

## A STRANGER APPEARS.

---

OUR friend Grant's sad story of John Macpherson of Invereshie and his unhappy lady produced so powerful an effect on his auditors, that we continued to walk on in silence for some time after he had concluded, each of us musing after his own fashion. We had been accidentally joined by a stranger, a stout made athletic little man, in an old-fashioned rusty black coat and waistcoat, corduroy breeches, and grey worsted stockings. In one hand he carried a good oaken stick, and in the other a little bundle, tied up in a red cotton handkerchief. This personage walked sturdily forth from a small house of refreshment by the wayside a few minutes before our friend had commenced his narrative ; and we had been too much

occupied with our own conversation, at the time of his appearance, to notice him farther, than by exchanging with him the customary "*good day to you*" of salutation. But the stranger, having taken even this much as a sufficient introduction among pedestrians travelling in the same direction in so lonely a country as that we were then passing through, ventured to continue to keep pace with us in such a way, as to be all the while within ear-shot of what was said. To the story of John Macpherson he listened with most unremitting attention; and to our no small surprise, he was the first person to open his mouth to make a comment upon it, now that it was ended. After taking a short trot of several yards, to bring himself abreast of our friend the narrator, and at the same time taking off a very well worn hat with an air of marked respect towards him whom he was addressing, he spoke as follows.

STRANGER.—Might I be so bold, sir, as to offer a few remarks, critical, historical, and explanatory on the fragment of Macpherson history which you have just finished rehearsing?

GRANT (*somewhat surprised*)—Certainly, sir; I shall be very glad to hear them.

STRANGER (*with a grave and solemn air*)—Why then, courteous sir, whilst I am altogether wishful to render unto your tale every such praise as may be justly found to be due to it as the produce of one remarkable for that sort of inventive genius which caused Homer to contrive so pretty a story out of the bare *facts* of the Trojan war, and which enabled Virgil to interest us so much with that long tale which he tells, by exaggerating those few dry adventures which befel the Pious Æneas as he fled from Troy to found a new kingdom in Italy, yet must I honestly admit that I cannot compliment the historical fragment which you have given furth to your friends for being par-teeklarly verawcious.

CLIFFORD.—Bravo! Well done, old fellow. Ha! ha! ha! You beat Touchstone all to sticks. Never heard the lie more ingeniously given in my life.

STRANGER (*with great earnestness and very much abashed*).—Howt no, Sir. Upon my solemn credit, I meant no such-an-a-thing. I only meant to convey to this gentleman, and that with all due respect and courtesy, my humble opinion, that in a grave piece of history, having reference

to a brave and honourable Highland clan, the true events should be closer stuck to, than it may be necessary to do where the subject matter is nothing better than such dubious and unimportant trash as that which the ancient Greek and Latin poets had to deal with.

GRANT (*a little nettled.*)—And what reason have you to suppose that this is not the true and authentic statement of the facts of John Macpherson's history as they really occurred? I gave them as I got them from another. You do not suppose that I altered or invented them?

STRANGER (*with an obsequious inclination of his body.*)—Howt away, no, no. No such-an-a-thing. If you got them from another, I have no manner of doot but you have rehearsed them simply as ye had them, without adding, or eiking, or paring, or changing one whit. But, nevertheless, the real facts have been sorely and most grievously tampered with by some one.

GRANT.—Indeed. And how come you to know anything about this Macpherson story? and what is your authority for saying that the facts have been tampered with?

STRANGER (*with oracular gravity.*)—Firstly,

or in the first place, I beg to premeese, that I am a schoolmaster; and therefore it is, that I am greatly given to accurate and parteeklar inquiry. Secondly, or in the second place, having daily practeesed myself into a habit of correcting the errors of my scholars, it is not very easy for me to pass silently by the blunders of other folk. And, thirdly, or in the third place, and to conclude, I am a Macpherson myself; and as it is natural that I should on that account be all the more earnest and punctilious in expiscating the facks connected with the history of that great clan, so is it also to be presumed that I may have had greater opportunity for conducking such an investigation. And so having premeesed this much, I may add, by way of an impruvment on the subject, that I shall be just as well pleased to correct your version of this history as I should be to correct the theme of any of my own boys.

GRANT (*smiling.*)—I am truly obliged to you for this gratuitous offer of your tuition.

