

## LEGEND OF CHIRSTY ROSS.

---

ABOUT the middle of last century, there resided in the burgh of Tain, on the eastern coast of Ross-shire, a poor shopkeeper of the name of Ross. The contents of that strange and multifarious emporium, which he called his shop, might have been well advertised by a handbill, like that which I once met with in Ireland, where, in the long list of miscellaneous articles enumerated, I remember to have seen "tar, butter, hog's-lard, brimstone, and other sweetmeats—brushes, scythe-stones, mouse-traps, and other musical instruments." You may easily imagine, that the profits arising from the sale of such trumpery wares as these, were barely sufficient to provide the necessaries of life for his numerous family, and to bestow on his children

the common education which Scotland, very much to her credit, so readily and cheaply affords. Although Mr. Ross's enjoyments were not numerous, yet, by endeavouring to have as few wants as possible, he managed to live contentedly and happily enough, and he cheerfully struggled on, drudging at his daily occupation, thanking God for the mercies which were bestowed on him, and looking forward with hope to the prospect of better days yet in store.

A circumstance occurred one afternoon, which led him to imagine that this prospect was nearer realization than he could have believed it to be. A stranger, of a spare form, and extremely atrabillious complexion, was seen to ride into the town at a gentle pace, and to go directly up to the principal house of entertainment for travellers, as if the way to it had been familiar to him. He had not been long housed there, when a waiter came across the street to Mr. Ross, with compliments "*from the gentleman at the inn,*" who requested a few minutes' conversation with him. The eager shopkeeper, anticipating some important sale of his goods, waited not to doff his apron and sleeves, but hurried over the way directly, and, what was

his astonishment and delight, when, after a few words of inquiry and explanation had passed between them, he found himself weeping tears of joy in the arms of an affectionate elder brother.

This man had left his father's house when very young, with little else but hope for his portion, and after being so long lost sight of by his relations, that they had long believed him to be dead, he now most unexpectedly returned to them from India with an ample fortune. Wonderful were the visions of wealth which now arose in the mind of the poor shopkeeper, and, on his warm invitation, his brother, and his brother's saddle-bags, were quickly transferred from the inn to his small and inconvenient house, and the Indian was speedily subjected to the danger of being smothered in the embraces of his sister-in-law and her numerous progeny.

Narrow as was his apartment, and small as was his bed, the nabob felt himself in elysium in his brother's house. He had never before experienced the genial effects of the warmth of kindred blood. He was idolized by every one of the family, and imminent was the risk he ran of being killed with kindness. Nor was he the great object of attention to his immediate relations alone. He soon

became the oracle of a large circle of kind friends and neighbours, who were seen crowding Mr. Ross's small back-parlour, which many of them had never before condescended to enter. And not only was the Indian feasted by small and great, but his humble brother and his sister-in-law were also invited to parties, by people who had hardly before been aware of the fact that such an individual as Mr. Ross the grocer and hardware-man existed in the place. But now Mr. Ross was not only discovered, as it were, but he was discovered to be a very sensible man, having much of his brother, the nabob's sound intellect, though wanting the advantages of cultivation. As to the nabob, he was a *rara avis in terris*,—an absolute phoenix,—a creature, a specimen of which is not to be met with in every age of the world. What the nabob uttered was considered as law; and even when he was absent, "the nabob said this," and "the nabob said that," and "that's the way the nabob likes it," were expressions continually employed by the good people of the town and neighbourhood to put an end to a debate; and they never failed to be quite conclusive upon every question. All this had a certain charm for the old Indian. It

was extremely pleasant thus despotically to rule over men's opinions, aye, and over women's too, even in such a place as Tain. But the copper of the gilded crown and sceptre of his dominion soon began to appear through its thin coating. His own origin had indeed been humble, but as his wealth had grown by degrees, so had he been gradually elevated above his original sphere, till he had at last risen into familiar intercourse with people of rank and consequence, from whose society his address, and still more, his ideas had received a certain degree of polish. This did not prevent him from greatly enjoying the plain, honest, warm, but very vulgar manners of his brother and his townsmen, whilst they were as yet new to him. They pleased him at first, precisely on the same principle of novelty, combined with old association, which made him relish for a certain time sheep's-head broth and haggis. But having unfortunately expressed himself rather strongly in his admiration of these dishes, the good folks thought themselves bound to give them to him upon all occasions, so that they soon began to lose their charm; and just so it was that the uninterrupted converse with the good, yet homely people

around him, to which he was daily subjected, very soon became dull, tiresome, ennuyant, and, finally, disgusting, until it eventually grew to be so very intolerable that he altogether abandoned the thought he had entertained of purchasing an estate in that neighbourhood which was then for sale, and he quickly came to the determination of bringing this visit to his native town to a speedy conclusion, and of returning to London to take up his abode there among people who like himself had known what it was to live on curries and muligatawny, and who could talk with him of tiffins and tiger hunting.

How shall I describe that wet blanket of disappointment that fell upon the shoulders of Mr. Ross, the grocer and hardwareman, and his family, when the nabob communicated to them this change in his plans. All the poor shop-keeper's splendid visions departed from him with the same suddenness with which the figures from a magic lantern disappear from a wall the moment its light is extinguished. He had already set it down in his own mind as a thing absolutely certain, that his beloved brother would live and die in his house; and he and his wife had been calculating, that as every

child they had would be as a child to its bachelor uncle, every child of them would be better provided than another. Ten thousand cobwebby castles had been erected in the air by this worthy couple, who had already made lairds of all the boys, and lairds' ladies at least of all the girls. "Out of sight out of mind," was a proverb that came with chilling truth to their hearts; and although the nabob had already shown much affection to them, and had behaved generously enough in giving liberal aid towards the improvement of his brother's condition, and that of his family, yet they could not help considering his threatened separation from them as the removal of the sunshine of fortune from the hemisphere of their fate. Never was the anticipated departure of any one more deeply or sincerely deplored. The nabob himself had no such feelings. He looked forward to his escape from his relatives and friends as to a period of happy relief. Yet to this there was one exception.

