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# MALCOLM

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BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

AUTHOR OF

“ROBERT FALCONER,” “PHANTASTES,” ETC., ETC.

“The greatest step is that out of doors”

*IN THREE VOLUMES. VOL. II.*

HENRY S. KING & Co.

65, CORNHILL; & 12, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

1875

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# MALCOLM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *ARMAGEDDON.*

THE home season of the herring-fishery was to commence a few days after the occurrences last recorded. The boats had all returned from other stations, and the little harbour was one crowd of stumpy masts, each with its halliard, the sole cordage visible, rove through the top of it, for the hoisting of a lug sail, tanned to a rich red brown. From this underwood towered aloft the masts of a coasting schooner, discharging its load of coal at the little quay. Other boats lay drawn up on the beach in front of the Seaton, and beyond it on the other side of the burn. Men and women were busy with the brown nets, laying them out on the short grass of the shore, mending them with netting-needles like small shuttles, carrying huge burdens of them on their shoulders in the hot sunlight ;

others were mending, calking, or tarring their boats, and looking to their various fittings. All was preparation for the new venture in their own waters, and everything went merrily and hopefully. Wives who had not accompanied their husbands now had them home again, and their anxieties would henceforth endure but for a night—joy would come with the red sails in the morning; lovers were once more together, the one great dread broken into a hundred little questioning fears; mothers had their sons again, to watch with loving eyes as they swung their slow limbs at their labour, or in the evenings sauntered about, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth, and blue bonnet cast carelessly on the head: it was almost a single family, bound together by a network of intermarriages, so intricate as to render it impossible for any one who did not belong to the community to follow the threads or read the design of the social tracery.

And while the Seaton swarmed with "the goings on of life," the town of Portlossie lay above it still as a country-hamlet, with more odours than people about: of people it was seldom indeed that three were to be spied at once in the wide street, while of odours you would always encounter a smell of

leather from the saddler's shop, and a mingled message of bacon and cheese from the very general dealer's—in whose window hung what seemed three hams, and only he who looked twice would discover that the middle object was no ham, but a violin—while at every corner lurked a scent of gillyflowers and southernwood. Idly supreme, Portlossie the upper looked down in condescension, that is, in half-concealed contempt, on the ant-heap below it.

The evening arrived on which the greater part of the boats was to put off for the first assay. Malcolm would have made one in the little fleet, for he belonged to his friend Joseph Mair's crew, had it not been found impossible to get the new boat ready before the following evening; whence, for this one more, he was still his own master, with one more chance of a pleasure for which he had been on the watch ever since Lady Florimel had spoken of having a row in his boat. True, it was not often she appeared on the shore in the evening; nevertheless he kept watching the dune with his keen eyes, for he had hinted to Mrs. Court-hope that perhaps her young lady would like to see the boats go out.

Although it was the fiftieth time his eyes had swept the links in vague hope, he could yet hardly believe their testimony when now at length he spied a form, which could only be hers, looking seaward from the slope, as still as a sphinx on Egyptian sands.

He sauntered slowly towards her, by the landward side of the dune, gathering on his way a handful of the reddest daisies he could find; then, ascending the sand-hill, approached her along the top.

“Saw ye ever sic gowans in yer life, my lady?” he said, holding out his posy.

“Is that what you call them?” she returned.

“Ow ay, my leddy—daisies *ye* ca’ them. I dinna ken but yours is the bonnier name o’ the twa—gien it be what Mr. Graham tells me the auld poet Chaucer maks o’ ’t.”

“What is that?”

“Ow, jist the een o’ the day—the *day’s eyes*, ye ken. They’re sma’ een for sic a great face, but syne there’s a lot o’ them to mak up for that. They’ve begun to close a’ready, but the mair they close the bonnier they luik, wi’ their bits o’ screwed-up mooies (*little mouths*). But saw ye ever sic reid anes, or ony sic a size, my leddy?”

“I don’t think I ever did. What is the reason they are so large and red?”

“I dinna ken. There canna be muckle nourishment in sic a thin soil, but there maun be something that agrees wi’ *them*. It’s the same a’ roon’ about here.”

Lady Florimel sat looking at the daisies, and Malcolm stood a few yards off, watching for the first of the red sails, which must soon show themselves, creeping out on the ebb tide. Nor had he waited long before a boat appeared, then another and another—six huge oars, ponderous to toil withal, urging each from the shelter of the harbour out into the wide weltering plain. The fishing-boat of that time was not decked as now, and each, with every lift of its bows, revealed to their eyes a gaping hollow, ready, if a towering billow should break above it, to be filled with sudden death. One by one the whole fleet crept out, and ever as they gained the breeze, up went the red sails, and filled: aside leaned every boat from the wind, and went dancing away over the frolicking billows towards the sunset, its sails, deep-dyed in oak-bark, shining redder and redder in the growing redness of the sinking sun.

Nor did Portlossie alone send out her boats,

like huge sea-birds warring on the live treasures of the deep; from beyond the headlands east and west, out they glided on slow red wing,—from Scaurnose, from Sandend, from Clamrock, from the villages all along the coast,—spreading as they came, each to its work apart through all the laborious night, to rejoin its fellows only as home drew them back in the clear gray morning, laden and slow with the harvest of the stars. But the night lay between, into which they were sailing over waters of heaving green that for ever kept tossing up roses—a night whose curtain was a horizon built up of steady blue, but gorgeous with passing purple and crimson, and flashing with molten gold.

Malcolm was not one of those to whom the sea is but a pond for fish, and the sky a storehouse of wind and rain, sunshine and snow: he stood for a moment gazing, lost in pleasure. Then he turned to Lady Florimel: she had thrown her daisies on the sand, appeared to be deep in her book, and certainly caught nothing of the splendour before her, beyond the red light on her page.

“Saw ye ever a bonnier sicht, my leddy?” said Malcolm.

She looked up, and saw, and gazed in silence.

Her nature was full of poetic possibilities; and now, a formless thought foreshadowed itself in a feeling she did not understand: why should such a sight as this make her feel sad? The vital connection between joy and effort had begun from afar to reveal itself with the question she now uttered.

“What is it all for?” she asked dreamily, her eyes gazing out on the calm ecstasy of colour, which seemed to have broken the bonds of law, and ushered in a new chaos, fit matrix of new heavens and new earth.

“To catch herrin’,” answered Malcolm, ignorant of the mood that prompted the question, and hence mistaking its purport.

But a falling doubt had troubled the waters of her soul, and through the ripple she could descry it settling into form. She was silent for a moment.

“I want to know,” she resumed, “why it looks as if some great thing were going on. Why is all this pomp and show? Something ought to be at hand. All I see is the catching of a few miserable fish! If it were the eve of a glorious battle now, I could understand it—if those were the little English boats rushing to attack the Spanish Armada, for instance. But they are only gone to



catch fish! Or if they were setting out to discover the Isles of the West, the country beyond the sunset!—but this jars.”

“I canna answer ye a’ at ance, my leddy,” said Malcolm; “I maun tak time to think about it. But I ken brawly what ye mean.”

Even as he spoke he withdrew, and, descending the mound, walked away beyond the bored craig, regardless now of the far-lessening sails and the sinking sun. The motes of the twilight were multiplying fast as he returned along the shore-side of the dune, but Lady Florimel had vanished from its crest. He ran to the top: thence, in the dim of the twilight, he saw her slow-retreating form, phantom-like, almost at the grated door of the tuñnel, which, like that of a tomb, appeared ready to draw her in, and yield her no more.

“My leddy! my leddy!” he cried, “winna ye bide for ’t?”

He went bounding after her like a deer. She heard him call, and stood holding the door half open.

“It ’s the battle o’ Armageddon, my leddy,” he cried, as he came within hearing distance.

“The battle of what?” she exclaimed, bewildered. “I really can’t understand your savage Scotch.”



“Hoot, my leddy! the battle o’ Armageddon’s no ane o’ the Scots battles; it’s the battle atween the richt an’ the wrang, ’at ye read about i’ the buik o’ the Revelations.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” returned Lady Florimel in dismay, beginning to fear that her squire was losing his senses.

“It’s jist what ye was sayin’, my leddy: sic a pomp as yon bude to hing abune a gran’ battle some gait or ither.”

“What *has* the catching of fish to do with a battle in the Revelations?” said the girl, moving a little within the door.

“Weel, my leddy, gien I took in han’ to set it furth to ye, I wad hae to tell ye a’ that Mr. Graham has been learnin’ me sin’ ever I can min’. He says ’at the whole economy o’ natur is fashiont unco like that o’ the kingdom o’ haven: its jist a gradation o’ services, an’ the highest en’ o’ ony animal is to contreebute to the life o’ ane higher than itsel’; sae that it’s the gran’ preevilege o’ the fish we tak, to be aten by human bein’s, an’ uphaud what’s abune them.”

“That’s a poor consolation to the fish,” said Lady Florimel.

“Hoo ken ye that, my leddy? Ye can tell nearhan’ as little about the hert o’ a heerin’—sic as it has—as the heerin’ can tell about yer ain, whilk, I’m thinkin’, maun be o’ the lairgest size.”

“How should you know anything about my heart, pray?” she asked, with more amusement than offence.

“Jist by my ain,” answered Malcolm.

Lady Florimel began to fear she must have allowed the fisher lad more liberty than was proper, seeing he dared avow that he knew the heart of a lady of her position by his own. But indeed Malcolm was wrong, for in the scale of hearts, Lady Florimel’s was far below his. She stepped quite within the door, and was on the point of shutting it, but something about the youth restrained her, exciting at least her curiosity; his eyes glowed with a deep quiet light, and his face, even grand at the moment, had a greater influence upon her than she knew. Instead therefore of interposing the door between them, she only kept it poised, ready to fall—to the moment the sanity of the youth should become a hair’s-breadth more doubtful than she already considered it.

“It’s a’ pairt o’ ae thing, my leddy,” Malcolm resumed. “The herrin’s like the fowk ’at cairries the mate an’ the pooder an’ sic like for them ’at does the fechtin.’ The hert o’ the leevin’ man’s the place whaur the battle’s foucht, an’ it’s aye gaein’ on an’ on there atween God an’ Sawtan; an’ the fish they haud fowk up till ’t——”

“Do you mean that the herrings help you to fight for God?” said Lady Florimel with a superior smile.

“Aither for God or for the deevil, my leddy—that depen’s upo’ the fowk themsel’s. I say it hauds them up to fecht, an’ the thing maun be fouchten oot. Fowk to fecht maun live, an’ the herrin’ hauds the life i’ them, an’ sae the catchin’ o’ the herrin’ comes in to be a pairt o’ the battle.”

“Wouldn’t it be more sensible to say that the battle is between the fishermen and the sea, for the sake of their wives and children?” suggested Lady Florimel supremely.

“Na, my leddy, it wadna be half sae sensible, for it wadna justifee the grandur that hings ower the fecht. The battle wi’ the sea’s no sae muckle o’ an affair. An’, ’deed, gien it warna that the wives an’ the verra weans hae themsel’s to fecht i’ the same battle o’ guid an’ ill, I dinna see the muckle

differ there wad be atween them an' the fish, nor what for they sudna ate ane anither as the cratur i' the watter du. But gien 't be the battle I say, there can be no pomp o' sea or sky ower gran' for 't; an' it's a' weel waured (*expended*) gien it but haud the gude anes merry an strong, an' up to their wark. For that, weel may the sun shine a celestial rosy reid, an' weel may the boatie row, an' weel may the stars luik doon, blinkin' an' luikin' again—ilk ane duin' its bonny pairt to mak a man a richt-hertit guid-willed sodger!"

"And, pray, what may be your rank in this wonderful army?" asked Lady Florimel, with the air and tone of one humouring a lunatic.

"I'm naething but a raw recruit, my leddy; but gien I hed my chice, I wad be piper to my reg'ment."

"How do you mean?"

"I wad mak sangs. Dinna lauch at me, my leddy, for they're the best kin' o' wapon for the wark 'at I ken. But I'm no a makar (*poet*), an' maun content mysel' wi' duin' my wark."

"Then why," said Lady Florimel, with the conscious right of social superiority to administer good counsel,—“why don't you work harder, and get a better house, and wear better clothes?"

Malcolm's mind was so full of far other and weightier things that the question bewildered him; but he grappled with the reference to his clothes.

"'Deed, my leddy," he returned, "ye may weel say that, seein' ye was never aboard a herrin' boat! but gien ye ance saw the inside o' ane fu' o' fish, whaur a body gangs slidderin' aboot, maybe up to the middle o' 's leg in wamlin' herrin', an' the neist meenute, maybe, weet to the skin wi' the splash o' a muckle jaw (*wave*), ye micht think the claes guid eneuch for the wark—though ill fit, I confess wi' shame, to come afore yer leddyship."

"I thought you only fished about close by the shore in a little boat; I didn't know you went with the rest of the fishermen: that's very dangerous work—isn't it?"

"No *ower* dangerous, my leddy. There's some gangs doon ilka sizzon; but it's a' i' the w'y o' yer wark."

"Then how is it you're not gone fishing to-night?"

"She's a new boat, an' there's anither day's wark on her afore we win oot.—Wadna ye like a row the nicht, my leddy?"

"No, certainly; it's much too late."

“It ’ll be nane mirker nor ’tis ; but I reckon ye’re richt. I cam ower by jist to see whether ye wadna like to gang wi’ the boats a bit ; but yer leddyship set me aff thinkin,’ an’ that pat it oot o’ my heid.”

“It’s too late now anyhow. Come to-morrow evening, and I’ll see if I can’t go with you.”

“I canna, my leddy—that’s the fash o’ ’t ! I maun gang wi’ Blue Peter the morn’s nicht. It was my last chance, I’m sorry to say.”

“It’s not of the slightest consequence,” Lady Florimel returned ; and, bidding him good-night, she shut and locked the door.

The same instant she vanished, for the tunnel was now quite dark. Malcolm turned with a sigh, and took his way slowly homeward along the top of the dune. All was dim about him—dim in the heavens, where a thin veil of gray had gathered over the blue ; dim on the ocean, where the stars swayed and swung, in faint flashes of dissolving radiance, cast loose like ribbons of sea-weed ; dim all along the shore, where the white of the breaking wavelet melted into the yellow sand ; and dim in his own heart, where the manner and words of the lady had half hidden her starry reflex with a chilling mist.

## CHAPTER II.

### *THE FEAST.*

TO the entertainment which the marquis and Lady Florimel had resolved to give, all classes and conditions in the neighbourhood now began to receive invitations—shop-keepers, there called merchants, and all socially above them, individually, by notes, in the name of the marquis and Lady Florimel, but in the handwriting of Mrs. Crathie and her daughters; and the rest generally, by the sound of bagpipes, and proclamation from the lips of Duncan MacPhail. To the satisfaction of Johnny Bykes, the exclusion of improper persons was left in the hands of the gatekeepers.

The thing had originated with the factor. The old popularity of the lords of the land had vanished utterly during the life of the marquis's brother, and Mr. Crathie, being wise in his generation, sought to initiate a revival of it by hinting the propriety of some general hospitality, a suggestion which the marquis was anything but loath to follow. For the present Lord Lossie, although as unready as most

men to part with anything he cared for, could yet cast away magnificently, and had always greatly prized a reputation for liberality.

For the sake of the fishermen, the first Saturday after the commencement of the home-fishing was appointed. The few serious ones, mostly Methodists, objected on the ground of the proximity of the Sunday; but their attitude was, if possible, of still less consequence in the eyes of their neighbours that it was well known they would in no case have accepted such an invitation.

The day dawned propitious. As early as five o'clock Mr. Crathie was abroad, booted and spurred—now directing the workmen who were setting up tents and tables; now conferring with house-steward, butler, or cook; now mounting his horse and galloping off to the home-farm or the distillery, or into the town to the Lossie Arms, where certain guests from a distance were to be accommodated, and whose landlady had undertaken the superintendence of certain of the victualling departments; for canny Mr. Crathie would not willingly have the meanest guest ask twice for anything he wanted—so invaluable did he consider a good word from the humblest quarter—and the best labours of



the French cook, even had he revered instead of despising Scottish dishes, would have ill-sufficed for the satisfaction of appetites critically appreciative of hotch-potch, sheep's head, haggis, and black puddings.

The neighbouring nobility and landed gentlemen, the professional guests also, including the clergy, were to eat with the marquis in the great hall. On the grass near the house, tents were erected for the burgesses of the burgh, and the tenants of the marquis's farms. I would have said *on the lawn*, but there was no lawn proper about the place, the ground was so picturesquely broken—in parts with all but precipices—and so crowded with trees. Hence its aspect was specially unlike that of an English park and grounds. The whole was *Celtic* as distinguished in character from *Saxon*. For the lake-like lawn, for the wide sweeps of airy room in which expand the mighty boughs of solitary trees, for the filmy gray-blue distances, and the far-off segments of horizon, here were the tree-crowded grass, the close windings of the long glen of the burn, heavily overshadowed, and full of mystery and covert, but leading at last to the widest vantage of outlook—the wild heathery hill down

which it drew its sharp furrow ; while, in front of the house, beyond hidden river, and plane of tree-tops, and far-sunk shore with its dune and its bored crag and its tortuous caves, lay the great sea, a pouting under-lip, met by the thin, reposeful—shall I say sorrowful?—upper-lip of the sky.

A bridge of stately span, level with the sweep in front, honourable embodiment of the savings of a certain notable countess, one end resting on the same rock with the house, their foundations almost in contact, led across the burn to more and more trees, their roots swathed in the finest grass, through which ran broad carriage drives and narrower foot-ways, hard and smooth with yellow gravel. Here amongst the trees were set long tables for the fishermen, mechanics, and farm-labourers. Here also was the place appointed for the piper.

As the hour drew near, the guests came trooping in at every entrance.. By the sea-gate came the fisher-folk, many of the men in the blue jersey, the women mostly in short print gowns, of large patterns—the married with huge, wide-frilled caps, and the unmarried with their hair gathered in silken nets ;—bonnets there were very few. Each group that entered had a joke or a jibe for Johnny Bykes, which

he met in varying, but always surly fashion—in that of utter silence in the case of Duncan and Malcolm, at which the former was indignant, the latter merry. By the town-gate came the people of Portlossie, by the new main entrance from the high road beyond the town, through lofty Greekish gates, came the lords and lairds, in yellow coaches, gigs, and post-chaises. By another gate, far up the glen, came most of the country-folk, some walking, some riding, some driving, all merry, and with the best intentions of enjoying themselves. As the common people approached the house, they were directed to their different tables by the sexton, for he knew everybody.

The marquis was early on the ground, going about amongst his guests, and showing a friendly off-hand courtesy which prejudiced every one in his favour. Lady Florimel soon joined him, and a certain frank way she inherited from her father, joined to the great beauty her mother had given her, straightway won all hearts. She spoke to Duncan with cordiality: the moment he heard her voice, he pulled off his bonnet, put it under his arm, and responded with what I can find no better phrase to describe than—a profuse dignity. Mal-

colm she favoured with a smile which swelled his heart with pride and devotion. The bold-faced countess next appeared: she took the marquis's other arm, and nodded to his guests condescendingly and often, but seemed, after every nod, to throw her head farther back than before. Then to haunt the goings of Lady Florimel came Lord Meikleham, receiving little encouragement, but eager after such crumbs as he could gather. Suddenly the great bell under the highest of the gilded vanes rang a loud peal, and the marquis having led his chief guests to the hall, as soon as he was seated, the tables began to be served simultaneously.

At that where Malcolm sat with Duncan, grace was grievously foiled by the latter, for, unaware of what was going on, he burst out, at the request of a waggish neighbour, with a tremendous blast, of which the company took advantage to commence operations at once, and presently the clatter of knives and forks and spoons was the sole sound to be heard in that division of the feast: across the valley, from the neighbourhood of the house, came now and then a faint peal of laughter, for there they knew how to be merry while they ate; but here, the human element was in abeyance, for

people who work hard, seldom talk while they eat. From the end of an overhanging bough a squirrel looked at them for one brief moment, wondering perhaps that they should not prefer cracking a nut in private, and vanished; but the birds kept singing, and the scents of the flowers came floating up from the garden below, and the burn went on with its own noises and its own silences, drifting the froth of its last passion down towards the doors of the world.

In the hall, ancient jokes soon began to flutter their moulted wings, and musty compliments to offer themselves for the acceptance of the ladies, and meet with a reception varied by temperament and experience: what the bold-faced countess heard with a hybrid contortion, half sneer and half smile, would have made Lady Florimel stare out of big refusing eyes.

Those more immediately around the marquis were soon laughing over the story of the trick he had played the blind piper, and the apology he had had to make in consequence; and perhaps something better than mere curiosity had to do with the wish of several of the guests to see the old man and his grandson. The marquis said the

piper himself would take care they should not miss him, but he would send for the young fellow, who was equally fitted to amuse them, being quite as much of a character in his way as the other.

He spoke to the man behind his chair, and in a few minutes Malcolm made his appearance, following the messenger.

"Malcolm," said the marquis kindly, "I want you to keep your eyes open, and see that no mischief is done about the place."

"I dinna think there's ane o' oor ain fowk wad dee ony mischeef, my lord," answered Malcolm; "but whan ye keep open yett, ye canna be sure wha wins in, specially wi' sic a gowk as Johnny Bykes at ane o' them. No 'at he wad wrang yer lordship a hair, my lord!"

"At all events you'll be on the alert," said the marquis.

"I wull that, my lord. There's twa or three about a'ready 'at I dinna a'thegither like the leuks o'. They're no like country-fowk, an' they're no fisher-fowk. It's no far aff the time o' year whan the gipsies are i' the w'y o' payin' 's a veesit, an' they may ha' come in at the Binn yett (*gate*), whaur there's nane but an auld wife to haud them oot."

“Well, well,” said the marquis, who had no fear about the behaviour of his guests, and had only wanted a colour for his request of Malcolm’s presence. “In the meantime,” he added, “we are rather short-handed here. Just give the butler a little assistance—will you?”

“Willin’ly, my lord,” answered Malcolm, forgetting altogether, in the prospect of being useful and within sight of Lady Florimel, that he had but half-finished his own dinner. The butler, who had already had an opportunity of admiring his aptitude, was glad enough to have his help; and after this day used to declare that in a single week he could make him a better servant than any of the men who waited at table. It was indeed remarkable how, with such a limited acquaintance with the many modes of an artificial life, he was yet, by quickness of sympathetic insight, capable not only of divining its requirements, but of distinguishing, amid the multitude of appliances around, those fitted to their individual satisfaction.

It was desirable, however, that the sitting in the hall should not be prolonged, and after a few glasses of wine, the marquis rose, and went to make the round of the other tables. Taking them in order,



he came last to those of the rustics, mechanics, and fisher-folk. These had advanced considerably in their potations, and the fun was loud. His appearance was greeted with shouts, into which Duncan struck with a pæan from his pipes ; but in the midst of the tumult, one of the oldest of the fishermen stood up, and in a voice accustomed to battle with windy uproars, called for silence. He then addressed their host.

“Ye’ll jist mak’s prood by drinkin’ a tum’ler wi’s, yer lordship,” he said. “It’s no ilka day we hae the honour o’ yer lordship’s company.”

“Or I of yours,” returned the marquis with hearty courtesy. “I will do it with pleasure—or at least a glass : my head’s not so well seasoned as some of yours.”

“Gien yer lordship’s hed hed as mony blasts o’ nicht win’, an’ as mony jaups o’ cauld sea-watter about its lugs as oors, it wad hae been fit to stan’ as muckle o’ the barley bree as the stievest o’ the lot, I s’ warran’.”

“I hope so,” returned Lord Lossie, who, having taken a seat at the end of the table, was now mixing a tumbler of toddy. As soon as he had filled his glass, he rose, and drank to the fishermen



of Portlossie, their wives, and their sweethearts, wishing them a mighty conquest of herring, and plenty of children to keep up the breed and the war on the fish. His speech was received with hearty cheers, during which he sauntered away to rejoin his friends.

Many toasts followed, one of which, "Damnation to the dog-fish," gave opportunity to a wag, seated near the piper, to play upon the old man's well-known foible by adding, "an' Cawmill o' Glenlyon;" whereupon Duncan, who had by this time taken more whisky than was good for him, rose, and made a rambling speech, in which he returned thanks for the imprecation, adding thereto the hope that never might one of the brood accursed go down with honour to the grave.

The fishermen listened with respectful silence, indulging only in nods, winks, and smiles for the interchange of amusement, until the utterance of the wish recorded, when, apparently carried away for a moment by his eloquence, they broke into loud applause. But from the midst of it, a low, gurgling laugh close by him reached Duncan's ear: excited though he was with strong drink and approbation, he shivered, sunk into his seat, and clutched

at his pipes convulsively, as if they had been a weapon of defence.

“Malcolm! Malcolm, my son!” he muttered feebly, “tere is a voman will pe laughing! She is a paad voman: she makes me cold!”

Finding from the no-response that Malcolm had left his side, he sat motionless, drawn into himself, and struggling to suppress the curdling shiver. Some of the women gathered about him, but he assured them it was nothing more than a passing sickness.

Malcolm's attention had, a few minutes before, been drawn to two men of somewhat peculiar appearance, who, applauding louder than any, only pretended to drink, and occasionally interchanged glances of intelligence. It was one of these peculiar looks that first attracted his notice. He soon discovered that they had a comrade on the other side of the table, who apparently, like themselves, had little or no acquaintance with any one near him. He did not like either their countenances or their behaviour, and resolved to watch them. In order therefore to be able to follow them when they moved, as he felt certain they would before long, without attracting their attention, he left the table and making a circuit

took up his position behind a neighbouring tree. Hence it came that he was not, at the moment of his need, by his grandfather's side, whither he had returned as soon as dinner was over in the hall.

Meantime it became necessary to check the drinking by the counter-attraction of the dance; Mr. Crathie gave orders that a chair should be mounted on a table for Duncan; and the young hinds and fishermen were soon dancing zealously with the girls of their company to his strathspeys and reels. The other divisions of the marquis's guests made merry to the sound of a small brass band, a harp, and two violins.

When the rest forsook the toddy for the reel, the objects of Malcolm's suspicion remained at the table, not to drink, but to draw nearer to each other and confer. At length, when the dancers began to return in quest of liquor, they rose and went away loiteringly through the trees. As the twilight was now deepening, Malcolm found it difficult to keep them in sight, but for the same reason he was able the more quickly to glide after them from tree to tree. It was almost moonrise, he said to himself, and if they meditated mischief, now was their best time.

Presently he heard the sound of running feet, and in a moment more spied the unmistakable form of the mad laird, darting through the thickening dusk of the trees, with gestures of wild horror. As he passed the spot where Malcolm stood, he cried out in a voice like a suppressed shriek,—

“It’s my mither! It’s my mither! I dinna ken whaur I come frae.”

His sudden appearance and outcry so startled Malcolm that for a moment he forgot his watch, and when he looked again, the men had vanished. Not having any clue to their intent, and knowing only that on such a night the house was nearly defenceless, he turned at once and made for it. As he approached the front, coming over the bridge, he fancied he saw a figure disappear through the entrance, and quickened his pace. Just as he reached it, he heard a door bang, and supposing it to be that which shut off the second hall, whence rose the principal staircase, he followed this vaguest of hints, and bounded to the top of the stair. Entering the first passage he came to, he found it almost dark, with a half-open door at the end, through which shone a gleam from some window beyond: this light was plainly shut off for a moment, as if by some one

passing the window. He hurried after—noiselessly, for the floor was thickly carpeted—and came to the foot of a winding stone stair. Afraid beyond all things of doing nothing, and driven by the formless conviction that if he stopped to deliberate he certainly should do nothing, he shot up the dark screw like an ascending bubble, passed the landing of the second floor without observing it, and arrived in the attic regions of the ancient pile, under low, irregular ceilings, here ascending in cones, there coming down in abrupt triangles, or sloping away to a hidden meeting with the floor in distant corners. His only light was the cold blue glimmer from here and there a storm-window or a sky-light. As the conviction of failure grew on him, the *ghostly* feeling of the place began to invade him. All was vague, forsaken, and hopeless, as a dreary dream, with the superadded miserable sense of lonely sleep-walking. I suspect that the feeling we call *ghostly* is but the sense of abandonment in the lack of companion life ; but be this as it may, Malcolm was glad enough to catch sight of a gleam as from a candle, at the end of a long, low passage on which he had come after mazy wandering. Another similar passage crossed its end, somewhere in which must

be the source of the light : he crept towards it, and, laying himself flat on the floor, peeped round the corner. His very heart stopped to listen : seven or eight yards from him, with a small lantern in her hand, stood a short female figure, which, the light falling for a moment on her soft evil countenance, he recognized as Mrs. Catanach. Beside her stood a tall graceful figure, draped in black from head to foot. Mrs. Catanach was speaking in a low tone, and what Malcolm was able to catch was evidently the close of a conversation.

“ I’ll do my best, ye may be sure, my leddy,” she said. “ There’s something no canny about the cratur, an’ doobtless ye was an ill-used wuman, an’ ye’re i’ the richt. But it’s a some fearsome ventur, an’ may be luikit intill, ye ken. There I s’ be yer scoug. Lippen to me, an’ ye s’ no repent it.”

As she ended speaking, she turned to the door, and drew from it a key, evidently after a foiled attempt to unlock it therewith ; for from a bunch she carried she now made choice of another, and was already fumbling with it in the key-hole, when Malcolm bethought himself that, whatever her further intent, he ought not to allow her to succeed in opening the door. He therefore rose slowly to his

feet, and stepping softly out into the passage, sent his round blue bonnet spinning with such a certain aim, that it flew right against her head. She gave a cry of terror, smothered by the sense of evil secrecy, and dropped her lantern. It went out. Malcolm pattered with his hands on the floor, and began to howl frightfully. Her companion had already fled, and Mrs. Catanach picked up her lantern and followed. But her flight was soft-footed, and gave sign only in the sound of her garments, and a clank or two of her keys.

Gifted with a good sense of relative position, Malcolm was able to find his way back to the hall without much difficulty, and met no one on the way. When he stepped into the open air a round moon was visible through the trees, and their shadows were lying across the sward. The merriment had grown louder ; for a good deal of whisky having been drunk by men of all classes, hilarity had ousted restraint, and the separation of classes having broken a little, there were many stragglers from the higher to the lower divisions, whence the area of the more boisterous fun had considerably widened. Most of the ladies and gentlemen were dancing in the chequer of the trees and moonlight, but, a little removed



from the rest, Lady Florimel was seated under a tree, with Lord Meikleham by her side, probably her partner in the last dance. She was looking at the moon, which shone upon her from between two low branches, and there was a sparkle in her eyes and a luminousness upon her cheek which to Malcolm did not seem to come from the moon only. He passed on, with the first pang of jealousy in his heart, feeling now for the first time that the space between Lady Florimel and himself was indeed a gulf. But he cast the whole thing from him for the time with an inward scorn of his foolishness, and hurried on from group to group, to find the marquis.

Meeting with no trace of him, and thinking he might be in the flower-garden, which a few rays of the moon now reached, he descended thither. But he searched it through with no better success, and at the farthest end was on the point of turning to leave it and look elsewhere, when he heard a moan of stifled agony on the other side of a high wall which here bounded the garden. Climbing up an espalier, he soon reached the top, and looking down on the other side, to his horror and rage espied the mad laird on the ground, and the very men of



whom he had been in pursuit, standing over him and brutally tormenting him, apparently in order to make him get up and go along with them. One was kicking him, another pulling his head this way and that by the hair, and the third punching and poking his hump, which last cruelty had probably drawn from him the cry Malcolm had heard.

Three might be too many for him: he descended swiftly, found some stones, and a stake from a bed of sweet-peas, then climbing up again, took such effectual aim at one of the villains that he fell without uttering a sound. Dropping at once from the wall, he rushed at the two with stick upheaved.

“Dinna be in sic a rage, man,” cried the first, avoiding his blow; “we’re about naething ayont the lawfu’. It’s only the mad laird. We’re takin’ ’im to the asylum at Ebberdeen. By the order o’ ’s ain mither!”

At the word a choking scream came from the prostrate victim. Malcolm uttered a huge imprecation, and struck at the fellow again, who now met him in a way that showed it was noise more than wounds he had dreaded. Instantly the other came up, and also fell upon him with vigour. But his stick was too much for them, and at length one of them, crying out—“It’s the blin’ piper’s bastard—

I'll mark him yet!" took to his heels, and was followed by his companion.

More eager after rescue than punishment, Malcolm turned to the help of the laird, whom he found in utmost need of his ministrations—gagged, and with his hands tied mercilessly tight behind his back. His knife quickly released him, but the poor fellow was scarcely less helpless than before. He clung to Malcolm, and moaned piteously, every moment glancing over his shoulder in terror of pursuit. His mouth hung open as if the gag were still tormenting him; now and then he would begin his usual lament and manage to say "*I dinna ken;*" but when he attempted the *whaur*, his jaw fell and hung as before. Malcolm sought to lead him away, but he held back, moaning dreadfully; then Malcolm would have him sit down where they were, but he caught his hand and pulled him away, stopping instantly, however, as if not knowing whither to turn from the fears on every side. At length the prostrate enemy began to move, when the laird, who had been unaware of his presence, gave a shriek, and took to his heels. Anxious not to lose sight of him, Malcolm left the wounded man to take care of himself, and followed him up the steep side of the little valley.

They had not gone many steps from the top of the ascent, however, before the fugitive threw himself on the ground exhausted, and it was all Malcolm could do to get him to the town, where, unable to go a pace further, he sank down on Mrs. Catanach's door-step. A light was burning in the cottage, but Malcolm would seek shelter for him anywhere rather than with her, and, in terror of her quick ears, caught him up in his arms like a child, and hurried away with him to Miss Horn's.

"Eh, sirs!" exclaimed Miss Horn, when she opened the door—for Jean was among the merry-makers—"wha's this 'at's killt noo?"

"It's the—laird—Mr. Stewart," returned Malcolm. "He's no freely killt, but nigh han'."

"Na! weel I wat! Come in an' set him doon till we see," said Miss Horn, turning and leading the way up to her little parlour.

There Malcolm laid his burden on the sofa, and gave a brief account of the rescue.

"Lord preserve's, Ma'colm!" cried Miss Horn, as soon as he had ended his tale, to which she had listened in silence, with fierce eyes and threatening nose; "isna't a mercy I wasna made like some fowk, or I couldna ha' bidden to see the puir fallow

misguidet that gait! It's a special mercy, Ma'colm MacPhail, to be made wantin' ony sic thing as feelin's."

She was leaving the room as she spoke—to return instantly with brandy. The laird swallowed some with an effort, and began to revive.

"Eh, sirs!" exclaimed Miss Horn, regarding him now more narrowly—"but he's in an awfu' state o' dirt! I maun wash his face an' han's, an' pit him till 's bed. Could *ye* help aff wi' 's claes, Ma'colm? Though I haena ony feelin's, I'm jist some eerie-like at the pair body's back."

The last words were uttered in what she judged a safe aside. As if she had been his mother, she washed his face and hands, and dried them tenderly, the laird submitting like a child. He spoke but one word—when she took him by the hand to lead him to the room where her cousin used to sleep: "Father o' lights!" he said, and no more. Malcolm put him to bed, where he lay perfectly still, whether awake or asleep they could not tell.

He then set out to go back to Lossie House, promising to return after he had taken his grandfather home, and seen him also safe in bed.

## CHAPTER III.

### *THE NIGHT WATCH.*

WHEN Malcolm returned, Jean had retired for the night, and again it was Miss Horn who admitted him, and led him to her parlour. It was a low-ceiled room, with lean spider-legged furniture and dingy curtains. Everything in it was suggestive of a comfort slowly vanishing. An odour of withered rose-leaves pervaded the air. A Japanese cabinet stood in one corner, and on the mantelpiece a pair of Chinese fans with painted figures whose faces were embossed in silk, between which ticked an old French clock, whose supporters were a shepherd and shepherdess in prettily painted china. Long faded as was everything in it, the room was yet very rich in the eyes of Malcolm, whose home was bare even in comparison with that of the poorest of the fisherwomen: they had a passion for ornamenting their chimneypieces with china ornaments, and their dressers with the most gorgeous crockery that their money could buy—a certain metallic orange being the prevailing hue; while in Duncan's cottage, where

woman had never initiated the taste, there was not even a china poodle to represent the finished development of luxury in the combination of the ugly and the useless.

Miss Horn had made a little fire in the old-fashioned grate, whose bars bellied out like a sail almost beyond the narrow chimney-shelf, and a tea-kettle was singing on the hob, while a decanter, a sugar basin, a nutmeg grater, and other needful things on a tray, suggested negus, beyond which Miss Horn never went in the matter of stimulants, asserting that, as she had no feelings, she never required anything stronger. She made Malcolm sit down at the opposite side of the fire, and mixing him a tumbler of her favourite drink, began to question him about the day, and how things had gone.

Miss Horn had the just repute of discretion, for, gladly hearing all the news, she had the rare virtue of not repeating things to the prejudice of others without some *good* reason for so doing; Malcolm therefore, seated thus alone with her in the dead of the night, and bound to her by the bond of a common well-doing, had no hesitation in unfolding to her all his adventures of the evening. She sat with her big hands in her lap, making no remark,

not even an exclamation, while he went on with the tale of the garret; but her listening eyes grew—not larger—darker and fiercer as he spoke; the space between her nostrils and mouth widened visibly; the muscles knotted on the sides of her neck; and her nose curved more and more to the shape of a beak.

“There’s some deevilry there!” she said at length after he had finished, breaking a silence of some moments, during which she had been staring into the fire. “Whaur twa ill women come thegither, there maun be the auld man himsel’ atween them.”

“I dinna doobt it,” returned Malcolm. “An’ ane o’ them ’s an ill wuman, sure eneuch; but I ken naething about the tither—only ’at she maun be a leddy, by the w’y the howdy-wife spak till her.”

“The waur token, whan a leddy collogues wi’ a wuman aneth her ain station, an’ ane ’at has keppit (*caught in passing*) mony a secret in her day, an’ by her callin’ has had mair opportunity—no to say farther—than ither fowk o’ duin’ ill things! An gien ye dinna ken her, that’s no rizzon ’at I sudna hae a groff guiss at her by the marks ye read aff o’ her. I’ll jist hae to tell ye a story sic as an auld wife like me seldom tells till a yoong man like yersel’.”

“Yer ain bridle sall rule my tongue, mem,” said Malcolm.