STRANGER (*whom I shall now call DOMINIE MACPHERSON.*)—Not in the very least obliged to me, sir. The greatest pleasure of my life is to instruct the ignorant; and in yespecial, I deem it

a vurra high honor and delight to me to have this opportunity of instructing such a gentleman as you. Proud truly may I be of my scholar.

CLIFFORD (*with mock gravity.*)—The master and the scholar methinks are quite worthy of each other.

DOMINIE (*with a bow to the speaker.*)—I am greatly obligated to you for the compliment, sir, (*then turning to Grant with a more confident and self-satisfied air than he had hitherto ventured to assume.*)—Firstly, or in the first place, then, sir, you must be pleased to know that John Macpherson of Invereshie did not espouse a south country woman; for his wife was a Shaw of Dalnabbert, on Speyside there. Secondly, or in the second place, the leddy never had any such extraordinary fascination over him as you have described her to have; for she was in reality so ill-natured a woman, that she and her goodman were continually discording and squabbling together. In the third place, or, as I should say, thirdly,—and it being one of the few conditions in which your tale in some sort agrees with the true history,—she was undoubtedly so great a spendthrift, that many was the bitter quarrel that arose 'twixt her goodman

and her, because of her extravagances. But, fourthly, or in the fourth place, the worthy John Macpherson did not throw the lady into the Feshie; and this is a fact which I would in yespécial crave you to correct in any future edition, seeing that it brings an evil and scandalous report upon the said John, and would seem to smell of murder, when the true parteeklars of the history, known to me from the time I was a babe, are as follows, to wit:—It happened one day that the dispute between them ran to a higher pitch than common, and the lady left the house with the intention of fleeing to her father at Dalnabhert. There was neither bridge nor boat upon Feshie at that same time; but the woman was so demented with rage, that she plunged into the water with the determination of wading through. Well, she had not gone three steps into the ford when she was carried off her legs entirely; but her body being buoyed up by reason of her petticoats, of which it is said that she was used to wear not less than four, (my grandmother, honest woman, did the same,) she floated down the stream into the deep water, until being brought by the swirl of an eddy near to a jutting out rock, she caught at a twig or

branch that grew near the edge, and held by it like grim death. And here I must admit, that, fifthly, or in the fifth place, Macpherson did of a surety apply the edge of his *skian dhu* to the bit twiggly she had a grip of. But, then, most people charitably believe that it was nothing else but pure courtesy that induced him to do so to the lady; for, as appearances most naturally caused him to believe that she had taken to the water with the full intent of making away with herself by drowning, he thought that the least that he as her husband could in common civility do, was to render to her what small help he could towards the effecting of her purpose. And then, as to his parting with her in these memorable words,—which, to the great edification of all the wives of Badenoch, have since become a proverb in that country, to wit, “*you have already taken much from me, you may take that with you too,*” it must strike you as being most evident, gentlemen, that if Macpherson was to part with his lady at all, he could not have parted with her in terms more truly obliging, or with words more generously liberal. But the most extraordinary and most important deviation from fact, of which the author of your

romance has been guilty, yet remains to be noticed; for, in the sixth place, or sixthly, Macpherson, who seems in the whole matter to have had no other intention than that his lady should get a good *dookie* (as we say, *Scottice*) in the Feshie, whereby to extinguish the fire of her rage, did not only most gallantly jump into the water to try to save her life, but he actually did save it, or at least the lady's life was saved some how or other, seeing that she was afterwards the mother of Æneas Macpherson of Invereshie, the direct ancestor of the present worthy Laird of Invereshie and Ballindalloch.

The modest yet dignified air of triumph, which the schoolmaster gradually assumed, as he thus went on unfolding fact after fact, and which was considerably augmented as he approached the conclusion of this his critical oration, very much amused us all.

GRANT. (*with an assumed gravity.*)—I see that I have not only to do with a gentleman of liberal classical acquirement, with one, too, who blessed with great acumen, has made the art of criticism an especial study, but with a person who is also great as an authority touching the particu-

lar historical point which is now in question. And yet, daring as it may be in one of my inexperience to enter the arena with an opponent so powerful, I may perhaps be permitted to observe, in defence of that version of this piece of history of which I have been possessed, that the apparent discrepancy between it and that which you are disposed to consider as the true statement, is, in truth, little or nothing in importance, and may, after all, be very easily reconciled. For, if we attend to the circumstances, we shall find, firstly, or in the first place, that there is nothing before us that may render it impossible for us to believe that Miss Shaw of Dalnabhert might not have received a boarding school education at Edinburgh, as many young ladies of Badenoch unquestionably do, yea and an education, too, which might have well enough fitted her to have mingled in the gaieties of a court. Secondly, or in the second place, as to the *discōrdings* which you say took place between her and her husband, I think you must do me the justice to recollect that these were alluded to in my narrative, though they were delicately touched on, as you will allow that all such family quarrels should be. But even if you do not ad-