Chirsty Ross, as his niece Christina was provincially called, was then a very beautiful and extremely engaging little girl of some five or six years of age. From the first day that the old Indian took up his residence in her father's house,

she had innocently and unconsciously commenced her approaches against the citadel of his heart. Each succeeding hour saw her gain outpost after outpost, and defence after defence, until she fairly entwined herself so firmly around his affections, that he could not contemplate the approaching loss of her smiles, of her kisses, and of her prattle, with any thing like philosophy. He had been naturally enough led to shower a double portion of his favours upon her. She was already in the habit of calling him "her own uncle," as if he had belonged exclusively and entirely to herself, and to this she had been a good deal encouraged by the nabob. It is not wonderful, therefore, that when his departure was communicated to her, she was thrown into an inconsolable paroxysm of grief, and clung to his knees, giving loud vent to her complaints, and sobbing as if her little heart would have burst.

"Take me with you! take me with you, my own dear uncle! oh, take your own Chirsty with you!" cried she.

"I shall take you with me, my little dear!" exclaimed the nabob, snatching her up, and kissing

her. "I shall take you with me, provided your father and mother will but part with you."

A negotiation was speedily entered into. The parents were too sensible of the great advantages which such a proposal opened for their child, to think for one moment of throwing any obstacle in the way of its fulfilment. They, moreover, hoped that this arrangement might have the desirable effect of keeping up a connecting tie between them and their rich relative. However much they might have been disappointed in this last respect, they certainly never had any reason to accuse the nabob of any forgetfulness of those promises which he made to them at parting.

He was no sooner established in his house in town, than he set about providing proper instructors for Chirsty, and a very few weeks proved to him that his care was by no means thrown away. The child's perception was quick, and her desire to learn was strong; so that things which were difficult to others, were, comparatively speaking, easy to her. So rapid was her progress, that her uncle became every day more and more interested in it; and as she advanced, he was from time to

time led to engage first rate masters, in order to perfect her in all manner of solid acquirements and elegant accomplishments. With all this, her person became every day more graceful as she grew in stature; and every thing she said and did was seasoned with so much sweetness of manner, that she gained the hearts of all who had the good fortune to meet with her.

Not a little proud of what he had so good a right to call his own work, the nabob, on her fifteenth birth-day, put the master-keys of his house with great but affectionate ceremonial into her hands, and with them he gave her the entire control and management of his household affairs. But she did not long continue to enjoy the distinguished situation in which he had thus placed her. Too close an application to the numerous branches of education she occupied herself with, soon brought upon her that delicacy of health which is too often the produce of the similar over-confinement of young growing girls in our own days. A very alarming cough came on, her strength visibly declined daily, and her spirits began to sink. She was compelled to give up all her favourite pursuits. Books and music lost their charms for her, and her hours

were spent in listless idleness, not unfrequently broken in upon by nervous fits of crying, which she could by no means account for. Then it was that in her moody dreamings her mind would revert to the innocent pleasures of her childhood, to the simple, the rustic, yet highly relished happiness she had enjoyed, whilst surrounded by her brothers and sisters, when they wandered about the furzy hillocks in a joyous knot, inhaling the perfume of the rich yellow blossoms,—when they dug little caves in the sandy banks,—or built their mimic houses,—or planted their perishable gardens, with careless hearts, noisy tongues, and laughing eyes. The thought that she might never again behold them or her dear parents, renewed her tears, and she pined more and more.

Her affectionate uncle became alarmed at this rapid and melancholy change. So far as gold could purchase the aid of the best medical skill, he commanded its attendance. But even the most learned of the London physicians could discover no medicine to remove her malady. In their own minds they despaired of her, but as usually happens in such cases, to cover the deficiency of their art, they recommended her native air as the *der-*

*nier ressort.* Chirsty eagerly caught at this last remaining hope, so congenial to the current of her feelings at the time, and her uncle was thus obliged to yield to necessity; and as certain matters in which he had engaged rendered it quite impossible for him to take charge of her himself, he was obliged to resign her to the care of her maid.

The doctors were right for once. Every breeze that blew on her from her native land as she proceeded on her journey, seemed to be fraught with health,—her spirits rose,—and long before she reached the place of her birth, she was so far recovered as to remove all fears of any serious termination of her complaint. How did her mind go on as she travelled, sketching to itself ideal pictures of the charms of home. But alas! how changed did every person and every thing seem to her when she at last reached it.—How pitiful did the provincial town appear to her London eyes! The streets seemed to have shrunk in, and the very houses and gardens to have dwindled; and when she reached her paternal mansion, she blushed to think how very grievously the fondness of her ancient recollections had deceived her.