“I s’ lippen to yer discretion,” said Miss Horn, and straightway began.—“Some years ago—an’ I s’ warran’ it’s weel ower twinty—that same wuman, Bawby Cat’nach,—wha was nae hame-born wuman, nor had been lang about the toon—comin’ as she did frae naebody kent whaur, ’cep maybe it was the markis ’at than was, preshumed to mak up to me i’ the w’y o’ frien’ly acquaintance—sic as a maiden ledly micht hae wi’ a howdy—an’ no ’at she forgot her proaper behaviour to ane like mysel’. But I cudna hae bidden (*endured*) the jaud, ’cep ’at I had rizzons for lattin’ her jaw wag. She was cunnin’, the auld vratch,—no that auld—maybe aboot forty,—but I was ower mony for her. She had the design to win at something she thought I kent, an’ sae, to enteece me to open my pock, she opent hers, an’ tellt me story efter story about this neebour an’ that—a’ o’ them things ’at ouchtna to ha’ been true, an’ ’at she ouchtna to ha’ loot pass her lips gien they war true, seein’ she cam by the knowledge o’ them as she said she did. But she gat naething o’ me—the fat-braint cat!—an’ she hates me like the verra mischeef.”



Miss Horn paused and took a sip of her negus.

“Ae day, I cam upon her sittin’ by the ingle-neuk i’ my ain kitchen, haudin’ a close an’ a laich confab wi’ Jean. I had Jean than, an’ hoo I hae keepit the hizzy, I hardly ken. I think it maun be that, haein’ nae feelin’s o’ my ain, I hae ower muckle regaird to ither fowk’s, an’ sae I never likit to pit her awa’ wi’oot doonricht provocation. But dinna ye lippen to Jean, Malcolm—na, na!—At that time, my cousin, Miss Grizel Cammell—my third cousin, she was—had come to bide wi’ me—a bonny yoong thing as ye wad see, but in sair ill health; an’ maybe she had her freits (*whims*), an’ maybe no, but she cudna bide to see the wuman Cat’nach about the place. An’ in verra trowth, she was to mysel’ like ane o’ thae ill-faured birds, I dinna min’ upo’ the name o’ them, ’at hings ower an’ airmy; for wharever there was onybody nae weel, or onybody deid, there was Bawby Cat’nach. I hae hard o’ creepin’ things ’at veesits fowk ’at ’s no weel—an’ Bawby was, an’ is, ane sic like! Sae I was angert at seein’ her colloquin’ wi’ Jean, an’ I cried Jean to me to the door o’ the kitchie. But wi’ that up jumps Bawby, an’ comin’ efter her, says to me—says she, ‘Eh, Miss Horn! there’s terrible news: Leddy

Lossie's deid!—she 's been three ooks deid!—  
'Weel,' says I, 'what's sae terrible about that?'  
For ye ken I never had ony feelin's, an' I cud see  
naething sae awfu' about a body deein' i' the ord'nar  
w'y o' natur like. 'We'll no miss her muckle doon  
here,' says I, 'for I never hard o' her bein' at the  
Hoose sin' ever I can min'.'—'But that's no a', says  
she; 'only I wad be laith to speyk about it i' the  
transe (*passage*). Lat me up the stair wi' ye, an'  
I'll tell ye mair.' Weel, pairtly 'at I was ta'en by  
surprise like, an' pairtly 'at I wasna sae auld as I  
am noo, an' pairtly that I was keerious to hear—  
ill 'at I likit her—what neist the wuman wad say,  
I did as I ouchtna, an' turned an' gaed up the stair,  
an' loot her follow me. Whan she cam in, she pat tu  
the door ahint her, an' turnt to me, an' said—says  
she: 'An' wha 's deid forbye, think ye?'—'I hae  
hard o' naebody,' I answered. 'Wha but the laird o'  
Gersefell!' says she. 'I'm sorry to hear that, honest  
man!' says I; for a'budy likit Mr. Stewart. 'An'  
what think ye o' 't?' says she, wi' a runklin o' her  
broos, an' a shak o' her heid, an' a settin' o' her roon'  
nieves upo' the fat hips o' her. 'Think o' 't?' says  
I; 'what sud I think o' 't, but that it's the wull o'  
Providence?' Wi' that she leuch till she wabblet

a' ower like cauld skink, an' says she—'Weel, that's jist what it is no, an' that lat me tell ye, Miss Horn!' I glowert at her, maist frichtit into believin' she was the witch fowk ca'd her. 'Wha's son 's the hump-backit cratur,' says she, 'at comes in i' the gig whiles wi' the groom-lad, think ye?'—'Wha's but the puir man's 'at's deid?' says I. 'Deil a bit o' 't!' says she, 'an' I beg yer pardon for mentionin' o' *him*,' says she. An' syne she screwt up her mou', an' cam closs up till me—for I wadna sit doon mysel', an' less wad I bid her, an' was sorry eneuch by this time 'at I had brought her up the stair—an' says she, layin' her han' upo' my airm wi' a clap, as gien her an' me was. to be freen's upo' sic a gran' foondation o' dirt as that!—says she, makin' a laich toot-moot o' 't,—'He's Lord Lossie's!' says she, an' maks a face 'at micht hae turnt a cat sick—only by guid luck I had nae feelin's. 'An' no suner 's my leddy deid nor *her* man follows her!' says she. 'An' what do ye mak o' that?' says she. 'Ay, what do ye mak o' that?' says I till her again. 'Ow! what ken I?' says she, wi' anither ill leuk; an' wi' that she leuch an' turned awa, but turned back again or she wan to the door, an' says she—'Maybe ye didna ken 'at she was

brought to bed hersel' about a sax ooks ago?'—  
'Puir leddy!' said I, thinkin' mair o' her evil report  
nor o' the pains o' childbirth. 'Ay,' says she, wi'  
a deevilich kin' o' a lauch, like in spite o' hersel',  
'for the bairn's deid, they tell me—as bonny a  
ladbairn as ye wad see, jist ooncoamon! An' whaur  
div ye think she had her doon-lying'? Jist at  
Lossie Hoose!' Wi' that she was oot at the door  
wi' a swag o' her tail, an' doon the stair to Jean  
again. I was jist at ane mair wi' anger at mysel'  
an' scunner at her, an' was in twa min's to gang  
efter her an' turn her oot o' the hoose, her an' Jean  
thegither. I could hear her snicherin' till hersel' as  
she gaed doon the stair. My verra stamack turned  
at the poozhonous ted.

"I canna say what was true or what was fause  
i' the scandal o' her tale, nor what for she tuik the  
trouble to cairry 't to me, but it sune cam to be  
said 'at the yoong laird was but half-wittet as weel's  
humpit, an' 'at his mither cudna bide him. An'  
certain it was 'at the puir wee chap cud as little  
bide his mither. Gien she cam near him ohn luikit  
for, they said, he wad gie a great skrieich, and rin  
as fest as his wee weyver (*spider*) legs cud wag  
aneth the wecht o' 's humpie—an' whiles her efter

him wi' onything she cud lay her han' upo,' they said—but I kenna. Ony gait, the widow hersel' grew waur and waur i' the temper, an' I misdoobt me sair was gey hard upo' the puir wee objeck—fell cruel till 'im, they said—till at len'th, as a'body kens, he forhooit (*forsook*) the hoose a'thegither. An' puttin' this an' that thegither, for I hear a hantle said 'at I say na ower again, it seems to me 'at her first scunner at her puir misformt bairn, wha they say was humpit whan he was born, an' maist cost her her life to get lowst o' him—her scunner at 'im 's been growin' an' growin', till it's grown to doonricht hate."

"It's an awfu' thing 'at ye say, mem, an' I doobt it's ower true. But hoo *can* a mither hate her ain bairn?" said Malcolm.

"'Deed it's no wonner ye sud speir, laddie! for it's weel kent 'at maist mithers, gien there be a shargar or a nat'ral or a crookit ane amo' their bairns, mak mair o' that ane nor o' a' the lave putten thegither—as gien they wad mak it up till 'im, for the fair play o' the warl.' But ye see in this case, he's aiblins (*perhaps*) the child o' sin—for a leear *may* tell an ill trowth—an' beirs the marks o' 't, ye see; sae to her he's jist her sin rinnin' about the warl'

incarnat; an' that canna be pleesant to luik upo'."

"But excep' she war ashamed o' 't, she wadna tak it sae muckle to hert to be remin't o' 't."

"Mony ane's ashamed o' the consequennces 'at's no ashamed o' the deed. Mony ane cud du the sin ower again, 'at canna bide the sicht or even the word o' 't. I hae seen a body 'at wad steal a thing as sune's luik at it gang daft wi' rage at bein' ca'd a thief. An' maybe she wadna care gien 't warna for the oogliness o' 'im. Sae be he was a bonny sin, I'm thinkin' she wad bide him weel eneuch. But seein' he 's naither i' the image o' her 'at bore 'im nor him 'at got 'im, but beirs on 's back, for ever in her sicht, the sin 'at was the gettin' o' 'm, he's a' hump to her, an' her hert's aye howkin a grave for 'im to lay 'im oot o' sicht intill: she bore 'im, an' she wad beery 'im. An' I'm thinkin' she beirs the markis—gien sae it be sae—deid an' gane as he is—a grutch yet, for passin' sic an offspring upon her, an' syne no merryin' her efter an' a', an' the ro'd clear o' baith 'at stude atween them. It *was* said 'at the man 'at killt 'im in a twasum fecht (*duel*), sae mony a year efter, was a freen' o' hers."

“But *wad* fowk du sic awfu’ ill things, mem—her a merried woman, an’ him a merried man?”

“There’s no sayin’, laddie, what a hantle o’ men and some women wad du. I hae muckle to be thankfu’ for ’at I was sic as no man ever luikit twice at. I wasna weel-faured eneuch; though I had bonny hair, an’ my mither aye said ’at her Maggy hed guid sense, whatever else she nicht or nicht not hae. But gien I cud hae gotten a guid man, sic-like’s is scarce, I cud hae lo’ed him weel eneuch. But that’s naither here nor there, an’ has naething to du wi’ onybody ava. The pint I had to come till was this: the wuman ye saw haudin’ a toot moot (*tout mout*?) wi’ that Cat’nach wife, was nane ither, I do believe, than Mistress Stewart, the puir laird’s mither. An’ I hae as little doobt that whan ye tuik ’s pairt, ye brought to noucht a plot o’ the twasum (*two together*) against him. It bodes guid to naebody whan there’s a conjunc o’ twa sic wanderin’ stars o’ blackness as yon twa.”

“His ain mither!” exclaimed Malcolm, brooding in horror over the frightful conjecture.

The door opened, and the mad laird came in. His eyes were staring wide, but their look and that of his troubled visage showed that he was awake

only in some frightful dream. "Father o' lights!" he murmured once and again, but making wild gestures, as if warding off blows. Miss Horn took him gently by the hand. The moment he felt her touch, his face grew calm, and he submitted at once to be led back to bed.

"Ye may tak yer aith upo' 't, Ma'colm," she said when she returned, "she means naething but ill by that pair cratur; but you and me—we'll ding (*defeat*) her yet, gien't be *his* wull. She wants a grip o' m for some ill rizzon or ither—to lock him up in a madhouse, maybe, as the villains said, or 'deed, maybe, to mak awa' wi' him a'thegither."

"But what guid wad that du her?" said Malcolm.

"It's ill to say, but she wad hae him oot o' her sicht, ony gait."

"She can hae but little sicht o' him as 'tis," objected Malcolm.

"Ay; but she aye kens he's whaur she doesna ken, puttin' her to shame, a' aboot the country, wi' that hump o' his. Oot o' fowk's sicht wad be to her oot a'thegither."

A brief silence followed.

"Noo," said Malcolm, "we come to the queston what the twa limmers could want wi' that door."



“Dear kens! It bude to be something wrang—that’s a’ ’at mortal can say; but ye may be sure o’ that.—I hae hard tell,” she went on reflectingly—“o’ some room or ither i’ the hoose ’at there’s a fearsome story aboot, an’ ’at ’s never opent on no accoont. I hae hard a’ aboot it, but I canna min’ upo’ ’t noo, for I paid little attention till ’t at the time, an’ it’s mony a year sin’ syne. But it wad be some deevilich ploy o’ their ain they wad be efter: it’s little the likes o’ them wad heed sic auld warld tales.”

“Wad ye hae me tell the markis?” asked Malcolm.

“Na, I wad no; an’ yet ye maun du ’t. Ye hae no business to ken o’ onything wrang in a body’s hoose, an’ no tell them—forbye ’at he pat ye in chairge. But it ’ll du naething for the laird; for what cares the markis for onything or onybody but himsel’?”

“He cares for’s dauchter,” said Malcolm.

“Ow ay!—as sic fowk ca’ carin’. There’s no a bla’guard i’ the haille queentry he wadna sell her till, sae be he was o’ an auld eneuch faimily, and had rowth o’ siller. Haith! noo a days the last ’ill come first, an’ a fish-cadger wi’ siller ’ill be

coontit a better bargain nor a lord wantin' 't; only he maun hae a *heap* o' 't, to cower the stink o' the fish."

"Dinna scorn the fish, mem," said Malcolm: they're innocent craturs, an' dinna smell waur nor they can help; an' that's mair nor ye can say for ilka lord ye come athort."

"Ay, or cadger aither," rejoined Miss Horn. "They're aft eneuch jist sic like, the main differ lyin' in what they're defiled wi'; an' 'deed whiles there's no differ there, or maist ony gait, maybe, but i' the set o' the shooters, an' the wag o' the tongue."

"An' what 'll we du wi' the laird?" said Malcolm.

"We maun first see what we *can* du wi' him. I wad try to keep him mysel', that is, gien he wad bide—but there's that jaud Jean! She's aye gabbin', an' claikin', an' cognostin' wi' the enemy, an' I canna lippen till her. I think it wad be better ye sud tak charge o' 'm yersel', Ma'colm. I wad willin'ly beir ony expense—for ye wadna be able to luik efter him an' du sae weel at the fishin', ye ken."

"Gien 't had been my ain line-fishin', I could aye

ha' taen him i' the boat wi' me; but I dinna ken for the herrin'. Blue Peter wadna object, but it's some rouch wark, an' for a waikly body like the laird to be oot a' nicht some nichts, sic weather as we hae to encoonter whiles, micht be the deid o' 'im."

They came to no conclusion beyond this, that each would think it over, and Malcolm would call in the morning. Ere then, however, the laird had dismissed the question for them. When Miss Horn rose, after an all but sleepless night, she found that he had taken affairs again into his own feeble hands, and vanished.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *NOT AT CHURCH.*

IT being well known that Joseph Mair's cottage was one of the laird's resorts, Malcolm, as soon as he learned his flight, set out to inquire whether they knew anything of him there.

Scaurnose was perched almost on the point of the promontory, where the land made its final slope, ending in a precipitous descent to the shore. Beneath lay rocks of all sizes and of fantastic forms, some fallen from the cape in tempests perhaps, some softly separated from it by the slow action of the winds and waves of centuries. A few of them formed, by their broken defence seawards, the unsafe natural harbour which was all the place enjoyed.

If ever there was a place of one colour, it was this village: everything was brown; the grass near it was covered with brown nets; at the doors were brown heaps of oak-bark, which, after dyeing the nets, was used for fuel; the cottages were roofed with old brown thatch; and the one street and the many *closes* were dark brown with the peaty earth

which, well mixed with scattered bark, scantily covered the surface of its huge foundation-rock. There was no pavement, and it was the less needed that the ways were rarely used by wheels of any description. The village was but a roost, like the dwellings of the sea birds which also haunted the rocks.

It was a gray morning with a gray sky and a gray sea; all was brown and gray, peaceful and rather sad. Brown-haired, gray-eyed Phemy Mair sat on the threshold, intently rubbing in her hands a small object like a moonstone. That she should be doing so on a Sunday would have shocked few in Scaurnose at that time, for the fisher-folk then made but small pretensions to religion; and for his part Joseph Mair could not believe that the Almighty would be offended "at seein' a bairn sittin' douce wi' her playocks, though the day *was his*."

"Weel, Phemy, ye're busy!" said Malcolm.

"Ay," answered the child, without looking up. The manner was not courteous, but her voice was gentle and sweet.

"What are ye doin' there?" he asked.

"Makin' a string o' beads, to weir at aunty's merriage."

"What are ye makin' them o'?" he went on.

"Haddicks' een."

"Are they a' haddicks'."

"Na, there's some cods' amo' them; but they're maistly haddicks'. I pikes them oot afore they're sautit, an' biles them; an' syne I polish them i' my han's till they're rale bonny."

"Can ye tell me onything about the mad laird, Phemy?" asked Malcolm, in his anxiety too abruptly.

"Ye can gang an' speir at my father: he's oot about," she answered, with a sort of marked coolness, which, added to the fact that she had never looked him in the face, made him more than suspect something behind.

"Div *ye* ken onything about him?" he therefore insisted.

"Maybe I div, an' maybe I divna," answered the child, with an expression of determined mystery.

"Ye'll tell me whaur ye *think* he is, Phemy?"

"Na, I winna."

"What for no?"

"Ow, jist for fear ye sud ken."

"But I'm a freen' till him."

"Ye may think ay, an' the laird may think no."

"Does he think *you* a freen', Phemy?" asked Malcolm, in the hópe of coming at something by widening the sweep of the conversation.

"Ay, he *kens* I'm a freen'," she replied.

"An' do ye aye ken whaur he is?"

"Na, no aye. He gangs here an' he gangs there—jist as he likes. It's whan *naebody* kens whaur he is, that I ken, an' gang till him."

"Is he i' the hoose?"

"Na, he 's no i' the hoose."

"Whaur is he than, Phemy?" said Malcolm coaxingly. "There's ill fowk aboot 'at's efter deein' him an ill turn."

"The mair need no to tell!" retorted Phemy.

"But I want to tak care o' 'im. Tell me whaur he is, like a guid lassie, Phemy."

"I'm no sure. I may say I dinna ken."

"Ye say ye ken whan ither fowk disna: noo naebody kens."

"Hoo ken ye that?"

"'Cause he's run awa."

"Wha frae? His mither

"Na, na; frae Miss Horn."

"I ken naething aboot *her*; but gien naebody kens, I ken whaur he is weel eneuch."

“Whaur than? Ye’ll be duin’ him a guid turn to tell me.”

“Whaur I winna tell, an’ whaur you nor nae ither body s’ get him. An’ ye needna speir, for it wadna be richt to tell; an’ gien ye gang on speirin’, you an’ me winna be lang freen’s.”

As she spoke, the child looked straight up into his face with wide-opened blue eyes, as truthful as the heavens, and Malcolm dared not press her, for it would have been to press her to do wrong.

“Ye wad tell yer father, wadna ye?” he said kindly.

“My father wadna speir. My father’s a guid man.”

“Weel, Phemy, though ye winna trust *me*—supposin’ I was to trust *you*?”

“Ye can du that gien ye like.”

“An’ ye winna tell?”

“I s’ mak nae promises. It’s no trustin’, to gar me promise.”

“Weel, I wull trust ye.—Tell the laird to haud weel oot o’ sicht for a while.”

“He’ll du that,” said Phemy.

“An’ tell him gien onything befa’ him, to sen’ to Miss Horn, for Ma’colm MacPhail may be oot wi’ the boats.—Ye winna forget that?”



"I'm no lickly to forget it," answered Phemy, apparently absorbed in boring a hole in a haddock's eye with a pin so bent as to act like a brace and bit.

"Ye'll no get yer string o' beads in time for the weddin', Phemy," remarked Malcolm, going on to talk from a desire to give the child a feeling of his friendliness.

"Ay will I—fine that," she rejoined.

"Whan is 't to be?"

"Ow, neist Setterday. Ye'll be comin' ower?"

"I haena gotten a call."

"Ye 'll be gettin' ane."

"Div ye think they'll gie me ane?"

"As sune 's onybody.—Maybe by that time I'll be able to gie ye some news o' the laird."

"There's a guid lassie!"

"Na, na; I'm makin' nae promises," said Phemy.

Malcolm left her and went to find her father, who, although it was Sunday, was already "oot about," as she had said. He found him strolling in meditation along the cliffs. They had a little talk together, but Joseph knew nothing of the laird.

Malcolm took Lossie House on his way back, for he had not yet seen the marquis, to whom he must report his adventures of the night before. The

signs of past revelling were plentifully visible as he approached the house. The marquis was not yet up, but Mrs. Courthope undertaking to send him word as soon as his lordship was to be seen, he threw himself on the grass and waited—his mind occupied with strange questions, started by the Sunday coming after such a Saturday—among the rest, how God could permit a creature to be born so distorted and helpless as the laird, and then permit him to be so abused in consequence of his helplessness. The problems of life were beginning to *bite*. Everywhere things appeared uneven. He was not one to complain of mere external inequalities: if he *was* inclined to envy Lord Meikleham, it was not because of his social position: he was even now philosopher enough to know that the life of a fisherman was preferable to that of such a marquis as Lord Lossie—that the desirableness of a life is to be measured by the amount of interest and not by the amount of ease in it, for the more ease the more unrest; neither was he inclined to complain of the gulf that yawned so wide between him and Lady Florimel; the difficulty lay deeper: such a gulf existing, by a social law only less inexorable than a natural one, why should he feel the rent

invading his individual being? in a word, though Malcolm put it in no such definite shape: Why should a fisher lad find himself in danger of falling in love with the daughter of a marquis? Why should such a thing, seeing the very constitution of things rendered it an absurdity, be yet a possibility?

The church bell began, rang on, and ceased. The sound of the psalms came, softly mellowed, and sweetly harmonized, across the churchyard through the gray Sabbath air, and he found himself, for the first time, a stray sheep from the fold. The service must have been half through before a lackey, to whom Mrs. Courthope had committed the matter when she went to church, brought him the message that the marquis would see him.

"Well, MacPhail, what do you want with me?" said his lordship as he entered.

"It's my duty to acquaint yer lordship wi' certain proceedin's 'at took place last night," answered Malcolm.

"Go on," said the marquis.

Thereupon Malcolm began at the beginning, and told of the men he had watched, and how, in the fancy of following them, he had found himself in the garret, and what he saw and did there.

“Did you recognize either of the women?” asked Lord Lossie.

“Ane ó’ them, my lord,” answered Malcolm. “It was Mistress Catanach, the howdie.”

“What sort of a woman is she?”

“Some fowk canna bide her, my lord. I ken no ill to lay till her chairge, but I wadna lippen till her. My gran’father—an’ he’s blin’, ye ken,—jist trimles whan she comes near him.”

The marquis smiled.

“What do you suppose she was about?” he asked.

“I ken no more than the bonnet I flang in her face, my lord; but it could hardly be guid she was efter. At ony rate, seein’ yer lordship pat me in a mainer in chairge, I bude to haud her oot o’ a closed room—an’ her gaein’ creepin’ aboot yer lordship’s hoose like a worm.”

“Quite right. Will you pull the bell there for me?”

He told the man to send Mrs. Courthope; but he said she had not yet come home from church.

“Could you take me to the room, MacPhail?” asked his lordship.

“I’ll try, my lord,” answered Malcolm.

As far as the proper quarter of the attics, he went straight as a pigeon; in that labyrinth he had to retrace his steps once or twice, but at length he stopped, and said confidently—

“This is the door, my lord.”

“Are you sure?”

“As sure’s death, my lord.”

The marquis tried the door and found it immovable.

“You say she had the key?”

“No, my lord: I said she had keys, but whether she had *the* key, I doobt if she kent hersel’. It may ha’ been ane o’ the bundle yet to try.”

“You’re a sharp fellow,” said the marquis. “I wish I had such a servant about me.”

“I wad mak a some rouch ane, I doobt,” returned Malcolm laughing.

His lordship was of another mind, but pursued the subject no farther.

“I have a vague recollection,” he said, “of some room in the house having an old story or legend connected with it. I must find out. I daresay Mrs. Courthope knows. Meantime you hold your tongue. We may get some amusement out of this.”

"I wull, my lord, like a deid man an' beeryt."

"You can—can you?"

"I can, my lord."

"You're a rare one!" said the marquis.

Malcolm thought he was making game of him as heretofore, and held his peace.

"You can go home, now," said his lordship. "I will see to this affair."

"But jist be canny meddlin' wi' Mistress Catanach, my lord: she's no mowse."

"What! you're not afraid of an old woman?"

"Deil a bit, my lord!—that is, I'm no feart at a dogfish or a rottan, but I wad tak tent an' grip them the richt gait, for they hae teeth. Some fowk thinks Mistress Catanach has mair teeth nor she shaws."

"Well, if she's too much for me, I'll send for you," said the marquis good-humouredly.

"Ye canna get me sae easy, my lord: we're efter the herrin' noo."

"Well, well, we'll see."

"But I wantit to tell ye anither thing, my lord," said Malcolm, as he followed the marquis down the stairs.

"What is that?"

"I cam upo' anither plot—a mair serious ane, bein' against a man 'at can ill haud aff o' himsel', an' cud waur bide onything than yer lordship—the puir mad laird."

"Who's he?"

"Ilka body kens *him*, my lord! He's son to the leddy o' Kirkbyres."

"I remember *her*—an old flame of my brother's."

"I ken naething about that, my lord; but he's her son."

"What about him, then?"

They had now reached the hall, and, seeing the marquis impatient, Malcolm confined himself to the principal facts.

"I don't think you had any business to interfere, MacPhail," said his lordship seriously. "His mother must know best."

"I'm no sae sure o' that, my lord! To say naething o' the illguideship, which micht hae garred a minister swëer, it wad be a cruelty naething short o' deev'lich to lock up a puir hairmless cratur like that, as innocent as he 's ill-shapit."

"He's as God made him," said the marquis.

"He 's no as God *wull* mak him," returned Malcolm.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the marquis.

"It stan's to rizzon, my lord," answered Malcolm, "that what's ill-made maun be made ower again. There's a day comin' whan a' 'at's wrang 'ill be set richt, ye ken."

"And the crooked made straight," suggested the marquis, laughing.

"Doobtless, my lord. He'll be strauchtit oot bonny that day," said Malcolm with absolute seriousness.

"Bah! You don't think God cares about a misshapen lump of flesh like that!" exclaimed his lordship with contempt.

"As muckle's aboot yersel', or my leddy," said Malcolm. "Gien he didna, he wadna be nae God ava' (*at ali*)."

The marquis laughed again: he heard the words with his ears, but his heart was deaf to the thought they clothed; hence he took Malcolm's earnestness for irreverence, and it amused him.

"*You've* not got to set things right, anyhow," he said. "You mind your own business."

"I'll try, my lord: it's the business o' ilka man, whaur he can, to lowse the weichty birns, an' lat



the forfouchten gang free.\*—Guid day to ye, my lord.”

So saying the young fisherman turned, and left the marquis laughing in the hall.

\* Isa. lviii 6.

## CHAPTER V.

### *LORD GERNON.*

WHEN his housekeeper returned from church, Lord Lossie sent for her.

“Sit down, Mrs. Courthope,” he said; “I want to ask you about a story I have a vague recollection of hearing when I spent a summer at this house some twenty years ago. It had to do with a room in the house that was never opened.”

“There is such a story, my lord,” answered the housekeeper. “The late marquis, I remember well, used to laugh at it, and threaten now and then to dare the prophecy; but old Eppie persuaded him not—or at least fancied she did.”

“Who is old Eppie?”

“She’s gone now, my lord. She was over a hundred then. She was born and brought up in the house, lived all her days in it, and died in it; so she knew more about the place than any one else.”

“Is ever likely to know,” said the marquis, super-adding a close to her sentence. “And why wouldn’t she have the room opened?” he asked.

"Because of the ancient prophecy, my lord."

"I can't recall a single point of the story."

"I wish old Eppie were alive to tell it," said Mrs. Courthope.

"Don't *you* know it then?"

"Yes, pretty well; but my English tongue can't tell it properly. It doesn't sound right out of my mouth. I've heard it a good many times too, for I had often to take a visitor to her room to hear it, and the old woman liked nothing better than telling it. But I couldn't help remarking that it had grown a good bit even in my time. The story was like a tree: it got bigger every year."

"That's the way with a good many stories," said the marquis. "But tell me the prophecy at least."

"That is the only part I can give just as she gave it. It's in rhyme. I hardly understand it, but I'm sure of the words."

"Let us have them then, if you please."

Mrs. Courthope reflected for a moment, and then repeated the following lines:

"The lord quha wad sup on 3 thowmes o' cauld airn,  
The ayr quha wad kythe a bastard and carena,  
The mayd quha wad tyne her man and her bairn,  
Lift the sneck, and enter, and fearna."

"That's it, my lord," she said, in conclusion. "And there's one thing to be observed," she added, "—that that door is the only one in all the passage that has a sneck, as they call it."

"What is a sneck?" asked his lordship, who was not much of a scholar in his country's tongue.

"What we call a latch in England, my lord. I took pains to learn the Scotch correctly, and I've repeated it to your lordship word for word."

"I don't doubt it," returned Lord Lossie, "but for the sense, I can make nothing of it.—And you think my brother believed the story?"

"He always laughed at it, my lord, but pretended at least to give in to old Eppie's entreaties."

"You mean that he was more near believing it than he liked to confess?"

"That's not what I mean, my lord."

"Why do you say *pretended* then?"

"Because when the news of his death came, some people about the place would have it that he must have opened the door some time or other."

"How did they make that out?"

"From the first line of the prophecy."

"Repeat it again."

"The lord quha wad sup on 3 thowmes o' cauld

airn," said Mrs. Courthope with emphasis, adding, "The *three* she always said was a figure 3."

"That implies it was written somewhere!"

"She said it was legible on the door in her day—as if burnt with a red-hot iron."

"And what does the line mean?"

"Eppie said it meant that the lord of the place who opened that door, would die by a sword-wound. Three inches of cold iron, it means, my lord."

The marquis grew thoughtful; his brother had died in a sword duel. For a few moments he was silent.

"Tell me the whole story," he said at length.

Mrs. Courthope again reflected, and began. I will tell the story, however, in my own words, reminding my reader that if he regards it as an unwelcome interruption, he can easily enough avoid this bend of the river of my narrative by taking a short cut across to the next chapter.

In an ancient time there was a lord of Lossie who practised unholy works. Although he had other estates, he lived almost entirely at the House of Lossie—that is, after his return from the East, where he had spent his youth and early manhood. But he paid no attention to his affairs: a steward

managed everything for him, and Lord Gernon (for that was the outlandish name he brought from England, where he was born while his father was prisoner to Edward Longshanks) trusted him for a great while without making the least inquiry into his accounts, apparently contented with receiving money enough to carry on the various vile experiments which seemed his sole pleasure in life. There was no doubt in the minds of the people of the town—the old town that is, which was then much larger, and clustered about the gates of the House—that he had dealings with Satan, from whom he had gained authority over the powers of nature; that he was able to rouse and lay the winds, to bring down rain, to call forth the lightnings and set the thunders roaring over town and sea; nay, that he could even draw vessels ashore on the rocks, with the certainty that not one on board would be left alive to betray the pillage of the wreck: this and many other deeds of dire note were laid to his charge in secret. The town cowered at the foot of the House in terror of what its lord might bring down upon it—as a brood of chickens might cower if they had been hatched by a kite, and saw, instead of the matronly head and beak of the hen of their

instinct, those of the bird of prey projected over them. Scarce one of them dared even look from the door when the thunder was rolling over their heads, the lightnings flashing about the roofs and turrets of the House, the wind raving in fits between as if it would rave its last, and the rain falling in sheets—not so much from fear of the elements, as for horror of the far more terrible things that might be spied careering in the storm. And indeed Lord Gernon himself was avoided in like fashion, although rarely had any one the evil chance of seeing him, so seldom did he go out of doors. There was but one in the whole community—and that was a young girl, the daughter of his steward—who declared she had no fear of him: she went so far as to uphold that Lord Gernon meant harm to nobody, and was in consequence regarded by the neighbours as unrighteously bold.

He worked in a certain lofty apartment on the ground floor—with cellars underneath, reserved, it was believed, for frightfullest conjurations and interviews; where, although no one was permitted to enter, they knew from the smoke that he had a furnace, and from the evil smells which wandered out that he dealt with things altogether devilish in their natures and powers. They said he always washed

there—in water medicated with distilments to prolong life and produce invulnerability; but of this they could of course know nothing. Strange to say, however, he always slept in the garret,—as far removed from his laboratory as the limits of the house would permit; whence people said he dared not sleep in the neighbourhood of his deeds, but sought shelter for his unconscious hours in the spiritual shadow of the chapel, which was in the same wing as his chamber. His household saw nearly as little of him as his retainers: when his tread was heard, beating dull on the stone turnpike, or thundering along the upper corridors in the neighbourhood of his chamber or of the library—the only other part of the house he visited, man or maid would dart aside into the next way of escape—all believing that the nearer he came to finding himself the sole inhabitant of his house, the better he was pleased. Nor would he allow man or woman to enter his chamber any more than his laboratory. When they found sheets or garments outside his door, they removed them with fear and trembling, and put others in their place.

At length, by means of his enchantments, he discovered that the man whom he had trusted had been



robbing him for many years: all the time he had been searching for the philosopher's stone, the gold already his had been tumbling into the bags of his steward. But what enraged him far more was, that the fellow had constantly pretended difficulty in providing the means necessary for the prosecution of his idolized studies: even if the feudal lord could have accepted the loss and forgiven the crime, here was a mockery which the man of science could not pardon. He summoned his steward to his presence, and accused him of his dishonesty. The man denied it energetically, but a few mysterious waftures of the hand of his lord set him trembling, and after a few more, his lips, moving by a secret compulsion, and finding no power in their owner to check their utterance, confessed all the truth, whereupon his master ordered him to go and bring his accounts. He departed all but bereft of his senses, and staggered home as if in a dream. There he begged his daughter to go and plead for him with his lord, hoping she might be able to move him to mercy; for she was a lovely girl, and supposed by the neighbours, judging from what they considered her foolhardiness, to have received from him tokens of something at least less than aversion.

She obeyed, and from that hour disappeared. The people of the house averred afterwards that the next day, and for days following, they heard, at intervals, moans and cries from the wizard's chamber, or somewhere in its neighbourhood—certainly not from the laboratory; but as they had seen no one visit their master, they had paid them little attention, classing them with the other and hellish noises they were but too much accustomed to hear.

The steward's love for his daughter, though it could not embolden him to seek her in the tyrant's den, drove him, at length, to appeal to the justice of his country for what redress might yet be possible: he sought the court of the great Bruce, and laid his complaint before him. That righteous monarch immediately despatched a few of his trustiest men-at-arms, under the protection of a monk whom he believed a match for any wizard under the sun, to arrest Lord Gernon and release the girl. When they arrived at Lossie House, they found it silent as the grave. The domestics had vanished; but by following the minute directions of the steward, whom no persuasion could bring to set foot across the threshold, they succeeded in finding their way to the parts of the house indicated by him. Having

forced the laboratory and found it forsaken, they ascended, in the gathering dusk of a winter afternoon, to the upper regions of the house. Before they reached the top of the stair that led to the wizard's chamber, they began to hear inexplicable sounds, which grew plainer, though not much louder, as they drew nearer to the door. They were mostly like the grunting of some small animal of the hog-kind, with an occasional one like the yelling roar of a distant lion; but with these were now and then mingled cries of suffering, so fell and strange that their souls recoiled as if they would break loose from their bodies to get out of hearing of them. The monk himself started back when first they invaded his ear, and it was no wonder then that the men-at-arms should hesitate to approach the room; and as they stood irresolute, they saw a faint light go flickering across the upper part of the door, which naturally strengthened their disinclination to go nearer.

"If it weren't for the girl," said one of them in a scared whisper to his neighbour, "I would leave the wizard to the devil and his dam."

Scarcely had the words left his mouth, when the door opened, and out came a form—whether phantom

or living woman none could tell. Pale, forlorn, lost, and purposeless, it came straight towards them, with wide unseeing eyes. They parted in terror from its path. It went on, looking to neither hand, and sank down the stair. The moment it was beyond their sight, they came to themselves and rushed after it; but although they searched the whole house, they could find no creature in it, except a cat of questionable appearance and behaviour, which they wisely let alone. Returning, they took up a position whence they could watch the door of the chamber day and night.

For three weeks they watched it, but neither cry nor other sound reached them. For three weeks more they watched it, and then an evil odour began to assail them, which grew and grew, until at length they were satisfied that the wizard was dead. They returned therefore to the king and made their report, whereupon Lord Gernon was decreed dead, and his heir was enfeoffed. But for many years he was said to be still alive; and indeed whether he had ever died in the ordinary sense of the word, was to old Eppie doubtful; for at various times there had arisen whispers of peculiar sounds, even strange cries, having been

heard issue from that room—whispers which had revived in the house in Mrs. Courthope's own time. No one had slept in that part of the roof within the memory of old Eppie: no one, she believed, had ever slept there since the events of her tale; certainly no one had in Mrs. Courthope's time. It was said also, that, invariably, sooner or later after such cries were heard, some evil befel either the Lord of Lossie, or some one of his family.

“Show me the room, Mrs. Courthope,” said the marquis, rising, as soon as she had ended.

The housekeeper looked at him with some dismay.

“What!” said his lordship, “you an Englishwoman and superstitious!”

“I am cautious, my lord, though not a Scotchwoman,” returned Mrs. Courthope. “All I would presume to say is—Don't do it without first taking time to think over it.”

“I will not. But I want to know which room it is.”

Mrs. Courthope led the way, and his lordship followed her to the very door, as he had expected, with which Malcolm had spied Mrs. Catanach tampering. He examined it well, and on the upper part

of it found what might be the remnants of a sunk inscription, so far obliterated as to convey no assurance of what it was. He professed himself satisfied, and they went down the stairs together again.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *A FISHER-WEDDING.*

WHEN the next Saturday came, all the friends of the bride or bridegroom who had "gotten a call" to the wedding of Annie Mair and Charley Wilson, assembled respectively at the houses of their parents. Malcolm had received an invitation from both, and had accepted that of the bride.

Whisky and oat-cake having been handed round, the bride, a short but comely young woman, set out with her father for the church, followed by her friends in couples. At the door of the church, which stood on the highest point in the parish, a centre of assault for all the winds that blew, they met the bridegroom and his party: the bride and he entered the church together, and the rest followed. After a brief and somewhat bare ceremony, they issued—the bride walking between her brother and the groomsman, each taking an arm of the bride, and the company following mainly in trios. Thus arranged they walked eastward along the high-road, to meet the bride's *first-foot*.