mit the propriety of this, you must at least grant that if I fell into an error at all in this respect, it was less an error of fact than of degree. In the third place, or thirdly, the evidence of both authorities is agreed as to the fact of the lady's extravagance, as well as in the important circumstance that her extravagance was the cause which ultimately led the parties to the brink of the river Feshie. Fourthly, or in the fourth place, the conflicting statements in the two several reports regarding the mode in which the lady first got into the water, will appear to be of little or no moment, when we give to them a due consideration. We are nowhere informed that any one was present but Macpherson and his wife; and when we reflect that these two individuals must have been at the time in a state of excitement and agitation so very great as altogether to deprive them of the power of judging distinctly of any thing, it would be quite vain for us to look to either of them for any accurate statement as to how the matter occurred. All accounts, however, are agreed as to the use made by Macpherson of the *skian dhu*. As to your sixthly, or in the sixth place, I think you will be disposed candidly to admit, that as my

informant saw fit to carry his narrative only to a certain point of time, so as to break off at the *black cloud* and *the despair*, it is not only perfectly possible, but extremely probable, that he meant to tell, in his second chapter, of the happy recovery of the lady from the waters of the Feshie,—of the perfect reconciliation of the pair,—of her reformation in all respects,—of the retrenchment of her expenditure,—of the disappearance of all dandies with plumed hats and piked shoes,—of the happy birth of the young *Æneas*,—and of his merry christening, with many other matters which the historian has now left us darkly to guess at.

The astonished critic was utterly confounded by our friend's reply, so solemnly and seriously uttered as it was; and after one or two "*hums*" and "*has!*" and a "*very true!*" or two, he fell back some footsteps in rear of us; and notwithstanding divers malicious attempts made on the part of Clifford to bring him once more into the fight, he relapsed into an humble and attentive listener.

AUTHOR.—Your tale, Grant, brings to my recollection a circumstance which, as tradition tells us, happened after the celebrated *Raid of Killychrist*.

GRANT.—I am not aware that I ever heard of the Raid of Killychrist, celebrated though you call it.

AUTHOR.—I believe the outline of the story of that Raid has been given somewhere or other in print by a literary friend of mine, though, to tell you the truth, I have never as yet had the good fortune to see it. But I will cheerfully give you my edition of it, such as it is, if you are willing to listen to it.

CLIFFORD.—But stop for one moment ; and, ere you begin your story, tell me, if you can, what that strange scare-crow looking figure is, which we see standing in yonder green marshy islet near the edge of the small lake immediately before us ?

AUTHOR.—That figure has excited much speculation. It for some time greatly puzzled myself. I passed by this way more than once, in the belief, from the cursory view I had of it, that it was a solitary heron. But my curiosity was excited at last, by observing that it was invariably and immoveably in the same spot in the islet, whilst I discovered, to my no small wonder, that the islet itself was never found by me twice successively in the same part of the little lake, being sometimes

stationed in the middle of it, and at other times somewhere towards either end, or near to either of the sides.

CLIFFORD.—Come, come! ha! ha! ha! you are coming magic over us now. You don't expect that we are to believe any such crammer as this!

AUTHOR.—I assure you that what I state is strictly and literally true, though I must admit that you have some reason for doubt until you have a farther explanation; and I am glad that I have it in my power to give it to you as it was given to myself by an intelligent man who lives in this neighbourhood. What you see is in reality a floating island.

CLIFFORD.—A floating island! I know that you Scots are said to be fond of migration; but I had no idea that any part of your soil was in the habit of making voyages either for profit or pleasure.

AUTHOR.—Nay, nor does a Scot himself often move from any station where he finds himself comfortable, except it may be for the purpose of migrating into some other which may hold out yet greater advantages than that which he possesses. But this whimsical islet shifts its position without rea-

son, exactly like an idle Englishman, who, without any fixed object, moves from one spot of Europe to another, he cannot himself tell why, and merely as the breezes of caprice may blow him about.

GRANT.—A Roland for your Oliver, master Clifford! But (*addressing Author*) tell us how you account for this strange phenomenon?