The full tide of unrestrained affection which burst

forth the moment she was within its walls was so gratifying to her heart, that for some time every other feeling or thought was absorbed by it ; but many weeks did not pass over her head until the conversation and manners of her parents and family, which had startled her even at the first interview, began to obtrude themselves on her notice in spite of all she could do to shut her eyes against them, until they finally became intolerably disagreeable to her. She soon discovered,—and a certain degree of sorrow and self-reproach accompanied the discovery,—that the refined education which she had received, had rendered it quite impossible that she could long endure the mortifications to which she was daily and hourly exposed by her vulgar, though affectionate and well-meaning relatives. Painful as the thought was for many reasons, she became convinced of the necessity of an early separation ; and, accordingly, she made her uncle's wish for her speedy return to him an apology for fixing an early day for her departure. Yet do not suppose from this that the ties of affection were not strong within her. The parting scene was not gone through without many tears and lingering embraces, that sufficiently proved

the triumph of nature in her mind over the arbitrary dictates of fashion. And after she was gone, the large richly bound folio bible, out of which her father ever afterwards read on Sundays,—the gold-mounted spectacles which enabled him so well to decipher its characters, and of which he was at all times so justly vain,—the cashmere shawl that kept her good mother so warm,—and the caps, the bonnets, the gowns, the globes, and the books of prints, with which her grown up sisters and brothers were so much delighted, and the dolls and humming tops of which the junior members of the family, down to the very youngest, were so proud as having been the gifts of “the *grand leddy from Lunnon*,” for sister they dared hardly to call her, were not the only marks of her affection that she left behind her. Besides these keepsakes, there were other presents of a more solid nature bestowed in secret, which, whilst they contributed to enable her father to hold his head higher as he walked up the causeway of the main street of Tain, compelled Chirsty herself to exercise a very strict economy in providing for those wants which her own style of life rendered essential to her, large as was

the sum which she had received from the bounty of her uncle.

Passing through Edinburgh on her way to London, she was visited and kindly invited by a lady of fashion who had known her in the metropolis, and she soon found herself deeply engaged in gaiety. Perhaps she did not enter into it the less readily that she had so recently returned from what might have been well enough called her life of mortification at Tain. Having once got into the vortex, she found it difficult to extricate herself from it, and this difficulty was not lessened by the admiration which her beauty and accomplishments so universally excited both in public and in private. She became the chief object of interest, and she was so caressed and courted by every one, that it was not very surprising if the adoration that was paid to her did in some degree affect so young a head. However this might be, three things were very certain, —in the first place, that she had been extremely regular in writing to her uncle during her stay at Tain ; secondly, that before leaving that place she had heard from her uncle, who had warmly expressed his anxiety for her return to him ; and

thirdly, that whereas she had intended to stay in Edinburgh for two or three days only, she was led on from day to day by this ball and the other party to remain, till nearly a whole winter had melted away like its own snows, during all which time she had likewise procrastinated, and, consequently, had entirely omitted the duty of writing to her uncle.

The day of thought and of self disapproval came at length, and bitter were her reflections. She resolved at least to do all in her power to repair her fault. She sat down immediately and wrote a long letter to her uncle, in which she scrupled not to blame herself to the fullest extent for her want of thought and apparent negligence towards so kind a friend and benefactor, and she declared her repentance and her intention of returning to him immediately.

Having accordingly reached London very soon after her letter, she was driven to her uncle's well known door. Her impatience to behold him was such, that she could hardly rest in the chaise till the postilion dismounted to knock for her admittance. How intense were her emotions during that brief space! How eagerly did her eyes run over every window

in the ample front of the house ! How rapidly did the images of her uncle, and of Alexander Tod, his old and faithful servant, dance through her imagination, whilst she gazed intently on the yet unopened door, prepared to catch the first smile of surprise and of welcome, which she knew would illuminate the honest countenance of that tried domestic, the moment he should discover who it was that summoned him. As she looked, she was surprised to perceive that the door itself had strangely changed the modest and unpretending hue which it had worn when she last saw it, for a queer uncouth flaring colour, somewhat between a pink and an orange. Before she had time to wonder at this metamorphosis, the door did open, and if its opening did produce any surprise, it was her own, for, instead of discovering the plain but respectable figure of Alexander Tod, whom she had been long taught to consider more as an old friend than as a menial, she beheld a saucy fopling bepowdered underbred footman, in a gaudy vulgar looking livery. The man stared when she asked for her uncle, and seemed but half inclined to consent to the hall being encumbered with her baggage, and, after having shewn her with uncon-

cealed petulance into a little back parlour, she had the mortification, through the door which he had carelessly left ajar behind him, to hear herself thus announced.

“ A young person in the back parlour who wishes to speak to you, sar.”

And, chagrined as she was by this provoking delay, she could not help laughing, as she threw herself into a sofa to wait for her uncle's appearance. He came at last, and his joy at again beholding her was great and unfeigned.

“ Welcome again to my house, my dear Chirsty,” said he, with tears of joy, after his first warm and silent embraces were over ; “ Oh ! why did you cease to write to me ? But I need say no more, for what is done cannot be undone ; yet, if you had but written to me, things might have been otherwise.”

“ I ought indeed to have written to you, my dear uncle,” replied Chirsty ; “ but much as I have deserved your anger, things cannot be but well with me, whilst I am thus affectionately and kindly received by you.”

Her uncle replied not ; but, with his eyes thrown on the ground, and with an air of solemnity, which

she had never seen him wear before, he led her up stairs to the large drawing-room, where she found seated a middle-aged and rather good looking woman, with an expression of countenance by no means very prepossessing, and whose person was tawdry and very much overdressed. What was her astonishment, and what was the shock she felt, when her uncle led her up to this lady, saying,

“ Mrs. Ross, this is my niece, of whom you have heard me speak so much ; and Chirsty, my dear, you will henceforth know and treat this lady as my wife and your aunt.”

