

VELVET CUSHIONS.

CLIFFORD.—Well done, Bigla Cumin ! If ever I marry, I am resolved to have a fearless wife, who can gallop across a country. But hey !—(*stretching himself as we arose to proceed*)—I protest I am quite stiff. Confound your green velvety grass !—commend me rather to your velvet cushion of Genoa. Your story was too long, Mr. Macpherson, and by far too interesting for a breezy hill side, and a dewy bank like this.

DOMINIE.—It will grieve me sore, Mr. Clifford, if you should in any way suffer from my prolixity.

CLIFFORD.—Tut, man, I'd sit in a snow wreath, or on a glacier, to listen to you. But, hark ye !

What was that you muttered, before you began your story about leaving us ?

DOMINIE.—Really I cannot speak it without vurra great pain, Mr. Clifford ; but my path disparts from your road a little way on here. I have to wend my way through the whole extent of these wild forests, which you see below us there, stretching across the intermediate country between us and the misty Cairngorums yonder. I am journeying to visit a brother of mine, who, as the elegant author of Douglas hath it,

—————“ Feeds his flocks,
A frugal swain,”

on the slopes of the mountains beyond.

CLIFFORD.—Nay, nay, we cannot part with you so. Had it been a lady, indeed, that you were going to visit, I should not have said a word. But for a brother merely.

DOMINIE, (*with the tear swelling in his eye.*)—Pardon me, Mr. Clifford—pardon me ; but I have an affection for my brother which few can estimate. We were twin bairns. Ewan and I alone remain of all our family. I make a yearly journey to visit him.

CLIFFORD.—I venerate you for your feelings, and I sympathise with them from the bottom of my heart. But, if I may make a guess at the geography of the country before us, I should conceive that if we could persuade you to go with us to To-mantoul to-day, your walk from thence to your brother's to-morrow would be but short.

DOMINIE, (*hesitating.*)—Hu—um!—that may be, sir. I am sure I am verra happy in your company; but, may I ask, gentlemen, what your plans are?

CLIFFORD.—We tie ourselves to no plans. For aught we know we may be in Switzerland or Sweden before this day month. But, at present, we propose to proceed up the Glen of the Aven to-morrow, on our way to Loch Aven.

DOMINIE.—It is a wild place, and the way is not easy to find.

AUTHOR.—Wild enough, indeed. I once wandered all round it; but I never approached it by its own glen.

DOMINIE.—I would have fain gone with you as your guide, for well do I know every mountain, moss, rock and well by the way. But I cannot

mistrust my brother, who is expectin' me about this time. Albeit, as I cannot go all the way myself with you, I would fain, before I quit you, put you into the hands of one who is well acquainted with all the mountain tracks and passes, that there may be no risk of your losing yourselves amidst those savage Alpine solitudes.

CLIFFORD.—Ah! that would be kind of you indeed.

GRANT.—Had you not better consent to spend this night with us at Tomantoul, then, Mr. Macpherson.

DOMINIE.—I was just thinking in my own mind, that I behooved so to do. I can then see you as far up Strathdaun to-morrow as Gaulrig, where old Willox the Wizard lives, and there——

CLIFFORD.—What? a wizard, said you? You don't mean to put us under the guidance of Satan, I hope. That would indeed be sending us to the

DOMINIE.—No, no, Mr. Clifford; but there is a friend of mine, who lives near to old Willox, one Archy Stewart, a retired serjeant, who will be just the man for your purpose, if we can find him

at home. He knows every inch of the mountains, and, moreover, he is as full of old stories as an egg is full of meat.

CLIFFORD.—The very man for us. But what can you tell us of old Willox the wizard? I hope we shall see him.

AUTHOR.—I have often heard of him. His name is MacGregor, is it not? I should like much to see him.

DOMINIE.—You will be sure to see him if you call at Gaulrig, for, as he is now above ninety, he is too old to leave home. He is worth the seeing too; for although, as I need not tell you, gentlemen, he never possessed any supernatural power, yet his cleverness must have been great to have enabled him to make the whole country, far and near, believe, even in these more enlightened days, that he can divine secrets and work wonders by means of his two charmed instruments—*the mermaid's stone*, and the enchanted *bridal of the water-kelpie*.

CLIFFORD.—How the deuce did he get hold of such articles? and what sort of things are they?

DOMINIE.—You will easily persuade him to show them to you; and it will be better for me to

leave him to tell his own story about them. But, as I have now made up my mind to go on with you to Tomantoul, gentlemen, I can tell you a short anecdote or two of him as we journey on our way, which will show you that all his fame as a warlock really rested on his own natural acuteness.

