fragrant flower ; and he gazed on her face with a rapture which he had never before experienced. Nor was all this very surprising, for she who thus attracted him had been born and educated in the metropolis,—had even mixed in the gay and splendid scenes of a court, and her dress and manners lent so dazzling an air to the lustre of her natural charms, that, compared to her,

the native beauties congregated from all parts of the vast strath of the Spey, fresh and lovely, graceful and intelligent, as fame has ever held its ladies to be, appeared before her as so many dim and feeble fixed stars in the path of some brilliant and glorious planet.

Invereshie's natural modesty made him shrink from asking for that very introduction for which his whole heart burned. But the lady was the niece of his host ; she had recently arrived with the intention of residing with him for some months, and the introduction came in the ordinary course of etiquette. He was seated by her during the greater part of that evening. Something more than mortal as she at first appeared to be in his eyes, he soon found, on a nearer approach, that she had nothing about her either overawing or repulsive. He listened to her syren tongue with an eagerness which until then had been quite a stranger to him. The hours flew like minutes. He suddenly perceived that every guest was gone but himself. He hurried away in confusion, and rode home in a delirium of delight so perfectly novel to him, that he two or three times seriously questioned himself by the way, whether reason was still

really holding her dominion over his brain, and the continual presence of the lady's image there, almost convinced him that she had usurped the throne of that judicious goddess.

Macpherson was soon drawn back to the castle of his friend, by an attraction which was quite irresistible. The impression made upon him by a first acquaintance, was powerfully strengthened by a second meeting,—a third and a fourth visit soon succeeded,—and their interviews became more and more frequent, as he began to perceive, with a certain air of triumph, that his attentions, offered at first with becoming deference, were much more graciously received than those which came from any of his brother lairds. His hunting expeditions became less numerous, and even his wonted pruden- tial daily superintendance of his rural concerns gave way to a new and much more seductive occupation. He gradually became almost a constant inmate in his friend's castle. But, in devoting so much of his time to attendance on her who had thus gained so overwhelming a dominion over his heart, he consoled himself for this unusual neglect of his affairs, by reflecting, that the prize he coveted was so rare as to be universally considered be-

yond all price,—a gem far richer than any of those that adorned his brooch; and that besides all its glitter and sparkle, it was not without considerable intrinsic value also, seeing, that in addition to her other advantages, the lady's *tocher* was such as might well satisfy a much more avaricious man than he knew himself to be.

As for the lady, I have only to say of her, that she was a woman. There are few of the fair sex whose bosoms have not been visited by a certain spirit of romance at one period or other, and, indeed, it may be matter of doubt, whether those who have altogether escaped from this visitation are much to be envied. It is that which makes many a town-bred girl sigh for love and a cottage, until such fancies are extinguished by maturer judgment. The soul of her of whom I speak had been deeply imbued with this poetry of life, and as yet she had seen no good reason for ridding herself of it. She was all enthusiasm. Invereshie's gay white tartan—his plumed bonnet and jewelled ornaments—his gallant, though unobtrusive, bearing—his firm tread and independent gait—the resolute and heroic character that sat upon his brow; and yielded a calm illumination to his pensive eye

—and, above all, the enchanting scenery of his river—the sparkling Feshie—its wild glen, and the prospective witchery of a Highland life, painted as it was with all the glowing colours of her fervid fancy, and with a thousand adventitious attractions which that fancy threw around it, had conspired to do as much execution on her heart, as her manifold charms had wrought upon his. The visions of town gaiety and grandeur, which had hitherto filled her young mind, speedily melted away. Rural circumstances, and rural imagery occupied it entirely. She suddenly became fond of moonlight walks—of wandering on the banks of the magnificent river that wound majestically through the wide vale, where she then resided—and of musing amid the chequered shadows which evening threw over the ruins of an ancient chapel and a burial-ground, embraced by one bold and beautiful sweep of the stream at no great distance from the castle.

She was one night seated on a grey moss-covered stone, one of the many frail memorials of the dead which were scattered through this retired spot, her eyes now lifted in admiration of the glorious orb that silently held its way through the skies above, and now thrown downwards to its

image then trembling in the mimic heaven then floating on the broad bosom of the stream below, when Invereshie, who had been called away by some express affair, was returning at a late hour to the castle. These were times, be it again remembered, when superstition held all mankind under her thral, and when the boldest Highlander, who would have fearlessly rushed on death in the battle field, would have quailed before the idle phantoms of his own imagination.