However little sensible people may think of those new-born and baseless dreams, which have been recently blown up into something falsely resembling a science, by the folly and vanity of man, and which I for one yet hope, for the honour of human intellect, to see burst and collapse ere I die, it must be admitted, that all are more or less Lavaterists ; and that even the youngest of us will involuntarily exercise some such scrutiny on the features of a countenance, when we happen to be placed in such circumstances as Chirsty Ross now found herself thrown into. She, poor girl, failed not to bring all

the little knowledge of this sort which she possessed into immediate requisition. The result of her investigations were most unfavourable to the subject of them, nor were these disagreeable impressions at all diminished by the profusion of protestations of kindness and affection, which the lady lavished upon her with a vulgar volubility, whilst at the same time she seemed to eye the young intruder in a manner that augured but little for her future happiness. But although Chirsty perceived all this, she inwardly determined to doubt the correctness of her own observation,—at all events, sorrowfully as she retired to rest, or rather to moisten her pillow with her tears, she failed not to arm herself with the virtuous resolution, that as this woman, be she what she might, was the wife of her uncle, who had acted as a father to her, she would use her best endeavours to gain her affection, seeing that she was now bound to regard her as a parent. But yet she did not close her eyes, without having almost unconsciously exclaimed,

“ What *could* have induced my uncle, with such tastes as he has, to marry such a person as this? Ah! if I had not fooled away my time in Edinburgh! or if I had only *but* written!”

Next morning she met her uncle alone in the library, and a single sentence of his explained the whole.

“What *could* have induced you to forget to write to me, Chirsty?” said the good man, kissing her tenderly, whilst his eyes betrayed a sensation which he vainly tried to hide. “We were *so* happy here alone together! But I have been a fool, Chirsty! Blinded by momentary pique, I saw not the slough of despond into which I was plunging until too late! But she is not a bad woman, though not quite what I was at first led to believe her to be; and so, all we can now say is, that she is your aunt and my wife, and we are both bound to make the best of it.”

Chirsty assured her uncle, that nothing should be wanting on her part towards her aunt; and she kept her word, for, neglecting all other things, she devoted herself entirely to the task of pleasing her. For some little while, her pious endeavours seemed to have succeeded; but it happened that Chirsty, unambitious as she was to shine, so far eclipsed her aunt in every attraction that makes woman charming, that without intending it, or rather whilst intending the very reverse, she monopolized all the

attention of those with whom they associated either at home or abroad. Compared to her Mrs. Ross was treated like a piece of furniture,—any table or cabinet in the room had more attention paid to it. She could not shut her eyes to her own inferiority, and envy, hatred, and malice took full possession of her. Chirsty's efforts to please, though they had ceased to be successful, were still unremitting; but her uninterrupted gentleness was met by perpetual peevishness and ill humour, always excepting such times as her uncle chanced to be present, when the lady's words and manner were ever bland, kind, and false. With such devilish tempers it often happens that the more they torture the more they hate, and so it was that the dislike of this woman towards her niece rapidly grew to so great a height, that she resolved to get her removed from the house.

Fondly believing that she had a stronger hold over her husband's affections than she really possessed, she first of all attempted to undermine her in her uncle's good opinion by sly insinuations against her truth, her temper, and what she called the girl's *pretended* love for him, which she declared was in reality no greater than her attention to her own

self interest required. But finding that this line of attack only excited his anger, she with great art gradually withdrew from it, and by slow degrees she began to confess that she now believed she had been altogether mistaken in her estimation of Chirsty, and every succeeding day heard her bestow more and more praise on her temper and disposition. This was a language that was much more congenial to the nabob, but he was not altogether the dupe of it. He however listened with seeming attention to his wife when she prosed on about the zeal she felt for her niece's interest, as well as when, after a long prologue, she finally proposed the grand scheme of sending Chirsty out to India to the care of a particular friend of the nabob's at Calcutta, that she might there make some wealthy match, so as to secure her a magnificent independence for life. Plainly as Mr. Ross saw through the motives that dictated all this apparent solicitude, he took care to appear to think it quite genuine. Nor did he refuse to entertain the project; for as he began shrewdly to suspect that his niece could now have but little happiness under the same roof with his wife, he resolved at least to put it in Chirsty's power to accept or reject this proposal. He accordingly sought for a pri-

vate interview with her, and then it was that her tears, and her half confessions with difficulty extracted, satisfied him of the correctness of his suspicions, and the readiness with which she acceded to the plan which he laid before her at once determined him as to the propriety of going immediately into it. He therefore lost not a moment in securing every thing that might contribute to her comfort and happiness during the voyage, and he presented her with a letter of credit for a sum of money amply sufficient to put her above all anxiety as to that matter on reaching the shores of the Ganges.

These substantial marks of her uncle's affection towards her, supported as they were by a thousand little nameless kindnesses, did not tend to allay the grief which she felt at parting with him. The reflection that she went because she felt convinced that her uncle's future domestic comfort required her absence, was all that she had to give her courage to bear it, and she was so much absorbed in this conviction, that she hardly gave much thought to the consideration of what her own future fate might be.

The gallant ship had gone merrily on its voyage for several days before Chirsty began to mix at all

with her fellow-passengers. But when she first came upon deck, it was like the appearance of the morning sun over the eastern horizon of some country where he is worshipped. All eyes were instantly bent upon her; and ere the people had been familiarized to her beauty, the elegance of her manners, and the charms of her conversation, soon made her the great centre of attraction to all who walked the quarter-deck. Above all others, she seemed to have made a deep and powerful impression on the commander, whom I shall call Captain Mordaunt, a very elegant and agreeable man, of superior intellect and information. He soon showed himself indefatigable in his attentions to her. His command of the ship gave him a thousand opportunities of manifesting a marked degree of politeness towards her, by doing her many little courteous services, which no one else had the power to perform. He easily invented means of keeping all other aspirants to her favour at a sufficient distance from her. Her heart was as yet her own; and as Mordaunt never lost any opportunity of engaging her in conversation, and as his talk was always well worth listening to, it was no wonder that so many unequivocal proofs of an at-

tachment on the part of so handsome a man, in the prime of life, and of address so superior, should have soon prepared the way for her favourable reception of his declared passion; and this having once been made, and mutually acknowledged, it seemed to grow in warmth as the days fled merrily away, and as the progress of the prosperous bark carried them nearer and nearer to that sun which gives life and heat to all animated nature. Often did Mordaunt gladden the artless mind of Chirsty Ross as they sat apart together on the poop of the vessel, towards the conclusion of their voyage, in the full enjoyment of the fanning sea-breeze, by the enchanting pictures which he painted of the happiness of their future wedded life.