They had gone about half-way to Portlossie, when a gentleman appeared, sauntering carelessly towards them, with a cigar in his mouth. It was Lord Meikleham. Malcolm was not the only one who knew him: Lizzy Findlay, only daughter of the Partan, and the prettiest girl in the company, blushed crimson: she had danced with him at Lossie House, and he had said things to her, by way of polite attention, which he would never have said had she been of his own rank. He would have lounged past, with a careless glance, but the procession halted by one consent, and the bride, taking a bottle and glass which her brother carried, proceeded to pour out a bumper of whisky, while the groomsman addressed Lord Meikleham.

“Ye ’re the bride’s first fut, sir,” he said.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Lord Meikleham.

“Here’s the bride, sir: she’ll tell ye.”

Lord Meikleham lifted his hat.

“Allow me to congratulate you,” he said.

“Ye ’re my first fut,” returned the bride eagerly yet modestly, as she held out to him the glass of whisky.

“This is to console me for not being in the bride-



groom's place, I presume; but notwithstanding my jealousy, I drink to the health of both," said the young nobleman, and tossed off the liquor.—"Would you mind explaining to me what you mean by this ceremony?" he added, to cover a slight choking caused by the strength of the dram.

"It's for luck, sir," answered Joseph Mair. A first fut wha wadna bring ill luck upon a new-merried couple, maun aye du as ye hae dune this meenute—tak a dram frae the bride."

"Is that the sole privilege connected with my good fortune?" said Lord Meikleham. "If I take the bride's dram, I must join the bride's regiment.—My good fellow," he went on, approaching Malcolm, "you have more than your share of the best things of this world."

For Malcolm had two partners, and the one on the side next Lord Meikleham, who, as he spoke, offered her his arm, was Lizzy Findlay.

"No as shares gang, my lord," returned Malcolm, tightening his arm on Lizzy's hand. "Ye maunna gang *wi'* ane o' oor customs to gang *agane* anither. Fisher fowk 's ready eneuch to pairt wi' their whusky, but no wi' their lasses!—Na, haith!"

Lord Meikleham's face flushed, and Lizzy looked

down, very evidently disappointed ; but the bride's father, a wrinkled and brown little man, with a more gentle bearing than most of them, interfered.

"Ye see, my lord—gien it be sae I maun ca' ye, an' Ma'colm seems to ken—we're like by oorsel's for the present, an' we're but a rouch set o' fowk for sic like 's yer lordship to haud word o' mou' wi'; but gien it wad please ye to come ower the gait ony time i' the evenin', an' tak yer share o' what's gauin', ye sud be walcome, an' we wad coont it a great honour frae sic's yer lordship."

"I shall be most happy," answered Lord Meikleham ; and taking off his hat, he went his way.

The party returned to the home of the bride's parents. Her mother stood at the door, with a white handkerchief in one hand, and a *quarter* of oat-cake in the other. When the bride reached the threshold, she stood, and her mother, first laying the handkerchief on her head, broke the oat-cake into pieces upon it. These were distributed among the company, to be carried home and laid under their pillows.

The bridegroom's party betook themselves to his father's house, where, as well as at old Mair's, a substantial meal of tea, bread and butter, cake, and cheese, was provided. Then followed another walk,

to allow of both houses being made tidy for the evening's amusements.

About seven, Lord Meikleham made his appearance, and had a hearty welcome. He had bought a showy brooch for the bride, which she accepted with the pleasure of a child. In their games, which had already commenced, he joined heartily, gaining high favour with both men and women. When the great clothes-basket full of *sweeties*, the result of a subscription among the young men, was carried round by two of them, he helped himself liberally with the rest; and at the inevitable game of forfeits met his awards with unflinching obedience; contriving ever through it all, that Lizzy Findlay should feel herself his favourite. In the general hilarity, neither the heightened colour of her cheek, nor the vivid sparkle in her eyes, attracted notice. Doubtless some of the girls observed the frequency of his attentions, but it woke nothing in their minds beyond a little envy of her passing good fortune.

Meikleham was handsome and a lord; Lizzy was pretty though a fisherman's daughter: a sort of Darwinian selection had apparently found place between them; but as the same entertainment was going on in two houses at once, and there was naturally a

good deal of passing and repassing between them, no one took the least notice of several short absences from the company on the part of the pair.

Supper followed, at which his lordship sat next to Lizzy, and partook of dried skate and mustard, bread and cheese, and beer. Every man helped himself. Lord Meikleham and a few others were accommodated with knives and forks, but the most were independent of such artificial aids. Whisky came next, and Lord Meikleham, being already, like many of the young men of his time, somewhat fond of strong drink, was not content with such sipping as Lizzy honoured his glass withal.

At length it was time, according to age-long custom, to undress the bride and bridegroom and put them to bed—the bride's stocking, last ceremony of all, being thrown amongst the company, as by its first contact prophetic of the person to be next married. Neither Lizzy nor Lord Meikleham, however, had any chance of being thus distinguished, for they were absent and unmissed.

As soon as all was over, Malcolm set out to return home. As he passed Joseph Mair's cottage, he found Phemy waiting for him at the door, still in the mild splendour of her pearl-like necklace.

"I tellt the laird what ye tellt me to tell him, Ma'colm," she said.

"An' what did he say, Phemy?" asked Malcolm.

"He said he kent ye was a freen'."

"Was that a'?"

"Ay; that was a'."

"Weel, ye're a guid lassie."

"Ow! middlin'," answered the little maiden.

Malcolm took his way along the top of the cliffs, pausing now and then to look around him. The crescent moon had gone down, leaving a star-lit night, in which the sea lay softly moaning at the foot of the broken crags. The sense of infinitude which comes to the soul when it is in harmony with the peace of nature, arose and spread itself abroad in Malcolm's being, and he felt with the Galilæans of old, when they forsook their nets and followed him who called them, that catching fish was not the end of his being, although it was the work his hands had found to do. The stillness was all the sweeter for its contrast with the merriment he had left behind him, and a single breath of wind, like the waft from a passing wing, kissed his forehead tenderly, as if to seal the truth of his meditations.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *FLORIMEL AND DUNCAN.*

IN the course of a fortnight, Lord Meikleham and his aunt, the bold-faced countess, had gone, and the marquis, probably finding it a little duller in consequence, began to pay visits in the neighbourhood. Now and then he would be absent for a week or two—at Bog o' Gight, or Huntly Lodge, or Fren draught, or Balvenie, and although Lady Florimel had not had much of his society, she missed him at meals, and felt the place grown dreary from his being nowhere within its bounds.

On his return from one of his longer absences, he began to talk to her about a governess; but, though in a playful way, she rebelled utterly at the first mention of such an incubus. She had plenty of material for study, she said, in the library, and plenty of amusement in wandering about with the sullen Demon, who was her constant companion during his absences; and if he did force a governess upon her, she would certainly murder the woman, if only for the sake of bringing him into trouble.

Her easy-going father was amused, laughed, and said nothing more on the subject at the time.

Lady Florimel did not confess that she had begun to feel her life monotonous, or mention that she had for some time been cultivating the acquaintance of a few of her poor neighbours, and finding their odd ways of life and thought and speech interesting. She had especially taken a liking to Duncan Mac-Phail, in which, strange to say, Demon, who had hitherto absolutely detested the appearance of any one not attired as a lady or gentleman, heartily shared. She found the old man so unlike anything she had ever heard or read of!—so full of grand notions in such contrast with his poor conditions! so proud yet so overflowing with service—dusting a chair for her with his bonnet, yet drawing himself up like an offended hidalgo if she declined to sit in it!—more than content to play the pipes while others dined, yet requiring a personal apology from the marquis himself for a practical joke! so full of kindness and yet of revenges!—lamenting over Demon when he hurt his foot, yet cursing, as she overheard him once, in fancied solitude, with an absolute fervour of imprecation, a continuous blast of poetic hate which made her shiver; and the next moment



sighing out a most wailful coronach on his old pipes ! It was all so odd, so funny, so interesting ! It nearly made her aware of human nature as an object of study. But Lady Florimel had never studied anything yet, had never even perceived that anything wanted studying, that is, demanded to be understood. What appeared to her most odd, most inconsistent, and was indeed of all his peculiarities alone distasteful to her, was his delight in what she regarded only as the menial and dirty occupation of cleaning lamps and candlesticks : the poetic side of it, rendered tenfold poetic by his blindness, she never saw.

Then he had such tales to tell her—of mountain, stream, and lake ; of love and revenge ; of beings less and more than natural—brownie and Boneless, kelpie and fairy ; such wild legends also, haunting the dim emergent peaks of mist-swathed Celtic history ; such songs—come down, he said, from Ossian himself—that sometimes she would sit and listen to him for hours together.

It was no wonder then that she should win the heart of the simple old man speedily and utterly ; for what can bard desire beyond a true listener—a mind into which his own may, in verse or tale or rhapsody, in pibroch or coronach, overflow ? But



when, one evening, in girlish merriment, she took up his pipes, blew the bag full, and began to let a highland air burst fitfully from the chanter, the jubilation of the old man broke all the bounds of reason. He jumped from his seat and capered about the room, calling her all the tenderest and most poetic names his English vocabulary would afford him; then abandoning the speech of the Sasenach, as if in despair of ever uttering himself through its narrow and rugged channels, overwhelmed her with a cataract of soft-flowing Gaelic, returning to English only as his excitement passed over into exhaustion—but in neither case aware of the transition.

Her visits were the greater comfort to Duncan, that Malcolm was now absent almost every night, and most days a good many hours asleep: had it been otherwise, Florimel, invisible for very width as was the gulf between them, could hardly have made them so frequent. Before the fishing-season was over, the piper had been twenty times on the verge of disclosing every secret in his life to the high-born maiden.

“It’s a pity you haven’t a wife to take care of you, Mr. MacPhail,” she said one evening. “You

must be so lonely without a woman to look after you!"

A dark cloud came over Duncan's face, out of which his sightless eyes gleamed.

"She'll haf her poy, and she'll pe wanting no wife," he said sullenly. "Wifes is paad."

"Ah!" said Florimel, the teasing spirit of her father uppermost for the moment, "that accounts for your swearing so shockingly the other day?"

"Swearing was she? Tat will pe wrong. And who was she'll pe swearing at?"

"That's what I want you to tell me, Mr. Mac-Phail."

"Did you'll hear her, my laty?" he asked, in a tone of reflection, as if trying to recall the circumstance.

"Indeed I did. You frightened me so that I didn't dare come in."

"Then she'll pe punished enough. Put it wass no harm to curse ta wicket Cawmill."

"It was not Glenlyon—it wasn't a man at all; it was a woman you were in such a rage with."

"Was it ta rascal's wife, then, my laty?" he asked, as if he were willing to be guided to the truth that he might satisfy her, but so much in the

habit of swearing, that he could not well recollect the particular object at a given time.

“Is his wife as bad as himself, then?”

“Wifes is aalways worser.”

“But what is it makes you hate him so dreadfully? Is he a bad man?”

“A fery pad man, my tear latty! He is tead more than a hundert years.”

“Then why do you hate him so?”

“Och hone! Ton't you'll never hear why?”

“He can't have done *you* any harm.”

“Not done old Tuncan any harm! Tidn't you'll know what ta tog would pe toing to her aancesors of Glenco? Och hone! Och hone! Gif her ta tog's heart of him in her teeth, and she'll pe tearing it—tearing it—tearing it!” cried the piper in a growl of hate, and with the look of a maddened tiger, the skin of his face drawn so tight over the bones that they seemed to show their whiteness through it.

“You quite terrify me,” said Florimel, really shocked. “If you talk like that, I must go away. Such words are not fit for a lady to hear.”

The old man heard her rise: he fell on his knees, and held out his arms in entreaty.

“She’s pegging your pardons, my laty. Sit town once more, anchel from hefen, and she’ll not say it no more. Put she’ll pe telling you ta story, and then you’ll pe knowing tat what ’ll not pe fit for laties to hear, as coot laties had to pear!”

He caught up the Lossie pipes, threw them down again, searched in a frenzy till he found his own, blew up the bag with short quick pants, forced from them a low wail, which ended in a scream—then broke into a kind of chant, the words of which were something like what follows: he had sense enough left to remember that for his listener they must be English. Doubtless he was translating as he went on. His chanter all the time kept up a low pitiful accompaniment, his voice only giving expression to the hate and execration of the song.

Black rise the hills round the vale of Glenco ;  
Hard rise its rocks up the sides of the sky ;  
Cold fall the streams from the snow on their summits ;  
Bitter are the winds that search for the wanderer ;  
False are the vapours that trail o’er the correi :  
Blacker than caverns that hollow the mountain,  
Harder than crystals in the rock’s bosom,  
Colder than ice borne down in the torrents,  
More bitter than hail wind-swept o’er the correi,  
Falsar than vapours that hide the dark precipice,  
Is the heart of the Campbell, the hell-hound Glenlyon.

Is it blood that is streaming down into the valley?  
Ha! 'tis the red-coated blood-hounds of Orange.

To hunt the red deer, is this a fit season?  
Glenlyon, said Ian, the son of the chieftain:  
What seek ye with guns and with gillies so many?

Friends, a warm fire, good cheer, and a drink,  
Said the liar of hell, with the death in his heart.

Come home to my house—it is poor, but your own.

Cheese of the goat, and flesh of black cattle,  
And dew of the mountain to make their hearts joyful,  
They gave them in plenty, they gave them with welcome;  
And they slept on the heather, and skins of the red deer.

Och hone for the chief! God's curse on the traitors!  
Och hone for the chief—the father of his people!  
He is struck through the brain, and not in the battle!

Och hone for his lady! the teeth of the badgers  
Have torn the bright rings from her slender fingers!  
They have stripped her, and shamed her in sight of her clansmen!  
They have sent out her ghost to cry after her husband.

Nine men did Glenlyon slay, nine of the true hearts!  
His own host he slew, the laird of Inverriggen.

Fifty they slew—the rest fled to the mountains.  
In the deep snow the women and children  
Fell down and slept, nor awoke in the morning.

The bard of the glen, alone among strangers,  
Allister, bard of the glen and the mountain,  
Sings peace to the ghost of his father's father,  
Slain by the curse of Glenco, Glenlyon.

Curse on Glenlyon ! His wife's fair bosom  
Dry up with weeping the fates of her children !  
Curse on Glenlyon ! Each drop of his heart's blood  
Turn to red fire and burn through his arteries !  
The pale murdered faces haunt him to madness !  
The shrieks of the ghosts from the mists of Glenco  
Ring in his ears through the caves of perdition !  
Man, woman, and child, to the last-born Campbell,  
Rush howling to hell, and fall cursing Glenlyon—  
The liar who drank with his host and then slew him !

While he chanted, the whole being of the bard seemed to pour itself out in the feeble and quavering tones that issued from his withered throat. His voice grew in energy for a while as he proceeded, but at last gave way utterly under the fervour of imprecation, and ceased. Then, as if in an agony of foiled hate, he sent from chanter and drone a perfect screech of execration, with which the instrument dropped from his hands, and he fell back in his chair, speechless.

Lady Florimel started to her feet, and stood trembling for a moment, hesitating whether to run from the cottage and call for help, or do what she might for the old man herself. But the next moment he came to himself, saying, in a tone of assumed composure :

“You’ll pe knowing now, my laty, why she’ll pe hating ta fery name of Clenlyon.”

“But it wasn’t *your* grandfather that Glenlyon killed, Mr. MacPhail—was it?”

“And whose grandfather would it pe then, my laty?” returned Duncan, drawing himself up.

“The Glenco people weren’t MacPhails. I’ve read the story of the massacre, and know all about that.”

“He might haf peen her mother’s father, my laty.”

“But you said *father’s* father, in your song.”

“She said *Allister’s* father’s father, my laty, she believes.”

“I can’t quite understand you, Mr. MacPhail.”

“Well, you see, my laty, her father was out in the forty-five, and fought ta red-coats at Culloden. That’s his claymore on ta wall there—a coot plade—though she’s not an Andrew Ferrara. She wass forched in Clenco, py a cousin of her own, Angus py name, and she’s a fery coot plade: she’ll can well whistle ta pibroch of Ian Lom apout ta ears of ta Sassenach. Her crandfather wass with his uncle in ta pattle of Killiecrankie after Tundee—a creat man, my laty, and he died there; and so

did her crand-uncle, for a fillain of a Mackay, from Lord Reay's cursed country—where they aalways wass repels, my laty—chust as her uncle was pe cutting town ta wicket Cheneral Mackay, turned him round, without gifing no warnings, and killed ta poor man at won plow.”

“But what has it all to do with your name? I declare I don't know what to call you.”

“Call her your own pard, old Tuncan MacPhail, my sweet laty, and haf ta patience with her, and she'll pe telling you aall apout eferything, only you must gif her olt prains time to tumples themselves apout. Her head crows fery stupid.—Yes, as she was saying, after ta ploody massacre at Culloden, her father had to hide himself away out of sight, and to forge himself—I mean to put upon himself a name that didn't mean himself at aal. And my poor mother, who pored me—pig old Tuncan—ta fery tay of ta pattle, would not be hearing won wort of him for tree months tat he was away; and when he would pe creep pack like a fox to see her one fine night when ta moon was not pe up, they'll make up an acreement to co away together for a time, and to call themselves MacPhails. But py and py they took their own nems acain.”



“And why haven’t you your own name now? I’m sure it’s a much prettier name.”

“Pecause she’ll pe taking the other, my tear laty.”

“And why?”

“Pecause—because——. She will tell you another time. She’ll pe tired to talk more apout ta cursed Cawmills this fery day.”

“Then Malcolm’s name is not MacPhail either?”

“No, it is not, my lady.”

“Is he your son’s son, or your daughter’s son?”

“Perhaps not, my lady.”

“I want to know what his real name is. Is it the same as yours? It doesn’t seem respectable not to have your own names.”

“Oh yes, my lady, fery respectable. Many coot men has to porrow nems of their neighpours. We’ve all cot our fery own names, only in pad tays, my lady, we ton’t aalways know which they are exactly; but we aal know which we are each other, and we get on fery coot without the names. We lay them py with our Sappath clothes for a few tays, and they come out ta fresher and ta sweeter for keeping ta Sappath so long, my leddy. And now she’ll pe playing you ta coronach of Clenco, which she was make herself for her own pipes.”

"I want to know first what Malcolm's real name is," persisted Lady Florimel.

"Well, you see, my lady," returned Duncan, "some peoples has names and does not know them; and some people hasn't names, and will pe supposing they haf."

"You are talking riddles, Mr. MacPhail, and I don't like riddles," said Lady Florimel, with an offence which was not altogether pretended.

"Yes surely—oh, yes! Call her Tuncan Mac-Phail, and neither more nor less, my lady—not yet," he returned, most evasively.

"I see you won't trust me," said the girl, and rising quickly, she bade him good-night, and left the cottage.

Duncan sat silent for a few minutes, as if in distress; then slowly his hand went out feeling for his pipes, wherewithal he consoled himself till bed-time.

Having plumed herself upon her influence with the old man, believing she could do anything with him she pleased, Lady Florimel was annoyed at failing to get from him any amplification of a hint in itself sufficient to cast a glow of romance about the youth who had already interested her so much.

Duncan also was displeased, but with himself, for disappointing one he loved so much. With the passion for confidences which love generates, he had been for some time desirous of opening his mind to her upon the matter in question, and had indeed, on this very occasion, intended to lead up to a certain disclosure; but just at the last he clung to his secret, and could not let it go.

Compelled thereto against the natural impulse of the Celtic nature, which is open and confiding, therefore in the reaction cunning and suspicious, he had practised reticence so long, that he now recoiled from a breach of the habit which had become a second, false nature. He felt like one who, having caught a bird, holds it in his hand with the full intention of letting it go, but cannot make up his mind to do it just yet, knowing that, the moment he opens his hand, nothing can make that bird his again.

A whole week passed, during which Lady Florimel did not come near him, and the old man was miserable. At length one evening, for she chose her time when Malcolm must be in some vague spot between the shore and the horizon, she once more entered the piper's cottage. He knew her step the moment

she turned the corner from the shore, and she had scarcely set her foot across the threshold before he broke out :

“ Ach, my tear lady! and did you’ll think old Tuncan such a stoopit old man as not to ’ll pe trusting ta light of her plind eyes? Put her lady must forgif her, for it is a long tale, not like anything you’ll pe in ta way of peliefing ; and aalso, it’ll pe but ta tassel to another long tale which tears ta pag of her heart, and makes her feel a purning tevil in ta pocket of her posom. Put she’ll tell you ta won half of it that pelongs to her poy Malcolm. He ’s a pig poy now, put he wasn’t aalways. No He was once a fery little smaal chylt, in her old plind aarms. But they wasn’t old then. Why must young peoples crow old, my lady? Put she’ll pe clad of it herself, for she’ll can hate ta petter.”

Lady Florimel, incapable either of setting forth the advantages of growing old, or of enforcing the duty, which is the necessity, of forgiveness, answered with some commonplace ; and as, to fortify his powers of narration, a sailor would cut himself a quid, and a gentleman fill his glass or light a fresh cigar, Duncan slowly filled his bag. After a few strange notes as of a spirit wandering in pain, he

began his story. But I will tell the tale for him, lest the printed oddities of his pronounciation should prove wearisome. I must mention first, however, that he did not commence until he had secured a promise from Lady Florimel that she would not communicate his revelations to Malcolm, having, he said, very good reasons for desiring to make them himself, so soon as a fitting time should have arrived.

Avoiding all mention of his reasons either for assuming another name or for leaving his native glen, he told how, having wandered forth with no companion but his bagpipes, and nothing he could call his own beyond the garments and weapons which he wore, he traversed the shires of Inverness and Nairn and Moray, offering at every house on his road, to play the pipes, or clean the lamps and candlesticks, and receiving sufficient return, mostly in the shape of food and shelter, but partly in money, to bring him all the way from Glenco to Portlossie: somewhere near the latter was a cave in which his father, after his flight from Culloden, had lain in hiding for six months, in hunger and cold, and in constant peril of discovery and death, all in that region being rebels—for as such Duncan of course regarded the adherents of the houses of

Orange and Hanover; and having occasion, for reasons, as I have said, unexplained, in his turn to seek, like a hunted stag, a place far from his beloved glen, wherein to hide his head, he had set out to find the cave, which the memory of his father would render far more of a home to him now than any other place left him on earth.

On his arrival at Portlossie, he put up at a small public house in the Seaton, from which he started the next morning to find the cave—a somewhat hopeless as well as perilous proceeding; but his father's description of its situation and character had generated such a vivid imagination of it in the mind of the old man, that he believed himself able to walk straight into the mouth of it; nor was the peril so great as must at first appear, to one who had been blind all his life. But he searched the whole of the east side of the promontory of Scaurnose, where it must lie, without finding such a cave as his father had depicted. Again and again he fancied he had come upon it, but was speedily convinced of his mistake. Even in one who had his eyesight, however, such a failure would not surprise those who understand how rapidly as well as constantly the whole faces of some cliffs are changing

by the fall of portions—destroying the very existence of some caves, and utterly changing the mouths of others.

From a desire of secrecy, occasioned by the haunting dread of its approaching necessity, day and night being otherwise much alike to him, Duncan generally chose the night for his wanderings amongst the rocks, and probings of their hollows.

One night, or rather morning, for he believed it was considerably past twelve o'clock, he sat weary in a large open cave, listening to the sound of the rising tide, and fell fast asleep, his bagpipes, without which he never went abroad, across his knees. He came to himself with a violent start, for the bag seemed to be moving, and its last faint sound of wail was issuing. Heavens! there was a baby lying upon it.—For a time he sat perfectly bewildered, but at length concluded that some wandering gipsy had made him a too ready gift of the child she did not prize. Some one must be near. He called aloud, but there was no answer. The child began to cry. He sought to soothe it, and its lamentation ceased. The moment that its welcome silence responded to his blandishments, the still small "Here I am" of the Eternal Love whispered



its presence in the heart of the lonely man: something lay in his arms so helpless that to it, poor and blind and forsaken of man and woman as he was, he was yet a tower of strength. He clasped the child to his bosom, and rising forthwith, set out, but with warier steps than heretofore, over the rocks for the Seaton.

Already he would have much preferred concealing him lest he should be claimed—a thing, in view of all the circumstances, not very likely—but for the child's sake he must carry him to The Salmon, where he had free entrance at any hour—not even the public house locking its doors at night.

Thither then he bore his prize, shielding him from the night air as well as he could, with the bag of his pipes. But he waked none of the inmates; lately fed, the infant slept for several hours, and then did his best both to rouse and astonish the neighbourhood.

Closely questioned, Duncan told the truth, but cunningly, in such manner that some disbelieved him altogether, while others, who had remarked his haunting of the rocks ever since his arrival, concluded that he had brought the child with him and had kept him hidden until now. The popular con-



viction at length settled to this, that the child was the piper's grandson—but base-born, whom therefore he was ashamed to acknowledge, although heartily willing to minister to and bring up as a foundling. The latter part of this conclusion, however, was not alluded to by Duncan in his narrative: it was enough to add that he took care to leave the former part of it undisturbed.

The very next day, he found himself attacked by a low fever; but as he had hitherto paid for everything he had at the inn, they never thought of turning him out when his money was exhausted; and as he had already by his discreet behaviour, and the pleasure his bagpipes afforded, made himself not a few friends amongst the simple-hearted people of the Seaton, some of the benevolent inhabitants of the upper town, Miss Horn in particular, were soon interested in his favour, who supplied him with everything he required until his recovery. As to the baby, he was gloriously provided for; he had at least a dozen foster-mothers at once—no woman in the Seaton who could enter a claim founded on the possession of the special faculty required, failing to enter that claim—with the result of an amount of jealousy almost incredible.

Meantime the town-drummer fell sick and died, and Miss Horn made a party in favour of Duncan. But for the baby, I doubt if he would have had a chance, for he was a stranger and interloper; the women, however, with the baby in their fore-front, carried the day. Then his opponents retreated behind the instrument, and strove hard to get the drum recognized as an essential of the office. When Duncan recoiled from the drum with indignation, but without losing the support of his party, the opposition had the effrontery to propose a bell: that he rejected with a vehemence of scorn that had nearly ruined his cause; and, assuming straight-way the position of chief party in the proposed contract, declared that no noise of his making should be other than the noise of bagpipes; that he would rather starve than beat drum or ring bell; if he served in the case, it must be after his own fashion;—and so on. Hence it was no wonder, some of the baillies being not only small men and therefore conceited, but powerful whigs, who despised everything highland, and the bagpipes especially, if the affair did for a while seem hopeless. But the more noble-minded of the authorities approved of the piper none the less for his independence, a generosity

partly rooted, it must be confessed, in the amusement which the annoyance of their weaker brethren afforded them—whom at last they were happily successful in outvoting, so that the bagpipes superseded the drum for a season.

It may be asked whence it arose that Duncan should now be willing to quit his claim to any paternal property in Malcolm, confessing that he was none of his blood.

One source of the change was doubtless the desire of confidences between himself and Lady Florimel; another, the growing conviction, generated it may be by the admiration which is born of love, that the youth had gentle blood in his veins; and a third, that Duncan had now so thoroughly proved the heart of Malcolm as to have no fear of any change of fortune ever alienating his affections, or causing him to behave otherwise than as his dutiful grandson.

It is not surprising that such a tale should have a considerable influence on Lady Florimel's imagination: out of the scanty facts which formed but a second volume, she began at once to construct both a first and a third. She dreamed of the young fisherman that night, and, reflecting in the morning on her intercourse with him, recalled sufficient indica-

tions in him of superiority to his circumstances, noted by her now, however, for the first time, to justify her dream: he might indeed well be the lost scion of a noble family.

I do not intend the least hint that she began to fall in love with him. To balance his good looks, and the nobility, to keener eyes yet more evident than to hers, in both his moral and physical carriage, the equally undeniable clownishness of his dialect and tone had huge weight, while the peculiar straightforwardness of his behaviour and address not unfrequently savoured in her eyes of rudeness; besides which objectionable things, there was the persistent odour of fish about his garments—in itself sufficient to prevent such a catastrophe. The sole result of her meditations was the resolve to get some amusement out of him by means of a knowledge of his history superior to his own.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *THE REVIVAL.*

BEFORE the close of the herring-fishing, one of those movements of the spiritual waters, which in different forms, and under different names, manifest themselves at various intervals of space and of time, was in full vortex. It was supposed by the folk of Portlossie to have begun in the village of Scaurnose; but by the time it was recognized as existent, no one could tell whence it had come, any more than he could predict whither it was going. Of its spiritual origin it may be also predicated with confidence that its roots lay deeper than human insight could reach, and were far more interwoven than human analysis could disentangle.

One notable fact bearing on its nature was, that it arose amongst the people themselves, without the intervention or immediate operation of the clergy, who indeed to a man were set against it. Hence the flood was at first free from the results of one influence most prolific of the pseudo-spiritual, namely, the convulsive efforts of men with faith in

a certain evil system of theology, to rouse a galvanic life by working on the higher feelings through the electric sympathies of large assemblages, and the excitement of late hours, prolonged prayers and exhortations, and sometimes even direct appeal to individuals in public presence. The end of these things is death, for the reaction is towards spiritual hardness and a more confirmed unbelief: when the excitement has died away, those at least in whom the spiritual faculty is for the time exhausted, presume that they have tasted and seen, and found that nothing is there. The whole thing is closely allied to the absurdity of those who would throw down or who would accept the challenge to test the reality of answer to prayer by applying the force of a multitudinous petition to the will of the supposed divinity—I say *supposed divinity*, because a being whose will could be thus moved like a water-wheel could not be in any sense divine. If there might be a religious person so foolish and irreverent as to agree to such a test—crucial indeed, but in a far other sense than that imagined—I would put it to him whether the very sense of experiment would not destroy in his mind all faculty of prayer, placing him in the position, no more of a son of God, but

of one who, tempting the Lord his God, may read his rebuke where it stands recorded for the ages.

But where such a movement has originated amongst the people, the very facts adduced to argue its falsehood from its vulgarity, are to me so many indications on the other side; for I could ill believe in a divine influence which did not take the person such as he was; did not, while giving him power from beyond him, leave his individuality uninjured, yea intensify it, subjecting the very means of its purification, the spread of the new leaven, to the laws of time and growth. To look at the thing from the other side, the genuineness of the man's reception of it will be manifest in the meeting of his present conditions with the new thing—in the show of results natural to one of his degree of development. To hear a rude man utter his experience in the forms of cultivation, would be at once to suspect the mere glitter of a reflex, and to doubt an illumination from within. I repeat, the genuine influence shows itself such in showing that it has laid hold of the very man, at the very stage of growth he had reached. The dancing of David before the ark, the glow of St. Stephen's face, and the wild gestures and rude songs of miners



and fishers and negroes, may all be signs of the presence of the same spirit in temples various. Children will rush and shout and hollo for the same joy which sends others of the family to weep apart.

Of course the one infallible test as to whether any such movement is of man without God, or of God within the man, is the following life; only a large space for fluctuation must be allowed where a whole world of passions and habits has to be subjected to the will of God through the vice-gerency of a human will hardly or only just awakened, and as yet unconscious of itself.

The nearest Joseph Mair could come to the origin of the present movement was the influence of a certain Stornoway fisherman, whom they had brought back with them on their return from the coasts of Lewis—a man of Celtic fervour and faith, who had agreed to accompany them probably in the hope of serving a set of the bravest and hardest-working men in the world, who yet spent a large part of their ease in drinking up the earnings of fierce and perilous labour. There were a few amongst them, he found, already prepared to receive the word, and to each of these he spoke in private. They spoke to one



another, then each to his friend outside the little circle. Next a few met to pray. These drew others in, and at length it was delivered from mouth to mouth that on the following Sunday, at a certain early hour in the morning, a meeting would be held in the Baillie's Barn, a cave large enough to receive all the grown population of Scaurnose.

The news of this gathering of course reached the Seaton, where, some were inclined to go and see, others to go and hear; most of even the latter class, however, being at the same time more than inclined to mock at the idea of a popular religious assembly.

Not so Duncan MacPhail, who, notwithstanding the more than half pagan character of his ideas, had too much reverence to mock at anything in the form of religion, to all the claims of which he was even eager to assent: when the duty of forgiveness was pressed upon him too hard, he would take his last refuge in excepting to the authority of the messenger. He regarded the announcement of the meeting with the greater respect that the man from Stornoway was a MacLeod, and so of his mother's clan.

It was now the end of August, when the sky is of

a paler blue in the day time, and greener about the sunset. The air had in it a touch of cold, which, like as a faint acid affects a sweet drink, only rendered the warmth more pleasant. On the appointed morning, the tide was low, and the waves died gently upon the sand, seeming to have crept away from the shore to get nearer to the sunrise. Duncan was walking along the hard wet sand towards the promontory, with Mr. Graham on one side of him and Malcolm on the other. There was no gun to fire this morning; it was Sunday, and all might repose undisturbed: the longer sleep in bed, possibly the shorter in church!

“I wish you had your sight but for a moment, Mr. MacPhail,” said the schoolmaster. “How this sunrise would make you leap for joy!”

“Ay!” said Malcolm, “it wad gar daddy grip till ’s pipes in twa hurries.”

“And what should she’ll pe wanting her pipes for?” asked Duncan.

“To praise God wi’,” answered Malcolm.

“Ay; ay;” murmured Duncan thoughtfully. “They are that.”

“What are they?” asked Mr. Graham gently.

“For to praise Cod,” answered Duncan solemnly.

"I almost envy you," returned Mr. Graham, "when I think how you will praise God one day. What a glorious waking you will have!"

"Then it 'll pe your opinion, Mr. Craham, that she'll pe sleeping her sound sleep, and not pe lying wide awake in her coffin all ta time?"

"A good deal better than that, Mr. MacPhail!" returned the schoolmaster cheerily "It's my opinion that you are, as it were, asleep now, and that the moment you die, you will feel as if you had just woke up, and for the first time in your life. For one thing, you will see far better then than any of us do now."

But poor Duncan could not catch the idea; his mind was filled with a preventing fancy.

"Yes; I know; at ta tay of chutchment," he said. "Put what 'll pe ta use of ketting her eyes open pefore she 'll pe up? How should she pe seeing with all ta earth apove her—and ta cravestone too tat I know my poy Malcolm will pe laying on ta top of his old crandfather to keep him waarm, and let peoples pe know tat ta plind piper will pe lying town pelow wide awake and fery uncomfortable?"

"Excuse me, Mr. MacPhail, but that's all a mistake," said Mr. Graham positively. "The body is

but a sort of shell that we cast off when we die, as the corn casts off its husk when it begins to grow. The life of the seed comes up out of the earth in a new body, as St. Paul says,—”

“Then,” interrupted Duncan, “she’ll pe crowing up out of her crave like a seed crowing up to pe a corn or a parley?”

The schoolmaster began to despair of ever conveying to the piper the idea that the living man is the seed sown, and that when the body of this seed dies, then the new body, with the man in it, springs alive out of the old one—that the death of the one is the birth of the other. Far more enlightened people than Duncan never imagine, and would find it hard to believe, that the sowing of the seed spoken of might mean something else than the burying of the body; not perceiving what yet surely is plain enough, that that would be the sowing of a seed already dead, and incapable of giving birth to anything whatever.

“No, no,” he said, almost impatiently; “*you* will never be in the grave; it is only your body that will go there, with nothing *like* life about it except the smile the glad soul has left on it. The poor body when thus forsaken is so dead that it can’t

even stop smiling. Get Malcolm to read to you out of the book of the Revelation how there were multitudes even then standing before the throne. They had died in this world, yet there they were, well and happy."

"Oh, yes!" said Duncan, with no small touch of spitefulness in his tone, "—twang-twanging at teir fine colden herps! She'll not pe thinking much of ta herp for a music-maker! And peoples tells her she'll not pe hafing her pipes tere! Och hone! Och hone!—She'll chust pe lying still and not pe ketting up, and when ta work is ofer, and efery-pody cone away, she'll chust pe ketting up, and taking a look apout her, to see if she'll pe finding a stand o' pipes that some coot highlandman has peen left pehint him when he died lately."

"You'll find it rather lonely—won't you?"

"Yes; no toubt, for they'll aal pe cone up.—Well, she'll haf her pipes; and she could not co where ta pipes was looked town upon by all ta creat people—and all ta smaal ones too."

They had now reached the foot of the promontory, and turned northwards, each of his companions taking an arm of the piper to help him over the rocks that lay between them and the mouth of the

cave, which soon yawned before them like a section of the mouth of a great fish. Its floor of smooth rock had been swept out clean, and sprinkled with dry sea sand. There were many hollows and projections along its sides rudely fit for serving as seats, to which had been added a number of forms extemporized of planks and thwarts. No one had yet arrived when they entered, and they went at once to the further end of the cave, that Duncan, who was a little hard of hearing, might be close to the speakers. There his companions turned and looked behind them: an exclamation, followed by a full glance at each other, broke from each.

The sun, just clearing the end of the opposite promontory, shone right into the mouth of the cave, from the midst of a tumult of gold, in which all the other colours of his approach had been swallowed up. The triumph strode splendid over sea and shore, subduing waves and rocks to a path for its mighty entrance into that dark cave on the human coast. With his back to the light stood Duncan in the bottom of the cave, his white hair gleaming argentine, as if his poor blind head were the very goal of the heavenly progress. He turned round.

“Will it be a fire? She feels something warm on

her head," he said, rolling his sightless orbs, upon which the splendour broke waveless, casting a grim shadow of him on the jagged rock behind.

"No," answered Mr. Graham; "it is the sun you feel. He's just out of his grave."

The old man gave a grunt.

"I often think," said the schoolmaster to Malcolm, "that possibly the reason why we are told so little about the world we are going to, is, that no description of it would enter our minds any more than a description of that sunrise would carry a notion of its reality into the mind of your grandfather."

"She's obleeched to you, Mr. Craham!" said the piper with offence. "You take her fery stupid. You're so proud of your eyes, you think a plind man cannot see at aall! Chm!"