CLIFFORD.—I could have guessed as much, methinks, without being any great conjuror myself. But let us have your anecdotes, if you please.

DOMINIE.—I had much information about Willox from the Rev. John Grant, late minister of Duthel, who was acquainted with him for many years. For, notwithstanding the warlock's reputation for the possession of uncanny qualities, he was uniformly consorted with and treated as a gentleman by all the gentry of this Highland country. My old and worthy, and kind and benevolent friend, Mr. Grant, was a man of too much wisdom as well as learning to believe in the supernatural powers of Willox, or any such pretender. Mr. Grant, indeed, was a man of vurra enlarged mind and sound judgment—a deep divine—a classical scholar, such as is seldom to be met with in our poor country of Scotland—an admirable critic—and an elegant

poet ; and although what I may be stating regarding him has little to do with what I am going to tell you about Willox, yet, as you may have a chance to hear more of Mr. Grant from my friend Serjeant Archy Stewart when you come to make his acquaintance, I may be allowed to complete my sketch of this remarkable man by saying that, whilst he was pious and regular in his duties, as became a clergyman, he was, nevertheless, cheerful and convivial, and extremely fond of a bit of humour ; and, moreover, as he was often called upon to give his opinion pretty strongly in argument, he was equally ready to back it up at any time by his courage and bodily vigour against the brute force or the insults of his opponents, in days, now happily gone by, when even the sacred character of a minister of the gospel did not always protect his person from injury. To enable him to defend himself the more effectually in such chance encounters, Nature had given to him a stout and athletic frame and a nervous arm, in addition to which he did himself furnish the hand of that arm with a great hazel stick, which he facetiously called his *Ruling Elder*, and so armed, no man, nor set of men in the whole country side could make him

show his back. He was a capital preacher; but many doubted whether his sermons or his cudgel wrought the most reformation in his neighbourhood.

It was observed that Mr. Grant was always peculiarly unfortunate in losing his cattle. Not a year passed that some of them did not die of a strange and unaccountable disease which quite baffled the skill of all the farriers and cow-leaches in the district. But on one occasion the mortality was so great as seriously to threaten the utter extermination of his stock. As this calamity seemed to affect none of his neighbours, and to fall upon him alone, it was not unnatural for his superstitious servants to say that his cattle were bewitched. In their opinion nobody but Willox could cure such an evil.

“If you don’t send for Willox, sir, you’ll lose every nout beast in your aught,” said the minister’s hind.

“Saunders,” replied the minister, “although I have no faith in any such wicked and abominable superstitions as would gift Mr. MacGregor with superhuman powers, I am willing enough to give him credit for more than ordinary shrewdness and

sagacity as a mere man. You may, therefore, send for him with my compliments, as I believe that he is more likely than any one to discover the natural cause of these my losses."

Willox came accordingly; and after the usual salutations he took the parson aside.

"Between you and me, Mr. Grant," said he, "there is no use in my making any pretence of witchcraft. But you know we may find out the cause of the death of your cattle for all that. Your losses, I think, always happen at or about this particular season of the year?"

"They do," replied the parson.

"Come, then, let you and me take a quiet walk together over your farm."

Mr. Grant and Willox patiently perambulated the farm, and especially the cattle-pastures for some hours together, Willóx all the while throwing his sharp eyes around him in every direction, until they came to a hollow place where the warlock suddenly stopped.

"Here is the cause of the evil," said Willox, at once pointing to a certain plant which grew there, and nowhere else in the neighbourhood. "If you will only take care that your man Saunders

never allows your cattle to get into this hollow until the flower of that plant is withered and gone, you will find that you will never again lose a single beast in the same way."

I need not tell you, gentlemen, that Mr. Grant took care that the warlock's advice was strictly followed; and the result was perfectly satisfactory.

CLIFFORD.—A most invaluable wizzard! I wonder whether one might hold a consultation with him on the mysteries of fly-fishing.

GRANT.—I have no doubt he could advise you well.

CLIFFORD.—Nay, it was not for myself that I was asking. I manage to do well enough by means of mine own conjuring rod; but to you and my friend there, some little aid of magic might be useful, seeing you can make so little of it by your own simple skill. But come, Mr. Macpherson, what more of old Willox?

DOMINIE.—A great alarm was created at Castle Grant, in consequence of a strange madness that frequently seized upon the cattle at pasture in the grounds. At such times they were observed furiously running in all directions, with the tips of

their noses and tails in the air, and bursting over all the fences. The easiest solution of this phenomenon was to say that they were bewitched; and all the servants about the castle, especially those who had the broken fences to mend, believed that it was the true one. Even Sir James Grant, worthy man, when brought out to judge for himself, could not deny the grounds at least of this general opinion. To satisfy those who held it, he allowed the aid of Willox to be called in.