Invereshie's nurse had early embued his mind with a firm faith in all the wildest of these imaginings, and with him this belief, then so common to all, had grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength. The horse that he rode started aside and snorted with affright, when, on bursting from the deep shade of the grove that partly embosomed the burial-ground, he first saw the white figure of the lady before him ; and it argued a more than common courage in the horseman, therefore, that he should have checked the flight of the terrified animal, in order to ascertain the nature of the object he beheld. The moonbeams shone fully and clearly on a face which he could not for a moment mistake ; yet their pale light shed so chilling and

unearthly a lustre over its well-known features, that, taken in combination with the hour and the place, it made him hesitate for a moment whether he really beheld the form of her whom he so much loved, or whether that which presented itself to him was one of those unsubstantial appearances which he believed evil spirits had power to assume for the bewilderment and destruction of mortals. But the sound of the trampling of his horse's hoof had fallen upon the lady's ear while it was yet afar off; as it drew nearer, the fluttering of her heart had whispered to her that it was Invereshie who came; and ere he had recovered from his surprise, she arose and saluted him in that voice which had now become as music to his ear. His blood, chilled and arrested as it had for a moment been by superstitious dread, now went dancing to his heart in a rushing tide of joy. He sprang from his horse, and eagerly availing himself of so favourable an opportunity, where all eyes but those of God were absent, he made a full and animated confession of his passion; and that little solitary field of the dead, which had been accustomed for so many ages to scenes of woe and bereavement alone, was now once more doomed to witness the pure effu-

sions of two as happy hearts as had ever been united together before its neighbouring altar, now so long dilapidated.

“ Macpherson !” said the lady, with that enthusiasm which so strongly characterised her, “ never forget this solemn hour and place, and let the image of that bright moon be ever in your memory ; for it has witnessed your vows, and beheld thee pledge thyself to me for ever !”

“ Never ! never can I forget it, lady !” replied Invereshie, with a depth of feeling equal to her own.

“ Tis well !” said the lady. “ And now it were better to shun the observation of prying eyes. This private converse of ours, at the witching hour of night, when none but spirits of the moon are abroad, might be misinterpreted. We must part here !” And ere he wist, she had disappeared among the brushwood.

“ The witching hour of night !” muttered Invereshie to himself, as he stood rivetted to the spot, overpowered by the surprise in which he was left by the strange and sudden manner in which she had vanished from his sight. There was something, he thought, marvellous and supernatural in

it. His eyes wandered round the silent churchyard, where he had found her seated. A thousand superstitious tales connected with that spot rushed upon his memory. It was there that in popular belief the wicked spirit of the waters often appeared to bewilder lated travellers, and to lure them to their destruction. He thought of the power which evil beings were supposed to have in re-animating the remains of the dead, or of thrusting forth human souls from their earthly habitations, in order that they might themselves become the tenants of the fairest and most angelic forms. His reason and his judgment were in vain opposed to these terrific phantoms of the brain.

“ The witching hour of night !” groaned he deeply.

The hand which he had but a moment before so warmly pressed, and which had sent a fever of joy through every fibre of his frame, now seemed to have conveyed to him an icy chillness, that ran through every vein till it froze his very heart ; and as he hurriedly, and almost unconsciously mounted his horse, to prosecute his way towards the castle, his mind was perplexed and tortured by strange and mysterious doubts and misgivings, which con-

tinued to haunt both his waking and his sleeping dreams during the remainder of that eventful night.

But as the dawn of morning swept away the fogs which hung upon the mountain-tops, so did it dissipate the gloomy visions which had thus for a few hours shrouded the lofty soul of Invereshie. Reason resumed her judgment-seat, and a little calm reflection brought a blush of shame into his cheek, occasioned by what he was now disposed to believe to have been his own weakness. Every manly feeling within him was aroused. Arraying himself in his richest attire, he sought for an audience of his friend the chief, and readily gained from him an uncle's and a guardian's consent to his union with her to whom his vows of love had been so recently plighted. Overjoyed at Invereshie's disclosure, the chief led him to the great hall, at that time thronged with guests, and having taken his seat to preside over the morning's meal, he called for a grace cup, and drinking to the health of the happy pair, he publicly announced the alliance which had been that morning agreed on.

All eyes were instantly turned on her to whom the flowing goblet had been so joyfully drained.

But whether it was from the sudden swelling of those emotions, naturally enough arising from this public declaration, or whether it was owing to some fortuitous cause, altogether unconnected with what was then passing, no one could say,—but, whatever might be the cause, her brilliant eyes had become fixed and glazed, the roses had fled from her cheeks, and she fell gently back in her chair, her lovely features exhibiting the ghastly hue of death. A chill shudder came over Invereshie's heart. Pushing back the seat in which he sat, he gazed with horror upon the spectacle before him. Again was his mind unmanned, and a vision of the unearthly appearance which the lady had presented to him when he first beheld her seated among the graves beneath the moonlight of the previous night, rushed upon his imagination. Overpowered by his feelings, he remained as if unconscious of what was passing around him. Nor was he at all observed amidst the general panic. The women shrieked, the guests arose in confusion, they crowded around the lady, and she was borne off to her apartment by the attendants.