But the folk began to assemble. By twos and threes, now from the one side, now from the other, they came dropping in as if out of the rush of the blinding sunshine, till the seats were nearly filled, while a goodly company gathered about the mouth of the cave, there to await the arrival of those who had called the meeting. Presently MacLeod, a small thin man, with iron-gray hair, keen, shrewd features, large head, and brown complexion, appeared, and



made his way to the farther end of the cave, followed by three or four of the men of Scaurnose, amongst whom walked a pale-faced consumptive lad, with bowed shoulders and eyes on the ground : he it was who, feebly clambering on a ledge of rock, proceeded to conduct the worship of the assembly. His parents were fisher-people of Scaurnose, who to make a minister of him had been half-starving the rest of their family ; but he had broken down at length under the hardships of endless work and wretched food. From the close of the session in March, he had been teaching in Aberdeen until a few days before, when he came home, aware that he was dying, and full of a fervour betraying anxiety concerning himself rather than indicating the possession of good news for others. The sun had now so far changed his position, that, although he still shone into the cave, the preacher stood in the shadow, out of which gleamed his wasted countenance, pallid and sombre and solemn, as first he poured forth an abject prayer for mercy, conceived in the spirit of a slave supplicating the indulgence of a hard master, and couched in words and tones that bore not a trace of the filial ; then read the chapter containing the curses of Mount Ebal, and gave the



congregation one of Duncan's favourite psalms to sing ; and at length began a sermon on what he called the divine justice. Not one word was there in it, however, concerning God's love of fair dealing, either as betwixt himself and man or as betwixt man and his fellow ; the preacher's whole notion of justice was the punishment of sin ; and that punishment was hell and hell only ; so that the whole sermon was about hell from beginning to end—hell appalling, lurid, hopeless. And the eyes of all were fixed upon him with that glow from within which manifests the listening spirit. Some of the women were pale as himself from sympathetic horror, doubtless also from a vague stirring of the conscience, which, without accusing them of crime, yet told them that all was not right between them and their God ; while the working of the faces of some of the men betrayed a mind not at all at ease concerning their prospects. It was an eloquent and powerful utterance, and might doubtless claim its place in the economy of human education ; but it was at best a pagan embodiment of truths such as a righteous pagan might have discovered, and breathed nothing of the spirit of Christianity, being as unjust towards God as it represented him to be towards

men: the God of the preacher was utterly unlike the Father of Jesus. Urging his hearers to flee from the wrath to come, he drew such a picture of an angry Deity as in nothing resembled the revelation in the Son.

“Fellow sinners,” he said in conclusion, “haste ye and flee from the wrath to come. Now is God waiting to be gracious—but only so long as his Son holds back the indignation ready to burst forth and devour you. He sprinkles its flames with the scarlet wool and the hyssop of atonement; he stands between you and justice, and pleads with his incensed Father for his rebellious creatures. Well for you that he so stands and so pleads! Yet even *he* could not prevail for ever against such righteous anger, and it is but for a season he will thus entreat; the day will come when he will stand aside and let the fiery furnace break forth and slay you. Then, with howling and anguish, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, ye shall know that God is a God of justice, that his wrath is one with his omnipotence, and his hate everlasting as the fires of hell. But do as ye will, ye cannot thwart his decrees, for to whom he will he showeth mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

Scarcely had he ceased, when a loud cry, clear and keen, rang through every corner of the cave. Well might the preacher start and gaze around him! for the cry was articulate, sharply modelled into the three words—"Father o' lights!" Some of the men gave a scared groan, and some of the women shrieked. None could tell whence the cry had come, and Malcolm alone could guess who must have uttered it.

"Yes," said the preacher, recovering himself, and replying to the voice, "he *is* the Father of lights, but only to them that are in Christ Jesus;—he is no father, but an avenging deity, to them over whom the robe of his imputed righteousness is not cast. Jesus Christ himself will not be gracious for ever. Kiss ye the son, lest even *he* be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

"Father o' lights!" rang the cry again, and louder than before.

To Malcolm it seemed close behind him, but he had the self-possession not to turn his head. The preacher took no farther notice. MacLeod stood up, and having, in a few simple remarks, attempted to smooth some of the asperities of the youth's ad-

dress, announced another meeting in the evening, and dismissed the assembly with a prayer.

Malcolm went home with his grandfather. He was certain it was the laird's voice he had heard, but he would attempt no search after his refuge that day, for dread of leading to its discovery by others.

That evening most of the boats of the Seaton set out for the fishing ground as usual, but not many went from Scaurnose. Blue Peter would go no more of a Sunday, hence Malcolm was free for the night, and again with his grandfather walked along the sands in the evening towards the cave.

The sun was going down on the other side of the promontory before them, and the sky was gorgeous in rose and blue, in peach and violet, in purple and green, barred and fretted, heaped and broken, scattered and massed—every colour edged and tinged and harmonized with a glory as of gold, molten with heat, and glowing with fire. The thought that his grandfather could not see, and had never seen such splendour, made Malcolm sad, and very little was spoken between them as they went.

When they arrived, the service had already commenced, but room was made for them to pass, and a seat was found for Duncan where he could hear. Just

as they entered, Malcolm spied, amongst those who preferred the open air at the mouth of the cavern, a face which he was all but certain was that of one of the three men from whom he had rescued the laird.

MacLeod was to address them. He took for his text the words of the Saviour, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and founded upon them a simple, gracious, and all but eloquent discourse, very different in tone and influence from that of the young student. It must be confessed that the Christ he presented was very far off, and wrapped in a hazy nimbus of abstraction; that the toil of his revelation was forgotten, the life he lived being only alluded to, and that not for the sake of showing what he was, and hence what God is, but to illustrate the conclusions of men concerning him; and yet there was that heart of reality in the whole thing which no moral vulgarity of theory, no injustice towards God, no tyranny of stupid logic over childlike intuitions, could so obscure as to render it inoperative. From the form of the Son of Man, thus beheld from afar, came a warmth like the warmth from the first approach of the far-off sun in spring, sufficing to rouse

the earth from the sleep of winter—in which all the time the same sun has been its warmth, and has kept it from sleeping unto death.

MacLeod was a thinker—aware of the movements of his own heart, and able to reflect on others the movements of their hearts; hence, although in the main he treated the weariness and oppression from which Jesus offered to set them free, as arising from a sense of guilt and the fear of coming misery, he could not help alluding to more ordinary troubles, and depicting other phases of the heart's restlessness with such truth and sympathy that many listened with a vague feeling of exposure to a supernatural insight. The sermon soon began to show its influence; for a sense of the need of help is so present to every simple mind, that, of all messages, the offer of help is of easiest reception; some of the women were sobbing, and the silent tears were flowing down the faces of others; while of the men many were looking grave and thoughtful, and kept their eyes fixed on the speaker. At length, towards the close, MacLeod judged it needful to give a word of warning.

“But, my friends,” he said, and his voice grew low and solemn, “I dare not make an end without

reminding you that, if you stop your ears against the gracious call, a day will come when not even the merits of the Son of God will avail you, but the wrath of the——”

“*Father o’ lights!*” once more burst ringing out, like the sudden cry of a trumpet in the night.

MacLeod took no notice of it, but brought his sermon at once to a close, and specified the night of the following Saturday for the next meeting. They sung a psalm, and after a slow, solemn, thoughtful prayer, the congregation dispersed.

But Malcolm, who, anxious because of the face he had seen as he entered, had been laying his plans, after begging his grandfather in a whisper to go home without him, for a reason he would afterwards explain, withdrew into a recess whence he could watch the cave, without being readily discovered.

Scarcely had the last voices of the retreating congregation died away, when the same ill-favoured face peeped round the corner of the entrance, gave a quick glance about, and the man came in. Like a snuffing terrier, he went peering in the dimness into every hollow, and behind every projection, until he suddenly caught sight of Malcolm, probably by a glimmering of his eyes.



“Hillo, Humpy!” he cried in a tone of exultation, and sprang up the rough ascent of a step or two to where he sat.

Malcolm half rose, and met him with a well-delivered blow between the eyes. He fell, and lay for a moment stunned. Malcolm sat down again and watched him. When he came to himself, he crept out, muttering imprecations. He knew it was not Humpy who dealt that blow.

As soon as he was gone, Malcolm in his turn began searching. He thought he knew every hole and corner of the cave, and there was but one where the laird, who, for as near him as he heard his voice the first time, certainly had not formed one of the visible congregation, might have concealed himself: if that was his covert, there he must be still, for he had assuredly not issued from it.

Immediately behind where he had sat in the morning, was a projection of rock, with a narrow cleft between it and the wall of the cavern, visible only from the very back of the cave, where the roof came down low. But when he thought of it, he saw that even here he could not have been hidden in the full light of the morning from the eyes of some urchins who had seated themselves as far back as



the roof would allow them, and they had never looked as if they saw anything more than other people. Still, if he was to search at all, here he must begin. The cleft had scarcely more width than sufficed to admit his body, and his hands told him at once that there was no laird there. Could there be any opening further? If there was, it could only be somewhere above. Was advance in that direction possible?

He felt about, and finding two or three footholds, began to climb in the dark, and had reached the height of six feet or so, when he came to a horizontal projection, which, for a moment only, barred his further progress. Having literally surmounted this, that is, got on the top of it, he found there a narrow vertical opening: was it but a shallow recess, or did it lead into the heart of the rock?

Carefully feeling his way both with hands and feet, he advanced a step or two, and came to a place where the passage widened a little, and then took a sharp turn and became so narrow that it was with difficulty he forced himself through. It was, however, but one close pinch, and he found himself, as his feet told him, at the top of a steep descent. He stood for a moment hesitating, for

prudence demanded a light. The sound of the sea was behind him, but all in front was still as the darkness of the grave. Suddenly up from unknown depths of gloom, came the tones of a sweet childish voice, singing—*The Lord's my Shepherd.*

Malcolm waited until the psalm was finished, and then called out :

“Mr. Stewart! I'm here—Malcolm MacPhail. I want to see ye. Tell him it's me, Phemy.”

A brief pause followed ; then Phemy's voice answered :

“Come awa' doon. He says ye s' be welcome.”

“Canna ye shaw a licht than ; for I dinna ken a fit o' the ro'd,” said Malcolm.

The next moment a light appeared at some little distance below, and presently began to ascend, borne by Phemy, towards the place where he stood. She took him by the hand without a word, and led him down a slope, apparently formed of material fallen from the roof, to the cave already described. The moment he entered it, he marked the water in its side, the smooth floor, the walls hollowed into a thousand fantastic cavities, and knew he had come upon the cave in which his great-grandfather had found refuge so many years before. Changes in

its mouth had rendered entrance difficult, and it had slipped by degrees from the knowledge of men.

At the bottom of the slope, by the side of the well, sat the laird. Phemy set the little lantern she carried on its edge. The laird rose and shook hands with Malcolm, and asked him to be seated.

"I'm sorry to say they're efter ye again, laird," said Malcolm after a little ordinary chat.

Mr. Stewart was on his feet instantly.

"I maun awa'. Tak care o' Phemy," he said hurriedly.

"Na, na, sir," said Malcolm, laying his hand on his arm; "there's nae sic hurry. As lang's I'm herè ye may sit still; an', as far's I ken, nobody's fun' the w'y in but mysel', an' that was yer ain wyte (*blame*), laird. But ye hae garred mair fowk nor me luik, an' that's the pity o' 't."

"I tauld ye, sir, ye sudna cry oot," said Phemy.

"I couldna help it," said Stewart apologetically.

"Weel, ye sudna ha' gane near them again," persisted the little woman.

"Wha kent but they kent whaur I cam frae?" also persisted the laird.

"Sit ye doon, sir, an' lat's hae a word about it," said Malcolm cheerily.

The laird cast a doubting look at Phemy.

"Ay, sit doon," said Phemy.

Mr. Stewart yielded, but nervous starts and sudden twitches of the muscles betrayed his uneasiness: it looked as if his body would jump up and run without his mind's consent.

"Hae ye ony w'y o' winnin' oot o' this, forbye (*besides*) the mou' o' the cave there?" asked Malcolm.

"Nane 'at I ken o'," answered Phemy. "But there's heaps o' hidy-holes i' the inside o' 't."

"That's a' verra weel; but gien they keepit the mou', an' took their time till 't, they bude to grip ye."

"There *may* be, though," resumed Phemy. "It gangs back a lang road. I hae never been in sicht o' the en' o' 't. It comes doon verra laich in some places, and gangs up heich again in ithers, but no sign o' an en' till 't."

"Is there ony soon' o' watter intill 't?" asked Malcolm.

"Na, nane at ever I hard. But I'll tell ye what I *hae* hard: I hae hard the flails gaein' thud, thud, abune my heid."

"Hoot toot, Phemy!" said Malcolm; "we're a

guid mile an' a half frae the nearest ferm-toon, an' that, I reckon, 'll be the Hoose-ferm."

"I canna help that," persisted Phemy. "Gien 't wasna the flails, whiles ane, an' whiles twa, I dinna ken what it cud hae been. Hoo far it was, I canna say, for it's ill measurin' i' the dark, or wi' naething but a bowat (*lantern*) i' yer han'; but gien ye ca'd it mair, I wadna won'er."

"It's a mighty howkin!" said Malcolm; "but for a' that it wadna haud ye frae the grip o' thae scoonrels: wharever ye ran they cud rin efter ye."

"I think we cud sort them," said Phemy. "There's ae place, a guid bit farrer in, whaur the rufe comes doon to the flure, leavin' jist ae sma' hole to creep throu': it wad be fine to hae a gey muckle stane handy, jist to row (*roll*) athort it, an' gar't luik as gien 't was the en' o' a' thing. But the hole's sae sma' at the laird has ill gettin' his puir back throu' 't."

"I couldna help won'erin' hoo he wan throu' at the tap there," said Malcolm.

At this the laird laughed almost merrily, and rising, took Malcolm by the hand and led him to the spot, where he made him feel a rough groove in the wall of the rocky strait: into this hollow he laid his hump, and so slid sideways through.

Malcolm squeezed himself through after him, saying,—

“Noo ye’re oot, laird, hadna ye better come wi’ me hame to Miss Horn’s, whaur ye wad be as safe’s gien ye war in h’aven itsel’?”

“Na, I canna gang to Miss Horn’s,” he replied.

“What for no, laird?”

Pulling Malcolm down towards him, the laird whispered in his ear,

“’Cause she’s fleyt at my back.”

A moment or two passed ere Malcolm could think of a reply both true and fitting. When at length he spoke again, there was no answer, and he knew that he was alone.

He left the cave and set out for the Seaton; but, unable to feel at peace about his friends, resolved, on the way, to return after seeing his grandfather, and spend the night in the outer cave.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *WANDERING STARS.*

HE had not been gone many minutes, when the laird passed once more through the strait, and stood a moment waiting for Phemy: she had persuaded him to go home to her father's for the night. But the next instant he darted back, with trembling hands, caught hold of Phemy, who was following him with the lantern, and stammered in her ear,—

“There's somebody there! I dinna ken whaur they come frae.”

Phemy went to the front of the passage and listened, but could hear nothing, and returned.

“Bide ye whaur ye are, laird,” she said; “I'll gang doon, an' gien I hear or see naething, I'll come back for ye.”

With careful descent, placing her feet on the well-known points unerringly, she reached the bottom, and peeped into the outer cave. The place was quite dark. Through its jaws the sea glimmered faint in the low light that skirted the northern horizon; and the slow pulse of the tide upon the

rocks, was the sole sound to be heard. No: another in the cave close beside her!—one small solitary noise, as of shingle yielding under the pressure of a standing foot! She held her breath and listened, her heart beating so loud that she feared it would deafen her to what would come next. A good many minutes, half an hour it seemed to her, passed, during which she heard nothing more; but as she peeped out for the twentieth time, a figure glided into the field of vision bounded by the cave's mouth. It was that of a dumpy woman. She entered the cave, tumbled over one of the forms, and gave a cry coupled with an imprecation.

“The deevil roast them ’at laid me sic a trap!” she said. “I hae broken the shins the auld markis laudit!”

“Hold your wicked tongue!” hissed a voice in return, almost in Phemy's very ear.

“Ow! ye ’re there, are ye, mem?” rejoined the other, in a voice that held internal communication with her wounded shins. “Coupit ye the crans like me?”

The question, Englished, was, “Did you fall heels over head like me?” but was capable of a metaphorical interpretation as well.



“Hold your tongue, I say, woman! Who knows but some of the saints may be at their prayers within hearing?”

“Na, na, mem, there’s nae risk o’ that; this is no ane o’ yer creepy caves whaur otters an wullcats hae their’ habitations; it’s a muckle open-mou’d place, like them ’at prays intill ’t—as toom an’ clear-sidit as a tongueless bell. But what for ye wad hae ’s come here to oor cracks (*conversation*), I canna faddom. A body wad think ye had an ill thought i’ yer heid—eh, mem?”

The suggestion was followed by a low, almost sneering laugh. As she spoke, the sounds of her voice and step had been advancing, with cautious intermittent approach.

“I hae ye noo,” she said, as she seated herself at length beside the other. “The gowk, Geordie Bray!” she went on, “—to tak it intill’s oogly heid ’at the cratur wad be hurklin’ here! It’s no the place for ane ’at has to hide ’s heid for verra shame o’ slippin’ aff the likes o’ himsel’ upo’ sic a braw mither! Could he get nae ither door to win in at, haith!”

“Woman, you’ll drive me mad!” said the other.

“Weel, hinney,” returned the former, suddenly

changing her tone, "I'm mair an' mair convenced 'at yon's the verra laad for yer purpose. For ae thing, ye see, nobody kens whaur he cam frae, as the laird, bonny laad, wad say, an' nobody can contradick a word—the auld man less than onybody, for I can tell him what he kens to be trowth. Only I winna muv till *I* ken whaur he comes frae."

"Wouldn't you prefer not knowing for certain? You could swear with the better grace."

"Deil a bit! It maitters na to me whilk side o' my teeth I chow wi'. But I winna sweir till I ken the trowth—'at I may haud aff o' 't. He's the man, though, gien we can get a grip o' 'm! He luiks the richt thing, ye see, mem. He has a glisk (*slight look*) o' the markis tu—divna ye think, mem?"

"Insolent wretch!"

"Caw canny, mem. A'thing maun be considered. It wad but gar the thing luik the mair likly. Fowk gangs the len'th o' sayin' 'at Humpy himsel' 's no the sin (*son*) o' the auld laird, honest man!"

"It's a wicked lie," burst with indignation from the other.

"There may be waur things nor a bit lee. Ony gait, ae thing's easy priven: ye lay verra dowie (*poorly*) for a month or sax ooks ance upon a time

at Lossie Hoose, an' that was a feow years, we needna speir hoo mony, efter ye was lichtened o' the tither. Whan they hear that at that time ye gae birth till a lad-bairn, the whilk was stown awa', an' never hard tell o' till noo—"It may weel be, fowk'll say: 'them 'at has drunk wad drink again!' It wad affoord rizzons, ye see, an' guid anes, for the bairn bein' putten oot o' sicht, and wad mak the haill story mair nor likly i' the jeedgment o' a' 'at hard it."

"You scandalous woman! That would be to confess to all the world that he was not the son of my late husband!"

"They say that o' him 'at *is*, an' hoo muckle the waur are ye? Lat them say 'at they like, sae lang 's we can shaw 'at he cam o' your body, an' was born i' wedlock? Ye hae yer lan's ance mair, for ye hae a sin 'at can guide them—and ye can guide him. He's a bonny lad—bonny eneuch to be yer leddyship's—and his lordship's; an' sae, as I was remarkin', i' the jeedgment o' ill-thoughtit fowk, the mair likly to be heir to auld Stewart o' Kirkbyres!"

She laughed huskily.

"But I maun hae a scart o' yer pen, mem, afore

I wag tongue about it," she went on. "I ken brawly hoo to set it gauin'! I sanna be the first to ring the bell. Na, na; I s' set Miss Horn's Jean jawin', an' it 'll be a' ower the toon in a jiffy—at first in a kin' o' a sough 'at naebody 'ill unnerstan'; but it 'll grow looder an' plainer. At the lang last it 'll come to yer leddyship's hearin'; an' syne ye hae me taen up an' questoned afore a justice o' the peace, that there may be no luik o' ony compack atween the twa o' 's. But, as I said afore, I'll no mov till I ken a' about the lad first, an' syne get a scart o' your pen, mem."

"You must be the devil himself!" said the other, in a tone that was not of displeasure.

"I hae been tellt that afore, an' wi' less rizzon," was the reply—given also in a tone that was not of displeasure.

"But what if we should be found out?"

"Ye can lay 't a' upo' me."

"And what will you do with it?"

"Tak it wi' me," was the answer, accompanied by another husky laugh.

"Where to?"

"Speir nae questons, an' ye'll be tellt nae lees. Ony gait, I s' lea' nae track ahin' me. An' for that

same sake, I maun hae my pairt i' my han' the meenute the thing's been sworn till. Gien ye fail me, ye'll sune see me get mair licht upo' the subjec', an' confess till a great mistak. By the Michty, but I'll sweir the verra contrar the neist time I'm hed up! Ay, an' ilka body 'ill believe me. An' whaur'll ye be than, my leddy? For though *I* nicht mistak, *ye* cudna! Faith! they'll hae ye ta'en up for perjury."

"You're a dangerous accomplice," said the lady.

"I'm a tule ye maun tak by the han'le, or ye'll rue the edge," returned the other quietly.

"As soon then as I get a hold of that misbegotten elf——"

"Mean ye the yoong laird, or the yoong markis, mem?"

"You forget, Mrs. Catanach, that you are speaking to a lady."

"Ye maun hae been unco like ane *ae* nicht, ony gait, mem. But I'm dune wi' my jokin'."

"As soon, I say, as I get my poor boy into proper hands, I shall be ready to take the next step."

"What for sud ye pit it aff till than? *He* canna du muckle ae w'y or ither."

"I will tell you: His uncle, Sir Joseph, prides

himself on being an honest man, and if some busy-body were to tell him that poor Stephen, as I am told people are saying, was no worse than harsh treatment had made him—for you know his father could not bear the sight of him to the day of his death—he would be the more determined to assert his guardianship and keep things out of my hands. But if I once had the poor fellow in an asylum, or in my own keeping—you see—”

“Weel, mem, gien I be potty, ye’re panny!” exclaimed the midwife with her gelatinous laugh. “Losh, mem!” she burst out after a moment’s pause, “gien you an’ me was to fa’ oot, there wad be a stramash! He! he! he!”

They rose and left the cave together, talking as they went; and Phemy, trembling all over, rejoined the laird.

She could understand little of what she had heard, and yet, enabled by her affection, retained in her mind a good deal of it. After events brought more of it to her recollection, and what I have here given is an attempted restoration of the broken mosaic. She rightly judged it better to repeat nothing of what she had overheard to the laird, to whom it would only redouble terror; and when he questioned her

in his own way concerning it, she had little difficulty, so entirely did he trust her, in satisfying him with a very small amount of information. When they reached her home, she told all she could to her father; whose opinion it was, that the best, indeed the only thing they could do, was to keep, if possible, a yet more vigilant guard over the laird and his liberty.

Soon after they were gone, Malcolm returned, and little thinking that there was no one left to guard, chose a sheltered spot in the cave, carried thither a quantity of dry sand, and lay down to sleep, covered with his tarpaulin coat. He found it something chilly, however, and did not rest so well but that he woke with the first break of day.

The morning, as it drew slowly on, was a strange contrast, in its gray and saffron, to the gorgeous sunset of the night before. The sea crept up on the land as if it were weary, and did not care much to flow any more. Not a breath of wind was in motion, and yet the air even on the shore seemed full of the presence of decaying leaves and damp earth. He sat down in the mouth of the cave, and looked out on the still, half-waking world of ocean and sky before him—a leaden ocean, and a

dull misty sky; and as he gazed, a sadness came stealing over him, and a sense of the endlessness of labour—labour ever returning on itself and making no progress. The mad laird was always lamenting his ignorance of his origin: Malcolm thought he knew whence he came—and yet what was the much good of life? Where was the end to it all? People so seldom got what they desired! To be sure his life was a happy one, or had been—but there was the poor laird! Why should he be happier than the laird? Why should the laird have a hump, and he have none? If all the world were happy but one man, that one's misery would be as a cairn on which the countless multitudes of the blessed must heap the stones of endless questions and enduring perplexities.

It is one thing to know from whom we come, and another to know him from whom we come.

Then his thoughts turned to Lady Florimel. All the splendours of existence radiated from her, but to the glory he could never draw nearer; the celestial fires of the rainbow fountain of her life could never warm him; she cared about nothing he cared about; if they had a common humanity they could not share it; to her he was hardly



human. If he were to unfold before her the deepest layers of his thought, she would look at them curiously, as she might watch the doings of an ant or a spider. Had he no right to look for more? He did not know, and sat brooding with bowed head.

Unseen from where he sat, the sun drew nearer the horizon; the light grew; the tide began to ripple up more diligently; a glimmer of dawn touched even the brown rock in the farthest end of the cave.

Where there was light, there was work, and where there was work for any one, there was at least justification of his existence. That work must be done, if it should return and return in a never broken circle. Its theory could wait. For indeed the only hope of finding the theory of all theories, the divine idea, lay in the going on of things.

In the meantime, while God took care of the sparrows by himself, he allowed Malcolm a share in the protection of a human heart capable of the keenest suffering—that of the mad laird.

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE SKIPPER'S CHAMBER.*

ONE day towards the close of the fishing-season, the marquis called upon Duncan, and was received with a cordial unembarrassed welcome.

“I want you, Mr. MacPhail,” said his lordship, “to come and live in that little cottage, on the banks of the burn, which one of the under-gamekeepers, they tell me, used to occupy. I’ll have it put in order for you, and you shall live rent-free as my piper.”

“I thank your lortship’s grace,” said Duncan, “and she would pe proud of ta honour, put it’ll pe too far away from ta shore for her poy’s fishing.”

“I have a design upon him too,” returned the marquis. “They ’re building a little yacht for me—a pleasure-boat, you understand—at Aberdeen, and I want Malcolm to be skipper. But he is such a useful fellow, and so thoroughly to be depended upon, that I should prefer his having a room in the house. I should like to know he was within call any moment I might want him.”

Duncan did not clutch at the proposal. He was silent so long that the marquis spoke again.

"You do not quite seem to like the plan, Mr. MacPhail," he said.

"If aal wass here as it used to wass in ta Highlants, my lort," said Duncan, "when every clansman wass son or prother or father to his chief, tat would pe tifferent ; put my poy must *not* co and eat with serfants who haf nothing put teir waches to make tem love and opey your lortship. If her poy serfs another man, it must pe because he loves him, and looks upon him as his chief, who will shake haands with him and take ta father's care of him ; and her poy must tie for him when ta time comes."

Even a feudal lord cannot be expected to have sympathized with such grand patriarchal ideas ; they were much too like those of the kingdom of heaven ; and feudalism itself had by this time crumbled away—not indeed into monthly, but into half-yearly wages. The marquis, notwithstanding, was touched by the old man's words, matter-of-fact as his reply must sound after them.

"I would make any arrangements you or he might wish," he said. "He should take his meals with Mrs. Courthope, have a bedroom to himself, and

be required only to look after the yacht, and now and then do some bit of business I could n't trust any one else with."

The highlander's pride was nearly satisfied.

"So," he said, "it'll be his own henchman my lort will be making of her poy?"

"Something like that. We'll see how it goes. If he does n't like it, he can drop it. It's more that I want to have him about me than anything else. I want to do something for him when I have a chance. I like him."

"My lort will be toing the laad a creat honour," said Duncan. "Put," he added, with a sigh, "she'll be lonely, her nainsel!"

"He can come and see you twenty times a day,—and stop all night when you particularly want him. We'll see about some respectable woman to look after the house for you."

"She'll haf *no* womans to look after her," said Duncan fiercely.

"Oh, very well!—of course not, if you don't wish it," returned the marquis, laughing.

But Duncan did not even smile in return. He sat thoughtful and silent for a moment, then said:

"And what'll become of her lamps and her shop?"

“You shall have all the lamps and candlesticks in the house to attend to and take charge of,” said the marquis, who had heard of the old man’s whim from Lady Florimel; “and for the shop, you won’t want that when you’re piper to the Marquis of Lossie.”

He did not venture to allude to wages more definitely.

“Well, she’ll be talking to her poy about it,” said Duncan, and the marquis saw that he had better press the matter no further for the time.

To Malcolm the proposal was full of attraction. True, Lord Lossie had once and again spoken so as to offend him, but the confidence he had shown in him had gone far to atone for that. And to be near Lady Florimel!—to have to wait on her in the yacht and sometimes in the house!—to be allowed books from the library perhaps!—to have a nice room, and those lovely grounds all about him!—It *was* tempting!

The old man also, the more he reflected, liked the idea the more. The only thing he murmured at was, being parted from his grandson at night. In vain Malcolm reminded him that during the fishing-season he had to spend most nights alone;

Duncan answered that he had but to go to the door, and look out to sea, and there was nothing between him and his boy; but now he could not tell how many stone walls might be standing up to divide them. He was quite willing to make the trial, however, and see if he could bear it. So Malcolm went to speak to the marquis.

He did not *altogether* trust the marquis, but he had always taken a delight in doing anything for anybody—a delight rooted in a natural tendency to ministration, unusually strong, and specially developed by the instructions of Alexander Graham conjoined with the necessities of his blind grandfather; while there was an alluring something, it must be confessed, in the marquis's high position—which let no one set down to Malcolm's discredit: whether the subordination of class shall go to the development of reverence or of servility, depends mainly on the individual nature subordinated. Calvinism itself has produced as loving children as abject slaves, with a good many between partaking of the character of both kinds. Still, as he pondered over the matter on his way, he shrunk a good deal from placing himself at the beck and call of another; it threatened to interfere with that

sense of personal freedom which is yet dearer perhaps to the poor than to the rich. But he argued with himself, that he had found no infringement of it under Blue Peter; and that, if the marquis were really as friendly as he professed to be, it was not likely to turn out otherwise with him.

Lady Florimel anticipated pleasure in Malcolm's probable consent to her father's plan; but certainly he would not have been greatly uplifted by a knowledge of the sort of pleasure she expected. For some time the girl had been suffering from too much liberty. Perhaps there is no life more filled with a sense of oppression and lack of freedom than that of those under no external control, in whom Duty has not yet gathered sufficient strength to assume the reins of government and subject them to the highest law. Their condition is like that of a creature under an exhausted receiver—oppressed from within outwards for want of the counteracting external weight. It was amusement she hoped for from Malcolm's becoming in a sense one of the family at the House—to which she believed her knowledge of the extremely bare outlines of his history would largely contribute.

He was shown at once into the presence of his

lordship, whom he found at breakfast with his daughter.

“Well, MacPhail,” said the marquis, “have you made up your mind to be my skipper?”

“Willin’ly, my lord,” answered Malcolm.

“Do you know how to manage a sail-boat?”

“I wad need, my lord.”

“Shall you want any help?”

“That depen’s upo’ saiveral things—her ain size, the wull o’ the win’, an’ whether or no yer lordship or my leddy can tak the tiller.”

“We can’t settle about that then till she comes. I hear she ’ll soon be on her way now.—But I cannot have you dressed like a farmer!” said his lordship, looking sharply at the Sunday clothes which Malcolm had donned for the visit.

“What was I to do, my lord?” returned Malcolm apologetically. “The only ither claes I hae, are verra fishy, an’ neither yersel’ nor my leddy cud bide them i’ the room aside ye.”

“Certainly not,” responded the marquis, as in a leisurely manner he devoured his omelette: “I was thinking of your future position as skipper of my boat.—What would you say to a kilt now?”

“Na, na, my lord,” rejoined Malcolm; “a kilt’s



no seafarin' claes. A kilt wadna du ava', my lord."

"You cannot surely object to the dress of your own people," said the marquis.

"The kilt's weel eneuch upon a hill-side," said Malcolm, "I dinna doobt; but faith! sea-farin', my lord, ye wad want the trews as weel."

"Well, go to the best tailor in the town, and order a naval suit—white ducks and a blue jacket—two suits you'll want."

"We s' gar ae shuit sair 's (*satisfy us*) to begin wi', my lord. I'll jist gang to Jamie Sangster, wha maks a' my claes—no 'at their mony!—an' get *him* to mizzur me. He'll mak them weel eneuch for me. Ye're aye sure o' the worth o' yer siller frae *him*."

"I tell you to go to the best tailor in the town, and order two suits."

"Na, na, my lord; there's no need. I canna affoord it forbye. We're no a' made o' siller like yer lordship."

"You booby! do you suppose I would tell you to order clothes I did not mean to pay for?"

Lady Florimel found her expectation of amusement not likely to be disappointed.

"Hoots, my lord!" returned Malcolm, "that wad

never du. I *mann* pey for my ain claes. I wad be in a constant terror o' blaudin' (*spoiling*) o' them gien I didna, an' that wad be eneuch to mak a body meeserable. It wad be a' the same, forbye, oot *an'* oot, as weirin' a leevry!"

"Well, well! please your pride, and be damned to you!" said the marquis.

"Yes, let him please his pride, and be damned to him!" assented Lady Florimel with perfect gravity.

Malcolm started and stared. Lady Florimel kept an absolute composure. The marquis burst into a loud laugh. Malcolm stood bewildered for a moment.

"I'm thinkin' I'm gaein' daft (*delirious*)!" he said at length, putting his hand to his head. "It's time I gaed. Guid mornin', my lord."

He turned and left the room, followed by a fresh peal from his lordship, mingling with which his ear plainly detected the silvery veins of Lady Florimel's equally merry laughter.

When he came to himself, and was able to reflect, he saw there must have been some joke involved: the behaviour of both indicated as much; and with this conclusion he heartened his dismay.

The next morning, Duncan called on Mrs. Partan, and begged her acceptance of his stock in trade, as,

having been his lordship's piper for some time, he was now at length about to occupy his proper quarters within the policies. Mrs. Findlay acquiesced, with an air better suited to the granting of slow leave to laboursome petition, than the accepting of such a generous gift ; but she made some amends by graciously expressing a hope that Duncan would not forget his old friends now that he was going amongst lords and ladies, to which Duncan returned as courteous answer as if he had been addressing Lady Florimel herself.

Before the end of the week, his few household goods were borne in a cart through the sea-gate dragonized by Bykes, to whom Malcolm dropped a humorous "Weel, Johnny!" as he passed, receiving a nondescript kind of grin in return. The rest of the forenoon was spent in getting the place in order, and in the afternoon, arrayed in his new garments, Malcolm reported himself at the House. Admitted to his lordship's presence, he had a question to ask and a request to prefer.

"Hae ye dune onything, my lord," he said, "about Mistress Catanach?"

"What do you mean?"

"Anent yon cat-prowl about the hoose, my lord."

“No. You have n’t discovered anything more—have you?”

“Na, my lord; I haena had a chance. But ye may be sure she had no guid design in ’t.”

“I don’t suspect her of any.”

“Weel, my lord, hae ye ony objection to lat me sleep up yonner?”

“None at all—only you’d better see what Mrs. Courthope has to say to it. Perhaps you won’t be so ready after you hear her story.”

“But I hae yer lordship’s leave to tak ony room I like?”

“Certainly. Go to Mrs. Courthope, and tell her I wish you to choose your own quarters.”

Having straightway delivered his lordship’s message, Mrs. Courthope, wondering a little thereat, proceeded to show him those portions of the house set apart for the servants. He followed her from floor to floor—last to the upper regions, and through all the confused rambling roofs of the old pile, now descending a sudden steep-yawning stair, now ascending another where none could have been supposed to exist—oppressed all the time with a sense of the multitudinous and intricate, such as he had never before experienced, and such as perhaps

only the works of man can produce, the intricacy and variety of those of nature being ever veiled in the grand simplicity which springs from primal unity of purpose.

I find no part of an ancient house so full of interest as the garret-region. It has all the mystery of the dungeon-cellars with a far more striking variety of form, and a bewildering curiosity of adaptation, the peculiarities of roof-shapes and the consequent complexities of their relations and junctures being so much greater than those of foundation-plans. Then the sense of lofty loneliness in the deeps of air, and at the same time of proximity to things aerial—doves and martins, vanes and gilded balls and lightning-conductors, the waves of the sea of wind, breaking on the chimneys for rocks, and the crashing roll of the thunder—is in harmony with the highest spiritual instincts; while the clouds and the stars look, if not nearer, yet more germane, and the moon gazes down on the lonely dweller in uplifted places, as if she had secrets with such. The cellars are the metaphysics, the garrets the poetry of the house.

Mrs. Courthope was more than kind, for she was greatly pleased at having Malcolm for an inmate. She led him from room to room, suggesting now and

then a choice, and listening amusedly to his remarks of liking or disliking, and his marvel at strangeness or extent. At last he found himself following her along the passage in which was the mysterious door, but she never stayed her step, or seemed to intend showing one of the many rooms opening upon it.

“Sic a bee’s-byke o’ rooms!” said Malcolm, making a halt. “Wha sleeps here?”

“Nobody has slept in one of these rooms for I dare not say how many years,” replied Mrs. Courthope, without stopping; and as she spoke, she passed the fearful door.

“I wad like to see intil this room,” said Malcolm.

“That door is never opened,” answered Mrs. Courthope, who had now reached the end of the passage, and turned, lingering as in act while she spoke to move on.

“And what for that?” asked Malcolm, continuing to stand before it.

“I would rather not answer you just here. Come along. This is not a part of the house where you would like to be, I am sure.”

“Hoo ken ye that, mem? An’ hoo can I say mysel’ afore ye hae shawn me what the room ’s

like? It may be the verra place to tak my fancy. Jist open the door, mem, gien ye please, an' lat's hae a keek intill 't."

"I daren't open it. It's never opened, I tell you. It's against the rules of the house. Come to my room, and I'll tell you the story about it."

"Weel, ye 'll lat me see intil the neist—winna ye? There's nae law agane openin' hit—is there?" said Malcolm, approaching the door next to the one in dispute.

"Certainly not; but I'm pretty sure, once you've heard the story I have to tell, you won't choose to sleep in this part of the house."

"Lat 's luik, ony gait."

So saying, Malcolm took upon himself to try the handle of the door. It was not locked: he peeped in, then entered. It was a small room, low-ceiled, with a deep dormer window in the high pediment of a roof, and a turret-recess on each side of the window. It seemed very light after the passage, and looked down upon the burn. It was comfortably furnished, and the curtains of its tent-bed were chequered in squares of blue and white.

"This is the verra place for me, mem," said Malcolm, re-issuing; "—that is," he added, "gien ye

dinna think it's ower gran' for the likes o' me 'at 's no been used to onything half sae guid."

"You're quite welcome to it," said Mrs. Courthope, all but confident he would not care to occupy it after hearing the tale of Lord Gernon.