“Some trick has been played here,” said the warlock, after inquiring into all the particulars, and minutely examining those parts of the pastures where the animals were in the habit of lying most frequently. “Some wicked person has thrown some disagreeable odour among the beasts.”

The probability of this was doubted by every one present. Nay, every one declared that such a thing was impossible.

“Well,” said Willox, “I know that what I say is true; and I’ll soon convince *you all* that it is possible. Drive the cattle into the fold.”

The cattle were folded accordingly, and Willox walked into the very midst of them. There he took certain ingredients from his pocket, and put-

ting them on a small bundle of tow, he prepared to strike fire with a flint and steel.

“ Now, gentlemen,” said he, “ I advise all of you who have any regard for your own safety to look sharp to it.”

The fire was struck, the tow was kindled, a most offensive stench arose, and no sooner had the cattle winded the fumes of it, than they darted off in twenty different directions, as if the burning tow had been the fuse that discharged them from some vast bomb-shell. The poles and other barriers of the fold were shivered and levelled in a moment, as if such an enclosure had never existed. Down went the astonished spectators one by one in detail, as they chanced to come into the diverging lines of flight of the scattering herd. Smack, crash, and rumble went the nearer fences, as the several flying animals went through or over them, like cannon-shot ; and by the time the poor wounded, maimed, and crippled people had gathered themselves to their legs, such of them, I mean, as had legs left to stand upon, they beheld, to their utter dismay, the cattle scouring the distant country in all directions.

I need hardly add, that a little farther investi-

gation enabled Willox, without the aid of witchcraft, not only to satisfy every one that his first suspicions had been well founded, but also to prove that they had been so by discovering the offender.

GRANT.—Depend upon it, this warlock must be no ordinary man.

DOMINIE.—I have another anecdote of him. A certain farm house in Strathspey was said to be haunted. Stones and dust and rubbish were thrown into the middle of the family apartment; and no one could discover whence or from what hand they came. Mr. John Grant, the minister of the parish, was sent for to lay the ghost; and to the great comfort of those to whom the house belonged, he came accompanied by Willox.

“While I am engaged in going through the evening family worship,” said the parson to Willox, “do you keep your eyes on the alert, and try to ascertain whence the missiles appear to come.”

The minister began the duties of the evening. A psalm was sung. During the time the people present were singing it, the volleys were discontinued; but the moment the psalm was ended, the discharges again commenced.

“ We had better sing another psalm,” whispered Willox to the parson. Mr. Grant immediately gave out some verses accordingly. The disturbance ceased as before; but they were no sooner concluded, than it began again with redoubled fury. The sharp eyes of Willox shot like lightning into every part of the chamber. In an instant they were arrested by one of those great clumsy wooden partitions so common in our Highland farmers’ humble dwellings, which, being boarded on both sides, rise up a certain height only towards the bare rafters above, leaving the vast vacuity below the roof undivided from end to end of the building. Willox gave a preconcerted sign to the parson:

“ My friends,” said Mr. Grant, “ I insist that the boxing of that partition be immediately opened up.”

His orders were obeyed, and no sooner were the boards removed than the ghost was discovered. A little black Highland herd lassie sat cowering within, her face filled with dread of the punishment that awaited her. The creature had managed from time to time to creep in there, by lifting up a loose plank, and from that concealment she had con-

trived to throw her missiles over the open top of the partition into the apartment, all which she had done to revenge herself against the family for having been whipt for some piece of negligence, of which she had been guilty. The parson had no sooner learned these particulars, than he pounced upon the trembling culprit, like a great mastiff on a mouse, and dragging her forth, he, without the least delay or ceremony, gave her, to use his own phrase, a good *skegging*.

CLIFFORD.—Had Mr. Grant and Willox been sent for, the celebrated ghost of Cock Lane would have had but a short reign of it.

DOMINIE.—I have but one story more of Willox to plague you with. William Stuart, a farmer in Brae Moray, was led, by his father's persuasion, and very much against his own inclination, to marry a woman whom he could not like, all because she possessed a certain tocher. He went to his marriage like a condemned thief to the gallows, and from the very first moment, he treated his wife as an alien. A certain worthy lady in the neighbourhood, who felt interested in Mrs. Stuart, firmly believed that her husband's dislike to her

was occasioned by witchcraft. She, accordingly, sent for Willox, and intreated him to exercise his skill in the poor woman's behalf, and the warlock undertook to do all in his power for her.