For several hours the lady lay on her couch so perfectly exanimate, that every individual in the

castle believed that she was dead, and mournful preparations were begun to be made for the funereal obsequies of her in whose animating smiles they had so recently rejoiced, and in whose bridal festivities they had anticipated that they were so soon to participate. Eloquent was the silence of that grief which reigned everywhere within the walls, unbroken save by the sobbing of those who hung around the couch of her who had already lived long enough among them to have gained the hearts of all who had approached her. But ere long it happily gave way to unrestrained joy ; for, to the amazement of her attendants, the warm blush of life gradually began to revisit her cheeks, —the heaving of her bosom gently returned,—her eye-lids slowly unsealed themselves,—the pulse resumed its former action,—the tide of life speedily carried renewed vigour into every limb,—her eyes regained their wonted brightness,—and, to the unspeakable surprise and delight of every one, she returned to the hall with a light and airy step, and with a sensible accession to her usual gaiety of heart, apparently resulting from its temporary slumber.

But hers was a gaiety that touched no respon-

sive chords in Macpherson's bosom. He had stood as it were appalled a motionless spectator of the various wonderful changes which had been so strangely produced upon her; and he remained for some time sunk in silent abstraction, ill befitting an ardent lover, who had thus had his soul's idol so miraculously restored to him from the very jaws of the grave. Those who were about him marvelled and whispered together. But his moody musings were quickly overcome by the lady's enchanting voice of gladness. The laughing sunshine that darted from her eyes soon dissipated those sombre clouds that overshadowed his brow. He again became the willing slave of every word and glance that fell from her. The fascination under which he was held increased every moment; and not many days went by ere the Laird of Invereshie, surrounded by a great gathering of his clansmen and followers, and proudly riding by her bridle-rein, led her home as his bride to the blithe sound of the bagpipe.

As he approached the mansion of his fathers, Invereshie was met by crowds of women and children and old men, who thronged about the cavalcade with eager curiosity to behold their future

lady, whom they greeted with shouts of gratulation that suffused her lovely cheek with blushes of joy, and flushed her husband's brow with a pride which he had never felt before. An event so interesting to all his dependants had made even the most aged and infirm to leave their humble dwellings. Some of those who had come from great distances were mounted on the shaggy little horses common to the country. The creatures were caparisoned in the rudest and most characteristic manner; and they formed many picturesque groupes, which every now and then called forth expressions of surprise and delight from her who was the fair cause of their assemblage. One of these was peculiarly striking.

Under an old twisted mountain ash stood a ragged red-headed boy, holding the withy that served as a halter to a pony, whose bones, exhibiting many an angle beneath his rough white skin, shewed that he had arrived at an age but rarely reached by any of his long-lived race. From either side of the wooden saddle that filled his hollow back, hung a huge pannier of the coarsest kind of wicker work, and from each of these arose the plaided head and pale parchment features of

an old woman. So very withered were these ancient crones, that, worn down and weak as was the animal that bore them, their wasted frames seemed scarcely to add any thing, in his estimation, to the weight of the baskets that contained them. There was something, at first sight, indescribably ludicrous in the picture they presented; and the bride, who was by no means insensible to such emotions, could not resist giving way for an instant to the laughter which it excited in her as she drew near to them. It so happened that the line of march of the procession brought her close past the tree under which these strange figures were stationed. No sooner had she come opposite to it, than one of them, remarkable for the length of her grey elf-like locks, which streamed from beneath the uncouth *mutch* that covered her head, reared herself up from amidst the heap of tartan stuff that enveloped her person. Stretching out her bare and skeleton arm, her red and gummy eye-lids expanded themselves so as to bring fully into action a pair of piercing black eyes, that flashed with a fire which even extreme age had been unable to tame, and which now lent a fearful animation to her otherwise spectral features.