She had not moved from the end of the passage while Malcolm was in the room—somewhat hurriedly she now led the way to her own. It seemed half a mile off to the wondering Malcolm, as he followed her down winding stairs, along endless passages, and round innumerable corners. Arrived at last, she made him sit down, and gave him a glass of home-made wine to drink, while she told him the story much as she had already told it to the marquis, adding a hope to the effect that, if ever the marquis should express a wish to pry into the secret of the chamber, Malcolm would not encourage him in a fancy the indulgence of which was certainly useless, and might be dangerous.

"*Me!*" exclaimed Malcolm with surprise. "—As gien he wad heed a word *I* said!"

"Very little sometimes will turn a man either in one direction or the other," said Mrs. Courthope.

"But surely, mem, ye dinna believe in sic fule auld warld stories as that! It's weel enuch for



a tale, but to think o' a body turnin' 'ae fit oot o' 's gait for 't, blecks (*nonplusses*) me."

"I do n't say I believe it," returned Mrs. Courthope, a little pettishly; "but there's no good in mere foolhardiness."

"Ye dinna surely think, mem, 'at God wad lat onything depen' upo' whether a man opent a door in 's ain hoose or no! It's agane a' rizzon!" persisted Malcolm.

"There might be reasons we could n't understand," she replied. "To do what we are warned against from any quarter, without good reason, must be foolhardy at best."

"Weel, mem, I maun hae the room neist the auld warlock's, ony gait, for in that I'm gauin' to sleep, an' in nae ither in a' this muckle hoose."

Mrs. Courthope rose, full of uneasiness, and walked up and down the room.

"I'm takin' upo' me naething ayont his lordship's ain word," urged Malcolm.

"If you're to go by the very word," rejoined Mrs. Courthope, stopping and looking him full in the face, "you might insist on sleeping in Lord Geron's chamber itself."

"Weel, an' sae I nicht," returned Malcolm.

The hinted possibility of having to change bad for so much worse, appeared to quench further objection.

"I must get it ready myself then," she said resignedly, "for the maids won't even go up that stair. And as to going into any of those rooms——!"

"'Deed no, mem! ye sanna du that," cried Malcolm. "Sayna a word to ane o' them. I s' wadger I'm as guid's the auld warlock himsel' at makin' a bed. Jist gie me the sheets an' the blankets, an' I'll du't as trim 's ony lass i' the hoose."

"But the bed will want airing," objected the housekeeper.

"By a' accoonts, that's the last thing it's likly to want—lyin' neist door to *yon* chaumer. But I hae sleepit mony 's the time er' noo upo' the tap o' a boat-load o' herrin', an' gien that never did me ony ill, it's no likly a guid bed 'll kill me gien it sud be a wee mochy (*rather full of moths*)."

Mrs. Courthope yielded and gave him all that was needful, and before night Malcolm had made his new quarters quite comfortable. He did not retire to them, however, until he had seen his grandfather laid down to sleep in his lonely cottage.

About noon the next day the old man made his

appearance in the kitchen. How he had found his way to it, neither he nor any one else could tell. There happened to be no one there when he entered, and the cook when she returned stood for a moment in the door, watching him as he felt flitting about with huge bony hands whose touch was yet light as the poise of a butterfly. Not knowing the old man, she fancied at first he was feeling after something in the shape of food, but presently his hands fell upon a brass candlestick. He clutched it, and commenced fingering it all over. Alas! it was clean, and with a look of disappointment he replaced it. Wondering yet more what his quest could be, she watched on. The next instant he had laid hold of a silver candlestick not yet passed through the hands of the scullery maid; and for a moment she fancied him a thief, for he had rejected the brass and now took the silver; but he went no farther with it than the fireplace, where he sat down on the end of the large fender, and, having spread his pocket-handerchief over his kilted knees, drew a similar rag from somewhere, and commenced cleaning it.

By this time one of the maids who knew him had joined the cook, and also stood watching him

with amusement. But when she saw the old knife drawn from his stocking, and about to be applied to the nozzle, to free it from adhering wax, it seemed more than time to break the silence.

“Eh! that’s a siller can’lestick, Maister Mac-Phail,” she cried, “an’ ye maunna tak a k-nife till ’t, or ye’ll scrat it a’ dreidfu’.”

An angry flush glowed in the withered cheeks of the piper, as, without the least start at the suddenness of her interference, he turned his face in the direction of the speaker.

“You take old Tuncan’s finkers for persons of no etchucation, mem! As if tey could n’t know ta silfer from ta prass! If tey wass so stupid, her nose would pe telling tem so. Efen old Tuncan’s knife ’ll pe knowing petter than to scratch ta silfer—or ta prass either; old Tuncan’s knife would pe scratching nothing petter than ta skin of a Cawmill.”

Now the candlestick had no business in the kitchen, and if it were scratched, the butler would be indignant; but the girl was a Campbell, and Duncan’s words so frightened her that she did not dare interfere. She soon saw, however, that the piper had not over-vaunted his skill: the skene left not a mark upon the metal; in a few minutes he

had melted away the wax he could not otherwise reach, and had rubbed the candlestick perfectly bright, leaving behind him no trace except an unpleasant odour of train-oil from the rag. From that hour he was cleaner of lamps and candlesticks, as well as blower of bagpipes, to the House of Lossie; and had everything provided necessary to the performance of his duties with comfort and success.

Before many weeks were over, he had proved the possession of such a talent for arrangement and general management, at least in everything connected with illumination, that the entire charge of the lighting of the house was left in his hands,—even to that of its stores of wax and tallow and oil; and great was the pleasure he derived, not only from the trust reposed in him, but from other more occult sources connected with the duties of his office.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE LIBRARY.*

MALCOLM'S first night was rather troubled,—not primarily from the fact that but a thin partition separated him from the wizard's chamber, but from the deadness of the silence around him; for he had been all his life accustomed to the near noise of the sea, and its absence had upon him the rousing effect of an unaccustomed sound. He kept hearing the dead silence—was constantly dropping as it were into its gulf; and it was no wonder that a succession of sleepless fits, strung together rather than divided by as many dozes little better than startled rousings, should at length have so shaken his mental frame as to lay it open to the assaults of nightly terrors, the position itself being sufficient to seduce his imagination, and carry it over to the interests of the enemy.

But Malcolm had early learned that a man's will must, like a true monarch, rule down every rebellious movement of its subjects, and he was far from yielding to such inroads as now assailed

him ; still it was long before he fell asleep, and then only to dream without quite losing consciousness of his peculiar surroundings. He seemed to know that he lay in his own bed, and yet to be somehow aware of the presence of a pale woman in a white garment, who sat on the side of the bed in the next room, still and silent, with her hands in her lap, and her eyes on the ground. He thought he had seen her before, and knew, notwithstanding her silence, that she was lamenting over a child she had lost. He knew also where her child was,—that it lay crying in a cave down by the sea-shore ; but he could neither rise to go to her, nor open his mouth to call. The vision kept coming and coming, like the same tune played over and over on a barrel organ, and when he woke seemed to fill all the time he had slept.

About ten o'clock he was summoned to the marquis's presence, and found him at breakfast with Lady Florimel.

"Where did you sleep last night?" asked the marquis.

"Neist door to the auld warlock," answered Malcolm.

Lady Florimel looked up with a glance of bright



interest: her father had just been telling her the story.

“You did!” said the marquis. “Then Mrs. Court-hope—did she tell you the legend about him?”

“Ay did she, my lord.”

“Well, how did you sleep?”

“Middlin’ only.”

“How was that?”

“I dinna ken, ’cep it was ’at I was fule eneuch to fin’ the place gey eerie like.”

“Aha!” said the marquis. “You’ve had enough of it! You won’t try it again!”

“What’s that ye say, my lord?” rejoined Malcolm. “Wad ye hae a man turn ’s back at the first fleg? Na, na, my lord; that wad never du!”

“Oh! then, you did have a fright?”

“Na, I canna say that aither. Naething waur came near me nor a dream ’at plaguit me—an’ it wasna sic an ill ane efter a’.”

“What was it?”

“I thocht there was a bonny leddy sittin’ o’ the bed i’ the neist room, in her nicht-goon like, an’ she was greitin’ sair in her heart, though she never loot a tear fa’ doon. She was greitin’ about a bairnie she had lost, an’ I kent weel whaur



the bairnie was—doon in a cave upo' the shore, I thought—an' was jist yirnin' to gang till her an' tell her, an' stop the greitin' o' her hert, but I cudna muv han' nor fit, naither cud I open my mou' to cry till her. An' I gaed dreamin' on at the same thing ower an' ower, a' the time I was asleep. But there was naething sae frichtsme aboot that, my lord."

"No, indeed," said his lordship.

"Only it garred me greit tu, my lord, 'cause I cudna win at her to help her."

His lordship laughed, but oddly, and changed the subject.

"There's no word of that boat yet," he said. "I must write again."

"May I show Malcolm the library, papa?" asked Lady Florimel.

"I *wad* fain see the buiks," adjected Malcolm.

"You don't know what a scholar he is, papa!"

"Little eneuch o' that!" said Malcolm.

"Oh yes! I do," said the marquis, answering his daughter. "But he must keep the skipper from my books and the scholar from my boat."

"Ye mean a scholar wha wad skip yer buiks, my lord! Haith! sic wad be a skipper wha wad ill

scull yer boat!" said Malcolm, with a laugh at the poor attempt.

"Bravo!" said the marquis, who certainly was not over critical. "Can you write a good hand?"

"No ill, my lord."

"So much the better! I see you'll be worth your wages."

"That depen's on the wages," returned Malcolm.

"And that reminds me you've said nothing about them yet."

"Naither has yer lordship."

"Well, what are they to be?"

"Whatever ye think proper, my lord. Only dinna gar me gang to Maister Crathie for them."

The marquis had sent away the man who was waiting when Malcolm entered, and during this conversation Malcolm had of his own accord been doing his best to supply his place. The meal ended, Lady Florimel desired him to wait a moment in the hall.

"He's so amusing, papa!" she said. "I want to see him stare at the books. He thinks the schoolmaster's hundred volumes a grand library! He's such a goose! It's the greatest fun in the world watching him."

“No such goose!” said the marquis; but he recognized himself in his child, and laughed.

Florimel ran off merrily, as bent on a joke, and joined Malcolm.

“Now, I’m going to show you the library,” she said.

“Thank ye, my leddy; that *will* be gran’!” replied Malcolm.

He followed her up two staircases, and through more than one long narrow passage: all the ducts of the house were long and narrow, causing him a sense of imprisonment—vanishing ever into freedom at the opening of some door into a great room. But never had he had a dream of such a room as that at which they now arrived. He started with a sort of marvelling dismay when she threw open the door of the library, and he beheld ten thousand volumes at a glance, all in solemn stillness. It was like a sepulchre of kings. But his astonishment took a strange form of expression, the thought in which was beyond the reach of his mistress.

“Eh, my leddy!” he cried, after staring for a while in breathless bewilderment, “it’s jist like a byke o’ frozen bees! Eh! gien they war a’ to come to life an’ stick their stangs o’ trowth intill a body, the

waukin' up wad be awfu'!—It jist gars my heid gang roon'!" he added, after a pause.

"It is a fine thing," said the girl, "to have such a library."

"'Deed is 't, my leddy! It's ane o' the preevileeges o' rank," said Malcolm. "It taks a faimily that hauds on throu' centeries in a hoose whaur things gether, to mak sic an unaccoontable getherin' o' buiks as that. It's a gran' sicht—worth livin' to see."

"Suppose you were to be a rich man some day," said Florimel, in the condescending tone she generally adopted when addressing him, "it would be one of the first things you would set about—wouldn't it—to get such a library together?"

"Na, my leddy; I wad hae mair wut. A leebrary canna be made a' at ance, ony mair nor a hoose, or a nation, or a muckle tree: *they* maun a' tak time to grow, an' sae maun a leebrary. I wadna even ken what buiks to gang an' speir for. I daursay, gien I war to try, I cudna at a moment's notice tell ye the names o' mair nor a twa score o' buiks at the ootside. Fowk maun mak acquaintance amo' buiks as they wad amo' leevin' fowk."

"But you could get somebody who knew more about them than yourself to buy for you."

"I wad as sune think o' gettin' somebody to ate my denner for me."

"No, that's not fair," said Florimel. "It would only be like getting somebody who knew more of cookery than yourself, to order your dinner for you."

"Ye're richt, my leddy; but still I wad as sune think o' the tane 's the tither. What wad come o' the like o' me, div ye think, broucht up upo' meal-brose, an' herrin', gien ye was to set me doon to sic a denner as my lord, yer father, wad ait ilka day, an' think naething o'? But gien some fowk hed the buyin' o' my buiks, I'm thinkin' the first thing I wad hae to du, wad be to fling the half o' them into the burn."

"What good would that do?"

"Clear awa' the rubbitch. Ye see, my leddy, it's no buiks, but what buiks. Eh! there maun be mony ane o' the richt sort here, though. I wonner gien Mr. Graham ever saw them. He wad surely hae made mention o' them i' my hearin'!"

"What would be the first thing you would do, then, Malcolm, if you happened to turn out a great man after all?" said Florimel, seating herself in a huge library chair, whence, having arranged her skirt, she looked up in the young fisherman's face.

"I doobt I wad hae to sit doon, an' turn ower the change a feow times afore I kent aither mysel' or what wad become me," he said.

"That's not answering my question," retorted Florimel.

"Weel, the second thing I wad do," said Malcolm, thoughtfully, and pausing a moment, "wad be to get Mr. Graham to gang wi' me to Ebberdeen, an' carry me throu' the classes there. Of coorse, I wadna try for prizes; that wadna be fair to them 'at cudna affoord a tutor at their lodgin's."

"But it's the *first* thing you would do that I want to know," persisted the girl.

"I tellt ye I wad sit doon an' think about it."

"I do n't count that *doing* anything."

"'Deed, my leddy! thinkin's the hardest wark I ken."

"Well, what is it you would think about first?" said Florimel—not to be diverted from her course.

"Ow, the third thing I wad du—"

"I want to know the first thing you would think about."

"I canna say yet what the third thing wad be. Fower year at the college wad gie me time to reflec upon a hantle o' things."

‘ I insist on knowing the first thing you would think about doing,’ cried Florimel, with mock imperiousness, but real tyranny.

‘ Weel, my leddy, gien ye wull hae ’t—but hoo great a man wad ye be makin’ o’ me?’

‘ Oh!—let me see;—yes—yes—the heir to an earldom.—That’s liberal enough—is it not?’

‘ That’s as muckle as say I wad come to be a yerl some day, sae be I didna dee upo’ the ro’d?’

‘ Yes—that’s what it means.’

‘ An’ a yerl’s neist door till a markis—isna he?’

‘ Yes—he’s in the next lower rank.’

‘ Lower?—Ay!—No that muckle, maybe?’

‘ No,’ said Lady Florimel consequentially; ‘ the difference is not so great as to prevent their meeting on a level of courtesy.’

‘ I dinna freely ken what that means; but gien ’t be yer leddyship’s wull to mak a yerl o’ me, I’m no to raise ony objections.’

He uttered it definitively, and stood silent.

‘ Well?’ said the girl.

‘ What’s yer wull, my leddy?’ returned Malcolm, as if roused from a reverie.

‘ Where’s your answer?’

‘ I said I wad be a yerl to please yer leddyship.

—I wad be a flunky for the same rizzon, gien 't was to wait upo' yersel', an' nae ither."

"I ask you," said Florimel, more imperiously than ever, "what is the first thing you would do, if you found yourself no longer a fisherman, but the son of an earl?"

"But it maun be that I *was* a fisherman—to the en' o' a' creation, my leddy."

"You refuse to answer my question?"

"By no means, my leddy, gien ye wull hae an answer."

"I *will* have an answer."

"Gien ye wull hae 't than——. But—"

"No *buts*, but an answer!"

"Weel—it's yer ain wyte, my leddy!—I wad jist gang doon upo' my k-nees, whaur I stude afore ye, and tell ye a heap o' things 'at maybe by that time ye wad ken weel eneuch a'ready."

"What would you tell me?"

"I wad tell ye 'at yer een war like the verra leme o' the levin (*brightness of the lightning*) itsel'; yer cheek like a white rose i' the licht frae a reid ane; yer hair jist the saft lattin' gang o' his han's whan the Maker cud du nae mair; yer mou' jist fashioned to drive fowk daft 'at daurna come nearer



nor luik at it; an' for yer shape, it was like nae-thing in natur' but itsel'.—Ye *wad* hae 't, my leddy!" he added apologetically—and well he might, for Lady Florimel's cheek had flushed and her eye had been darting fire long before he got to the end of his Celtic outpouring. Whether she was really angry or not, she had no difficulty in making Malcolm believe she was. She rose from her chair—though not until he had ended—swept half-way to the door, then turned upon him with a flash.

"How *dare* you?" she said, her breed well obeying the call of the game.

"I'm verra sorry, my leddy," faltered Malcolm, trying to steady himself against a strange trembling that had laid hold upon him, "—but ye maun alloo it was a' yet ain wyte."

"Do you dare to say *I* encouraged you to talk such stuff to me?"

"Ye did gar me, my leddy."

Florimel turned and undulated from the room, leaving the poor fellow like a statue in the middle of it, with the books all turning their backs upon him.

"Noo," he said to himself, "she's aff to tell her father, and there 'll be a bonny bane to pyke atween

him an' me! But haith! I'll jist tell him the trowth o' 't, an' syne he can mak a kirk an' a mill o' 't, gien he likes."

With this resolution he stood his ground, every moment expecting the wrathful father to make his appearance and at the least order him out of the house. But minute passed after minute, and no wrathful father came. He grew calmer by degrees, and at length began to peep at the titles of the books.

When the great bell rang for lunch, he was embalmed rather than buried in one of Milton's prose volumes—standing before the shelf on which he had found it—the very incarnation of study.

My reader may well judge that Malcolm could not have been very far gone in love, seeing he was thus able to read. I remark in return that it was not merely the distance between him and Lady Florimel that had hitherto preserved his being from absorption and his will from annihilation, but also the strength of his common sense, and the force of his individuality.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *MILTON, AND THE BAY MARE.*

FOR some days Malcolm saw nothing more of Lady Florimel ; but with his grandfather's new dwelling to see to, with the carpenter's shop and the blacksmith's forge open to him, and an eye to detect whatever wanted setting right, the hours did not hang heavy on his hands. At length, whether it was that she thought she had punished him sufficiently for an offence for which she was herself only to blame, or that she had indeed never been offended at all and had only been keeping up her one-sided game, she began again to indulge the interest she could not help feeling in him, an interest heightened by the mystery which hung over his birth, and by the fact that she knew that concerning him of which he was himself ignorant. At the same time, as I have already said, she had no little need of an escape from the *ennui* which, now that the novelty of a country life had worn off, did more than occasionally threaten her. She began again to seek his company under the guise of his help, half

requesting, half commanding his services; and Malcolm found himself admitted afresh to the heaven of her favour. Young as he was, he read himself a lesson suitable to the occasion.

One afternoon the marquis sent for him to the library, but when he reached it, his master was not yet there. He took down the volume of Milton in which he had been reading before, and was soon absorbed in it again.

“Faith! it’s a big shame,” he cried at length almost unconsciously, and closed the book with a slam.

“What is a big shame?” said the voice of the marquis close behind him.

Malcolm started, and almost dropped the volume.

“I beg yer lordship’s pardon,” he said; “I didna hear ye come in.”

“What is the book you were reading?” asked the marquis.

“I was jist readin’ a bit o’ Milton’s Eikonoklastes,” answered Malcolm, “—a buik I hae hard tell o’, but never saw wi’ my ain een afore.”

“And what’s your quarrel with it?” asked his lordship.

“I canna mak oot what sud set a great man

like Milton sae sair agane a puir cratur like Cherles."

"Read the history, and you'll see."

"Ow! I ken something about the politics o' the time, an' I'm no sayin' they war that wrang to tak the heid frae him, but what for sud Milton hate the man efter the king was deid?"

"Because he did n't think the king dead enough, I suppose."

"I see!—an' they war settin' him up for a sant. Still he had a richt to fair play.—Jist hearken, my lord."

So saying, Malcolm reopened the volume, and read the well-known passage, in the first chapter, in which Milton censures the king as guilty of utter irreverence, because of his adoption of the prayer of Pamela in the Arcadia.

"Noo, my lord," he said, half-closing the book, "what wad ye expec' to come upo', efter sic a denunciation as that, but some awfu' haithenish thing? Weel, jist hearken again, for here's the verra prayer itsel' in a futnote."

His lordship had thrown himself into a chair, had crossed one leg over the other, and was now stroking its knee.

“Noo, my lord,” said Malcolm again, as he concluded, “what think ye o’ the jeedgment passed?”

“Really I have no opinion to give about it,” answered the marquis. “I’m no theologian. I see no harm in the prayer.”

“Hairm in ’t, my lord! It’s perfetly gran’! It’s sic a prayer as cudna weel be aiqualt. It vexes me to the verra hert o’ my sowl that a mighty man like Milton—an whase bein’ was a crood o’ hermonies—sud ca’ that the prayer o’ a haithen wuman till a haithen God. ‘O all-seein’ Licht, an’ eternal Life o’ a’ things!’—Ca’s he that a haithen God?—or her ’at prayed sic a prayer a haithen wuman?”

“Well, well,” said the marquis, “I do n’t want it all over again. I see nothing to find fault with, myself, but I do n’t take much interest in that sort of thing.”

“There’s a wee bitty o’ Laitin, here i’ the note, ’at I canna freely mak oot,” said Malcolm, approaching Lord Lossie with his finger on the passage, never doubting that the owner of such a library must be able to read Latin perfectly: Mr. Graham would have put him right at once, and *his* books would have been lost in one of the window-corners

of this huge place. But his lordship waved him back.

“I can’t be your tutor,” he said, not unkindly. “My Latin is far too rusty for use.”

The fact was that his lordship had never got beyond Maturin Cordier’s Colloquies.

“Besides,” he went on, “I want you to do something for me.”

Malcolm instantly replaced the book on its shelf, and approached his master, saying—

“Wull yer lordship lat me read whiles, i’ this gran’ place? I mean whan I’m no wantit ither gaits, an’ there’s naebody here.”

“To be sure,” answered the marquis; “—only the scholar mustn’t come with the skipper’s hands.”

“I s’ tak guid care o’ that, my lord. I wad as sune think o’ han’lin’ a book wi’ wark-like han’s as I wad o’ branderin’ a mackerel ohn cleaned it oot.”

“And when we have visitors, you’ll be careful not to get in their way.”

“I wull that, my lord.”

“And now,” said his lordship rising, “I want you to take a letter to Mrs. Stewart of Kirkbyres. —Can you ride?”

“I can ride the bare back weel enuch for a

fisher-loon," said Malcolm; "but I never was upon a saiddle i' my life."

"The sooner you get used to one the better. Go and tell Stoat to saddle the bay mare. Wait in the yard: I will bring the letter out to you myself."

"Verra weel, my lord!" said Malcolm. He knew, from sundry remarks he had heard about the stables, that the mare in question was a ticklish one to ride, but would rather have his neck broken than object.

Hardly was she ready, when the marquis appeared, accompanied by Lady Florimel—both expecting to enjoy a laugh at Malcolm's expense. But when the mare was brought out, and he was going to mount her where she stood, something seemed to wake in the marquis's heart, or conscience, or wherever the pigmy Duty slept that occupied the all-but sinecure of his moral economy: he looked at Malcolm for a moment, then at the ears of the mare hugging her neck, and last at the stones of the paved yard.

"Lead her on to the turf, Stoat," he said.

The groom obeyed, all followed, and Malcolm mounted. The same instant he lay on his back on the grass, amidst a general laugh, loud on the part of marquis and lady, and subdued on that of the servants. But the next he was on his feet,



and, the groom still holding the mare, in the saddle again: a little anger is a fine spur for the side, of even an honest intent. This time he sat for half a minute, and then found himself once more on the grass. It was but once more: his mother earth had claimed him again only to complete his strength. A third time he mounted—and sat. As soon as she perceived it would be hard work to unseat him, the mare was quiet.

“Bravo!” cried the marquis, giving him the letter.

“Will there be an answer, my lord?”

“Wait and see.”

“I s’ gar you pey for ’t, gien we come upon a broon rig atween this an’ Kirkbyres,” said Malcolm, addressing the mare, and rode away.

Both the marquis and Lady Florimel, whose laughter had altogether ceased in the interest of watching the struggle, stood looking after him with a pleased expression, which, as he vanished up the glen, changed to a mutual glance and smile.

“He’s got good blood in him, however he came by it,” said the marquis. “The country is more indebted to its nobility than is generally understood.”

Otherwise indebted at least than Lady Florimel could gather from her father’s remark!

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *KIRKBYRES.*

MALCOLM felt considerably refreshed after his tussle with the mare and his victory over her, and much enjoyed his ride of ten miles. It was a cool autumn afternoon. A few of the fields were being reaped, one or two were crowded with stooks, while many crops of oats yet waved and rustled in various stages of vanishing green. On all sides kine were lowing; over head rooks were cawing; the sun was nearing the west, and in the hollows a thin mist came steaming up. Malcolm had never in his life been so far from the coast before: his road led southwards into the heart of the country.

The father of the late proprietor of Kirkbyres had married the heiress of Gersfell, an estate which *marched* with his own, and was double its size, whence the lairdship was sometimes spoken of by the one name, sometimes by the other. The combined properties thus inherited by the late Mr. Stewart were of sufficient extent to justify him, although a plain man, in becoming a suitor for the

hand of the beautiful daughter of a needy baronet in the neighbourhood—with the already somewhat tarnished condition of whose reputation, having come into little contact with the world in which she moved, he was unacquainted. Quite unexpectedly she also, some years after their marriage, brought him a property of considerable extent, a fact which had doubtless had its share in the birth and nourishment of her consuming desire to get the estates into her own management.

Towards the end of his journey, Malcolm came upon a bare moorland waste, on the long ascent of a low hill,—very desolate, with not a tree or house within sight for two miles. A ditch, half full of dark water, bordered each side of the road, which went straight as a rod through a black peat moss lying cheerless and dreary on all sides—hardly less so where the sun gleamed from the surface of some stagnant pool filling a hole whence peats had been dug, or where a patch of cotton-grass waved white and lonely in the midst of the waste expanse. At length, when he reached the top of the ridge, he saw the house of Kirkbyres below him; and, with a small modern lodge near by, a wooden gate showed the entrance to its grounds. Between the

gate and the house, he passed through a young plantation of larches and other firs for a quarter of a mile, and so came to an old wall with an iron gate in the middle of it, within which the old house, a gaunt meagre building—a bare house in fact, relieved only by four small turrets or bartizans, one at each corner—lifted its gray walls, pointed gables, and steep roof, high into the pale blue air. He rode round the outer wall, seeking a back entrance, and arrived at a farm yard, where a boy took his horse. Finding the kitchen door open, he entered, and having delivered his letter to a servant girl, sat down to wait the possible answer.

In a few minutes she returned and requested him to follow her. This was more than he had calculated upon, but he obeyed at once. The girl led him along a dark passage, and up a winding stone-stair, much worn, to a room richly furnished, and older-fashioned, he thought, than any room he had yet seen in Lossie House.

On a settee, with her back to a window, sat Mrs. Stewart, a lady tall and slender, with well-poised, easy carriage, and a motion that might have suggested the lithe grace of a leopard. She greeted him with a bend of the head and a smile, which,

even in the twilight and her own shadow, showed a gleam of ivory, and spoke to him in a hard sweet voice, wherein an ear more experienced than Malcolm's might have detected an accustomed intent to please. Although he knew nothing of the so-called world, and hence could recognize neither the Parisian air of her dress nor the indications of familiarity with fashionable life prominent enough in her bearing, he yet could not fail to be at least aware of the contrast between her appearance and her surroundings. Yet less could the far stronger contrast escape him, between the picture in his own mind of the mother of the mad laird, and the woman before him: he could not by any effort cause the two to coalesce.

"You have had a long ride, Mr. MacPhail," she said; "you must be tired."

"What wad tire me, mem?" returned Malcolm. "It's a fine caller evenin', an' I hed ane o' the marquis's best mears to carry me."

"You'll take a glass of wine, anyhow," said Mrs. Stewart. "Will you oblige me by ringing the bell?"

"No, I thank ye, mem. The mear wad be better o' a mou'fu' o' meal an' watter, but I want naething mysel'."

A shadow passed over the lady's face. She rose and rang the bell, then sat in silence until it was answered.

"Bring the wine and cake," she said, then turned to Malcolm. "Your master speaks very kindly of you. He seems to trust you thoroughly."

"I'm verra glaid to hear't, mem; but he has never had muckle cause to trust or distrust me yet."

"He seems even to think that *I* might place equal confidence in you."

"I dinna ken. I wadna hae ye lippen to me ower muckle," said Malcolm.

"You do not mean to contradict the good character your master gives you?" said the lady, with a smile and a look right into his eyes.

"I wadna hae ye lippen till me afore ye had my word," said Malcolm.

"I may use my own judgment about that," she replied, with another winning smile. "But oblige me by taking a glass of wine."

She rose and approached the decanters.

"'Deed no, mem! I'm no used till 't, an' it micht jumple *my* jeedgement," said Malcolm, who had placed himself on the defensive from the first, jealous of his own conduct as being the friend of the laird.

At his second refusal the cloud again crossed the lady's brow, but her smile did not vanish. Pressing her hospitality no more, she resumed her seat.

"My lord tells me," she said, folding a pair of lovely hands on her lap, "that you see my poor unhappy boy sometimes."

"No sae dooms (*absolutely*) unhappy, mem!" said Malcolm; but she went on without heeding the remark.

"And that you rescued him not long ago from the hands of ruffians."

Malcolm made no reply.

"Everybody knows," she continued, after a slight pause, "what an unhappy mother I am. It is many years since I lost the loveliest infant ever seen, while my poor Stephen was left to be the mockery of every urchin in the street!"

She sighed deeply, and one of the fair hands took a handkerchief from a work-table near.

"No in Portlossie, mem," said Malcolm. "There's verra feow o' them so hard-hertit or so ill-mainnert. They're used to seein' him at the schuil, whaur he shaws himsel' whiles; an' he 's a great favourite wi' them, for he's ane o' the best craturs livin'."

"A poor, witless, unmanageable being! He's

a dreadful grief to me," said the widowed mother, with a deep sigh.

"A bairn could manage him," said Malcolm in strong contradiction.

"Oh, if I could but convince him of my love! but he won't give me a chance. He has an unaccountable dread of me, which makes him as well as me wretched. It is a delusion which no argument can overcome, and seems indeed an essential part of his sad affliction. The more care and kindness he needs, the less will he accept at my hands. I long to devote my life to him, and he will not allow me. I should be but too happy to nurse him day and night. Ah, Mr. MacPhail, you little know a mother's heart! Even if my beautiful boy had not been taken from me, Stephen would still have been my idol, idiot as he is—and will be as long as he lives. And—"

"He's nae idiot, mem," interposed Malcolm.

"And just imagine," she went on, "what a misery it must be to a widowed mother, poor companion as he would be at the best, to think of her boy roaming the country like a beggar! sleeping she doesn't know where! eating wretched food! and—"

"Guid parritch an' milk, an' brose an' butter," said



Malcolm parenthetically ; “—whiles herrin’ an’ yallow haddies.”

“It’s enough to break a mother’s heart ! If I could but persuade him to come home for a week, so as to have a chance with him ! But it’s no use trying : ill-disposed people have made mischief between us, telling wicked lies, and terrifying the poor fellow almost to death. It is quite impossible except I get some one to help me—and there are so few who have any influence with him !”

Malcolm thought she must surely have had chances enough before he ran away from her ; but he could not help feeling softened towards her.

“Supposin’ I was to get ye speech o’ ’im, mem ?” he said.

“That would not be of the slightest use. He is so prejudiced against me, he would only shriek, and go into one of those horrible fits.”

“I dinna see what’s to be dune than,” said Malcolm.

“I must have him brought here—there is no other way.”

“An’ whaur wad be the guid o’ that, mem ? By yer ain shawin’, he wad rin oot o’ ’s verra body to win awa’ frae ye.”

“I did not mean by force,” returned Mrs. Stewart. “Some one he has confidence in must come with him. Nothing else will give me a chance. He would trust you now; your presence would keep him from being terrified—at his own mother, alas! through you he would learn to trust me; and if a course of absolute indulgence did not bring him to live like other people—that of course is impossible—it might at least induce him to live at home, and cease to be a by-word to the neighbourhood.”

Her tone was so refined, and her voice so pleading; her sorrow was so gentle; and she looked, in the dimness, to Malcolm’s imagination at least, so young and handsome, that the strong castle of his prejudices was swaying as if built on reeds; and had it not been that he was already the partizan of her son, and therefore in honour bound to give *him* the benefit of every doubt, he would certainly have been gained over to work her will. He *knew* absolutely nothing against her—not even that she was the person he had seen in Mrs. Catanach’s company in the garret of Lossie House. But he steeled himself to distrust her, and held his peace.

“It is clear,” she resumed after a pause, “that the intervention of some friend of both is the only thing

that can be of the smallest use. I know you are a friend of his—a true one, and I do not see why you should not be a friend of mine as well.—Will you be my friend too?”

She rose as she said the words, and approaching him, bent on him out of the shadow the full strength of eyes whose light had not yet begun to pale before the dawn we call death, and held out a white hand glimmering in the dusk: she knew only too well the power of a still fine woman of any age over a youth of twenty.

Malcolm, knowing nothing about it, yet felt hers, and was on his guard. He rose also, but did not take her hand.

“I have had only too much reason,” she added, “to distrust some who, unlike you, professed themselves eager to serve me; but I know neither Lord Lossie nor you will play me false.”

She took his great rough hand between her two soft palms, and for one moment Malcolm was tempted—not to betray his friend, but to simulate a yielding sympathy, in order to come at the heart of her intent, and, should it prove false, to foil it the more easily. But the honest nature of him shrunk from deception, even where the object of

it was good : he was not at liberty to use falsehood for the discomfiture of the false even ; a pretended friendship was of the vilest of despicable things, and the more holy the end, the less fit to be used for the compassing of it—least of all in the cause of a true friendship.

“I canna help ye, mem,” he said ; “I daurna. I hae sic a regaird for yer son 'at afore I wad du onything to hairm him, I wad hae my twa han's chappit frae the shackle-bane.”

“Surely, my dear Mr. MacPhail,” returned the lady, in her most persuasive tones, and with her sweetest smile, “you cannot call it harming a poor idiot to restore him to the care of his own mother !”

“That's as it turnt oot,” rejoined Malcolm. “But I'm sure o' ae thing, mem, an' that is, 'at he's no sae muckle o' an eediot as some fowk wad hae him.”

Mrs. Stewart's face fell. She turned from him, and going back to her seat, hid her face in her handkerchief.

“I'm afraid,” she said sadly, after a moment, “I must give up my last hope : you are not disposed to be friendly to me, Mr. MacPhail ; you too have been believing hard things of me.”

“That's true ; but no frae hearsay alane,” returned

Malcolm. "The luik o' the puir fallow whan he but hears the chance word *mithier*, 's a sicht no to be forgotten. He grips his lugs atween 's twa han's, an' rins like a colley wi' a pan at 's tail. That couldna come o' naething."

Mrs. Stewart hid her face on the cushioned arm of the settee, and sobbed. A moment after, she sat erect again, but languid and red-eyed, saying, as if with sudden resolve:

"I will tell you all I know about it, and then you can judge for yourself. When he was a very small child, I took him for advice to the best physicians in London and Paris: all advised a certain operation which had to be performed for consecutive months, at intervals of a few days. Though painful it was simple, yet of such a nature that no one was so fit to attend to it as his mother. Alas! instead of doing him any good, it has done me the worst injury in the world: my child hates me!"

Again she hid her face on the settee.

The explanation was plausible enough, and the grief of the mother surely apparent! Malcolm could not but be touched.

"It's no 'at I'm no willin' to be your freen', mem ;

but I'm yer son's freen' a'ready, an' gien he war to hear onything 'at gart him mislippen till me, it wad gang to my hert."

"Then you can judge what I feel!" said the lady.

"Gien it wad hale your hert to hurt mine, I wad think aboot it, mem ; but gien it hurtit a' three o' 's, and did guid to nane, it wad be a misfit a'thegither. I'll du naething till I'm doonricht sure it 's the pairt o' a freen'."

"That's just what makes you the only fit person to help me that I know. If I were to employ people in the affair, they might be rough with the poor fellow."

"Like eneuch, mem," assented Malcolm, while the words put him afresh on his guard.

"But I might be driven to it," she added.

Malcolm responded with an unuttered vow.

"It might become necessary to use force—whereas you could lead him with a word."

"Na ; I'm naither sic witch nor sic traitor."

"Where would be the treachery when you knew it would be for his good ?"

"That's jist what I dinna ken, mem," retorted Malcolm. "Luik ye here, mem," he continued,

rousing himself to venture an appeal to the mother's heart; "—here's a man it has pleased God to mak no freely like ither fowk. His min', though cawp-able o' a hantle mair nor a body wad think 'at didna ken him sae weel as I du, is certainly weyk—though maybe the weykness lies mair i' the tongue than i' the brain o' 'im efter a'—an' he's been sair frichtit wi' some guidship or ither; the upshot o't a' bein', 'at he's unco timoursome, and ready to bursten himsel' rinnin' whan there's nane pursuin'. But he's the gentlest o' cratur—a doonricht gentleman, mem, gien ever there was ane—an' that kin'ly wi' a' cratur, baith man an' beast! A verra bairn cud guide him—ony gait but ane."

"Anywhere but to his mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Stewart, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed as she spoke. "—There is a child he is very fond of, I am told," she added, recovering herself.

"He likes a' bairns," returned Malcolm, "an' they're maistly a' freen'ly wi' him. But there's but jist ae thing 'at maks life endurable till 'im. He suffers a hantle (*a great deal*) wi' that puir back o' his, an' wi' his breath tu whan he's frichtit, for his hert gangs loupin like a sawmon in a bag-net.

An' he suffers a hantle, forbye, in his puir feeble min', tryin' to unnerstan' the guid things 'at fowk tells him, an' jaloosin' it's his ain wyte 'at he disna unnerstan' them better; an' whiles he thinks himsel' the child o' sin and wrath, an' that Sawtan has some speecial propriety in him, as the carritchis says—"

"But," interrupted the lady hurriedly, "you were going to tell me the one comfort he has."

"It's his leeberty, mem—jist his leeberty;—to gang whaur he lists like the win'; to turn his face whaur he wull i' the mornin', an' back again at nicht gien he likes; to wan'er——"

"Back *where?*" interrupted the mother, a little too eagerly.