“ I have already realized a tolerable fortune,” said he, one evening carelessly, “ so that by the time I return to Calcutta from my trip to China, whither you know the vessel is bound, I may safely claim your hand, in order that we may sail home together as man and wife. You can have no dread of spending our honey-moon on the wide waters, my love, since they have yielded us so happy a courtship, especially when you think that we shall be on our way to some sweet rural resi-

dence in England, where we shall be insured the enjoyment of tranquillity and happiness for the rest of our days. And there, with what I have saved, added to the liberal allowance which your rich uncle will give you during his life, and with the certainty which you have of succeeding to his immense fortune at his death, we shall be able to live in a style altogether worthy of that exquisite beauty, and that angelic soul, with which Heaven has blessed you, and of those fascinating manners and brilliant accomplishments, which are calculated to make you the queen of any society you may be pleased to grace with your presence."

"Stay, stay, Mordaunt!" replied Chirsty, smiling playfully. "You are running too fast before the wind. I need not tell you what you have so often told me, that I am prepared to be thine on the wide ocean, in the populous city, or in the lonely desert, in sickness or in health, in wealth or in poverty! And well is it, indeed, that you have so often vowed all this much to me, for I must needs disabuse your mind of some part of its visions of riches, so far at least as that share may have reached which your fancy has ascribed to me. I have neither claims nor expectations from my uncle,

who has already done more for me than any niece in my circumstances had a right to expect."

"Haul taught that weather main-brace!" cried the captain, suddenly starting from her side; and although there appeared to be little change in the wind or the weather to warrant such activity, he became from that moment too much occupied in the care of the ship for any farther conversation with Chirsty that evening.

In the morning the lovers met as usual, and then, as well as during the few remaining days of the voyage, Mordaunt was as full of affection and endearment to her as ever. Their last private interview took place ere she left the ship to go into the small craft that was to take her up the river, and then all their mutual vows were solemnly repeated. An understanding took place between them, that their engagements should be kept private, unless circumstances should arise which might render a disclosure necessary. Poor Chirsty gave way to all the poignancy of that grief which she felt at being thus obliged to part, even for a few months, from him to whom, in the then orphan state of her soul, she had given up the whole strength of her undivided affections. But hard as

she found the effort to be, she was obliged to dry up her tears, and even to throw a faint and fleeting smile over her countenance as she left the ship, that she might not betray her own secret before indifferent persons; and it was only that warm and cherishing hope that lay nearest to her heart, that kept the pulses of her life playing, and that enabled her to go through the trying scene of parting coolly with her lover, after he had deposited her under the roof of her uncle's friend, where they bid each other such a polite adieu, as might have befitted two well-bred people who were separating with mutual esteem for one another, and who were, at the same time, very little solicitous as to whether there did or did not exist any future chance of their ever meeting again.

Mr. Gardner, as I shall call the gentleman to whose protection the nabob had consigned Chirsty, well deserved the confidence which had been placed in him. He spoke warmly of the many obligations under which he lay to Mr. Ross, and he declared himself to be delighted in having the opportunity which had thus been afforded him of proving his gratitude for those obligations. His lady entered deeply into all her husband's feelings,

and both of them zealously occupied themselves in doing all in their power to promote the young lady's comfort and happiness. Numerous and brilliant were the parties which they made for the purpose of introducing their lovely protégé with sufficient éclat to the society of Calcutta. But not even the novelty and grandeur of eastern magnificence, though produced for her with all its splendour, had any effect in removing that pensive air which their young friend wore when she landed, and which she continued to wear notwithstanding all the smiling new faces to which she was every moment introduced. One very natural result, however, was soon produced by these numerous public appearances which the kindness of her friends obliged her to make. She was immediately encircled by crowds of admirers; and before she had been many months in the country, she had been put to the unpleasant necessity of declining proposals of marriage from numerous military men and civilians of rank so high, as to make those with whom she lived wonder at the indifference she displayed. The more she was courted, the more retiring she appeared to become.

Among the few who were admitted to a some-

what more familiar intercourse with Chirsty, was a Scottish gentleman of good family, whom I shall call Charles Græme. Though young, he had risen to a high civil situation, and he had already realized a very handsome fortune. He was a gentleman of enlarged mind and extremely liberal education ; and as he was of manners much more retiring than most of those with whom she had become acquainted, she the more readily yielded to that intimacy which his greater friendship with her host and hostess gave him very frequent opportunities of forming with her. Like herself he was full of accomplishments ; yet such was his modesty, that she had known him for a considerable time before accident led her to discover them. His mind was richly stored with the treasures of European literature ; yet it was only on particular occasions that he allowed himself to give forth the sweets he had hoarded up, or to indulge in those critical remarks to which every one was prepared to listen with delight. As he became better known to her, and more at his ease with her, she discovered that his tastes, his acquirements, his sentiments, nay, his very soul, were all so much in harmony with her own, that she soon began to prefer his

society to that of any other gentleman who approached her. Had her heart been unengaged, she might perhaps have had some degree of palpitation in its pulses, as she sensibly felt their friendship becoming every day more and more familiar ; but, as the partridge believes that when its head is in the bush the whole of its body is secure, so she, knowing her own safety, owing to that secret cause which bound her to another, never dreamed that the accomplished Scotsman could be in any danger of feeling for her any sentiment one degree warmer than that of esteem. Thus it was, that with perfect unconsciousness on her part, of the havock she was working in his heart, she read with him, criticised with him, played with him, sang with him, or sketched with him, as the fancy of the moment might dictate, her heart being all the while filled with gratitude to him, for so good-naturedly enabling her to pass with at least some degree of rational enjoyment, some of those tedious hours that must yet elapse ere the return of him to whom she had pledged her virgin affections.