She glared into the lady's face with a fixed gaze and a wild expression that blanched her cheek, and at once banished every thing like mirth or joy from her bosom. In vain did the lady try to avert her eyes from an object which was now to her terrific,—they seemed as if enchained to it by a power like that of the basilisk ; and to add to her misery, some accidental obstacle created at that very moment a stop in their onward march. Anxiously did she wish to have taken refuge in conversation with her husband, but he was just then employed in replying to the warm compliments of some humble well-wisher, who addressed him from the opposite side of the way. Meanwhile the bony and toothless jaws of the old woman seemed to be moved by a temporary palsy, created by her anxiety to utter something which the lady dreaded to hear. But her very eagerness apparently deprived her of the power of speech ; for though her skinny lips were seen to move, no sound proceeded from them except an inarticulate muttering, the import of which was lost amidst the din and bustle of the crowd. But although the lady gathered not the sense, the lurid lightnings that shot from the eyes of this miserable looking wretch, told her that the words, if words they

were, could have conveyed no prayer of benediction. A sudden failure of nature came over the lady, and she must have dropped from her saddle to the ground, had not her husband's attention been recalled to her at that moment by the renewal of the onward movement of the march. Altogether unconscious of what had caused this apparent faintness, nor indeed being quite aware of the full extent of it, his arm was ready to uphold her. Her vital spirits rallied at his touch. She recovered her seat, and then calling his attention to the object of her alarm, who was by this time left some short way behind them,

“ Tell me,” said she, “ tell me, I entreat thee, who is that fearful looking old woman under yonder tree ?”

“ That,” replied he, “ is my old nurse Elspeth Macpherson, one who is believed by all to be gifted with more than mortal powers.”

“ Her eye is indeed terrible !” replied the lady, shuddering.

“ Why shouldst thou be afraid of her ?” said Macpherson, in a graver tone. “ She can never be terrible to thee ! Great as her wisdom and great as her powers undoubtedly are, they can

never come to me or to mine but to succour and to bless. From my cradle upwards hath she been as a guardian spirit to me, averting all misfortunes that might have assailed me ; and, twined as thy future fate now is with mine, my love," continued he, with a forced smile, " trust me, dearest, that her searching eye will be continually over it and on it."

An involuntary tremor seized the lady at the very thought of her fate being under the control of an eye, the piercing and unfriendly influence of which was still so strong upon her mind. She forbore to reply ; but she could not exclude a train of very unpleasant reflections, which even the rapidly succeeding circumstances of the gay Highland pageant, in which she performed so prominent a part, failed for a while in removing. For some time, too, her husband rode by her side wrapped up in silence and abstraction, till rousing himself from what appeared to be a dreaming fit, he addressed to her some kind expressions, which fell on her soul like balm, and by degrees regaining her wonted cheerfulness, she at length rode onwards distributing sunshine and sweetness on all sides, in return for the many warm welcomes that

were showered on her, till she was finally lifted from her saddle, at the door of her future home, by the nervous arm of the enraptured Invereshie, amidst the deafening shouts of his friends and retainers.

Invereshie's hospitable board was spread with more than its usual liberality on this joyful occasion ; and, according to the custom of the time, its feast and revelry endured for many days. As his lady's previous nurture and education had accustomed her to much nicety of domestic arrangement, and to many luxuries then altogether unknown in the Highlands, he exerted himself to the utmost to lessen the disagreeable effect of that change which he was conscious she must experience on her first entrance into his family. He strove to anticipate every wish ; and when he had failed in anticipating her wishes, he spared neither pains nor expense to gratify them the moment she had breathed them. He procured comforts and rarities of all sorts from great distances, and at a cost which he would have considered most alarming, had he not trusted that it would cease with the departure of the guests who thronged his house to welcome his newly married wife. But time wore

on, and the lady seemed to have no inclination to get rid of either.

There is a prudent and useful old saying—"begin with a wife as you mean to end with her." It would have been well for Macpherson that he had acted upon this principle. Instead of boldly bringing down his lady's ideas at once to that pitch which would have been in rational harmony with his own habits, as well as with his circumstances, to which her strong attachment to him would have most probably insured her ready submission, he had himself done all in his power to give a false colour to things, which he now felt it a very delicate and difficult matter to attempt to remove. Meanwhile, she went innocently enough on in obedience to that bent which her education had given her, in the full persuasion that she was only doing that which her duty, as his wife, prescribed to her. Yielding to her resistless importunity and attractions, the neighbouring gentry were drawn around her, as if by some magic spell; and many of them became, in a manner, domesticated at her husband's hearth. Then every succeeding day brought to the old house some new friend from afar, whom she had been dying to make acquaint-

ed with that man of whom she was so proud, and to whom her whole heart was now devoted, that she might prove how much she had gained by relinquishing the world for a prize so inestimable; and for the entertainment of persons so cultivated as these were, it naturally followed that more refined schemes of pleasure and amusement were devised, which, whilst they gratified Invereshie at the time, by exciting universal admiration at the tasteful genius of his lady who had conceived them, made him afterwards wince at the large and repeated demands which were made on his treasury, for purposes altogether foreign to the whole pursuits of his former life, and which the whole tenor of it had led him to consider as vain and unprofitable. He wondered that her ingenuity could be so enduring, and still comforting himself with the hope that each particular instance of it that occurred must necessarily be the last, he was still doomed to be astonished every succeeding day by new and yet more expensive projects. Amidst all this bustle and occupation, her speech was ever of the delights of her HIGHLAND SOLITUDE, as she called their residence, whilst her thoughts seemed to be unceasingly employed in endeavours to invent