Having contrived to pay a visit at Stuart's house, when he knew that he should find him at home, he accepted his invitation to stay to dine with him, and after they had had a cheerful glass together, Willox ventured to begin his attempt by drinking Mrs. Stuart's health.

"You are the only man, Stuart, who does not admire your own wife," said Willox, in a half jocular tone.

"May be so," said Stuart dryly.

"If you were not bewitched, as my skill tells me that you are, you would find more happiness at your own fireside than you do," continued Willox.

"Maybe I am bewitched," said Stuart, from the mere desire of being civil.

"I tell you I know you are," said Willox, "and if you will allow me I shall soon show you the people who have bewitched you."

"Ha! ha! I should like to see them," said Stuart with a forced laugh, "but if you do show

them to me, you are even a greater conjuror than I take you to be."

Willox, with great solemnity, now took forth the mermaid's stone from his pocket. It was semi-transparent, circular, and convex, like an ordinary lens, and it filled the palm of his hand. Placing the back of his hand on the table, and keeping the stone in the hollow of it, he solemnly addressed Stuart.

"If you would know those who bewitch you," said he, "look downwards through the mermaid's stone."

"I see nothing," said Stuart, following his direction.

"Do you see nothing now?" demanded Willox.

"Yes," replied Stuart, "I see something like a red spot.

"Look again, do you see nothing more now?" demanded Willox.

"Yes," said Stuart again, "I see something like a black spot, a little way from the red spot."

"Listen, then!" said Willox. "These are the heads of a red-haired lass and a black-haired lass,

and it is they who bewitch you from your lawful wife."

"If you are not a great warlock, you are at least a great rascal," cried Stuart, losing all temper; "but by the great oath, I'll soon know which you are." And saying so, he suddenly seized on the wizard's hand before he was aware, and turning it up, he extracted two pins from between the fingers, the head of one of which had been dipped in red wax, and the head of the other in black wax.

"You scoundrel," said Stuart, preparing to assault him, "you have been unjustifiably prying into my secrets, but I'll teach you to use greater discretion in future."

"Approach me at your peril!" cried Willox, stepping back towards the door, and brandishing a dagger which he drew from his bosom. "I have done or said nothing but what is friendly to you, and if you have the folly to attempt anything of a different nature towards me, you must take the consequences," and so saying he immediately took himself off. So ended the Dominie.

Our walk to-day had little beauty in it except in its distant prospects, which, when we looked

over the vast extent of fir forests towards the Cairngorum group of mountains, were always grand. The scenery of the Aven, indeed, and especially at the spot where we crossed it, delighted us all. The fragment of the ruined bridge of Campdale still stood, a sad monument of the ravages of the fearful flood of August 1829 ; but the stream now sparkled away along its customary channel like liquid chrystal.

CLIFFORD, (*stopping mechanically to put his fishing-rod together.*)—It is certainly the clearest stream I ever beheld. Yet shall I try my skill to extract some trouts from it for dinner.

GRANT, (*as we ascended the path that led us up from the deep glen of the Aven where we left Clifford fishing.*)—Anything to be seen at Toman-toul ?

AUTHOR.—Nothing that I have ever been able to discover. The site is one of the dreariest I know,—a high, wide, bare, and uninteresting moor, quite raised as you see above all the beauties of the river, which are buried from it in the profound of the neighbouring valley ; nor has the village itself any very great redeeming charm about it.

GRANT.—How comes it that all the cottages

and walls are built of sandstone, in the very heart of this primitive country ?

AUTHOR.—You may well be surprised, but you will perhaps be still more astonished to learn that the place stands on a great detached isolated field of the floetz strata, four miles in length by one in breadth, which has been raised up on the very bosom of the primitive granite.

GRANT.—A curious geological fact.

AUTHOR.—It is a fact which I learned when I was here formerly, from a very intelligent gentleman who is the clergyman here, to whom I was also indebted for much valuable information during my enquiries about the great flood. I shall be happy to introduce you to him.

GRANT.—I believe similar instances occur elsewhere in this part of Scotland.

AUTHOR.—Yes, at Kildrummie Castle,—in the Glen of Dollas,—and also near the borders of the primitive in the vale of Pluscardine.

DOMINIE.—To what strange changes has this earth of ours been subjeckit !

GRANT.—Tell me, I pray you, what nice looking house is this ?

AUTHOR.—It is the residence of the clergy-

man ; perhaps you would like to call on him now, while our friend here goes on to the inn with our man to secure beds and entertainment for us all.