As for Charles Græme, he soon began to find that he existed only when his soul was animated by her bright eyes and her seraphic voice. When

absent from their influence, he felt like a walking mass of frozen clay. Her society became more necessary to him than food or air. He almost lived at the house of the Gardners, who, on their part, gave him every encouragement, being secretly pleased at what they believed to be the mutual attachment that was so rapidly growing, as they thought, between two individuals whom they had reason to love so much, and whom they knew to be so worthy of each other, and so well calculated to make each other happy for life. Day after day the infatuated young man drank deeper and deeper draughts of the sweet intoxication of love. At last the hour of wretchedness came. Seizing what he fondly believed to be a favourable moment, and with a bosom full of bounding hopes, he laid open the state of his heart to the idol of his soul. The scales fell as if by magic from her mental vision.

“What have I done, Mr. Græme,” she cried, whilst her cheeks were suffused with blushes, and her whole frame trembled. “I have been blind! I have been thoughtless, most culpably thoughtless. Forgive me! oh, forgive me! but I cannot, I dare not, love you! I am already the pledged bride of another.”

It would be vain for me to attempt to describe the kind of temporary death that fell upon her unfortunate lover, as she uttered these terrible words, which, like the simoom of the desert, left no atom of hope behind them. Sinking into a chair, he uttered no sound, and he sat for some time quite unconscious even of those attentions which her compassion for him at the moment led her unscrupulously to administer to him. The friendship and the high respect which she entertained for him, as well as a regard for her own justification in his eyes, forbade her to allow him to leave her, without a full explanation. It was given to him under the seal of secrecy, and the interview terminated with an agony of feeling and floods of tears upon his part, in which her compassion for that affliction which she had so innocently occasioned him, compelled her, in spite of herself, to participate.

The young Scotsman tried for some time after this, to frequent the house where she lived as he had done previously. But her smiles fell upon him like sunshine upon a spectre. Reason and prudence at last came to his aid; and seeing that his heart could never hope for ease, whilst he remained within reach of her attractions, he, to the

great astonishment and disappointment of his friends, made use of the powerful interest which he possessed to procure another situation in a distant station, and he tore himself away from Calcutta.

And now came the time of misery to poor Chirsty herself, the season of hope deferred, of nervous impatience, and of sad forebodings. The period for which her fond heart panted in secret arrived—it passed away. Days—nay, weeks and months beyond it elapsed ; and yet no tidings came of the gallant vessel that bore her betrothed husband. Delicately alive to the apprehension of betraying her secret by inquiry, she did not dare to ask questions. Fears, agonizing fears, began to possess her, that some fatal calamity had befallen the ship, till, happening accidentally one day to cast her eyes over an old shipping list, she read, and her sight grew dim as she read, of its arrival from China, and its subsequent departure for England ! How indestructible is hope ! Even then she imagined it possible that all this might have been the result of accident, or might have arisen from the orders of superiors. But still her anxiety preyed terribly upon her mind, whilst she now looked for-

ward to the new period of the ship's return from England. In vain did she try to occupy herself in her former pursuits. In vain did her friends endeavour to interest her with the amusements they provided for her. All were equally fruitless in their efforts; and the only explanation which the Gardners could find for her mysterious abstraction, was in the belief that the remembrance of Charles Græme was not altogether indifferent to her; and thence they cherished the hope that the matter between that young man and her might yet one day end as they wished it to do.

Months rolled on, as if the days of which they were composed had been years, till Chirsty was one evening, with some difficulty, induced by her friends to go to a great public entertainment. She entered the room, leaning on Mrs. Gardner's arm; and they were on their way to find a seat at the upper end of it, when her eyes suddenly beheld him for whose return she had been so long vainly sighing. Her heart beat as if it would have burst from its seat in her bosom. She clung unconsciously with a firmer hold to the arm of her friend, and her limbs tottered under her with nervous joy, as she moved forward. He was advanc-

ing slowly with a lady ; and as he drew near, she held out her hand to him with a smile of happy and welcome recognition. He started at sight of her ; and then, after scanning every feature of her countenance with calm indifference, he bowed coldly, turned aside, and moved away. Chirsty uttered a faint cry, swooned away, and was carried home by her friends in a state of insensibility, leaving the whole room in confusion.

Sufficient natural and ordinary reasons were very easily found by a company in such a climate as that of India for such an accident. But Mrs. Gardner had seen enough to convince her that some deeper and more powerful cause had operated upon Chirsty, than the mere heat of weather or the crowded state of a room ; and after she had successfully used the necessary means for recovering her from her fainting fit, she insisted on being allowed to share confidentially in the secret of her afflictions. Chirsty felt some slight relief in telling her all ; and strange it was, that she still clung most unaccountably to hope. He might not have recognised her at first. He would yet appear. But Mrs. Gardner's common sense told her there was no hope ; and she judged that it would be far better that Chirsty should

receive conviction, however cruel that conviction might be, rather than remain in an anxiety which was so agonizing and destructive. A very little time enabled Mrs. Gardner to collect all the particulars of his treachery. To sum up all in one word,—he had arrived at Calcutta from England with a rich wife, with whom he had already sailed on his last voyage home.