means of depriving it of all claim to any such title, by filling it with as large a portion as she could of the gay crowd and vanities of a city. Of all these vanities none were so galling to the honest heart of Invereshie, as the arrival of a certain knot of gallant rufflers from the court—men of broad hats jauntingly cocked to one side, and balanced by long feathers of various hues—who flaunted it in silken cloaks, and strutted it in long-piked shoes; all of which, in his eyes, seemed to sort but ill with the manly Celtic garb worn by himself and his Highland friends. But much as it irked him to be compelled to receive such popinjays as these, and irritated as he frequently was by their unblushing impudence, he submitted calmly to that which the rules of hospitality dictated, and even repressed all outward appearance of his dissatisfaction; and he was rendered the more ready to impose this restraint on himself, by the reflection, that most of these gay gallants were in some way or other related to or connected with his wife; and he felt that, as her kinsmen or friends, they claimed the full extent of a Highland welcome. But these southern summerfly cousins were no sooner gone than they were succeeded by clouds of fresh and

yet more thirsty insects of the same genus ; and these tormentors not only contributed, in their own persons, largely to augment the consumption of those luxuries which had been so recently introduced into his house, and to the promotion of those extravagancies which were conceived and executed more especially for their amusement ; but the more simple natives of the glens also were soon taught by their infectious example to relish them quite as much as they did.

Invereshie was long silent under all this ; but he did not suffer the less deeply in secret on that account. The ardent love with which he adored his wife, and that certain mistaken chivalrous notion of delicacy, which has been already noticed as operating so strongly on his feelings, long prevented him from attempting to restrain the expenses of so fascinating a woman, who had brought him money enough to furnish at least some apology for the expenditure she occasioned. But ample as her *tocher* had once appeared to him, he soon began to see that it was melting rapidly away under those immense drains which she was daily applying to it ; and at length, with more of love than of chiding in his tone, he ventured to speak to her

on the painful subject which had so long oppressed him. But alas! whilst he did speak to her, her very eye unmanned him,—and what he did bring himself to say was couched in terms so gentle and so general, as neither to convey to her any very useful or impressive lesson, nor even any very definite idea of the extent to which she had erred. The lady flung her snowy arms around his neck—bedewed his face with her tears, and made many earnest and sincere protestations, all of which she sincerely intended most sacredly to fulfil. Macpherson was enraptured. He blamed himself for what he called his severity—kissed away the precious drops from her eyes with a more than ordinary glow of affection. They were the happiest pair in the universe—and in a few days her extravagance was going on at its usual rapid pace, whilst she was all the while in the most perfect belief that she was giving the fullest attention to his wishes.

Many were the scenes of this description that afterwards, from time to time, took place between Invereshie and his lady. The kind of life into which he was now so unwittingly and unwillingly plunged, allowed him few moments for sober reflection. But when such moments did occur, they

were bitter ones indeed. At such times gloomy and harrowing recollections, and dreadful and appalling doubts would steal over his soul, putting his very reason to flight before them,—and his flesh would creep, and his hair would bristle, whilst his mind was thus yielding to its own speculative misgivings as to the mysterious nature of that fascination which could thus drag him on to certain ruin in despite of his own better judgment. But resolute as was his natural character, and deep as were his determinations at such times, they were all put to flight at once by the first bewitching love-glance of his lady's eye.

Things had gone on in this way for months, growing worse and worse every day, when Invereshie, oppressed by that gloom, which now clung more frequently and more closely to him, set out one morning very early to join some of his neighbours in a distant chase of the deer. He was that day more than usually successful; and his attendants having been left behind to bring home the spoils, he was compelled to return in the evening alone. The sun was getting low as he came down into the upper part of his own deep and precipitous Glen Feshie, and the shaggy faces of its eastern

mountains were broadly lighted up by its rays, thus rendering the crags on its western side, and the shadows they threw across the wooded bottom, doubly obscured by the blazing contrast. As the laird advanced, he came suddenly in view of a cottage, perched on the summit of a little knoll, and sheltered by one huge twisted and scathed pine alone, the bared limbs of which permitted the spot to be gladdened by a lingering sunbeam, to which the dense forest that surrounded it forbade all entrance elsewhere. This was the habitation of his nurse, whose strange appearance has been already described. She and the old crone her sister, who was believed to be scarcely less gifted than herself, were seated on settles at the door, availing themselves of what yet remained of the glowing light to twine a thrifty thread with distaff and spindle. The laird seldom passed this way without visiting old Elspeth; and on this occasion he turned from his direct path the more readily, because his conscience accused him that he had somewhat neglected her of late. The continual round of dissipation in which he had been for some time whirled, had not permitted him once to see her since that accidental glance he had had of her on