AUTHOR.—The mass, as you see, is not very large. Its extent is only a few yards each way. It is composed of a light, fibrous, peaty soil, which was probably originally torn from its connecting foundation by the influx of some sudden flood, aided by a contemporaneous and tempestuous wind. Being once fairly turned adrift in the lake, we can easily conceive that its specific gravity must have been every succeeding day lessened by the growth of the matted roots of the numerous aquatic plants that grew on it, till it rose more and more out of the water, and became at length so very buoyant as to be transported about by every change of the wind.

CLIFFORD.—Bravo! You have lectured to us like a geologist; and I must confess, with as much show of reason in your theory as those of many of these antediluvian philosophers can pre-

tend to. But you have yet to play the part of the zoologist, and to give us some account of that strange animal, human being or beast—alive or stuffed—as it may be, that so strangely stands sentry yonder in the midst of it. One might almost fancy it to be one of Macbeth's weird sisters.

GRANT.—It has indeed a most uncouth and ghostly appearance when seen at this distance. It looks so much like some withered human figure, where we cannot easily reconcile it to reason, that any human figure could possibly be.

AUTHOR.—Yes; and when we think what its effect must be when it is seen by a stranger, sailing slowly over the surface of the little lake, impelled by a whistling wind—at that hour when spirits of all kinds are supposed to have power to burst their cerements—when the moon may give sufficient light to display enough of its wasted and wizard looking form to beget fearful conceptions, without affording such an illumination as might be sufficient to explain its nature; we may easily believe that many are the rustic hearts that sink with dread, and many are the clodpate heads of hair that bristle up—“like quills upon the fretful porcupine”—whilst whips and spurs are employed

with all manner of good will on the unfortunate hides of such unlucky animals as may chance to be carrying lated travellers past this enchanted lake towards their distant place of repose.

CLIFFORD.—I can well enough conceive all this. But you have yet to tell us what the figure really is.

AUTHOR.—Notwithstanding its imposing appearance, it is nothing more, after all, than a figure made of rushes and rags carelessly tied about a pole by some of the simple shepherds of these wilds. It is comparatively of recent creation; but I understand that the islet is by no means of modern origin, though I am led to believe that, like other more extensive pieces of earth, it has undergone many changes since its first creation. It must have been liable to be increased and diminished by various natural causes at different periods of its history.

DOMINIE MACPHERSON, (*half advancing into the group, with a chastened air, and more obsequious inclination of his body than he had ever yet used.*)—If I may make so bold as to put in my word—ha—hum. If I might be permitted to make so bold as to speak, I can assure you, gen-

tlemen, that the bit island yonder has long existed. I have known these parts for many a long year ; and I can testify to the fact, from my own observation, added to and eiked out by that of men who were old when I was born. Superstitious people call it the witches' island, and believe that the weird sisterhood hold it under their yespecial control and governance.

CLIFFORD.—Much better sailing in it than in a sieve. But have you gathered none of the adventures of the Beldams to whom you say it belongs ?

DOMINIE.—God forbid, sir, that I should say it belongs to such uncanny people ! But truly there is a very strange story connected with it.

CLIFFORD.—A story, Mr. Macpherson,—pray let's have your story without delay, if you please, that we may forthwith judge whether you are to rank highest in the world of letters as an historian or as a critic. “ *Perge Domine !* ”

GRANT.—You will gratify us much, sir.

DOMINIE.—I shall willingly try my hand, sir ; and if you find not the sweetness of Homer or Maro in my narrative, at least you shall be sure of that accuracy as to fact which so much distinguished the elegant author of the commentaries.

CLIFFORD, (*with mock gravity.*)—Doth the narrative touch your own adventures, my friend? Are you like Cæsar, the historian of your own deeds?

DOMINIE.—Not so, sir; but I had all the facts from my father, who knew the hero and the heroine, and all the persons whose names are mentioned in it.

CLIFFORD.—Ha! you have a hero, then, and a heroine too? Why that, methinks, looks somewhat more like romance than history.

GRANT (*smiling.*)—Be quiet, Clifford! You forget that you are all this while keeping us from our story. Pray, sir, have the goodness to begin.

The schoolmaster bowed; and taking a central place in the line of march, he proceeded with his narrative in language, so mingled with quaint and original expressions, that I cannot hope, and therefore do not always pretend to render it with the same raciness with which it was uttered.