This overwhelming intelligence was too much for the shattered frame of poor Chirsty Ross. She was attacked by a most alarming fever, which finally produced delirium ; and even after the physicians had been able to master the bodily disease, the mental derangement continued so long unabated, that her friends the Gardners considered it proper to write home, to inform her uncle of her unhappy state.

It pleased God, however, to restore her at length to her right mind ; and then it was that she was seized with an unconquerable desire of returning to England. The most that the Gardners could prevail upon her to agree to, was to delay her voyage to a period so far distant, as might ensure that fresh letters should reach her uncle, to inform him of her perfect mental recovery, and to teach him

to look for her arrival by a certain ship they named; and after impatiently waiting till the time destined for her departure arrived, she bade her kind friends the Gardners an affectionate farewell, and sailed with a fair wind for Britain.

Who was it that arrived a week afterwards at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Gardner in the middle of the night, having come by Dawk from a far distant province? It was the shadow of Charles Græme!

“Thank God! thank God!” cried he energetically, after being told of her recovery, and at the same time bursting into a flood of tears, which weakness and fatigue left him no power to restrain. “Thank God for her restoration! But oh! that I had reached Calcutta but eight days sooner!”

He took his determination, applied for leave, to which the state of his health might of itself well enough have entitled him, and went for England by the very first fleet that sailed.

Chirsty Ross had a prosperous, but not a happy voyage. Her bodily health improved every day that she was at sea; but her thoughts having full time to brood over her miseries, her spirits became

more and more sunk. She rallied a little when she beheld the English shore; and when she arrived in the river her heart began to beat with affectionate joy, at the prospect of again embracing her dear uncle. Even the image of her aunt had had its asperities softened down by length of time and absence; and she almost felt something resembling pleasure at the prospect of seeing her again. As the vessel arrived in the evening at her moorings, a boat came alongside, and a voice was heard to demand if there was a Miss Ross on board? Readily did Chirsty answer to the inquiry; and being told that it was her uncle's servant come to take her home, she lost not a moment in desiring her black maid to hand up a small box, containing a few things to be put into the boat; and leaving the girl to follow next day with her heavy baggage, she quickly descended the ladder. She was immediately accosted by a stout vulgar-looking man out of livery, who announced himself to her as Mr. Ross's servant, and informed her that a carriage waited for her near the landing-place. She did accordingly find a post-chaise there; but when the door of it was opened, and the steps were let down, she started back on per-

ceiving that there was a man seated at the farther side of it.

“ Only a friend of Mr. Ross, Ma'am, whom he has sent to attend you home,” said the fellow who held the handle of the carriage-door.

Surprised as she was at the vulgarity of the dress and appearance of the gentleman who was inside, and still more at his want of politeness in not coming out of the carriage to hand her into it, her heart was too full of home at the moment to admit of her inquiring very particularly into circumstances, and accordingly, without more ado, she entered the vehicle. But whilst she was yet only in the act of seating herself, the fellow who had passed himself as her uncle's servant, sprang in after her, pulled up the steps, shut the door, the side blinds were drawn up, and the post-chaise was instantly flying at the rate of twelve or fourteen miles an hour. She screamed aloud, but the ruffian hands of both the villains were immediately on her mouth, and silence was inculcated with the most horrible and blasphemous menaces.

“ We must have none of your Indian fury here, mistress,” said one of the fellows. “ Behave peaceably and quietly, and you shall be treated

gently enough, but if you offer to rave and riot, the whip, the gag, and the strait-waistcoat shall be your portion."

"Merciful Providence!" said Chirsty Ross, "why am I thus treated, and whither would you carry me?"

"As to your treatment, young lady," said the man, "methinks you have no right to complain of that *as yet*; and as to the *why*, I should be as mad as yourself were I to hold any talk with you about *that*; and, then, as to the *whither*, you have been already told that you are going to your uncle's residence."

"Mad!" exclaimed Chirsty, with a shudder that ran through her whole frame. "But, ah! I see how it is. Mr. Gardner's letters have been received by my uncle, and not those which I wrote to him sometime afterwards. And yet how did he know to expect me in England, and by this particular ship, too, if my letters have not yet reached him. It is very puzzling—very perplexing—very distressing—but since I am going to him, I may thank God that all will soon be put to rights."

"Aye, aye," said both the men at once, whilst

they laughed rudely to one another, "all will soon be put to rights, I'll warrant me."

Chirsty sat silently dreaming over this strange and most vexatious occurrence, yet hoping that her misery would be but of short duration, till the chaise suddenly stopped, when one of the men let down the window, and called to the postilion to ring the great bell at a gate, which he had no sooner done, than the peal was answered by the fierce barking of a watch-dog.

"What place is this?" cried Chirsty, with new-born alarm. "This is not the house of my Uncle Ross."

"You will see that all in good time, ma'am," replied one of the men. "Post-boy, ring again. What are they all about, I wonder?"

At this second summons the huge nail-studded leaves of the ponderous oak and iron-bound gate were slowly rolled back, and the chaise was admitted into a large paved court, where the lights that were borne by one or two men of similar appearance to those who accompanied her, showed the plain front of a pretty considerable brick building, the narrow windows of which were strongly barred with iron. The door, too, was of the most mas-

sive strength, and the whole character of the edifice would of itself have conveyed to her the heart-sinking conviction, that she was within the precincts of a mad-house, even if those strange sounds of uncouth laughter, wild rage, and wailing despair that came from various parts of the interior, had been altogether unheard by her. Rapidly did her thoughts traverse her mind. The first natural impulse that possessed her, was a desire to scream out for help. But Chirsty was not destitute of resolution and self-command ; and as she immediately reflected that nothing but the calmest behaviour could afford her any chance of convincing the people of such an establishment that she in reality was sane, she at once resolved to restrain herself from every thing that might look like excitement.