the day she appeared at his marriage pageant. On that occasion, too, he felt that she should have been a guest at that table where his humbler friends were entertained; but he remembered that although she had been invited, she did not appear. The recollection of that joyous day shot across his mind like the gleaming lightning of a summer night, only to be succeeded by a deeper gloom arising from the recurrence of all that had passed since. Unperceived by the frail owners of the cottage, he wound his way towards it with a sinking heart. In approaching it, he was compelled by the nature of the ground to make a half circuit around the knoll, which thus brought him up in rear of it; and he was about to discover himself to the two old women, by turning the angle of the gable of the little building, when his steps were almost unconsciously arrested by hearing his own name pronounced, and he halted for a moment. It was his nurse who was speaking to her sister emphatically and energetically in Gaelic; and that which he heard, might have been nearly interpreted thus:—

“Och hone, Invereshie!” exclaimed she in a shrill tone of lament, as if she had been apostrophizing him in his own presence. “Och hone!

what but the black art of hell itself could have so cast the glamour o'er thee, my bonny bairn, that thou should'st sit and see thy newly-chartered hills and glens melt from thy grasp as calmly and silently as yonder pine-clad rock beholds the sunshine creep away from its bosom, and never once come to seek counsel as thou were wont from these lips which never lied to thine ear."

"Witchcraft!" muttered her sister; "wicked witchcraft is at work with him."

"Witchcraft!" cried the nurse with an emotion so violent as fearfully to agitate her whole frame; "witchcraft, said ye? The prince of darkness is himself at work with him. The foul fiend, in a woman's form, is linked to him. Bethink thee of her moonlight wanderings by the waters,—her unhallowed midnight orgies among the graves of the dead, where they say she is still seen to walk while he is sleeping,—her sudden death, for death it was, on that ill-starred morning which proclaimed their union,—the strange reanimation of the corpse by the foul fiend that now possesses it,—the momentary sinking, and terror, and confusion of that wicked spirit when he quailed before the gaze of mine own gifted eye, shot from beneath the shade of

the spell-dispersing rowan-tree;—bethink thee of these things, sister Marion, and wonder not that mine unwilling lips should have been urged to mutter a curse, where my heart would have fain poured forth a blessing.”

“ I saw, I saw,” replied the other crone, “ thine eye was, indeed, then most potently gifted, sister, and thy will was not thine own.”

“ Och hone, och hone !” wailed out the nurse again, “ that I should live to see my soul’s darling thus rent away from the care of heaven, handed over to the powers of hell, and doomed to destruction both here and hereafter ! Och hone, willingly would I give my worthless life if I could yet save him ! Och hone, if I could but pour my burning words into his ear, so that his eyes might be opened, and that he might stent his heart strings to the stern work of his own salvation.”

The unhappy laird had already heard enough. He felt as if the deadly juice of upas had found its way into his veins. His whole frame was, as it were, paralyzed. He leaned against the gable of the cottage for some moments, during which he was almost unconscious of thought or of existence ; and then, with his limbs failing under him, he stag-

gered, giddy and confused, down the side of the knoll into the pathway below, and sank exhausted upon a mossy bank, where he lay for a time in a state nearly approaching to insensibility. Starting up at last with an unnatural effort which he had no reason left to guide, and regardless of all pathway, he hurried along by the brink of the stream with a fury as wild as that which impelled its rushing waters. Slackening his pace by degrees, as his bewildered recollection began to return to him, he at length stopped, and resting against a rock, his scattered thoughts returned thickly upon him. At first he resolved to go back to hold converse with his nurse, but ere he had well conceived this idea, he rejected it as an idle waste of time; for the fresh recurrence to his recollection of all she had uttered flashed conviction too strongly on his mind to render any farther question necessary. Those dark and mysterious doubts which had so long tortured him from time to time during his moody musings, now reared themselves into one gigantic, horrible, and overwhelming certainty, to dwell on which, even for an instant, filled him with an agony that brought large drops of cold perspiration to his brow. His jaws chattered

against each other, and a cold shudder ran through his whole system, like that which precedes the last shiver of death. Again, a burning fever seized his brain, and he struck his forehead with the palm of his hand, and he wept and groaned aloud. Relieved by this sudden burst of affliction, he started from his resting-place, and knocking violently on his breast, as if to summon up all of man that was yet left within him,

“ Invereshie !” cried he, addressing himself in unconscious soliloquy, “ Invereshie ! where is thy boasted resolution ? Whither hath thy courage fled ? But it shall come to thee now !” said he, setting his teeth together, and clenching his hands. “ Hah ! nor mortal nor demon shall keep me in this unhallowed state of enchantment, if it be in the power of fire or of water to break the spell. Let me think,” said he again, striking his forehead, as if to rouse up his sharpest intellect ; and then after a pause, during which he strode for a few turns backwards and forwards beneath the deep shadow of the rock, “ I have it !” he exclaimed, and he urged on his steps with reckless haste towards his home.