"Whaur he likes, mem—I cudna say whaur wi' ony certainty. But aih! he likes to hear the sea moanin', an' watch the stars sheenin'!—There's a sicht o' oondevelopit releegion in him, as Maister Graham says; an' I div *not* believe 'at the Lord 'll see him wranged mair nor 's for 's guid. But it's my belief, gien ye took the leeberty frae the puir cratur, ye wad kill him."

"Then you won't help me!" she cried despairingly. "They tell me you are an orphan yourself—and yet



you will not take pity on a childless mother!—worse than childless, for I had the loveliest boy once—he would be about your age now, and I have never had any comfort in life since I lost him. Give me my son, and I will bless you—love you.”

As she spoke, she rose, and approaching him gently, laid a hand on his shoulder. Malcolm trembled, but stood his mental ground.

“’ Deed, mem, I can an’ wull promise ye naething!” he said. “Are ye to play a man fause ’cause he’s less able to tak care o’ himsel’ than ither fowk? Gien I war sure ’at ye cud mak it up, an’ ’at he wad be happy wi’ ye efterhin, it micht be anither thing; but excep’ ye garred him, ye cudna get him to bide lang eneuch for ye to try—an’ syne (*even then*) he wad dee afore ye hed convenced him. I doobt, mem, ye hae lost yer chance wi’ him, and maun du yer best to be content withoot him.—I’ll promise ye this muckle, gien ye like—I s’ tell him what ye hae said upo’ the subjec’.”

“Much good that will be!” replied the lady, with ill-concealed scorn.

“Ye think he wadna unnerstan’ t; but he unnerstan’s wonnerfu’.”

“And you would come again, and tell me what

he said?" she murmured, with the eager persuasive-ness of reviving hope.

"Maybe ay, maybe no—I winna promise.—Hae ye ony answer to sen' back to my lord's letter, mem?"

"No; I cannot write; I cannot even think. You have made me so miserable!"

Malcolm lingered.

"Go, go," said the lady dejectedly. "Tell your master I am not well. I will write to-morrow. If you hear anything of my poor boy, do take pity upon me and come and tell me."

The stiffer partizan Malcolm appeared, the more desirable did it seem in Mrs. Stewart's eyes to gain him over to her side. Leaving his probable active hostility out of the question, she saw plainly enough that, if he were called on to give testimony as to the laird's capacity, his witness would pull strongly against her plans; while, if the interests of such a youth were wrapped up in them, that fact in itself would prejudice most people in favour of them.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *THE BLOW.*

“WELL, Malcolm,” said his lordship, when the youth reported himself, “how’s Mrs. Stewart?”

“No ower weel pleased, my lord,” answered Malcolm.

“What!—you haven’t been refusing to——?”

“’Deed hev I, my lord!”

“Tut! tut!—Have you brought me any message from her?”

He spoke rather angrily.

“Nane but that she wasna weel, an’ wad write the morn.”

The marquis thought for a few moments.

“If I make a personal matter of it, MacPhail—— I mean—you won’t refuse me if I ask a personal favour of you?”

“I maun ken what it is afore I say anything, my lord.”

“You may trust me not to require anything you couldn’t undertake.”

“There micht be twa opingons, my lord.”

“You young boor! What is the world coming to? By Jove!”

“As far 's I can gang wi' a clean conscience, I'll gang,—no ae step ayont,” said Malcolm.

“You mean to say your judgment is a safer guide than mine?”

“No, my lord; I might weel follow yer lordship's jeedgment, but gien there be a conscience i' the affair, it's my ain conscience I'm bun' to follow, an' nō yer lordship's, or ony ither man's. Suppose the thing 'at seemed richt to yer lordship, seemed wrang to me, what wad ye hae me du than?”

“Do as I told you, and lay the blame on me.”

“Nā, my lord, that winna haud: I bude to du what I thought richt, an' lay the blame upo' nobody, whatever cam o' 't.”

“You young hypocrite! Why did n't you tell me you meant to set up for a saint before I took you into my service?”

“'Cause I had nae sic intention, my lord. Surely a body might ken himsel' nae sant, an' yet like to haud his han's clean!”

“What did Mrs. Stewart tell you she wanted of you?” asked the marquis almost fiercely, after a moment's silence.

"She wantit me to get the puir laird to gang back till her; but I sair misdoobt, for a' her fine words, it's a closed door, gien it bena a lid, she wad hae upon him; an' I wad suner be hangt nor hae a thoom i' that haggis."

"Why should you doubt what a lady tells you?"

"I wadna be ower ready, but I hae hard things, ye see, an' bude to be upo' my gaird."

"Well, I suppose, as you are a personal friend of the idiot——"

His lordship had thought to sting him, and paused for a moment; but Malcolm's manner revealed nothing except waiting watchfulness.

"—I must employ some one else to get a hold of the fellow for her," he concluded.

"Ye winna du that, my lord," cried Malcolm in a tone of entreaty; but his master chose to misunderstand him.

"Who's to prevent me, I should like to know!" he said.

Malcolm accepted the misinterpretation involved, and answered—but calmly:

"Me, my lord. *I* wull. At ony rate, I s' du my best."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Lord Lossie, "you

presume sufficiently on my good nature, young man !”

“Hear me ae moment, my lord,” returned Malcolm. “I’ve been turnin’ ’t ower i’ my min’, an’ I see, plain as the daylight, that I’m bun’, bein’ yer lordship’s servan’, an’ trustit by yer lordship, to say that to yersel’ the whilk I was nowise bun’ to say to Mistress Stewart. Sae, at the risk o’ angerin’ ye, I maun tell yer lordship, wi’ a’ respect, ’at gien *I* can help it, there sall no han’, gentle or semple, be laid upo’ the laird against his ain wull.”

The marquis was getting tired of the contest. He was angry too, and none the less that he felt Malcolm was in the right.

“Go to the devil, you booby!” he said—even more in impatience than in wrath.

“I’m thinkin’ I needna budge,” retorted Malcolm, angry also.

“What do you mean by that insolence?”

“I mean, my lord, that to gang will be to gang *frae* him. He canna be far frae yer lordship’s lug this meenute.”

All the marquis’s gathered annoyance broke out at last in rage. He started from his chair, made three strides to Malcolm, and struck him in the

face. Malcolm staggered back till he was brought up by the door.

“Hoot, my lord!” he exclaimed, as he sought his blue cotton handkerchief, “ye sudna hae dune that: ye’ll blaud the carpet!”

“You precious idiot!” cried his lordship, already repenting the deed; “why did n’t you defend yourself?”

“The quarrel was my ain, an’ I cud du as I likit, my lord.”

“And why should you like to take a blow? Not to lift a hand, even to defend yourself!” said the marquis, vexed both with Malcolm and with himself.

“Because I saw I was i’ the wrang, my lord. The quarrel was o’ my ain makin’: I hed no richt to lowse my temper an’ be impident. Sae I didna daur defen’ mysel’. An’ I beg yer lordship’s pardon. But dinna ye du me the wrang to imaigine, my lord, ’cause I took a flewet (*blow*) in guid pairt whan I kent mysel’ i’ the wrang, ’at that’s hoo I wad cairry mysel’ gien ’twas for the puir laird. Faith! I s’ gar *ony* man ken a differ there!”

“Go along with you—and don’t show yourself till you’re fit to be seen. I hope it ’ll be a lesson to you.”

“It wull, my lord,” said Malcolm. “But,” he added, “there was nae occasion to gie me sic a dirdum: a word wad hae pitten me mair i’ the wrang.”

So saying, he left the room, with his handkerchief to his face.

The marquis was really sorry for the blow, chiefly because Malcolm, without a shadow of pusillanimity, had taken it so quietly. Malcolm would, however, have had very much more the worse of it had he defended himself, for his master had been a bruiser in his youth, and neither his left hand nor his right arm had yet forgot their cunning so far as to leave him less than a heavy overmatch for one unskilled, whatever his strength or agility.

For some time after he was gone, the marquis paced up and down the room, feeling strangely and unaccountably uncomfortable.

“The great lout!” he kept saying to himself; “why did he let me strike him?”

Malcolm went to his grandfather’s cottage. In passing the window, he peeped in. The old man was sitting with his bagpipes on his knees, looking troubled. When he entered, he held out his arms to him.



“Tere’ll pe something cone wrong with you, Malcolm, my son!” he cried. “You’ll pe hafing a hurt! She knows it. She has it within her, though she couldn’t chust see it. Where is it?”

As he spoke he proceeded to feel his head and face.

“God pless her sowl! you are ploding, Malcolm!” he cried the same moment.

“It’s naething to greit aboot, daddy. It’s hardly mair nor the flype o’ a sawmon’s tail.”

“Put who ’ll pe tone it?” asked Duncan angrily.

“Ow, the maister gae me a bit flewet!” answered Malcolm with indifference.

“Where is he?” cried the piper, rising in wrath. “Take her to him, Malcolm. She will stap him. She will pe killing him. She will trive her turk into his wicked pody.”

“Na, na, daddy,” said Malcolm; “we hae hed eneuch o’ durks a’ready!”

“That you haf tone it yourself, then, Malcolm? My prave poy!”

“No, daddy; I took my licks like a man, for I deserved them.”

“Deserfed to pe peaten, Malcolm?—to pe peaten like a tog? Ton’t tell her that! Ton’t preak her heart, my poy.”

"It wasna that muckle, daddy. I only telled him auld Horny was at 's lug."

"And she 'll make no toubt it was true," cried Duncan, emerging sudden from his despondency.

"Ay, sae he was, only I had no richt to say 't."

"Put you striked him pack, Malcolm? Ton't say you didn't gif him pack his plow. Ton't tell it to her, Malcolm!"

"Hoo cud I hit my maister, an' mysel' i' the wrang, daddy?"

"Then she 'll must to it herself," said Duncan quietly, and, with the lips compressed of calm decision, turned towards the door, to get his dirk from the next room.

"Bide ye still, daddy," said Malcolm, laying hold of his arm, "an' sit ye doon till ye hear a' about it first."

Duncan yielded, for the sake of better instruction in the circumstances; over the whole of which Malcolm now went. But before he came to a close, he had skilfully introduced and enlarged upon the sorrows and sufferings and dangers of the laird, so as to lead the old man away from the quarrel, dwelling especially on the necessity of protecting Mr. Stewart from the machinations of his mother.

Duncan listened to all he said with marked sympathy.

“An’ gien the markis daur to cross me in ’t,” said Malcolm at last, as he ended, “lat him leuk till himsel’, for it’s no at a buffet or twa I wad stick, gien the puir laird was intill ’t.”

This assurance, indicative of a full courageous intent on the part of his grandson, for whose manliness he was jealous, greatly served to quiet Duncan; and he consented at last to postpone all quittance, in the hope of Malcolm’s having the opportunity of a righteous quarrel for proving himself no coward. His wrath gradually died away until at last he begged his boy to take his pipes, that he might give him a lesson. Malcolm made the attempt, but found it impossible to fill the bag with his swollen and cut lips, and had to beg his grandfather to play to him instead. He gladly consented, and played until bed-time; when, having tucked him up, Malcolm went quietly to his own room, avoiding supper and the eyes of Mrs. Court-hope together. He fell asleep in a moment, and spent a night of perfect oblivion, dreamless of wizard lord or witch lady.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE CUTTER.*

SOME days passed during which Malcolm contrived that no one should see him: he stole down to his grandfather's early in the morning, and returned to his own room at night. Duncan told the people about that he was not very well, but would be all right in a day or two. It was a time of jubilation to the bard, and he cheered his grandson's retirement with music, and with wild stories of highland lochs and moors, chanted or told. Malcolm's face was now much better, though the signs of the blow were still plain enough upon it, when a messenger came one afternoon to summon him to the marquis's presence.

"Where have you been sulking all this time?" was his master's greeting.

"I havena been sulkin', my lord," answered Malcolm. "Yer lordship tauld me to haud oot o' the gait till I was fit to be seen, an' no a sowl has set an ee upo' me till this verra moment 'at yer lordship has me in yer ain."

“Where have you been then?”

“I’ my ain room at nicht, and doon at my gran’father’s as lang’s fowk was aboot—wi’ a bit dauner (*stroll*) up the burn i’ the mirk.”

“You couldn’t encounter the shame of being seen with such a face—eh?”

“It nicht ha’ been thought a disgrace to the tane or the tither o’ ’s, my lord—maybe to baith.”

“If you don’t learn to curb that tongue of yours, it will bring you to worse.”

“My lord, I confessed my faut, and I pat up wi’ the blow. But if it hadna been that I was i’ the wrang—weel, things nicht hae differt.”

“Hold your tongue, I tell you. You’re an honest, good fellow, and I’m sorry I struck you. There!”

“I thank yer lordship.”

“I sent for you because I’ve just heard from Aberdeen that the boat is on her way round. You must be ready to take charge of her the moment she arrives.”

“I wull be that, my lord. It doesna shuit me at a’ to be sae lang upo’ the solid: I’m like a cowl upon a toll-ro’d.”

The next morning he got a telescope, and taking with him his dinner of bread and cheese, and a

book in his pocket, went up to the Temple of the Winds, to look out for the boat. Every few minutes he swept the offing, but morning and afternoon passed, and she did not appear. The day's monotony was broken only by a call from Demon. Malcolm looked landwards, and spied his mistress below amongst the trees, but she never looked in his direction.

He had just become aware of the first dusky breath of the twilight, when a tiny sloop appeared, rounding the Deid Heid, as they called the promontory which closed in the bay on the east. The sun was setting, red and large, on the other side of the Scaurnose, and filled her white sails with a rosy dye, as she came stealing round in a fair soft wind. The moon hung over her, thin and pale and ghostly, with hardly shine enough to show that it was indeed she, and not the forgotten scrap of a torn up cloud. As she passed the point and turned towards the harbour, the warm amethystine hue suddenly vanished from her sails, and she looked white and cold, as if the sight of the Death's Head had scared the blood out of her.

"It's hersel'!" cried Malcolm in delight. "About the size o' a muckle herrin' boat, but nae mair like

ane than Lady Florimel's like Meg Partan! It'll be jist gran' to hae a cratur sae near leevin' to guide an' tak yer wull o'! I had nae idea she was gaein' to be onything like sae bonny. I'll no be fit to manage her in a squall though. I maun hae anither han'. An' I winna hae a laddie aither. It maun be a grown man, or I winna tak in han' to haud her abune the watter. I wull no. I s' hae Blue Peter himsel' gien I can get him. Eh! jist luik at her—wi' her bit gaff-tappie set, and her jib an' a', booin' an' booin', an' comin' on ye as gran' 's ony born leddy!"

He shut up his telescope, ran down the hill, unlocked the private door at its foot, and in three or four minutes was waiting her on the harbour-wall.

She was a little cutter—and a lovely show to eyes capable of the harmonies of shape and motion. She came walking in, as the Partan, whom Malcolm found on the pierhead, remarked, "like a leddy closin' her parasol as she cam." Malcolm jumped on board, and the two men who had brought her round gave up their charge.

She was full-decked, with a dainty little cabin. Her planks were almost white: there was not a

board in her off which one might not, as the Partan expanded the common phrase, "ait his parritch, an' never fin' a mote in 's mou'." Her cordage was all so clean, her standing rigging so taut, everything so shipshape, that Malcolm was in raptures. If the burn had only been navigable so that he might have towed the graceful creature home and laid her up under the very walls of the House! It would have perfected the place in his eyes. He made her snug for the night, and went to report her arrival.

Great was Lady Florimel's jubilation. She would have set out on a "coasting voyage," as she called it, the very next day, but her father listened to Malcolm.

"Ye see, my lord," said Malcolm, "I maun ken a' about her afore I daur tak ye oot in her. An' I canna unnertak' to manage her my lane. Ye maun jist gie me anither man wi' me."

"Get one," said the marquis.

Early in the morning, therefore, Malcolm went to Scaurnose, and found Blue Peter amongst his nets. He could spare a day or two, and would join him. They returned together, got the cutter into the offing, and, with a westerly breeze, tried



her every way. She answered her helm with readiness, rose as light as a bird, made a good board, and seemed every way a safe boat.

“She’s the bonniest craft ever lainched!” said Malcolm, ending a description of her behaviour and qualities rather too circumstantial for his master to follow.

They were to make their first trip the next morning—eastward, if the wind should hold, landing at a certain ancient ruin on the coast, two or three miles from Portlossie.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *THE TWO DOGS.*

LADY Florimel's fancy was so full of the expected pleasure, that she woke soon after dawn. She rose and anxiously drew aside a curtain of her window. The day was one of God's odes—written for men. Would that the days of our human autumn were as calmly grand, as gorgeously hopeful as the days that lead the aging year down to the grave of winter! If our white hairs were sunlit from behind like those radiance-bordered clouds; if our air were as pure as this when it must be as cold; if the falling at last of longest-cherished hopes did but, like that of the forest leaves, let in more of the sky, more of the infinite possibilities of the region of truth which is the matrix of fact; we should go marching down the hill of life like a battered but still bannered army on its way home. But alas! how often we rot, instead of march, towards the grave! "If he be not rotten before he die," said Hamlet's absolute gravedigger.—If the year was dying around Lady Florimel, as she looked,

like a deathless sun from a window of the skies, it was dying at least with dignity.

The sun was still revelling in the gift of himself. A thin blue mist went up to greet him, like the first of the smoke from the altars of the morning. The fields lay yellow below ; the rich colours of decay hung heavy on the woods, and seemed to clothe them as with the trappings of a majestic sorrow ; but the spider-webs sparkled with dew, and the gossamer films floated thick in the level sunbeams. It was a great time for the spiders, those visible Deaths of the insect race.

The sun, like a householder leaving his house for a time, was burning up a thousand outworn things before he went ; hence the smoke of the dying hearth of summer was going up to the heavens ; but there was a heart of hope left, for, when farthest away, the sun is never gone, and the snow is the earth's blanket against the frost. But, alas, it was not Lady Florimel who thought these things ! Looking over her shoulder, and seeing both what she can and what she cannot see, I am having a think to myself.

“ Which it is an offence to utter in the temple of Art ! ” cry the critics.

Not against Art, I think ; but if it be an offence to the worshipper of Art, let him keep silence before his goddess ; for me, I am a sweeper of the floors in the temple of Life, and his goddess is my mare, and shall go in the dust-cart : if I find a jewel as I sweep, I will fasten it on the curtains of the doors, nor heed if it should break the fall of a fold of the drapery.

Below Lady Florimel's oriel window, under the tall bridge, the burn lay dark in a deep pool, with a slow-revolving eddy, in which one leaf, attended by a streak of white froth, was performing solemn gyrations : away to the north, the great sea was merry with waves, and spotted with their broken crests ; heaped against the horizon, it looked like a blue hill dotted all over with feeding sheep ; but, to-day, she never thought *why* the waters were so busy—to what end they foamed and ran, flashing their laughter in the face of the sun : the mood of nature was in harmony with her own, and she felt no need to discover any higher import in its merriment. How could she, when she sought no higher import in her own—had not as yet once suspected that every human gladness—even to the most transient flicker of delight—is the reflex—from a

potsherd it may be—but of an eternal sun of joy?—Stay, let me pick up the gem: every faintest glimmer, all that is not utter darkness, is from the shining face of the Father of Lights.—Not a breath stirred the ivy leaves about her window; but out there, on the wide blue, the breezes were frolicking; and in the harbour, the new boat must be tugging to get free! She dressed in haste, called her stag-hound, and set out the nearest way, that is, by the town-gate, for the harbour. She must make acquaintance with her new plaything.

Mrs. Catanach in her nightcap looked from her upper window as she passed, like a great spider from the heart of its web, and nodded significantly after her, with a look and a smile such as might mean, that for all her good looks she might have the heart-ache some day. But she was to have the first herself, for that moment her ugly dog, now and always with the look of being fresh from an ash-pit, rushed from somewhere, and laid hold of Lady Florimel's dress, frightening her so that she gave a cry. Instantly her own dog, which had been loitering behind, came tearing up, five lengths at a bound, and descended like an angel of vengeance upon the offensive animal, which would have

fled, but found it too late. Opening his huge jaws, Demon took him across the flanks, much larger than his own, as if he had been a rabbit. His howls of agony brought Mrs. Catanach out in her petticoats. She flew at the hound, which Lady Florimel was in vain attempting to drag from the cur, and seized him by the throat.

“Take care ; he is dangerous !” cried the girl.

Finding she had no power upon him, Mrs. Catanach forsook him, and, in despairing fury, rushed at his mistress. Demon saw it with one flaming eye, left the cur—which, howling hideously, dragged his hind quarters after him into the house—and sprang at the woman. Then indeed was Lady Florimel terrified, for she knew the savage nature of the animal when roused. Truly, with his eyes on fire as now, his long fangs bared, the bristles on his back erect, and his moustache sticking straight out, he might well be believed, much as civilization might have done for him, a wolf after all ! His mistress threw herself between them, and flung her arms tight round his neck.

“Run, woman ! Run for your life !” she shrieked. “I can’t hold him long.”

Mrs. Catanach fled, cowed by terror. Her huge

legs bore her huge body, a tragi-comic spectacle, across the street to her open door. She had hardly vanished, flinging it to behind her, when Demon broke from his mistress, and going at the door as if launched from a catapult, burst it open and disappeared also.

Lady Florimel gave a shriek of horror, and darted after him.

The same moment the sound of Duncan's pipes as he issued from the town-gate, at which he always commenced instead of ending his *reveillé* now, reached her, and bethinking herself of her inability to control the hound, she darted again from the cottage, and flew to meet him, crying aloud,—

“Mr. MacPhail! Duncan! Duncan! stop your pipes and come here directly.”

“And who may pe calling me?” asked Duncan, who had not thoroughly distinguished the voice through the near clamour of his instrument.

She laid her hand trembling with apprehension on his arm, and began pulling him along.

“It's me,—Lady Florimel,” she said. “Come here directly. Demon has got into a house and is worrying a woman.”

“God haf mercy!” cried Duncan. “Take her pipes, my laty, for fear anything paad should happen to them.”

She led him hurriedly to the door. But ere he had quite crossed the threshold, he shivered and drew back.

“This is an efil house,” he said. “She’ll not can co in.”

A great floundering racket was going on above, mingled with growls and shrieks, but there was no howling.

“Call the dog then. He will mind you, perhaps,” she cried—knowing what a slow business an argument with Duncan was—and flew to the stair.

“Temon! Temon!” cried Duncan, with agitated voice.

Whether the dog thought his friend was in trouble next, I cannot tell, but down he came that instant, with a single bound from the top of the stair, right over his mistress’s head as she was running up, and leaping out to Duncan, laid a paw upon each of his shoulders, panting with out-lolled tongue.

But the piper staggered back, pushing the dog from him.

“It is plood!” he cried; “—ta efil woman’s plood!”



“Keep him out, Duncan dear,” said Lady Florimel. “I will go and see. There! he’ll be up again if you don’t mind!”

Very reluctant, yet obedient, the bard laid hold of the growling animal by the collar; and Lady Florimel was just turning to finish her ascent of the stair and see what dread thing had come to pass, when, to her great joy, she heard Malcolm’s voice, calling from the farther end of the street—

“Hey, daddy! What’s happened ’at I dinna hear the pipes?”

She rushed out, the pipes dangling from her hand, so that the drone trailed on the ground behind her.

“Malcolm! Malcolm!” she cried; and he was by her side in scarcely more time than Demon would have taken.

Hurriedly and rather incoherently, she told him what had taken place. He sprang up the stair, and she followed.

In the front garret—with a dormer-window looking down into the street—stood Mrs. Catanach facing the door, with such a malignant rage in her countenance that it looked demoniacal. Her dog lay at her feet with his throat torn out.

As soon as she saw Malcolm, she broke into

a fury of vulgar imprecation—most of it quite outside the pale of artistic record.

“Hoots! for shame, Mistress Catanach!” he cried. “Here’s my lady ahin’ me, hearin’ ilka word!”

“Deil stap her lugs wi’ brunstane! What but a curse wad she hae frae me? I sweir by God I s’ gar her pey for this, or my name’s no——”

She stopped suddenly.

“I thocht as muckle,” said Malcolm with a keen look.

“Ye’ll think twise, ye deil’s buckie, or ye think richt! Wha are ye to think? What sud my name be but Bawby Catanach? Ye’re unco upsettin’ sin’ ye turned my leddy’s flunky! Sorrow tak ye baith! My dawtit Beauty!—worriet by that hell-tyke o’ hers!”

“Gien ye gang on like that, the markis ’ll hae ye drummed oot o’ the toon or twa days be ower,” said Malcolm.

“Wull he than?” she returned with a confident sneer, showing all the teeth she had left. “Ye’ll be far ben wi’ the markis, nae doobt! An’ yon donnert auld deevil ye ca’ yer gran’father ’ill be fain eneuch to be drummer, I’ll sweir. Care’s my case!”

“My leddy, she’s ower ill-tonqued for you to hearken

till," said Malcolm, turning to Florimel who stood in the door white and trembling. "Jist gang doon, an' tell my gran'father to sen' the dog up. There's surely some gait o' garrin' her haud her tongue!"

Mrs. Catanach threw a terrified glance towards Lady Florimel.

"Indeed I shall do nothing of the kind!" replied Florimel. "For shame!"

"Hoots, my leddy!" returned Malcolm; "I only said it to try the effec' o' 't. It seems no that ill."

"Ye son o' a deevil's soo!" cried the woman; "I s' hae amen's o' ye for this, gien I sud ro'st my ain hert to get it."

"'Deed, but ye're duin that fine a'ready! That foul brute o' yours has gotten *his* arles (*earnest*) tu. I wonner what he thinks o' sawmon-troot noo!—Eh, mem?"

"Have done, Malcolm," said Florimel. "I am ashamed of you. If the woman is not hurt, we have no business in her house."

"Hear till her!" cried Mrs. Catanach contemptuously. "*The woman!*"

But Lady Florimel took no heed. She had already turned and was going down the stair.

Malcolm followed in silence; nor did another word from Mrs. Catanach overtake them.

Arrived in the street, Florimel restored his pipes to Duncan—who, letting the dog go, at once proceeded to fill the bag—and, instead of continuing her way to the harbour, turned back, accompanied by Malcolm, Demon, and Lady Stronach's Strathspey.

"What a horrible woman that is!" she said with a shudder.

"Ay is she; but I doobt she wad be waur gien she didna brak oot that gait whiles," rejoined Malcolm.

"How do you mean?"

"It frichts fowk at her, an' maybe sometimes pits 't oot o' her pooer to du waur. Gien ever she seek to mak it up wi' ye, my leddy, I wad hae little to say till her, gien I was you."

"What could I have to say to a low creature like that?"

"Ye wadna ken what she micht be up till, or hoo she micht set about it, my leddy. I wad hae ye mistrust her a'thegither. My daddy has a fine moral nose for vermin, an' he canna bide her, though he never had a glimp o' the fause face o' her, an' in trowth never spak till her."

“I will tell my father of her. A woman like that is not fit to live amongst civilized people.”

“Ye’re richt there, my leddy; but she wad only gang some ither gait amo’ the same. Of coorse ye maun tell yer father, but she’s no fit for him to tak any notice o’.”

As they sat at breakfast, Florimel did tell her father. His first emotion, however—at least the first he showed—was vexation with herself.

“You must *not* be going out alone—and at such ridiculous hours,” he said. “I shall be compelled to get you a governess.”

“Really, papa,” she returned, “I don’t see the good of having a marquis for a father, if I can’t go about as safe as one of the fisher-children. And I might just as well be at school, if I’m not to do as I like.”

“What if the dog had turned on you?” he said.

“If he dared!” exclaimed the girl, and her eyes flashed.

Her father looked at her for a moment, said to himself—“There spoke a Colonsay!” and pursued the subject no further.

When they passed Mrs. Catanach’s cottage an

hour after, on their way to the harbour, they saw the blinds drawn down, as if a dead man lay within : according to after report, she had the brute already laid out like a human being, and sat by the bedside awaiting a coffin which she had ordered of Watty Witherspail.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *COLONSAY CASTLE.*

THE day continued lovely, with a fine breeze. The whole sky and air and sea were alive—with moving clouds, with wind, with waves flashing in the sun. As they stepped on board amidst the little crowd gathered to see, Lady Florimel could hardly keep her delight within the bounds of so-called propriety. It was all she could do to restrain herself from dancing on the little deck half-swept by the tiller. The boat of a schooner which lay at the quay towed them out of the harbour. Then the creature spread her wings like a bird—main-sail and gaff-topsail, staysail and jib—leaned away to leeward, and seemed actually to bound over the waves. Malcolm sat at the tiller, and Blue Peter watched the canvas.

Lady Florimel turned out to be a good sailer, and her enjoyment was so contagious as even to tighten certain strings about her father's heart which had long been too slack to vibrate with any simple gladness. Her questions were incessant—first about

the sails and rigging, then about the steering ; but when Malcolm proceeded to explain how the water re-acted on the rudder, she declined to trouble herself with that.

“Let me steer first,” she said, “and then tell me how things work.”

“That is whiles the best plan,” said Malcolm. “Jist lay yer han’ upo’ the tiller, my leddy, an’ luik oot at yon pint they ca’ the Deid Heid yonner. Ye see, whan I turn the tiller this gait, her heid fa’s aff frae the pint ; an’ whan I turn’t this ither gait, her heid turns till ’t again : haud her heid jist about a twa yairds like aff o’ ’t.”

Florimel was more delighted than ever when she felt her own hand ruling the cutter—so overjoyed indeed, that, instead of steering straight, she would keep playing tricks with the rudder,—fretting the mouth of the sea-palfrey, as it were. Every now and then Malcolm had to expostulate.

“Noo, my leddy, caw canny. Dinna steer sae wull. Haud her stedy.—My lord, wad ye jist say a word to my leddy, or I’ll be forced to tak the tiller frae her.”

But by and by she grew weary of the attention required, and, giving up the helm, began to seek



the explanation of its influence, in a way that delighted Malcolm.

“Ye’ll mak a guid skipper some day,” he said: “ye speir the richt questons, an’ that’s ’maist as guid’s kennin’ the richt answers.”

At length she threw herself on the cushions Malcolm had brought for her, and, while her father smoked his cigar, gazed in silence at the shore. Here, instead of sands, low rocks, infinitely broken and jagged, filled all the tidal space—a region of ceaseless rush and shattered waters. High cliffs of gray and brown rock, orange and green with lichens here and there, and in summer crowned with golden furze, rose behind—untouched by the ordinary tide, but at high water lashed by the waves of a storm. Beyond the headland which they were fast nearing, the cliffs and the sea met at half-tide.

The moment they rounded it—

“Luik there, my lord,” cried Malcolm, “—there’s Colonsay Castel, ’at yer lordship gets yer name, I’m thinkin’, an’, ony gait, ane o’ yer teetles frae. It maun be mony a hunner year sin’ ever Colonsay baid intill ’t!”

Well might he say so! for they looked but saw nothing—only cliff beyond cliff rising from a white-

fringed shore. Not a broken tower, not a ragged battlement invaded the horizon!

“There’s nothing of the sort there!” said Lady Florimel.

“Ye maunna luik for tooer or pinnacle, my leddy, for nane will ye see: their time’s lang ower. But jist tak the sea-face o’ the scaur (*cliff*) i’ yer ee, an’ traivel alang ’t oontil ye come till a bit ’at luiks like mason-wark. It scarce rises abune the scaur in ony but ae pairt, an’ there it’s but a feow feet o’ a wa’.”

Following his direction, Lady Florimel soon found the ruin. The front of a projecting portion of the cliff was faced, from the very water’s edge as it seemed, with mason-work; while on its side, the masonry rested here and there upon jutting masses of the rock, serving as corbels or brackets, the surface of the rock itself completing the wall-front. Above, grass-grown heaps and mounds, and one isolated bit of wall pierced with a little window, like an empty eyesocket with no skull behind it, was all that was visible from the sea of the structure which had once risen lordly on the crest of the cliff.

“It is poor for a ruin even!” said Lord Lossie.

“But jist consider hoo auld the place is, my lord!

—as auld as the time o' the sea-rovin' Danes, they say. Maybe it's aulder nor King Alfred! Ye maun regard it only as a foondation; there's stanes enech lyin' about to shaw 'at there maun hae been a gran' supperstructur on 't ance. I some think it has been ance disconnekit frae the lan', an' jined on by a draw-brig. Mony a lump o' rock an' castel thegither has rowed doon the brae upon a' sides, an' the ruins may weel hae filled up the gully at last. It's a wonnerfu' auld place, my lord."

"What would you do with it if it were yours, Malcolm?" asked Lady Florimel.

"I wad spen' a' my spare time patchin' 't up to gar't stan' oot agane the wither. It's crum'let awa' a heap sin' I min'."

"What would be the good of that? A rickle of old stones!" said the marquis.

"It's a growth 'at there winna be mony mair like," returned Malcolm. "I wonner 'at yer lordship!"

He was now steering for the foot of the cliff. As they approached, the ruin expanded and separated, grew more massy, and yet more detailed. Still it was a mere root clinging to the soil.

"Suppose you were Lord Lossie, Malcolm, what

would you do with it?" asked Florimel, seriously, but with fun in her eyes.

"I wad win at the boddom o' 't first."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ye'll see whan ye win in till't. There's a heap o' voutit places inside yon blin' face. Du ye see yon wee bit squaur winnock? That lats the licht in till ane o' them. There may be vouts aneath vouts, for them 'at ye can win intill 's half fu' o' yird an' stanes. I wad hae a' that cleart oot, an' syne begin frae the verra foondation, biggin', an' patchin', an' buttressin', till I got it a' as soun' as a whunstane; an' whan I cam to the tap o' the rock, there the castel sud tak to growin' again; an' grow it sud, till there it stude, as near what it was as the wit an' the han' o' man cud set it."

"That would ruin a tolerably rich man," said the marquis.

"Ony gait it's no the w'y fowk ruins themsel's noo-a-days, my lord. They'll pu' doon an auld hoose ony day to save themsel's blastin'-poother. There's that gran' place they ca' Huntly Castel!—a suckin' bairn to this for age, but wi' wa's, they tell me, wad stan' for thoosan's o' years: wad ye believe 't? there's a sowless chiel' o' a factor there

biggin' park-wa's an' a grainary oot o' 't, as gien 'twar a quarry o' blue stane! An' what 's ten times mair exterord'nar, there's the Duke o' Gordon jist lattin' the gype tak 's wull o' the hoose o' his grace's ain forbears! I wad maist as sune lat a man speyk ill o' my daddy!"

"But this is past all rebuilding," said his lordship. "It would be barely possible to preserve the remains as they are."

"It *wad* be ill to du, my lord, *ohn* set it up again. But jist think what a gran' place it wad be to bide in!"

The marquis burst out laughing.

"A grand place for gulls and kittiwakes and sea-crows!" he said. "But where is it, pray, that a fisherman like you gets such extravagant notions?—How do you come to think of such things?"

"Thought 's free, my lord. Gien a thing be guid to think, what for sudna a fisher-lad think it? I hae read a heap about auld castles an' sic like i' the history o' Scotlan', an' there's mony an auld tale an' ballant about them.—Jist luik there, my leddy: ye see yon awfu' hole i' the wa', wi' the verra inside o' the hill, like, rushin' oot at it?—I cud tell ye a fearfu' tale about that same."

"Do let us have it," said Florimel eagerly, setting herself to listen.

"Better wait till we land," said the marquis lazily.

"Ay, my lord; we're ower near the shore to begin a story.—"Slack the mainsheet, Peter, an' stan' by the jib-doonhaul.—"Dinna rise, my leddy; she'll be o' the grun' in anither meenute."

Almost immediately followed a slight grating noise, which grew loud, and before one could say her speed had slackened, the cutter rested on the pebbles, with the small waves of the just turned tide flowing against her quarter. Malcolm was overboard in a moment.

"How the deuce are we to land here?" said the marquis.

"Yes!" followed Florimel, half-risen on her elbow, "how the deuce *are* we to land here?"

"Hoot, my leddy!" said Malcolm, "sic words ill become yer bonny mou'."

The marquis laughed.

"I ask you how we are to get ashore?" said Florimel with grave dignity, though an imp was laughing in the shadows of her eyes.

"I'll sune lat ye see that, my leddy," answered

Malcolm; and leaning over the low bulwark he had her in his arms almost before she could utter an objection. Carrying her ashore like a child—indeed, to steady herself, she had put an arm round his shoulders—he set her down on the shingle, and turning in the act, left her as if she had been a burden of nets, and waded back to the boat.

“And how, pray, am I to go?” asked the marquis. “Do you fancy you can carry me in that style?”

“Ow na, my lord! that wadna be dignified for a man. Jist loup upo’ my back.”

As he spoke he turned his broad shoulders, stooping.

The marquis accepted the invitation, and rode ashore like a schoolboy, laughing merrily.

They were in a little valley, open only to the sea, one boundary of which was the small promontory whereon the castle stood. The side of it next them, of stone and live rock combined, rose perpendicular from the beach to a great height; whence, to gain the summit, they had to go a little way back, and ascend by a winding path till they reached the approach to the castle from the landward side.

“Noo, *wadna* this be a gran’ place to bide at,

my lord?" said Malcolm, as they reached the summit—the marquis breathless, Florimel fresh as a lark. "Jist see sic an ootluik! The verra place for pirates like the auld Danes! Naething cud escape the sicht o' them here. Yon's the hills o' Sutherland'. Ye see yon ane like a cairn? that's a great freen' to the fisher-fowk to tell them whaur they are. Yon's the laich co'st o' Caithness. An' yonner 's the north pole, only ye canna see sae far. Jist think, my lord, hoo gran' wad be the blusterin' blap o' the win' about the turrets, as ye stude at yer window on a winter's day, luikin oot ower the gurlly twist o' the watters, the air fu' o' flichterin snaw, the clouds a mile thick abune yer heid, an' no a leevin cratur but yer ain fowk nearer nor the fairm-toon ower the broo yonner!"

"I don't see anything very attractive in your description," said his lordship. "And where," he added, looking around him, "would be the garden?"

"What cud ye want wi' a gairden, an' the sea oot afore ye there? The sea's bonnier than ony gairden. A gairden's maist aye the same, or it changes sae slow, wi' the ae floer gaein' in, an' the ither floer comin' oot, 'at ye maist dinna nottice



the odds. But the sea's never twa days the same. Even lauchin' she never lauchs twise wi' the same face, an' whan she sulks, she has a hunner w'ys o' sulkin'."

"And how would you get a carriage up here?" said the marquis.