Grant assented, and, entering the manse accordingly, we remained talking very agreeably there, until the whistling of Clifford, as he marched up the street with his rod in his hand, and his fishing panier on his back, made us suddenly terminate our interesting colloquy, in order to run after him. As we got into the inn, we found him in the act of admiring his trouts, which filled a large trencher.

CLIFFORD.—See what noble fellows ! There is one of three pounds and a half if he is an ounce. I hooked him in the pool above the broken bridge, and I called to you, as you were going up the hill, to come back and witness the sport he yielded, but you were too intent on your own conversation to hear me, and so you lost it all. What *were* you talking about ?

GRANT.—Geology.

CLIFFORD.—Geology !—fiddlesticks.—By all that is good you deserve to dine upon fossil fishes.

AUTHOR, (*to the landlady*).—Well, ma'am, I hope you can give us something good for dinner.

LANDLADY.—We shall see, sir; we'll do the best we can.

AUTHOR.—You will at least be able to give us an omelet, after the instructions I gave you when I was last in your house.

LANDLADY.—That I can; I made one for the Duke, when he was up here at the fowling, and he said that it was just famous.

CLIFFORD.—Can you give us any soup?

LANDLADY.—Na, sir; I'm dootin' that I hae na' time for that.

CLIFFORD.—Pooh! If you will give me a large smooth white pebble, such as is called by my geological friends here, quartz, but which you know better, I believe, by the name of a *chucky-stane*, I'll make some capital soup out of it in a very few minutes.

LANDLADY.—Odd, sir, I'm thinkin' ye'll be clever an ye can do that.

CLIFFORD.—Be quick, then, and fetch me such a stone as I have described. Remember it must be quite clean, and large enough to make soup for four gentlemen,—and recollect that we are very hungry.

LANDLADY, (*entering with a stone in one*

hand.)—There it is. It's quite clean, for I washed it wi' my ain hands.

CLIFFORD.—So, that is all right. Now, fetch me a pan with clean water in it. Oh, you have it there I see. Well, put in the stone, and put the pan on the fire. Now, you see, my good woman, I am a pupil of old Willox the warlock, therefore you need not be astonished at any thing I do. Go get me a spoon to taste the soup with. (*Whilst her back is turned, slyly dropping a cake or two of portable soup into the pot.*) Aye, now, let me see; taste it yourself. It already begins to have some flavour.

LANDLADY, (*astonished.*)—Have a care o' huz a', so it has!

CLIFFORD, (*stirring it.*)—But, stay a moment, —taste it now!

LANDLADY, (*taking a spoonful of it.*)—Keep me, that is just awthegither maygics indeed!

CLIFFORD, (*tasting it.*)—Oh, it will do now. Bring me an iron spoon to take out the stone with. Now, here take it away,—dry it well, and lock it carefully up in your larder; for, you perceive, that it is but very little wasted, and consequently it will make some good tureens of soup yet; and though

such stones are plenty enough, yet you know it is always good housewifery to be economical.

LANDLADY, (*taking away the stone.*)—That's true indeed, sir.

GRANT, (*after we had dined.*)—Well, thanks to Clifford's chunky-stone soup, his delicious *fritto* of trout, our landlady's excellent mutton-chops, and your omelet, we have dined like princes.

CLIFFORD.—I am now hungry for nothing but a narrative. Come, Mr. Macpherson, as we are to lose you to-morrow, I must remind you that you are still in my book for some story about Old Stachcan, the man with the pistol, I mean, whose portrait we saw at Castle-Grant. Pray, do not hesitate to clear off your score.

DOMINIE.—I need not say, Mr. Clifford, that since you and your friends here are so good as to accept of such poor coin as my bit stories, in return for all the kindness and condescension which I have received from you, it is well my part to pay it readily, and without a grudge. But what I had to tell you about Old Stachcan, was more an account of the man, than any very parteeklar story about him. Now, as you will pass by the very bit where he lay concealed, I would rather leave it

to my friend Serjeant Archy Stewart, who knows more about him than I do, to give you his history on the spot.

GRANT.—Well—since that is the case, Mr. Macpherson, I shall undertake to tell a story for you. And instead of that which you were to tell us about *one* Grant, I shall give you a legend which I have heard of *two* lairds of that name.

CLIFFORD.—Provided you do not on that account make your story twice as long as Mr. Macpherson's would have been, I for one am contented.

GRANT.—If I should do so, you have your resource, Clifford, you may go to sleep, you know; and if you do, I shall perhaps have the pleasure of singing, in the words of Scott's Water Sprite,

“ Good luck to your fishing.”

CLIFFORD.—No more of that, an thou lovest me, Hal.