“ Where is Sarah ?” cried one of the men as he assisted Chirsty out of the vehicle. “ Aye, aye, here she comes. Here is your charge, Sall.

“ A tall, handsome young woman,” said Sarah, surveying Chirsty from head to foot, whilst she herself exhibited a person in every respect the reverse of that which she was admiring, being almost a dwarf, though with a body thickly and strongly built. Her head was large, with harsh prominent

features, and her legs were bowed, and her arms long and uncouth looking. Round her waist, if waist that might be called where waist there was none, there was fastened a leathern belt, to which was appended a large bunch of great keys. In the eyes of Chirsty she was altogether a most formidable looking object.

“ A tall, handsome young woman,” said she. “ In what sort of temper is she, I wonder ? ”

“ She was a little bit riotous at first,” said one of the men, “ but she has been quiet enough ever since.”

“ Come this way, young lady,” said Sarah to Chirsty, in a rough tone and sharp voice, and at the same time she stretched out her long arm, and grasped her wrist with her bony fingers, whilst with the other hand she held up an iron lamp, the light of which she threw before her.

“ Treat me not harshly,” said Chirsty gently. “ I am ready to obey you. I am quite aware, that, from the strange mistake that has occurred, it would be vain for me to attempt to convince you at present of my sanity. I must patiently submit, therefore, to whatever restraint you may impose on me, until my uncle comes to see me, and con-

vince himself. But do not, I pray you, exercise any unnecessary severity."

"No, no, poor thing," replied Sarah. "No, no—no severity that is not quite necessary, I promise you. As to your uncle—ha! ha! ha!—no doubt, you may chance to see un ere you leave this. Come this way."

Whilst this dialogue was passing, Chirsty was led by her strange conductress through some long passages, in which were several rectangular turnings;—past many strongly secured doors, from within which issued strange discordant sounds of human misery, mingled with the clanking of chains; and up one or two flights of stairs, which induced her to believe that the apartment to which she was about to be introduced was in the upper story, and in a wing of the building. The door was like those she had seen in her way thither, of immense strength, and it was secured by a powerful lock, a couple of heavy bolts, and a huge chain and padlock. It was the last door of the narrow passage, which terminated about a yard beyond it in a dead wall. The little woman pushed Chirsty past it into the *cul de sac* which the passage thus formed, and then quitting her arm, she planted the fixed

gaze of her formidable eye upon her, and placing the lamp on the ground, she selected the necessary keys, and using both hands she exerted her strength to undo the lock and padlock, and then drawing the bolts and removing the chain, she opened the den within. Beckoning to her charge with an air of command not to be misunderstood, she pushed Chirsty into the place, and then standing in the aperture of the half closed door for a minute or more, with her right hand on the key, she threw in the light of the lamp so as fully to show the whole interior. It was indeed a wretched place. A low narrow bed-stead, with bed-clothes of the coarsest and meanest description, was the whole of its furniture, and that occupied more than a fourth part of the space contained within its four brick and stone walls. The floor was of flags,—it had no fire-place, and one small narrow iron-grated window was all the visible perforation that could admit light or air.

“ May I not be allowed to have the few things which came in my travelling-box ? ” said Chirsty mildly, after having seated herself on the side of the bed.

“ We shall consider of that, young lady, ” said

Sarah sternly. "But in the meanwhile, to satisfy my mind that you may be safely left for a little time, you must suffer me to put those lily-white hands of yours into this glove;" and setting the lamp on the floor, she drew from her ample pocket a leathern bag, into which Chirsty patiently submitted to have both her hands thrust together, after which they were secured by a strap in such a manner as to leave them entirely useless.

"Let me see now that you have got nothing dangerous about you," said Sarah; and after searching her all over, and removing from her a pocket-book containing such small instruments as women generally use, together with one or two other articles, and not forgetting her purse, which she secreted carefully in her own bosom, she added, "I shall be back with you in the twinkling of an eye, for you must have food ere you go to rest, meanwhile, the quieter you are the better it will be for you;" and with these words she lifted the lamp and retired with it, locking and bolting the door with the utmost care.

It is needless for me to speculate as to what were Chirsty's thoughts, left as she was in the dark, as she listened to the retreating steps of her keeper

until a stillness reigned around her that was only interrupted at times by the distant baying of the watch-dog in the court-yard, or by some of those melancholy demonstrations of madness that came every now and then upon her ear, of different degrees of intensity, as they chanced to be modified by circumstances. Notwithstanding all the resolution which she had summoned to her support, she shuddered to think of the vexatious confinement to which she might be exposed ere her fond uncle might be able to gather courage enough to come to visit her in the melancholy state of mind in which he probably believed her to be. Whilst she was ruminating on such matters, she heard the returning footstep of Sarah.

“Here is some food for you,” said her keeper, after opening the door and entering cautiously, “and, see, I have brought your night-clothes. I promised to use no needless severity; and if you continue to behave, you shall have no reason to complain of me. Let me help you to eat your supper; for this night you must be contented with simple bread and milk.” And the first meal that poor Chirsty eat after returning to her native Britain, was doled out to her by spoonfuls from a por-

ringer by the long fingers of her dwarfish keeper, who, after making down her bed, assisted her into it, and then left her for the night.

And a strange night it was to her. Fatigue brought sleep upon her it is true, but there was no refreshment in it, for it was full of wild visions, and she started from time to time, and awaked to have her mind brought back to the full conviction of her distressing situation by the maniac laughter or howlings that broke at intervals upon the stillness around her. The only support she had in circumstances so trying was derived from religious meditations and aspirations, together with the hope which never forsook her, that her affectionate uncle might next day visit and relieve her.