"Fine that, my lord. There's a ro'd up as far's yon neuk. An' for this broo, I wad clear awa the lowse stanes, an' lat the nait'ral gerse grow sweet an' fine, an' turn a lot o' bonny heelan' sheep on till 't. I wad keep yon ae bit o' whuns, for though they're rouch i' the leaf, they blaw sae gowden. Syne I wad gether a' the bits o' drains frae a' sides, till I had a bonny stream o' watter aff o' the sweet corn-lan', rowin' doon here whaur we stan', an' ower to the castel itsel', an' throu' coort an' kitchie, gurglin' an' rinnin', an' syne oot again an' doon the face o' the scaur, splashin' an' loupin' like mad. I wad lea' a' the lave to Natur' hersel'. It *wad* be a gran' place, my lord! An' whan ye was tired o' 't, ye cud jist rin awa' to Lossie Hoose, an' hide ye i' the how there for a cheenge. I wad like fine to hae the sortin' o' 't for yer lordship."

"I daresay!" said the marquis.

"Let's find a nice place for our luncheon, papa,

and then we can sit down and hear Malcolm's story," said Florimel.

"Dinna ye think, my lord, it wad be better to get the baskets up first?" interposed Malcolm.

"Yes, I think so. Wilson can help you."

"Na, my lord; he canna lea' the cutter. The tide's risin, an' she's ower near the rocks."

"Well, well; we shan't want lunch for an hour yet, so you can take your time."

"But ye maun tak tent, my lord, hoo ye gang amo' the ruins. There's awkward kin' o' holes about thae vouts, an' jist whaur ye think there's nane. I dinna a'thegither like yer gaein' wantin' me."

"Nonsense! Go along," said the marquis.

"But I'm no jokin'," persisted Malcolm.

"Yes, yes; we'll be careful," returned his master impatiently, and Malcolm ran down the hill, but not altogether satisfied with the assurance.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *THE DEIL'S WINNOCK.*

FLORIMEL was disappointed, for she longed to hear Malcolm's tale. But amid such surroundings it was not so very difficult to wait. They set out to have a peep at the ruins, and choose a place for luncheon.

From the point where they stood, looking seawards, the ground sunk to the narrow isthmus supposed by Malcolm to fill a cleft formerly crossed by a drawbridge, and, beyond it, rose again to the grassy mounds in which lay so many of the old bones of the ruined carcass.

Passing along the isthmus, where on one side was a steep descent to the shore of the little bay, and on the other the live rock hewn away to a wall, shining and sparkling with crystals of a clear irony brown, they next clambered up a rude ascent of solid rock, and so reached what had been the centre of the seaward portion of the castle. Here they came suddenly upon a small hole at their feet, going right down. Florimel knelt, and peeping in, saw the remains of a small spiral stair. The opening

seemed large enough to let her through, and, gathering her garments tight about her, she was half-way buried in the earth before her father, whose attention had been drawn elsewhere, saw what she was about. He thought she had fallen in, but her merry laugh reassured him, and ere he could reach her, she had screwed herself out of sight. He followed her in some anxiety, but, after a short descent, rejoined her in a small vaulted chamber, where she stood looking from the little square window Malcolm had pointed out to them as they neared the shore. The bare walls around them were of brown stone, wet with the drip of rains, and full of holes where the mortar had yielded and stones had fallen out. Indeed the mortar had all but vanished; the walls stood and the vaults hung chiefly by their own weight. By breaches in the walls, where once might have been doors, Florimel passed from one chamber to another and another, each dark, brown, vaulted, damp, and weather-eaten, while her father stood at the little window she had left, listlessly watching the two men on the beach far below landing the lunch, and the rippled sea, and the cutter rising and falling with every wave of the flowing tide.

At length Florimel found herself on the upper end

of a steep-sloping ridge of hard, smooth earth, lying along the side of one chamber, and leading across to yet another beyond, which, unlike the rest, was full of light. The passion of exploration being by this time thoroughly roused in her, she descended the slope, half sliding, half creeping. When she thus reached the hole into the bright chamber, she almost sickened with horror, for the slope went off steeper, till it rushed, as it were, out of a huge gap in the wall of the castle, laying bare the void of space, and the gleam of the sea at a frightful depth below: if she had gone one foot further, she could not have saved herself from sliding out of the gap. It was the very breach Malcolm had pointed out to them from below, and concerning which he had promised them the terrible tale. She gave a shriek of terror, and laid hold of the broken wall. To heighten her dismay to the limit of mortal endurance, she found at the very first effort, partly, no doubt, from the paralysis of fear, that it was impossible to reascend; and there she lay on the verge of the steeper slope, her head and shoulders in the inner of the two chambers, and the rest of her body in the outer, with the hideous vacancy staring at her. In a few moments it had fascinated

her so that she dared not close her eyes lest it should leap upon her. The wonder was that she did not lose her consciousness, and fall at once to the bottom of the cliff.

Her cry brought her father in terror to the top of the slope.

"Are you hurt, child?" he cried, not seeing the danger she was in.

"It's so steep, I can't get up again," she said faintly.

"I'll soon get you up," he returned cheerily, and began to descend.

"Oh, papa!" she cried, "don't come a step nearer. If you should slip, we should go to the bottom of the rock together. Indeed, indeed, there is great danger! Do run for Malcolm."

Thoroughly alarmed, yet mastering the signs of his fear, he enjoined her to keep perfectly still while he was gone, and hurried to the little window. Thence he shouted to the men below, but in vain, for the wind prevented his voice from reaching them. He rushed from the vaults, and began to descend at the first practicable spot he could find, shouting as he went.

The sound of his voice cheered Florimel a little,

as she lay forsaken in her misery. Her whole effort now was to keep herself from fainting, and for this end, to abstract her mind from the terrors of her situation: in this she was aided by a new shock, which, had her position been a less critical one, would itself have caused her a deadly dismay. A curious little sound came to her, apparently from somewhere in the dusky chamber in which her head lay. She fancied it made by some little animal, and thought of the wild cats and otters of which Malcolm had spoken as haunting the caves; but, while the new fear mitigated the former, the greater fear subdued the less. It came a little louder, then again a little louder, growing like a hurried whisper, but without seeming to approach her. Louder still it grew, and yet was but an inarticulate whispering. Then it began to divide into some resemblance of articulate sounds. Presently, to her utter astonishment, she heard herself called by name.

“Lady Florimel! Lady Florimel!” said the sound plainly enough.

“Who’s there?” she faltered, with her heart in her throat, hardly knowing whether she spoke or not.

"There's nobody here," answered the voice. "I'm in my own bedroom at home, where your dog killed mine."

It was the voice of Mrs. Catanach, but both words and tone were almost English.

Anger, and the sense of a human presence, although an evil one, restored Lady Florimel's speech.

"How dare you talk such nonsense?" she said.

"Don't anger me again," returned the voice. "I tell you the truth. I'm sorry I spoke to your ladyship as I did this morning. It was the sight of my poor dog that drove me mad."

"*I* couldn't help it. I tried to keep mine off him, as you know."

"I do know it, my lady, and that's why I beg your pardon."

"Then there's nothing more to be said."

"Yes, there is, my lady: I want to make you some amends. I know more than most people, and I know a secret that some would give their ears for. Will you trust me?"

"I will hear what you've got to say."

"Well, I don't care whether you believe me or not: I shall tell you nothing but the truth. What do you think of Malcolm MacPhail, my lady?"



“What do you mean by asking me such a question?”

“Only to tell you that by birth he is a gentleman, and comes of an old family.”

“But why do you tell *me*?” said Florimel. “What have *I* to do with it?”

“Nothing, my lady—or himself either. *I* hold the handle of the business. But you needn't think it's from any favour for *him*! I don't care what comes of him. There's no love lost between him and me. You heard yourself, this very day, how he abused both me and my poor dog who is now lying dead on the bed beside me!”

“You don't expect me to believe such nonsense as that!” said Lady Florimel.

There was no reply. The voice had departed; and the terrors of her position returned with gathered force in the desolation of redoubled silence that closes around an unanswered question. A trembling seized her, and she could hardly persuade herself that she was not slipping by slow inches down the incline.

Minutes that seemed hours passed. At length she heard feet and voices, and presently her father called her name, but she was too agitated to reply except with a moan. A voice she was yet more

glad to hear followed—the voice of Malcolm, ringing confident and clear.

“Haud awa’, my lord,” it said, “an’ lat *me* come at her.”

“You’re not going down so!” said the marquis angrily. “You’ll slip to a certainty, and send her to the bottom.”

“My lord,” returned Malcolm, “I ken what I’m about, an’ ye dinna. I beg ’at ye’ll haud ootby, an’ no upset the lassie, for something maun depen’ upon hersel’. Jist gang awa’ back into that ither vout, my lord. I insist upo’ ’t.”

His lordship obeyed, and Malcolm, who had been pulling off his boots as he spoke, now addressed Mair.

“Here, Peter!” he said, “haud on to the tail o’ that rope like grim deith.—Na, I dinna want it roon’ me; it’s to gang roon’ her. But dinna ye haul, for it micht hurt her, an’ she’ll lippen to me and come up o’ hersel’. Dinna be feart, my bonny leddy: there’s nae danger—no ae grain. I’m comin’.”

With the rope in his hand, he walked down the incline, and kneeling by Florimel, close to the broken wall, proceeded to pass the rope under and round her waist, talking to her, as he did so, in the tone of one encouraging a child.

“Noo, my leddy! Noo, my bonny leddy! Ae meenute, an' ye're as safe's gien ye lay i' yer minnie's lap!”

“I daren't get up, Malcolm! I daren't turn my back to it! I shall drop right down into it if I do!” she faltered, beginning to sob.

“Nae fear o' that! There! ye canna fa' noo, for Blue Peter has the ither en', and Peter's as strong's twa pownies. I'm gaein to tak aff yer shune neist.”

So saying, he lowered himself a little through the breach, holding on by the broken wall with one hand, while he gently removed her sandal shoes with the other. Drawing himself up again, he rose to his feet, and taking her hand, said,—

“Noo, my leddy, tak a guid grip o' my han', an' as I lift ye, gie a scam'le wi' yer twa bit feet, an' as sune's ye fin' them aneth ye, jist gang up as gien ye war clim'in' a gey stey brae (*rather steep ascent*). Ye cudna fa' gien ye tried yer warst.”

At the grasp of his strong hand the girl felt a great gush of confidence rise in her heart; she did exactly as he told her, scrambled to her feet, and walked up the slippery way without one slide, holding fast by Malcolm's hand, while Joseph kept just feeling her waist with the loop of the rope as he drew it in. When she reached the top, she fell,

almost fainting, into her father's arms; but was recalled to herself by an exclamation from Blue Peter: just as Malcolm relinquished her hand, his foot slipped. But he slid down the side of the mound only—some six or seven feet to the bottom of the chamber, whence his voice came cheerily, saying he would be with them in a moment. When, however, ascending by another way, he rejoined them, they were shocked to see blood pouring from his foot: he had lighted amongst broken glass, and had felt a sting, but only now was aware that the cut was a serious one. He made little of it, however, bound it up, and, as the marquis would not now hear of bringing the luncheon to the top, having, he said, had more than enough of the place, limped painfully after them down to the shore.

Knowing whither they were bound, and even better acquainted with the place than Malcolm himself, Mrs. Catanach, the moment she had drawn down her blinds in mourning for her dog, had put her breakfast in her pocket, and set out from her back door, contriving mischief on her way. Arrived at the castle, she waited a long time before they made their appearance, but was rewarded for her patience, as she said to herself, by the luck which had so

wonderfully seconded her cunning. From a broken loophole in the foundation of a round tower, she now watched them go down the hill. The moment they were out of sight, she crept like a fox from his earth, and having actually crawled beyond danger of discovery, hurried away inland, to reach Portlossie by foot-paths and by-ways, and there show herself on her own door-step.

The woman's consuming ambition was to possess power *over* others—power to hurt them if she chose—power to pull hidden strings fastened to their hearts or consciences or history or foibles or crimes, and so reduce them, in her knowledge, if not in theirs, to the condition of being, more or less, her slaves. Hence she pounced upon a secret as one would on a diamond in the dust; any fact even was precious, for it might be allied to some secret—might, in combination with other facts, become potent. How far this vice may have had its origin in the fact that she had secrets of her own, might be an interesting question.

As to the mysterious communication she had made to her, Lady Florimel was not able to turn her mind to it—nor indeed for some time was she able to think of anything.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *THE CLOUDED SAPPHIRES.*

BEFORE they reached the bottom of the hill, however, Florimel had recovered her spirits a little, and had even attempted a laugh at the ridiculousness of her late situation ; but she continued very pale. They sat down beside the baskets—on some great stones, fallen from the building above. Because of his foot, they would not allow Malcolm to serve them, but told Mair and him to have their dinner near, and called the former when they wanted anything.

Lady Florimel revived still more after she had had a morsel of partridge and a glass of wine, but every now and then she shuddered : evidently she was haunted by the terror of her late position, and, with the gladness of a discoverer, the marquis be-thought himself of Malcolm's promised tale, as a means of turning her thoughts aside from it. As soon, therefore, as they had finished their meal, he called Malcolm, and told him they wanted his story.

"It's some fearsome," said Malcolm, looking anxiously at the pale face of Lady Florimel.

"Nonsense!" returned the marquis; for he thought, and perhaps rightly, that if such it would only serve his purpose the better.

"I wad raither tell 't i' the gloamin' roon' a winter fire," said Malcolm, with another anxious look at Lady Florimel.

"Do go on," she said. "I want so much to hear it!"

"Go on," said the marquis; and Malcolm, seating himself near them, began.

I need not again tell my reader that he may take a short cut if he pleases.

"There was ance a great nobleman—like yersel', my lord, only no sae douce—an' he had a great followin', and was thought muckle o' in a' the country, frae John o' Groat's to the Mull o' Gallowa'. But he was terrible prood, an' thought naebody was to compare wi' him, nor onything 'at onybody had, to compare wi' onything 'at he had. His horse war aye swifter, an' his kye aye better milkers nor ither fowk's; there war nae deer sae big nor had sic muckle horns as the reid deer on his heelan' hills;

ane gillies sae strang's his gillies; and nae castles sae weel biggit or sae auld as his! It may ha' been a' verra true for onything I ken, or onything the story says to the contrar'; but it wasna heumble or Christi-an-like o' him to be aye at it, ower an' ower, aye gloryin'—as gien he had a'thing sae by-ord'nar' 'cause he was by-ord'nar' himsel', an' they a' cam till him by the verra natur' o' things. There was but ae thing in which he was na fawvoured, and that was, that he had nae son to tak up what he left. But it maittered the less, that the teetle as weel's the lan's, wad, as the tale tells, gang a' the same till a lass-bairn—an' a lass-bairn he had."

"That is the case in the Lossie family," said the marquis.

"That's hoo I hae hard the tale, my lord; but I wad be sorry sud a' it conteens meet wi' like corroboration.—As I say, a dochter there was, an' gien a' was surpassin', she was surpassin' a'. The faimily piper, or sennachy, as they ca'd him—I wadna wonner, my lord, gien thae gran' pipes yer boonty gae my gran'father, had been his!—he said in ane o' his sangs, 'at the sun blinkit whanever she shawed hersel' at the hoose-door. I s' warran' ae thing—'at a' the lads blinkit whan she luikit at



them, gien sae be she cud ever be said to condescen' sae far as to *luik* at ony; for gien ever she set ee upo' ane, she never loot it rist: her ee aye jist slippit ower a face as gien the face nicht or nicht not be there—she didna ken or care. A'body said she had sic a haughty leuk as was never seen on human face afore; an' for freen'ly luik, she had nane for leevin' cratur, 'cep' it was her ain father, or her ain horse 'at she rade upo'. Her mither was deid.

“Her father wad fain hae seen her merriet afore he dee'd, but the pride he had gien her was like to be the en' o' a', for she coontit it naething less than a disgrace to pairt wi' maiden-leebeerty. ‘There's no man,’ she wad say, whan her father wad be pressin' upo' the subjec',—‘there's no mortal man, but yersel', worth the turn o' my ee.’ An' the father, puir man, was ower weel pleased wi' the flattery to be sae angry wi' her as he wad fain hae luikit. Sae time gaed on, till frae a bonny lassie she had grown a gran' leddy, an' cud win up the hill nae forder, but bude to gang doon o' the ither side; an' her father was jist near-han' daft wi' anxiety to see her wad. But no! never ane wad she hearken till!

“At last there cam to the hoose—that's Colonsay

Castel, up there—ae day, a yoong man frae Norrawa', the son o' a great nobleman o' that country; an' wi' him she was some ta'en. He was a fine man to leuk at, an' he pat them a' to shame at onything that nott stren'th or skeel. But he was as heumble as he was fit, an' never teuk ony credit till himsel' for onything 'at he did or was; an' this she was ill-pleased wi', though she cudna help likin' him, an' made nae banes o' lattin' him see 'at he wasna a'thegither a scunner till her.

“Weel, ae mornin', verra ear', she gaed oot intill her gairden, an' luikit ower the hedge; an' what sud she see but this same yoong nobleman tak the bairn frae a puir traivellin' body, help her ower a dyke, and gie her her bairn again! He was at her ain side in anither meenute, but he was jist that meenute ahint his tryst, an' she was in a cauld rage at him. He tried to turn her hert, sayin'—wad she hae had him no help the puir thing ower the dyke, her bairnie bein' but a fortnicht auld, an' hersel' unco weak-like? but my lady made a mou' as gien she was scunnert to hear sic things made mention o'. An' was *she* to stan' luikin' ower the hedge, an' him convoyin' a beggar-wife an' her brat! An' syne to come to *her* ohn ever washen his han's!

‘Hoot, my leddy,’ says he, ‘the puir thing was a human cratur!’—‘Gien she had been a God’s angel,’ says she, ‘ye had no richt to keep me waitin’.’—‘Gien she had been an angel,’ says he, ‘there wad hae been little occasion, but the wuman stude in want o’ help!’—‘Gien ’t had been to save her life, ye sudna hae keepit me waitin’,’ says she. The lad was scaret at that, as weel he micht, an’ takin’ aff ’s bannet, he lowtit laich, an’ left her. But this didna shuit my leddy; she wasna to be left afore she said *gang!* sae she cried him back, an’ he cam, bannet in han’; an’ she leuch, an’ made as gien she had been but tryin’ the smeddum o’ ’m, an’ thought him a true k-nicht. The puir fallow pluckit up at this, an’ doon he fell upo’ s k-nees, an’ oot wi’ a ’at was in ’s hert,—hoo ’at he lo’ed her mair nor tongue cud tell, an’ gien she wad hae him, he wad be her slave for ever.

“‘Ye s’ be that,’ says she, an’ leuch him to scorn. ‘Gang efter yer beggar-wife,’ she says; ‘I’m sick o’ ye.’

“He rase, an’ teuk up ’s bannet, an’ loupit the hedge, an’ gae a blast upo’ s horn, an’ gethered his men, an’ steppit aboard his boat, ower by Puffie Heid yonner, an’ awa to Norrowa’ ower the faem,

'an was never hard tell o' in Scotlan' again. An' the leddy was haughtier, and cairried her heid heicher nor ever—maybe to hide a scaum (*slight mark of burning*) she had taen, for a' her pride.

“Sae things gaed on as afore, till at len'th the tide o' *her* time was weel past the turn, an' a streak o' the snaw in her coal-black hair. For, as the auld sang says, Her hair was like the crow, An' her ble was like the snaw, An' her bow-bendit lip Was like the rose-hip, An' her ee was like the licht'nin', Glorious an' fricht'nin'. But a' that wad sune be ower!

“Aboot this time, ae day i' the gloamin', there cam on sic' an awfu' storm, 'at the fowk o' the castel war frichtit 'maist oot o' their wits. The licht'nin' cam oot o' the yerd, an' no frae the lift at a'; the win' roared as gien 't had been an incarnat rage; the thunner rattlet an' crackit, as gien the mune an' a' the stars had been made kettle-drums o' for the occasion; but never a drap o' rain or a stane o' hail fell; naething brak oot but blue licht an' roarin' win'. But the strangest thing was, that the sea lay a' the time as oonconcerned as a sleepin' bairn; the win' got nae mair grip o' 't nor gien a' the angels had been poorin' ile oot o' widows' cruses upo' 't; the verra tide came up

quaierter nor ord'nar ; and the fowk war sair perplext as weel's frichtit.

“ Jist as the clock o' the castel chappit the deid o' the nicht, the clamour o' v'ices was hard throu' the thunner an' the win', an' the warder luikin' doon frae the heich bartizan o' the muckle tooer, saw, i' the fire-flauchts, a company o' riders appro'chin' the castel, a' upo' gran' horses, he said, that sprang this gait an' that, an' shot fire frae their een. At the drawbrig they blew a horn 'at rowtit like a' the bulls o' Bashan, an', whan the warder challencht them, claimt hoose-room for the nicht. Naebody had ever hard o' the place they cam frae ; it was sae far awa 'at as sune's a body hard the name o' 't, he forgot it again ; but their beasts war as fresh an' as fu' o' smeddum as I tell ye, an' no a hair o' ane o' them turnt. There was jist a de'il's dizen o' them, an' whaurever ye began to coont them, the thirteent had aye a reid baird.

“ Whan the news was taen to the markis—the yerl, I sud say—he gae orders to lat them in at ance ; for whatever fau'ts he had, naither fear nor hainin' (*penuriousness*) was amang them. Sae in they cam, clatterin' ower the drawbrig, 'at gaed up an' down aneth them as gien it wad hae cast them.

“Richt fremt (*strange*) fowk they luikit whan they cam intill the coort-yaird—a’ spanglet wi’ bonny bricht stanes o’ a’ colours. They war like nae fowk ’at ever the yerl had seen, an’ he had been to Jeroozlem in ’s day, an’ had fouchten wi’ the Saracenes. But they war coorteous men an’ weel-bred—an’ maistly weel-faured tu—ilk ane luikin’ a lord’s son at the least. They had na a single servin’-man wi’ them, an’ wad alloo nane o’ the fowk about the place to lay han’ upo’ their beasts; an’ ilk ane as he said *na*, wad gie the stallion aneth him a daig wi’ ’s spurs, or a kick i’ the ribs, gien he was aff o’ ’s back, wi’ the steel tae o’ his bute; an’ the brute wad lay his lugs i’ the how o’ ’s neck, an’ turn his heid asklent, wi’ ae white ee gleyin’ oot o’ ’t, an’ lift a hin’ leg wi’ the glintin’ shue turnt back, an’ luik like Sawtan himsel’ whan he daurna.

“Weel, my lord an’ my leddy war sittin’ i’ the muckle ha’, for they cudna gang to their beds in sic a by-ous storm, whan him ’at was the chief o’ them was ushered in by the seneschal, that’s the steward, like, booin’ afore him, an’ ca’in’ him the Prence, an’ nae mair, for he cudna min’ the name o’ ’s place lang eneuch to say ’t ower again.

“An’ sae a prence he was! an’, forbye that, jist a

man by himsel' to luik at!—i' the prime o' life, maybe, but no freely i' the first o' 't, for he had the luik as gien he had had a hard time o' 't, an' had a white streak an' a craw's fit here and there—the liklier to please my leddy, wha luikit doon upo' a'budy yoonger nor hersel'. He had a commandin', maybe some owerbeirin' luik—ane 'at a man micht hae birstled up at, but a leddy like my leddy wad welcome as worth bringin' doon. He was dressed as never man had appeart in Scotlan' afore—glorious without—no like the leddy i' the Psalms!—for yer ee cud licht nowhaur but there was the glitter o' a stane, sae 'at he flashed a' ower, ilka motion he made. He cairriet a short sword at his side—no muckle langer nor my daddy's dirk, as gien he never foucht but at closs quarters—the whilk had three sapphires—blue stanes, they tell me—an' muckle anes, lowin' i' the sheath o' 't, an' a muckler ane still i' the heft; only they war some drumly (*clouded*), the leddy thought, bein' a jeedge o' hingars-at-lugs (*earrings*) an' sic vainities.

“That may be 's it may; but in cam the prence, wi' a laich boo, an' a gran' upstrauchtin' again; an' though, as I say, he was flashin' a' ower, his mainner was quaiet as the munelicht,—jist grace itsel'. He



profest himsel unco' indebtit for the shelter accordit him ; an his een aye soucht the leddy's, an' his admiration o' her was plain in ilka luik an' gestur', an' though his words were feow, they a' meant mair nor they said. Afore his supper cam in, her hert was at his wull.

“They say that whan a wuman's late o' fa'in' in love—ye'll ken, my lord—I ken naething about it—it's the mair likly to be an oonrizzonin' an' ooncontrollable fancy ; in sic maitters it seems wisdom comesna wi' gray hairs : within ae hoor the leddy was enamoured o' the stranger in a fearfu' w'y. She poored oot his wine till him wi' her ain han' ; an' the moment he put the glaiss till 's lips, the win' fell, an' the lichtnin' devallt (*ceased*). She set hersel' to put questons till him, sic as she thought he wad like to answer—a' aboot himsel' an' what he had come throu' ; an' sic stories as he tellt ! She atten't till him as she had never dune to guest afore, an' her father saw 'at she was sair taen wi' the man. But he wasna a'thegither sae weel pleased, for there was something about him—he cudna say what—'at garred him grue (*shudder*). He wasna a man to hae fancies, or stan' upo' freits, but he cudna help the creep that gaed doon his backbane ilka



time his ee encoontert that o' the prence—it was aye sic a strange luik the prence cuist upon him—a luik as gien him an' the yerl had been a'ready ower weel acquaint, though the yerl cudna min' 'at ever he had set ee upo' him. A' the time, hooever, he had a kin' o' a suspicion 'at they bude to be auld acquaintances, an' sair he soucht to mak him oot, but the prence wad never lat a body get a glimp o' his een 'cep' the body he was speykin' till—that is gien he cud help it, for the yerl did get twa or three glimps o' them as he spak till 's dauchter; an' he declaret efterhin to the king's commissioner, that a pale, blue kin' o' a licht cam frae them, the whilk the body he was conversin' wi', an' luikin' straucht at, never saw.

“Weel, the short and the lang o' 't that nicht was, that they gaed a' to their beds.

“I' the mornin', whan the markis—the yerl, I sud say—an' his dochter cam doon the stair, the haill menyie (*company*) was awa. Never a horse or horse was i' the stable, but the yerl's ain beasts—no ae hair left ahin' to shaw that they had been there! an' i' the chaumers allotted to their riders, never a pair o' sheets had been sleepit in.

“The yerl an' my leddy sat doon to brak their

fast—no freely i' the same humour, the twa o' them, as ye may weel believe. Whan they war about half throu', wha sud come stridin' in, some dour an' ill-pleased like, but the prence himsel'! Baith yerl an' leddy startit up: 'at *they* sud hae sitten doon till a meal ohn even advertteest their veesitor that sic was their purpose! They made muckle adu wi' apologies an' explanations, but the prence aye boood an' boood, an' said sae little, that they thocht him mortal angert, the whilk was a great vex to my leddy, ye may be sure. He had a withert-like luik, an' the verra diamonds in 's claes war douf like. A'thegither he had a brunt-oot kin' o' aissy (*ashy*) leuk.

“At len'th the butler cam in, an' the prence signed till him, an' he gaed near, an' the prence drew him doon, an' toot-mootit in 's lug—an' his breath, the auld man said, was like the grave: he hadna had 's mornin', he said, an' tellt him to put the whusky upo' the table. The butler did as he was tauld, an' set doon the decanter, an' a glaiss aside it; but the prence bannt him jist fearfu', an' ordert him to tak awa that playock, and fess a tum'ler.

“I'm thinkin', my lord, that maun be a modern

touch," remarked Malcolm here, interrupting himself: "there wasna glaiss i' thae times—was there?"

"What do I know!" said the marquis. "Go on with your story."

"But there's mair intill 't than that," persisted Malcolm. "I doobt gien there was ony whusky i' thae times aither; for I hard a gentleman say the ither day 'at hoo he had tastit the first whusky 'at was ever distillt in Scotlan', an' horrible stuff it was, he said, though it was 'maist as auld as the forty-five."

"Confound your long wind!—Go on," said the marquis peremptorily.

"We s' ca' 't whusky, than, ony gait," said Malcolm, and resumed.

"The butler did again as he was bidden, an' fiess (*fetched*) a tum'ler, or mair likly a siller cup, an' the prence took the decanter, or what it might be, an' filled it to the verra brim. The butler's een 'maist startit frae 's heid, but naebody said naething. He liftit it, greedy like, an' drank aff the whusky as gien 't had been watter. 'That's mid-dlin', he said, as he set it o' the table again. They luikit to see him fa' doon deid, but in place o' that he begoud to gether himsel' a bit, an' says he, 'We brew the same drink i' my country, but a

wee mair pooerfu.’ Syne he askit for a slice o’ boar-ham an’ a raw aipple ; an’ that was a’ he ate. But he took anither waucht (*large draught*) o’ the whusky, an’ his een grew brichter, an’ the stanes aboot him began to flash again ; an’ my leddy admired him the mair, that what wad hae felled ony ither man, only waukened him up a bit. An’ syne he telled them hoo, laith to be fashous, he had gi’en orders till ’s menyie to be aff afore the mornin’ brak, an’ wait at the neist cheenge-hoose till he jined them. ‘Whaur,’ said the leddy, ‘I trust ye’ll lat them wait, or else sen’ for them.’ But the yerl sat an’ said never a word. The prence gae him ae glower, an’ declared that his leddy’s word was law to him ; he wad bide till she wulled him to gang. At this her een shot fire ’maist like his ain, an’ she smilit as she had never smilit afore ; an’ the yerl cudna bide the sicht o’ ’t, but daurna interfere : he rase an’ left the room an’ them thegither.

“What passed atwixt the twa, there was nane to tell ; but or an hoor was by, they cam oot upo’ the gairden-terrace thegither, han’ in han’, luikin’ baith o’ them as gran’ an’ as weel pleased as gien they had been king and queen. The lang an’ the short o’ ’t was, that the same day at nicht the twa was

merried. Naither o' them wad hear o' a priest. Say what the auld yerl cud, they wad *not* hear o' sic a thing, an' the leddy was 'maist mair set agane 't nor the prence. She wad be merried accordin' to Scots law, she said, an' wad hae nae ither ceremony, say 'at he likit!

“A gran' feast was gotten ready, an' jist the meenute afore it was cairriet to the ha', the great bell o' the castel yowlt oot, an' a' the fowk o' the hoose was gaithered i' the coort-yaird, an' oot cam the twa afore them, han' in han', declarin' themsel's merried fowk, the whilk, accordin' to Scots law, was but ower guid a merriage. Syne they sat doon to their denner, an' there they sat—no drinkin' muckle, they say, but merrily enjoyin' themsel's, the leddy singin' a sang noo an' again, an' the prence sayin' he ance cud sing, but had forgotten the gait o' 't; but never a prayer said, nor a blessin' askit—oontil the clock chappit twal, whaurupon the prence and the prencess rase to gang to their bed—in a room whaur the king himsel' aye sleepit whan he cam to see them. But there wasna ane o' the men or the maids 'at wad hae daured be their lanes wi' that man, prence as he ca'd himsel'.

“A meenute, or barely twa, was ower, whan a

cry cam frae the king's room—a fearfu' cry—a lang lang skreigh. The men an' the maids luikit at ane anither wi' awsome luiks; an' 'He's killin' her!' they a' gaspit at ance.

"Noo she was never a favourite wi' ony ane o' her ain fowk, but still they couldna hear sic a cry frae her ohn run to the yerl.

"They fand him pacin' up and doon the ha', an' luikin' like a deid man in a rage o' fear. But whan they telled him, he only leuch at them, an' ca'd them ill names, an' said he had na hard a cheep. Sae they tuik naething by that, an' gaed back trimlin'.

"Twa o' them, a man an' a maid to haud hert in ane anither, gaed up to the door o' the transe (*passage*) 'at led to the king's room; but for a while they hard naething. Syne cam the soon' like o' moanin' an' greitin' an' prayin'.

"The neist meenute they war back again amo' the lave, luikin' like twa corps. They had opent the door o' the transe to hearken closer, an' what sud they see there but the fiery een an' the white teeth o' the prence's horse, lyin' athort the door o' the king's room, wi' 's heid atween 's fore feet, an' keepin' watch like a tyke (*dog*)!

"Er' lang they bethocht themsels, an' twa o'

them set oot an' aff thegither for the priory—that's—whaur yer ain hoose o' Lossie noo stan's, my lord, to fess a priest. It wad be a guid twa hoor or they wan back, an' a' that time, ilka noo an' than, the moanin' an' the beggin' an' the cryin' wad come again. An' the warder upo' the heich tooer declared 'at ever sin' midnicht the prence's menyie, the hail twal' o' them, was careerin' about the castel, roon' an' roon', wi' the een o' their beasts lowin', and their heids oot, an' their manes up, an' their tails fleelin' ahint them. He aye lost sicht o' them whan they wan to the edge o' the scaur, but roon' they aye cam again upo' the ither side, as gien there had been a ro'd whaur there wasna even a ledge.

“The moment the priest's horse set fut upo' the drawbrig, the puir leddy gae anither ougsome cry, a hantle waur nor the first, an' up gat a suddent roar an' a blast o' win' that maist cairried the castel there aff o' the cliff intill the watter, an' syne cam a flash o' blue licht an' a rum'lin'. Efter that, a' was quaiet: it was a' ower afore the priest wan athort the coort-yaird an' up the stair. For he crossed himsel' an' gaed straucht for the bridal chaumer. By this time the yerl had come up, an' followed cooerin' ahin' the priest.



“Never a horse was i’ the transe; an’ the priest, first layin’ the cross ’at hang frae ’s belt agane the door o’ the chaumer, flang ’t open wi’oot ony ceremony, for ye ’ll alloo there was room for nane.

“An’ what think ye was the first thing the yerl saw?—A great hole i’ the wa’ o’ the room, an’ the starry pleuch luikin’ in at it, an’ the sea lyin’ far doon afore him—as quaiet as the bride upo’ the bed—but a hantle bonnier to luik at; for ilka steek that had been on her was brunt aff, an’ the bonny body o’ her was lyin’ a’ runklet, an’ as black ’s a coal frae heid to fut; an’ the reek ’at rase frae ’t was heedeous. I needna say the bridegroom wasna there. Some fowk thought it a guid sign that he hadna cairried the body wi’ him; but maybe he was ower suddent scared by the fut o’ the priest’s horse upo’ the drawbrig, an’ dauredna bide his oncome. Sae the fower-fut stane-wa’ had to flee afore him, for a throu’-gang to the Prence o’ the Pooer o’ the Air. An’ yon’s the verra hole to this day, ’at ye was sae near ower weel acquaint wi’ yersel’, my leddy. For the yerl left the castel, and never a Colonsay has made his abode there sin’ syne. But some say ’at the rizzon the castel cam to be desertit



a'thegither was, that as aften as they biggit up the hole, it fell oot again as sure 's the day o' the year cam roon' whan it first happent. They say, that at twal o'clock that same nicht, the door o' that room aye gaed tu, an' that naebody daur touch 't, for the heat o' the han'le o' 't; an' syne cam the skreighin' an' the moanin', an' the fearsome skelloch at the last, an' a rum'le like thun'er; an' i' the mornin' there was the wa' oot! The hole's bigger noo, for a' the decay o' the castel has taen to slidin' oot at it, an' doobtless it'll spread an' spread till the haill structur vainishes; at least sae they say, my lord; but I wad hae a try at the haudin' o' 't thegither for a' that. I dinna see 'at the deil sud hae 't a' his ain gait, as gien we war a' fleyt at him. Fowk hae threepit upo' me that there i' the gloamin' they hae seen an' awsome face luikin' in upo' them throu' that slap i' the wa'; but I never believed it was onything but their ain fancy, though for a' 'at I ken, it may ha' been something no canny. Still, I say, wha's feart? The Ill Man has no pooer 'cep ower his ain kin. We're tellt to resist him an' he'll flee frae 's."

"A good story, and well told," said the marquis kindly. "—Don't you think so, Florimel?"

“Yes, papa,” Lady Florimel answered; “only he kept us waiting too long for the end of it.”

“Some fowk, my leddy,” said Malcolm, “wad aye be at the hin’er en’ o’ a’thing. But for mysel’, the mair pleased I was to be gaein’ ony gait, the mair I wad spin oot the ro’d till’t.”

“How much of the story may be your own invention now?” said the marquis.

“Ow, nae that muckle, my lord; jist a feow extras an’ partic’lars ’at micht weel hae been, wi’ an adjective, or an adverb, or sic like, here an’ there. I made ae mistak’ though; gien ’t was yon hole yonner, they bude till hae gane doon an’ no up the stair to their chaumer.”

His lordship laughed, and, again commending the tale, rose: it was time to re-embark—an operation less arduous than before, for in the present state of the tide it was easy to bring the cutter so close to a low rock that even Lady Florimel could step on board.

As they had now to beat to windward, Malcolm kept the tiller in his own hand. But indeed, Lady Florimel did not want to steer; she was so much occupied with her thoughts that her hands must remain idle.

Partly to turn them away from the more terrible portion of her adventure, she began to reflect upon her interview with Mrs. Catanach—if *interview* it could be called, where she had seen no one. At first she was sorry that she had not told her father of it, and had the ruin searched; but when she thought of the communication the woman had made to her, she came to the conclusion that it was, for various reasons—not to mention the probability that he would have set it all down to the workings of an unavoidably excited nervous condition—better that she should mention it to no one but Duncan MacPhail.

When they arrived at the harbour-quay, they found the carriage waiting, but neither the marquis nor Lady Florimel thought of Malcolm's foot, and he was left to limp painfully home. As he passed Mrs. Catanach's cottage, he looked up: there were the blinds still drawn down; the door was shut, and the place was silent as the grave. By the time he reached Lossie House, his foot was very much swollen. When Mrs. Courthope saw it, she sent him to bed at once, and applied a poultice.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *DUNCAN'S DISCLOSURE.*

THE night long Malcolm kept dreaming of his fall ; and his dreams were worse than the reality, inas-much as they invariably sent him sliding out of the breach, to receive the cut on the rocks below. Very oddly this catastrophe was always occasioned by the grasp of a hand on his ankle. Invariably also, just as he slipped, the face of the Prince appeared in the breach, but it was at the same time the face of Mrs. Catanach.

The next morning, Mrs. Courthope found him feverish, and insisted on his remaining in bed—no small trial to one who had never been an hour ill in his life ; but he was suffering so much that he made little resistance.