The distant murmurs of its mirth and its revelry

came on his ears whilst he was yet above a bow-shot off,—an arrow itself could not have rent his heart more cruelly. He flew forward, and brushing almost unnoticed through the crowd of serving-men in gay attire that obstructed his entrance, he sought a lonely chamber, where, in darkness and in silence, he sat brooding over his misery, and nursing the terrible purpose that possessed him. Every now and then his soul was stung to madness by the shouts of mirth, the music, and the other sounds of jollity which, from time to time, arose from the festal-hall below, until, unable longer to bear the torture he suffered, he rushed forth again into the woods. There he wandered for some hours to and fro, torn by his contending passions; for love was still powerful within him, and would, even yet, often rise up for a time to wrestle hard with the wizard Superstition who had now so irrecoverably entangled and bemeshed his judgment. But ever as the recurrence of the tender emotion was felt within him, he summoned up his sterner nature to exorcise it forth as something unholy. At length the broad moon arose,—lighted up the bold front of the lofty Craigmigavie,—spread its beams over the far-stretched surface of Loch

Inch,—shed a pale lustre on the distant Craighou, the Macpherson's watch-hill,—and fully illuminated the wild scenery and the sparkling waters of the Feshie, and the noble birches that wept over its roaring rapids, and its deep and pellucid pools.

It is not for me to say what were these mysterious associations which came over the mind of Invereshie as he beheld the ample disk of the glorious luminary arise over the mountain top, and launch itself upward to hold its silent and undisturbed way through the immensity of ethereal space. They seemed to bring an artificial calm to his bosom. But it was the calm of a mind irrevocably wound up to a determined purpose. And now, with his arms folded with convulsive tightness over his breast, as if to prevent the possibility of that purpose escaping thence, he stalked with a steady and resolute step towards the house.

It was now midnight. The revelry which had raged within its walls was silent, and the guests, wearied with the feast and the dance, and the tired servants, were alike buried in sleep. John of Invereshie stole to his lady's chamber. She, too, had retired to rest, and that deep and quiet sleep which results from purity and innocence of soul

had shed its balm upon her pillow. Her lamp was extinguished, but the moonbeams shone full through the casement directly on the bed where her beautiful form was disposed, and touched her lovely features with the pale polished glaze of marble. Had it not been for her long dark eye-lashes, and those raven ringlets that, escaping from their confinement, had strayed over her snowy neck, she might, in very deed, have been mistaken for some exquisitely sculptured monumental figure. For one moment Invereshie's purpose was shaken. But it was for one moment only; for as memory brought back to him the lonely churchyard,—her appeal to the moon,—the mysterious events that followed their nocturnal meeting, and all those after circumstances which had combined to produce that awful and to him infallible judgment which accident had led him to hear his old nurse pronounce, his dread purpose became firmly restored to his mind. He stretched forth his hand and griped the wrist of the delicately moulded arm that lay upon her bosom. The lady awoke in alarm; but instantly recognising her husband, her fears were at once tranquillized, and, springing from her recumbent posture, she threw herself on his neck. Surprised

thus unexpectedly into her embrace, Invereshie stood silent and motionless. Love thrilled through every fibre with one last expiring effort. Aware of the potency of its influence over his heart, he threw his eyes upwards, and,—ignorant and unhappy man!—blinded by the dark and bewildering mists of the wild superstition that had dominion over him, he actually prayed to heaven to give him power to go through with his work; and then, with a fixed composure, gained from that fancied aid which he imagined he was thus experiencing, he calmly and quietly turned to the lady.

“Dost thou see yonder moon?” said he; “never was there sky so fair, or scene so glorious. The night, too, is soft and balmy.—Say, will ye wander forth with me a little while to note how the eddies of the Feshie are distilled into liquid silver by her beams?”

“Let me but wrap me in my robe and my velvet mantle, and I will forth with you with good will,” replied the lady, quite overjoyed to be thus gratified by her husband in the indulgence of her romantic propensity for such walks. “How kind in you, my love, to think thus of my fancies when rest must be so needful for you.” And having

hastily protected her person from the night air, she slipped her arm within her husband's, and with a short light step, that but ill accorded with the solemn and funereal stride of him on whom she leaned, she tripped with him down stairs and across the dewy lawn.