In the enforced quiescence, and under the excite-ments of pain and fever, Malcolm first became aware how much the idea of Lady Florimel had at length possessed him. But even in his own thought he never once came upon the phrase, *in love*, as representing his condition in regard of her :

he only knew that he worshipped her, and would be overjoyed to die for her. The youth had about as little vanity as could well consist with individual coherence; if he was vain at all, it was neither of his intellectual nor personal endowments, but of the few tunes he could play on his grandfather's pipes. He could run and swim, rare accomplishments amongst the fishermen, and was said to be the best dancer of them all; but he never thought of such comparison himself. The rescue of Lady Florimel made him very happy: he had been of service to her; but so far was he from cherishing a shadow of presumption, that as he lay there he felt it would be utter content to live serving her for ever, even when he was old and wrinkled and gray like his grandfather: he never dreamed of her growing old and wrinkled and gray.

A single sudden thought sufficed to scatter—not the devotion, but its peace. Of course she would marry some day, and what then? He looked the inevitable in the face; but as he looked, that face grew an ugly one. He broke into a laugh:—his soul had settled like a brooding cloud over the gulf that lay between a fisher-lad and the daughter of a peer! But although he was no coxcomb, neither

had fed himself on romances, as Lady Florimel had been doing of late, and although the laugh was quite honestly laughed at himself, it was nevertheless a bitter one. For again came the question:—Why should an absurdity be a possibility? It was absurd, and yet possible: there was the point. In mathematics it was not so: there, of two opposites to prove one an absurdity, was to prove the other a fact. Neither in metaphysics was it so: there also an impossibility and an absurdity were one and the same thing. But here, in a region of infinitely more import to the human life than an eternity of mathematical truth, there was at least one absurdity which was yet inevitable—an absurdity—yet with a villainous attendance of direst heat, marrow-freezing cold, faintings, and ravings, and demoniacal laughter.

Had it been a purely logical question he was dealing with, he might not have been quite puzzled; but to apply logic here, as he was attempting to do, was like—not like attacking a fortification with a penknife, for a penknife might win its way through the granite ribs of Cronstadt—it was like attacking an eclipse with a broomstick: there was a solution to the difficulty; but as the difficulty

itself was deeper than he knew, so the answer to it lay higher than he could reach—was in fact at once grander and finer than he was yet capable of understanding.

His disjointed meditations were interrupted quite by the entrance of the man to whom alone of all men he could at the time have given a hearty welcome. The schoolmaster seated himself by his bedside, and they had a long talk. I had set down this talk, but came to the conclusion I had better not print it: ranging both high and wide, and touching on points of vital importance, it was yet so odd, that it would have been to too many of my readers but a Chimæra tumbling in a vacuum—as they will readily allow when I tell them that it started from the question—which had arisen in Malcolm's mind so long ago, but which he had not hitherto propounded to his friend—as to the consequences of a man's marrying a mermaid; and that Malcolm, reversing its relations, proposed next, the consequences of a man's being in love with a ghost or an angel.

“I'm dreidfu' tired o' lyin' here i' my bed,” said Malcolm at length when, neither desiring to carry the conversation further, a pause had intervened.



“I dinna ken what I want. Whiles I think it’s the sun, whiles the win’, and whiles the watter. But I canna rist. Haena ye a bit ballant ye could say till me, Mr. Graham? There’s naething wad quaiet me like a ballant.”

The schoolmaster thought for a few minutes, and then said,—

“I’ll give you one of my own, if you like, Malcolm. I made it some twenty or thirty years ago.”

“That *wad* be a trate, sir,” returned Malcolm; and the master, with perfect rhythm, and a modulation amounting almost to melody, repeated the following verses :—

The water ran doon frae the heich hope-heid, (*head of*  
*Wi’ a Rin, burnie, rin;* [the valley]

It wimpled, an’ waggled, an’ sang a screed

O’ nonsense, an’ wadna blin, (*cease*)

*Wi’ its Rin, burnie, rin.*

Frae the hert o’ the warl’, wi’ a swirl an’ a sway,

*An’ a Rin, burnie, rin,*

That water lap clear frae the dark till the day,

An’ singin’ awa’ did spin,

*Wi’ its Rin, burnie, rin.*

Ae wee bit mile frae the heich hope-heid,

*Wi’ a Rin, burnie, rin,*

’Mang her yows an’ her lambs the herd-lassie stude,

An’ she loot a tear fa’ in,

*Wi’ a Rin, burnie, rin.*



Frae the hert o' the maiden that tear-drap rase,  
*Wi' a Rin, burnie, rin;*

Wearily clim'in' up narrow ways,  
 There was but a drap to fa' in,  
 Sae slow did that burnie rin.

Twa wee bit miles frae the heich hope-heid,  
*Wi' a Rin, burnie, rin,*

Doon creepit a cowerin' streakie o' reid,  
 An' meltit awa' within,  
*Wi' a Rin, burnie, rin.*

Frae the hert o' a youth cam the tricklin' reid,  
*Wi' a Rin, burnie, rin;*

It ran an' ran till it left him deid,  
 An' syne it dried up i' the win',  
 An' that burnie nae mair did rin.

Whan the wimplin' burn that frae three herts gaed  
*Wi' a Rin, burnie, rin,*

Cam to the lip o' the sea sae braid,  
 It curled an' grued wi' pain o' sin—  
 But it took that burnie in.

“It's a bonny, bonny sang,” said Malcolm; “but I canna say I a'thegither like it.”

“Why not?” asked Mr. Graham, with an inquiring smile.

“Because the ocean sudna mak a mou' at the puir earth-burnie that cudna help what ran intill 't.”

“It took it in though, and made it clean, for all the pain *it* couldn't help either.”

“Weel, gien ye luik at it that gait!” said Malcolm.

In the evening his grandfather came to see him, and sat down by his bedside, full of a tender anxiety which he was soon able to alleviate.

“Wounded in ta hand and in ta foot!” said the seer: “what can it mean? It must mean something, Malcolm, my son.”

“Weel, daddy, we maun jist bide till we see,” said Malcolm cheerfully.

A little talk followed, in the course of which it came into Malcolm’s head to tell his grandfather the dream he had had so much of, the first night he had slept in that room—but more for the sake of something to talk about that would interest one who believed in all kinds of prefigurations, than for any other reason.

Duncan sat moodily silent for some time, and then, with a great heave of his broad chest, lifted up his head, like one who had formed a resolution, and said:

“The hour has come. She has long peen afraid to meet it, but it has come, and Allister will meet it.—She’ll not be your cran’father, my son.”

He spoke the words with perfect composure, but as soon as they were uttered, burst into a wail, and sobbed like a child.

"Ye'll be my ain father than?" said Malcolm.

"No, no, my son. She'll not pe anything that's your own at aal!"

And the tears flowed down his channelled cheeks.

For one moment Malcolm was silent, utterly bewildered. But he must comfort the old man first, and think about what he had said afterwards.

"Ye're my ain daddy, whatever ye are!" he said. "Tell me a' about it, daddy."

"She'll tell you all she'll pe knowing, my son, and she nefer told a lie efen to a Cawmill."

He began his story in haste, as if anxious to have it over, but had to pause often from fresh outbursts of grief. It contained nothing more of the essential than I have already recorded, and Malcolm was perplexed to think why what he had known all the time should affect him so much in the telling. But when he ended with the bitter cry—"And now you'll pe loving her no more, my poy, my chilt, my Malcolm!" he understood it.

"Daddy! daddy!" he cried, throwing his arms round his neck and kissing him, "I lo'e ye better nor ever. An' weel I may!"

"But how can you, when you've cot none of ta plood in you, my son?" persisted Duncan.

“ I hae as muckle as ever I had, daddy.

“ Yes, put you’ll didn’t know.”

“ But ye did, daddy.”

“ Yes, and inteed she cannot tell why she’ll pe loving you so much herself aal ta time!”

“ Weel, daddy, gien ye cud lo’e me sae weel, kennin’ me nae bluid’s bluid o’ yer ain—I canna help it: I *maun* lo’e ye mair nor ever, noo’ at I ken’t tu.—Daddy, daddy, I had *nae* claim upo’ ye, an’ ye hae been father an’ gran’father an’ a’ to me!”

“ What could she do, Malcolm, my poy? Ta chilt had no one, and she had no one, and so it wass. You must pe her own poy after all!—And she’ll not pe wondering put.— It might pe.—Yes, inteed not!”

His voice sank to the murmurs of a half-uttered soliloquy, and as he murmured he stroked Malcolm’s cheek.

“ What are ye efter noo, daddy?” asked Malcolm.

The only sign that Duncan heard the question was the complete silence that followed. When Malcolm repeated it, he said something in Gaelic, but finished the sentence thus, apparently unaware of the change of language :

“—only how else should she be loving you so much, Malcolm, my son?”

“I ken what Maister Graham would say, daddy,” rejoined Malcolm, at a half-guess.

“What would he say, my son? He’s a coot man, your Master Craham.—It could not be without the same fathers, and the same chief.”

“He wad say it was ’cause we war a’ o’ ae bluid—’cause we had a’ ae father.”

“Oh yes, no doubt! We aal come from the same first parents; but that will be a fery long way off, before the clans cot together. It’ll not be holding fery well now, my son. That wass before the Cawmills.”

“That’s no what Maister Graham would mean, daddy,” said Malcolm. “He wad mean that God was the father o’ ’s a’, and sae we cudna help lo’in’ ane anither.”

“No; that cannot be right, Malcolm; for then we should haf to love eferypody. Now she loves you, my son, and she hates Cawmill of Clenlyon. She loves Mistress Partan when she’ll not be too rude to her, and she hates that Mistress Catanach. She’s a paad woman, ’tat, she’ll be certain sure, though she’ll nefer saw her to speak to her. She’ll haf claws to her poosoms.”

“Weel, daddy, there was naething ither to gar ye lo’e me. I was jist a helpless human bein’, an’ sae for that, an’ nae ither rizzon, ye tuik a’ that fash wi’ me! An’ for mysel’, I’m deid sure I cudna lo’e ye better gien ye war twise my gran’father.”

“He’s her own poy!” cried the piper, much comforted; and his hand sought his head, and lighted gently upon it. “—Put, maype,” he went on, “she might not haf loved you so much if she hadn’t peen thinking sometimes——”

He checked himself. Malcolm’s questions brought no conclusion to the sentence, and a long silence followed.

“Supposin’ I was to turn oot a Cawmill?” said Malcolm, at length.

The hand that was fondling his curls withdrew as if a serpent had bit it, and Duncan rose from his chair.

“Wass it her own son to pe speaking such an efil thing!” he said, in a tone of injured and sad expostulation.

“For onything ye ken, daddy—ye canna tell but it *mith* be.”

“Ton’t preathe it, my son!” cried Duncan in a voice of agony, as if he saw unfolding a fearful

game the arch-enemy had been playing for his soul. —“Put it cannot pe,” he resumed instantly, “for then how should she pe loving you, my son?”

“’Cause ye was in for that afore ye kent wha the puir beastie was.”

“The tarling chilt! she could *not* haf loved him if he had been a Cawmill. Her soul would haf chumped pack from him as from ta snake in ta tree. Ta hate in her heart to ta plood of ta Cawmill, would have killed ta chilt of ta Cawmill plood. No, Malcolm! no, my son!”

“Ye wadna hae me believe, daddy, that gien ye had kent by mark o’ hiv (*hoof*) an’ horn, that the cratur they laid i’ yer lap was a Cawmill—ye wad hae risen up, an’ looten it lie whaur it fell?”

“No, Malcolm; I would haf put my foot upon it, as I would on ta young fiper in ta heather.”

“Gien I *was* to turn oot ane o’ that ill race, ye wad hate me, than, daddy—efter a’! Ochone, daddy! Ye wad be weel pleased to think hoo ye stack yer durk throu’ the ill han’ o’ me, an’ wadna rist till ye had it throu’ the waur hert.—I doobt I had better up an’ awa’, daddy, for wha’ kens what ye mayna du to me?”

Malcolm made a movement to rise, and Duncan's quick ears understood it. He sat down again by his bedside and threw his arms over him.

“Lie town, lie town, my poy. If you ket up, tat will pe you are a Cawmill. No, no, my son! You are ferry cruel to your own old daddy. She would pe too much sorry for her poy to hate him. It will pe so treadful to pe a Cawmill! No, no, my poy! She would take you to her poosom, and tat would trive ta Cawmill out of you. Put ton't speak of it any more, my son, for it cannot pe.—She must co now, for her pipes will pe waiting for her.”

Malcolm feared he had ventured too far, for never before had his grandfather left him except for work. But the possibility he had started might do something to soften the dire endurance of his hatred.

His thoughts turned to the new darkness let in upon his history and prospects. All at once the cry of the mad laird rang in his mind's ear: “I dinna ken whaur I cam frae!”

Duncan's revelation brought with it nothing to be done—hardly anything to be *thought*—merely room for most shadowy, most unfounded conjecture—nay, not conjecture—nothing but the vaguest of castle-building! In merry mood, he would henceforth be



the son of some mighty man, with a boundless future of sunshine opening before him ; in sad mood, the son of some strolling gipsy or worse—his very origin better forgotten—a disgrace to the existence for his share in which he had hitherto been peacefully thankful.

Like a lurking phantom-shroud, the sad mood leaped from the field of his speculation, and wrapped him in its folds : sure enough he was but a beggar's brat!—How henceforth was he to look Lady Flormel in the face? Humble as he had believed his origin, he had hitherto been proud of it : with such a high-minded sire as he deemed his own, how could he be other? But now! Nevermore could he look one of his old companions in the face! They were all honourable men ; he a base-born foundling!

He would tell Mr. Graham of course ; but what could Mr. Graham say to it? The fact remained. He must leave Portlossie.

His mind went on brooding, speculating, devising. The evening sunk into the night, but he never knew he was in the dark until the housekeeper brought him a light. After a cup of tea, his thoughts found pleasanter paths. One thing was

certain :—he must lay himself out, as he had never done before, to make Duncan MacPhail happy. With this one thing clear to both heart and mind, he fell fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *THE WIZARD'S CHAMBER.*

HE woke in the dark, with that strange feeling of bewilderment which accompanies the consciousness of having *been* waked: is it that the brain wakes before the mind, and like a servant unexpectedly summoned, does not know what to do, with its master from home? or is it that the master wakes first, and the servant is too sleepy to answer his call?—Quickly coming to himself, however, he sought the cause of the perturbation now slowly ebbing. But the dark into which he stared could tell nothing; therefore he abandoned his eyes, took his station in his ears, and thence sent out his messengers. But neither, for some moments, could the scouts of hearing come upon any sign.

At length, something seemed doubtfully to touch the sense—the faintest suspicion of a noise in the next room—the wizard's chamber: it was enough to set Malcolm on the floor. Forgetting his wounded foot and lighting upon it, the agony it caused him dropped him at once on his hands and knees, and

in this posture he crept into the passage. As soon as his head was outside his own door, he saw a faint gleam of light coming from beneath that of the next room. Advancing noiselessly, and softly feeling for the latch, his hand encountered a bunch of keys depending from the lock, but happily did not set them jingling. As softly, he lifted the latch, when, almost of itself, the door opened a couple of inches, and, with bated breath, he saw the back of a figure he could not mistake—that of Mrs. Catanach. She was stooping by the side of a tent bed much like his own, fumbling with the bottom hem of one of the check-curtains, which she was holding towards the light of a lantern on a chair. Suddenly she turned her face to the door, as if apprehending a presence; as suddenly, he closed it, and turned the key in the lock. To do so he had to use considerable force, and concluded its grating sound had been what waked him.

Having thus secured the prowler, he crept back to his room, considering what he should do next. The speedy result of his cogitations was, that he indued his nether garments, though with difficulty from the size of his foot, thrust his head and arms through a jersey, and set out on hands and knees

for an awkward crawl to Lord Lossie's bedroom.

It was a painful journey, especially down the two spiral stone stairs which led to the first floor where it lay. As he went, Malcolm resolved, in order to avoid rousing needless observers, to enter the room, if possible, before waking the marquis.

The door opened noiselessly. A night-light, afloat in a crystal cup, revealed the bed, and his master asleep, with one arm lying on the crimson quilt. He crept in, closed the door behind him, advanced half-way to the bed, and in a low voice called the marquis.

Lord Lossie started up on his elbow, and without a moment's consideration seized one of a brace of pistols which lay on a table by his side, and fired. The ball went with a sharp thud into the thick mahogany door.

"My lord! my lord!" cried Malcolm, "it's only me!"

"And who the devil are you?" returned the marquis, catching up the second pistol.

"Malcolm, yer ain henchman, my lord."

"Damn you! what are you about, then? Get up. What are you after there—crawling like a thief?"

As he spoke he leaped from the bed, and seized Malcolm by the back of the neck.

"It's a mercy I wasna mair like an honest man," said Malcolm, "or that bullet wad hae been throu' the harns o' me. Yer lordship's a wheen ower rash."

"Rash! you rascal!" cried Lord Lossie; "—when a fellow comes into my room on his hands and knees in the middle of the night? Get up, and tell me what you are after, or, by Jove! I'll break every bone in your body."

A kick from his bare foot in Malcolm's ribs fitly closed the sentence.

"Ye *are* ower rash, my lord!" persisted Malcolm. "I canna get up. I hae a fit the size o' a sma' buoy!"

"Speak then, you rascal!" said his lordship, loosening his hold, and retreating a few steps, with the pistol cocked in his hand.

"Dinna ye think it wad be better to lock the door, for fear the shot sud bring ony o' the fowk?" suggested Malcolm, as he rose to his knees and leaned his hands on a chair.

"You're bent on murdering me—are you then?" said the marquis, beginning to come to himself and see the ludicrousness of the situation.

"Gien I had been that, my lord, I wadna hae waukent ye up first."

"Well, what the devil is it all about?—You needn't think any of the men will come. They're a pack of the greatest cowards ever breathed."

"Weel, my lord, I hae gruppit her at last, an' I bude to come an' tell ye."

"Leave your beastly gibberish. You can speak what at least resembles English when you like."

"Weel, my lord, I hae her unner lock an' keye."

"Who, in the name of Satan?"

"Mistress Catanach, my lord?"

"Damn her eyes! What's she to me that I should be waked out of a good sleep for *her*?"

"That's what I wad fain yer lordship kent: *I* dinna."

"None of your riddles! Explain yourself;—and make haste; I want to go to bed again."

"'Deed, yer lordship maun jist pit on yer claes, an' come wi' me."

"Where to?"

"To the warlock's chaumer, my lord—whaur that ill wuman remains 'in durance vile,' as Spenser wad say—but no sae vile's hersel', I doobt."

Thus arrived at length, with a clear road before

him, at the opening of his case, Malcolm told in few words what had fallen out. As he went on, the marquis grew interested, and by the time he had finished, had got himself into dressing gown and slippers.

“Wadna ye tak yer pistol?” suggested Malcolm slyly.

“What! to meet a woman?” said his lordship.

“Ow na! but wha kens there nichtna be anither murderer about? There nicht be twa in ae nicht.”

Impertinent as was Malcolm's humour, his master did not take it amiss: he lighted a candle, told him to lead the way, and took his revenge by making joke after joke upon him as he crawled along. With the upper regions of his house the marquis was as little acquainted as with those of his nature, and required a guide.

Arrived at length at the wizard's chamber, they listened at the door for a moment, but heard nothing; neither was there any light visible at its lines of junction. Malcolm turned the key, and the marquis stood close behind, ready to enter. But the moment the door was unlocked, it was pulled open violently, and Mrs. Catanach, looking too high to see Malcolm who was on his knees, aimed a good



blow at the face she did see, in the hope, no doubt, of thus making her escape. But it fell short, being countered by Malcolm's head in the softest part of her person, with the result of a clear entrance. The marquis burst out laughing, and stepped into the room with a rough joke. Malcolm remained in the doorway.

"My lord," said Mrs. Catanach, gathering herself together, and rising little the worse, save in temper, for the treatment he had commented upon, "I have a word for your lordship's own ear."

"Your right to be there does stand in need of explanation," said the marquis.

She walked up to him with confidence.

"You shall have an explanation, my lord," she said, "such as shall be my full quittance for intrusion even at this untimely hour of the night."

"Say on then," returned his lordship.

"Send that boy away then, my lord."

"I prefer having him stay," said the marquis.

"Not a word shall cross my lips till he's gone," persisted Mrs. Catanach. "I know him too well! Awa' wi' ye, ye deil's buckie!" she continued, turning to Malcolm; "I ken mair aboot you nor ye ken aboot yersel', an' deil hae't I ken o' guid to you

or yours! But I s' gar ye lauch o' the vrang side o' *your* mou' yet, my man."

Malcolm, who had seated himself on the threshold, only laughed and looked reference to his master.

"Your lordship was never in the way of being frightened at a woman," said Mrs. Catanach, with an ugly expression of insinuation.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"That depends," he said. Then turning to Malcolm,—“Go along,” he added; “only keep within call. I may want you.”

“Nane o' yer hearkenin' at the key-hole, though, or I s' lug-mark ye, ye ——!” said Mrs. Catanach, finishing the sentence none the more mildly that she did it only in her heart.

“I wadna hae ye believe *a'* 'at she says, my lord,” said Malcolm, with a significant smile, as he turned to creep away.

He closed the door behind him, and lest Mrs. Catanach should re-possess herself of the key, drew it from the lock, and, removing a few yards, sat down in the passage by his own door. A good many minutes passed, during which he heard not a sound.

At length the door opened, and his lordship

came out. Malcolm looked up, and saw the light of the candle the marquis carried, reflected from a face like that of a corpse. Different as they were, Malcolm could not help thinking of the only dead face he had ever seen. It terrified him for the moment in which it passed without looking at him.

“My lord!” said Malcolm gently.

His master made no reply.

“My lord!” cried Malcolm, hurriedly pursuing him with his voice, “am I to lea’ the keyes wi’ yon hurdon, and lat her open what doors she likes?”

“Go to bed,” said the marquis angrily, “and leave the woman alone;” with which words he turned into the adjoining passage, and disappeared.

Mrs. Catanach had not come out of the wizard’s chamber, and for a moment Malcolm felt strongly tempted to lock her in once more. But he reflected that he had no right to do so after what his lordship had said—else, he declared to himself, he would have given her at least as good a fright as she seemed to have given his master, to whom he had no doubt she had been telling some horrible lies. He withdrew, therefore, into his room—to lie pondering again for a wakeful while.

This horrible woman claimed then to know more concerning him than his so-called grandfather, and, from her profession, it was likely enough ; but information from her was hopeless—at least until her own evil time came ; and then, how was any one to believe what she might choose to say ? So long, however, as she did not claim him for her own, she could, he thought, do him no hurt he would be afraid to meet.

But what could she be about in that room still ? She might have gone, though, without the fall of her soft fat foot once betraying her !

Again he got out of bed, and crept to the wizard's door, and listened. But all was still. He tried to open it, but could not : Mrs. Catanach was doubtless spending the night there, and perhaps at that moment lay, evil conscience and all, fast asleep in the tent-bed. He withdrew once more, wondering whether she was aware that he occupied the next room ; and, having, for the first time, taken care to fasten his own door, got into bed, finally this time, and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE HERMIT.*

MALCOLM had flattered himself that he would at least be able to visit his grandfather the next day ; but, instead of that, he did not even make an attempt to rise—head as well as foot aching so much, that he felt unfit for the least exertion—a phase of being he had never hitherto known. Mrs. Courthope insisted on advice, and the result was that a whole week passed before he was allowed to leave his room.

In the meantime, a whisper awoke and passed from mouth to mouth in all directions through the little burgh—whence arising only one could tell, for even her mouth-piece, Miss Horn's Jean, was such a mere tool in the midwife's hands, that she never doubted but Mrs. Catanach was, as she said, only telling the tale as it was told to her. Mrs. Catanach, moreover, absolutely certain that no threats would render Jean capable of holding her tongue, had so impressed upon her the terrible consequences of repeating what she had told her, that,

the moment the echo of her own utterances began to return to her own ears, she began to profess an utter disbelief in the whole matter—the precise result Mrs. Catanach had foreseen and intended : now she lay unsuspected behind Jean, as behind a wall whose door was built up ; for she had so graduated her threats, gathering the fullest and vaguest terrors of her supernatural powers about her name, that while Jean dared, with many misgivings, to tamper with the secret itself, she dared not once mention Mrs. Catanach in connection with it. For Mrs. Catanach herself, she never alluded to the subject, and indeed when it was mentioned in her hearing pretended to avoid it ; but at the same time she took good care that her silence should be not only eloquent, but discreetly so, that is, implying neither more nor less than she wished to be believed.

The whisper, in its first germinal sprout, was merely that Malcolm was not a MacPhail ; and even in its second stage it only amounted to this, that neither was he the grandson of old Duncan.

In the third stage of its development, it became the assertion that Malcolm was the son of somebody of consequence ; and in the fourth, that a

certain person, not yet named, lay under shrewd suspicion.

The fifth and final form it took was, that Malcolm was the son of Mrs. Stewart of Gersfell, who had been led to believe that he died within a few days of his birth, whereas he had in fact been carried off and committed to the care of Duncan MacPhail, who drew a secret annual stipend of no small amount in consequence—whence indeed his well-known riches!

Concerning this final form of the whisper, a few of the women of the burgh believed or thought or fancied they remembered both the birth and reported death of the child in question—also certain rumours afloat at the time, which cast an air of probability over the new reading of his fate. In circles more remote from authentic sources, the general reports met with remarkable embellishments, but the framework of the rumour—what I may call the bones of it—remained undisputed.

From Mrs. Catanach's behaviour, every one believed that she knew all about the affair, but no one had a suspicion that she was the hidden fountain and prime mover of the report—so far to the contrary was it, that people generally anticipated

a frightful result for her when the truth came to be known, for that Mrs. Stewart would follow her with all the vengeance of a bereaved tigress. Some indeed there were who fancied that the mother, if not in full complicity with the midwife, had at least given her consent to the *arrangement*; but these were not a little shaken in their opinion when at length Mrs. Stewart herself began to figure more immediately in the affair, and it was witnessed that she had herself begun to search into the report. Certain it was that she had dashed into the town in a carriage and pair—the horses covered with foam—and had hurried, quite *raised-like*, from house to house, prosecuting inquiries. It was said that, finding at length, after much labour, that she could arrive at no certainty even as to the first promulgator of the assertion, she had a terrible fit of crying, and professed herself unable, much as she would have wished it, to believe a word of the report: it was far too good news to be true; no such luck ever fell to *her* share—and so on. That she did not go near Duncan MacPhail was accounted for by the reflection, that, on the supposition itself, he was of the opposite party, and the truth was not to be looked for from him.



At length it came to be known that, strongly urged, and battling with a repugnance all but invincible, she had gone to see Mrs. Catanach, and had issued absolutely radiant with joy, declaring that she was now absolutely satisfied, and, as soon as she had communicated with the young man himself, would, without compromising any one, take what legal steps might be necessary to his recognition as her son.

Although, however, these things had been going on all the week that Malcolm was confined to his room, they had not reached this last point until after he was out again, and meantime not a whisper of them had come to his or Duncan's ears. Had they been still in the Seaton, one or other of the travelling ripples of talk must have found them; but Duncan had come and gone between his cottage and Malcolm's bedside, without a single downy feather from the still widening flap of the wings of Fame ever dropping on him; and the only persons who visited Malcolm besides, were the doctor—too discreet in his office to mix himself up with gossip; Mr. Graham, to whom nobody, except it had been Miss Horn, whom he had not seen for a fortnight, would have dreamed of mentioning such a subject; and

Mrs. Courthope—not only discreet like the doctor, but shy of such discourse as any reference to the rumour must usher in its train.

At length he was sufficiently recovered to walk to his grandfather's cottage; but only now for the first time had he a notion of how far bodily condition can reach in the oppression and overclouding of the spiritual atmosphere.—“Gien I be like this,” he said to himself, “what maun the weather be like aneth yon hump o’ the laird’s!” Now also for the first time he understood what Mr. Graham had meant when he told him that he only was a strong man who was strong in weakness; he only a brave man who, inhabiting trembling, yet faced his foe; he only a true man who, tempted by *good*, yet abstained.

Duncan received him with delight, made him sit in his own old chair, got him a cup of tea, and waited upon him with the tenderness of a woman. While he drank his tea, Malcolm recounted his last adventure in connection with the wizard's chamber.

“Tat will be ta ped she'll saw in her feeshon,” said Duncan, whose very eyes seemed to listen to the tale.

When Malcolm came to Mrs. Catanach's assertion

that she knew more of him than he did himself—

“Then she peliefs ta voman does, my poy. We are aall poth of us in ta efil voman’s power,” said Duncan sadly.

“Never a hair, daddy!” cried Malcolm. “A’ poer’s i’ the han’s o’ ane, an’ that’s no *her* maister. Ken she what she likes, she canna pairt you an’ me, daddy.”

“God forpid!” responded Duncan. “But we must pe on our kard.”

Close by the cottage stood an ivy-grown bridge, of old leading the king’s highway across the burn to the Auld Toon, but now leading only to the flower-garden. Eager for the open air of which he had been so long deprived, and hoping he might meet the marquis or Lady Florimel, Malcolm would have had his grandfather accompany him thither; but Duncan declined, for he had not yet attended to the lamps; and Malcolm therefore went alone.

He was slowly wandering, where never wind blew, betwixt rows of stately hollyhocks, on which his eyes fed, while his ears were filled with the sweet noises of a little fountain, issuing from the upturned beak of a marble swan, which a marble urchin sought in vain to check by squeezing the long throat

of the bird, when the sounds of its many-toned fall in the granite basin seemed suddenly centupled on every side, and Malcolm found himself caught in a tremendous shower. Prudent enough to avoid getting wet in the present state of his health, he made for an arbour he saw near by, on the steep side of the valley—one he had never before happened to notice.

Now it chanced that Lord Lossie himself was in the garden, and, caught also by the rain while feeding some pet goldfishes in a pond, betook himself to the same summer-house, following Malcolm.

Entering the arbour, Malcolm was about to seat himself until the shower should be over, when, perceiving a mossy arched entrance to a gloomy recess in the rock behind, he went to peep into it, curious to see what sort of a place it was.

Now the foolish whim of a past generation had, in the farthest corner of the recess, and sideways from the door, seated the figure of a hermit, whose jointed limbs were so furnished with springs and so connected with the stone that floored the entrance, that as soon as a foot pressed the threshold, he rose, advanced a step, and held out his hand.

The moment, therefore, Malcolm stepped in, up

rose a pale, hollow-cheeked, emaciated man, with eyes that stared glassily, made a long skeleton-like stride towards him, and held out a huge bony hand, rather, as it seemed, with the intent of clutching, than of greeting, him. An unaccountable horror seized him; with a gasp which had nearly become a cry, he staggered backwards out of the cave. It seemed to add to his horror that the man did not follow—remained lurking in the obscurity behind. In the arbour Malcolm turned—turned to flee!—though why, or from what, he had scarce an idea.

But when he turned, he encountered the marquis, who was just entering the arbour.

“Well, MacPhail,” he said kindly, “I’m glad——”

But his glance became fixed in a stare; he changed colour, and did not finish his sentence.

“I beg yer lordship’s pardon,” said Malcolm, wondering through all his perturbation at the look he had brought on his master’s face; “I didna ken ye was at han’.”

“What the devil makes you look like that?” said the marquis, plainly with an effort to recover himself.

Malcolm gave a hurried glance over his shoulder.

“Ah! I see!” said his lordship, with a mechanical

kind of smile, very unlike his usual one; “—you’ve never been in there before!”

“No, my lord.”

“And you got a fright?”

“Ken ye wha’s that, in there, my lord?”

“You booby! It’s nothing but a dummy—with springs, and—and—all damned tom-foolery!”

While he spoke his mouth twitched oddly, but instead of his bursting into the laugh of enjoyment natural to him at the discomfiture of another, his mouth kept on twitching and his eyes staring.

“Ye maun hae seen him yersel’ ower my shouther, my lord,” hinted Malcolm.

“I saw your face, and that was enough to——.”  
But the marquis did not finish the sentence.

“Weel, ’cep it was the oonnaiteral luik o’ the thing—no human, an’ yet sae dooms like it—I can not accoont for the grue or the trimmle ’at cam ower me, my lord. I never fan’ onything like it i’ my life afore. An’ even noo ’at I unnerstan’ what it is, I kenna what wad gar me luik the boody (*bogie*) i’ the face again.”

“Go in at once,” said the marquis fiercely.

Malcolm looked him full in the eyes.

“Ye mean what ye say, my lord?”

“Yes, by God!” said the marquis, with an expression I can describe only as of almost savage solemnity.

Malcolm stood silent for one moment.

“Do you think I’ll have a man about me that has no more courage than—than—a—woman?” said his master, concluding with an effort.

“I was jist turnin’ ower an auld queston, my lord—whether it be lawfu’ to obey a tyrant. But it’s nae worth stan’in’ oot upo’. I s’ gang.”

He turned to the arch, placed a hand on each side of it, and leaning forward with outstretched neck, peeped cautiously in, as if it were the den of a wild beast. The moment’ he saw the figure—seated on a stool—he was seized with the same unaccountable agitation, and drew back shivering.

“Go in,” shouted the marquis.

Most Britons would count obedience to such a command slavish; but Malcolm’s idea of liberty differed so far from that of most Britons, that he felt, if now he refused to obey the marquis, he might be a slave for ever; for he had already learned to recognize and abhor that slavery which is not the less the root of all other slaveries that it remains occult in proportion to its potency—self-slavery:—he must



and would conquer this whim, antipathy, or whatever the loathing might be: it was a grand chance given him of proving his will supreme—that is, himself a free man! He drew himself up, with a full breath, and stepped within the arch. Up rose the horror again, jerked itself towards him with a clank, and held out its hand. Malcolm seized it with such a gripe that its fingers came off in his grasp.

“Will that du, my lord?” he said calmly, turning a face rigid with hidden conflict, and gleaming white from the framework of the arch, upon his master, whose eyes seemed to devour him.

“Come out,” said the marquis, in a voice that seemed to belong to some one else.

“I hae blaudit yer playock, my lord,” said Malcolm ruefully, as he stepped from the cave and held out the fingers.

Lord Lossie turned and left the arbour.

Had Malcolm followed his inclination, he would have fled from it, but he mastered himself still, and walked quietly out. The marquis was pacing, with downbent head and hasty strides, up the garden; Malcolm turned the other way.

The shower was over, and the sun was drawing out millions of mimic suns from the drops that hung, for



a moment ere they fell, from flower and bush and great tree. But Malcolm saw nothing. Perplexed with himself, and more perplexed yet with the behaviour of his master, he went back to his grandfather's cottage, and, as soon as he came in, recounted to him the whole occurrence.

"He had a feeshon," said the bard, with wide eyes.

"He comes of a race that sees."

"What cud the veesion hae been, daddy?"

"Tat she knows not, for ta feeshon tid not come to her," said the piper solemnly.

Had the marquis had his vision in London, he would have gone straight to his *study*, as he called it, not without a sense of the absurdity involved, opened a certain cabinet, and drawn out a certain hidden drawer; being at Lossie, he walked up the glen of the burn to the bare hill, overlooking the House, the royal burgh, the great sea, and his own lands lying far and wide around him. But all the time he saw nothing of these—he saw but the low white forehead of his vision, a mouth of sweetness, and hazel eyes that looked into his very soul.

Malcolm walked back to the House, clomb the narrow duct of an ancient stone stair that went screwing like a great auger through the pile from

top to bottom, sought the wide lonely garret, flung himself upon his bed, and from his pillow gazed through the little dormer window on the pale blue skies flecked with cold white clouds, while in his mind's eye he saw the foliage beneath burning in the flames of slow decay, diverse as if each of the seven in the prismatic chord had chosen and seared its own: the first nor'-easter that drove the flocks of Neptune on the sands, would sweep its ashes away. Life, he said to himself, was but a poor gray kind of thing after all. The peacock summer had folded its gorgeous train, and the soul within him had lost its purple and green, its gold and blue. He never thought of asking how much of the sadness was owing to bodily conditions with which he was little acquainted, and to compelled idleness in one accustomed to an active life. But if he had, the sorrowful probabilities of life would have seemed just the same. And indeed he might have argued that, to be subject to any evil from a cause inadequate, only involves an absurdity that embitters the pain by its mockery. He had yet to learn what faith can do, in the revelation of the Moodless, for the subjugation of mood to will.

As he lay thus weighed upon rather than ponder-

ing, his eye fell on the bunch of keys which he had taken from the door of the wizard's chamber, and he wondered that Mrs. Courthope had not seen and taken them—apparently had not missed them. And the chamber doomed to perpetual desertion lying all the time open to any stray foot! Once more at least, he must go and turn the key in the lock.

As he went the desire awoke to look again into the chamber, for that night he had had neither light nor time enough to gain other than the vaguest impression of it.

But for no lifting of the latch would the door open.—How could the woman—witch she must be—have locked it? He proceeded to unlock it. He tried one key, then another. He went over the whole bunch. Mystery upon mystery!—not one of them would turn. Bethinking himself, he began to try them the other way, and soon found one to throw the bolt *on*. He turned it in the contrary direction, and it threw the bolt off: still the door remained immovable! It must then—awful thought!—be fast on the inside! Was the woman's body lying there behind those check curtains? Would it lie there until it vanished, like that of the wizard,—vanished utterly—bones and all, to a little dust, which

one day a housemaid might sweep up in a pan?

On the other hand, if she had got shut in, would she not have made noise enough to be heard?—he had been day and night in the next room! But it was not a spring-lock, and how could that have happened? Or would she not have been missed, and inquiry made after her? Only such an inquiry might well have never turned in the direction of Lossie House, and he might never have heard of it, if it had.

Anyhow he must do something; and the first rational movement would clearly be to find out quietly for himself whether the woman was actually missing or not.

Tired as he was he set out at once for the burgh, and the first person he saw was Mrs. Catanach standing on her doorstep and shading her eyes with her hand, as she looked away out to the horizon over the roofs of the Seaton. He went no farther.

In the evening he found an opportunity of telling his master how the room was strangely closed; but his lordship pooh-poohed, and said something must have gone wrong with the clumsy old lock.

With vague foresight, Malcolm took its key

from the bunch, and, watching his opportunity, unseen hung the rest on their proper nail in the housekeeper's room. Then, having made sure that the door of the wizard's chamber was locked, he laid the key away in his own chest.

END OF VOL. II.















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