“It is, indeed, a most glorious scene!” exclaimed the enraptured lady. “But, in truth, thou saidst not well, Invereshie, in saying, that never was there sky so fair or scene so glorious.” Then smiling in his face, and sportively kissing his cheek, she innocently added, “I trust thou art no traitor.”

“Traitor!” exclaimed Invereshie, with a sudden start that might have betrayed him to any one less unsuspecting.

“Aye, traitor in very deed!” replied the lady laughing. “Traitor truly art thou if thou can'st forget the lonely churchyard where you bound yourself to me for ever, and that broad moon which then shed over us her *magic influence!*”

“*Magic influence!*” groaned Invereshie in a deep and hollow tone of anguish.

“Alas! are you unwell, my dearest?” earnestly exclaimed his anxious and affectionate wife. “I

fear you have already done too much to-day ; and your kindness to me would make thee thus expose thyself when thou wouldst most need repose. See yonder dark cloud, too, pregnant with storm. Look how it careers towards the moon ; might not one fancy that some demon of the air bestrode it ? Had we not better return to bed ? Thou art not well, my love. Come, come, let us return."

"No !" replied Invereshie, in a tone calculated to disguise his feelings as much as possible. "I shall get better in the air. A sickness—a slight sickness only—a little farther walk will rid me of my malady."

The lady said no more ; and Invereshie walked onwards with a slow, firm, but somewhat convulsive step, treading through the chequered wood by a path that wound among green knolls covered with birches of stupendous growth, and that led them to the rocky banks of the Feshie. There they reached a crag that projected over a deep and rapid part of the stream. Its waves were dancing in all the glories of that silver light which they borrowed from the bright luminary that still rode sublimely within a pure haven in the lowering sky, its brilliancy increased by contrast with

the dense, and pitchy, and portentous cloud that came sailing sublimely down upon it, like a huge winged continent.

“ Invereshie !” cried the lady, her feelings strongly excited by the grandeur and beauty of the scene ; and bursting forth in rapturous ecstasy, “ do we not seem like the beings of another world as we stand on this giddy point, with the moon thus pouring out upon us all its potent enchantment ?”

“ Now God and Jesu be my guides but I will try thine enchantment !” cried Invereshie.

Steeling up his heart to the deed, and nerving his muscular arms to the utmost, he lifted the light and sylph-like form of his lady. One piercing shriek burst from her as he poised her aloft,—a benighted traveller heard it at a distance, crossed himself, and hurried onwards with trembling limbs,—and ere the lady had uttered another scream, Invereshie had thrown her, like a breeze-borne snow-wreath, far amid the bosom of the waves. The wretched man bent forward from the rock, his fingers clenched, his teeth set together, and his eyeballs stretching after the object which his hands had but just parted with.

“Holy Virgin, she floats!” cried he as he beheld her, by the light of the moonbeam, playing on the ripple that followed her form as it was hurried down the stream, supported by her wide-spread mantle.

“Help! oh help!—my love!—my lord!—’twas madness!—’twas accident!—but oh! mercy and save me!—save, or I am lost for ever!”

“She floats!” hoarsely muttered Invereshie, drawing his breath rapidly, and with a croaking sound in his throat, that spoke the agonizing torture he was enduring. “Ha! she floats! by Saint Mary then was the old woman right! Ha! she struggles at yonder tree!” He sprang from the rock to the margin of the stream, and scrambled towards the spot whither the eddy had whirled the already sinking lady. She had caught with a death-grasp by one frail twig of an alder sapling, though her strength was fast failing. Invereshie’s eyes glared over her face as her head and her long dripping hair half emerged from the water.

“Help!—oh, save!—oh, help! was now all she could faintly utter, whilst her expiring look fixed itself upon her husband.

“Help, saidst thou? thou canst well help thy-

self by thy foul enchantments!" cried Invereshie. "Blessed Saint Michael be mine aid!—thou hadst well nigh taken from me my all, fiend that thou art,—thou may'st e'en take that twig with thee, too!" and drawing from his belt his *skian-dhu*, he sternly divided the sapling at its very root. As it parted from its hold, the lady disappeared amid the rough surges of the rapid stream, and the blindness which superstition had thrown over him fell at once from her distracted husband.

"Holy angels, she sank!" exclaimed Invereshie with a maddening yell that overwhelmed for a moment the very roar of the flood. "My love! my wife!—Oh murderer! murderer!"

He rushed wildly among the waters to save her. But the impenetrable cloud which had been all this time careering onwards, at that very instant blotted out the moon from the firmament, and left his soul to the midnight darkness of remorse and despair.