

III.

THE SALMON-FISHER OF UDOLL.

CHAPTER I.

And the fishers shall mourn and lament;
All those that cast the hook on the river,
And those that spread nets on the face of the waters,
Shall languish.

LOWTH'S TRANSLATION OF ISA. xix. 8.

IN the autumn of 1759, the Bay of Udoll, an arm of the sea which intersects the southern shore of the Frith of Cromarty, was occupied by two large salmon-wears, the property of one Allan Thomson, a native of the province of Moray, who had settled in this part of the country a few months before. He was a thin, athletic, raw-boned man, of about five feet ten, well-nigh in his thirtieth year, but apparently younger; erect and clean-limbed, with a set of handsome features, bright, intelligent eyes, and a profusion of light brown hair curling around an ample expanse of forehead. For the first twenty years of his life he had lived about a farm-house, tending cattle when a boy, and guiding the plough when he had grown up. He then travelled into England, where he wrought about seven years as a common laborer. A novelist would scarcely make choice of such a person for the hero of a tale; but men are to be estimated rather by the size and color of

their minds than the complexion of their circumstances ; and this ploughman and laborer of the north was by no means a very common man. For the latter half of his life he had pursued, in all his undertakings, one main design. He saw his brother rusties tied down by circumstance — that destiny of vulgar minds — to a youth of toil and dependence, and an old age of destitution and wretchedness ; and, with a force of character which, had he been placed at his outset on what may be termed the table-land of fortune, would have raised him to her higher pinnacles, he persisted in adding shilling to shilling and pound to pound, not in the sordid spirit of the miser, but in the hope that his little hoard might yet serve him as a kind of stepping-stone in rising to a more comfortable place in society. Nor were his desires fixed very high ; for, convinced that independence and the happiness which springs from situation in life lie within the reach of the frugal farmer of sixty or eighty years, he moulded his ambition on the conviction, and scarcely looked beyond the period at which he anticipated his savings would enable him to take his place among the humbler tenantry of the country.

Our friths and estuaries at this period abounded with salmon, one of the earliest exports of the kingdom ; but from the low state into which commerce had sunk in the northern districts, and the irregularity of the communication kept up between them and the sister kingdom, by far the greater part caught on our shores were consumed by the inhabitants. And so little were they deemed a luxury, that it was by no means uncommon, it is said, for servants to stipulate with their masters that they should not have to diet on salmon oftener than thrice a week. Thomson, however, had seen quite enough, when in England, to convince him that, meanly as they were esteemed by his

country-folks, they might be rendered the staple of a profitable trade; and, removing to the vicinity of Cromarty, for the facilities it afforded in trading to the capital, he launched boldly into the speculation. He erected his two wears with his own hands; built himself a cottage of sods on the gorge of a little ravine sprinkled over with bushes of alder and hazel; entered into correspondence with a London merchant, whom he engaged as his agent; and began to export his fish by two large sloops which plied at this period between the neighboring port and the capital. His fishings were abundant, and his agent an honest one; and he soon began to realize the sums he had expended in establishing himself in the trade.

Could any one anticipate that a story of fondly-cherished but hapless attachment — of one heart blighted for ever, and another fatally broken — was to follow such an introduction?

The first season of Thomson's speculation had come to a close. Winter set in, and, with scarcely a single acquaintance among the people in the neighborhood, and little to employ him, he had to draw for amusement on his own resources alone. He had formed, when a boy, a taste for reading; and might now be found, in the long evenings, hanging over a book beside the fire. By day he went sauntering among the fields, calculating on the advantages of every agricultural improvement, or attended the fairs and trysts of the country, to speculate on the profits of the drover and cattle-feeder and make himself acquainted with all the little mysteries of bargain-making.

There holds early in November a famous cattle-market in the ancient barony of Ferintosh, and Thomson had set out to attend it. The morning was clear and frosty, and he felt buoyant of heart and limb, as, passing westwards

along the shore, he saw the huge Ben Wevís towering darker and more loftily over the Frith as he advanced, or turned aside, from time to time, to explore some ancient burying-ground or Danish encampment. There is not a tract of country of equal extent in the three kingdoms where antiquities of this class lie thicker than in that northern strip of the parish of Resolis which bounds on the Cromarty Frith. The old castle of Craig House, a venerable, time-shattered building, detained him, amid its broken arches, for hours; and he was only reminded of the ultimate object of his journey when, on surveying the moor from the upper bartizan, he saw that the groups of men and cattle, which since morning had been mottling in succession the track leading to the fair, were all gone out of sight, and that, far as the eye could reach, not a human figure was to be seen. The whole population of the country seemed to have gone to the fair. He quitted the ruins; and, after walking smartly over the heathy ridge to the west, and through the long birch wood of Kinbeakie, he reached, about mid-day, the little straggling village at which the market holds.

Thomson had never before attended a thoroughly Highland market, and the scene now presented was wholly new to him. The area it occupied was an irregular opening in the middle of the village, broken by ruts and dung-hills and heaps of stone. In front of the little turf-houses, on either side, there was a row of booths, constructed mostly of poles and blankets, in which much whiskey, and a few of the simpler articles of foreign merchandise, were sold. In the middle of the open space there were carts and benches, laden with the rude manufactures of the country: Highland brogues and blankets; bowls and platters of beech; a species of horse and cattle harness, formed of the twisted

twigs of birch; bundles of split fir, for lath and torches; and hair tackle and nets for fishermen. Nearly seven thousand persons, male and female, thronged the area, bustling and busy, and in continual motion, like the tides and eddies of two rivers at their confluence. There were country-women, with their shaggy little horses laden with cheese and butter; Highlanders from the far hills, with droves of sheep and cattle; shoemakers and weavers from the neighboring villages, with bales of webs and wallets of shoes; farmers and fishermen, engaged, as it chanced, in buying or selling; beviies of bonny lasses, attired in their gayest; ploughmen and mechanics; drovers, butchers, and herd-boys. Whiskey flowed abundantly, whether bargain-makers bought or sold, or friends met or parted; and, as the day wore later, the confusion and bustle of the crowd increased. A Highland tryst, even in the present age, rarely passes without witnessing a fray; and the Highlanders seventy years ago were of more combative dispositions than they are now. But Thomson, who had neither friend nor enemy among the thousands around him, neither quarrelled himself, nor interfered in the quarrels of others. He merely stood and looked on, as a European would among the frays of one of the great fairs of Bagdad or Astrakan.

He was passing through the crowd, towards evening, in front of one of the dingier cottages, when a sudden burst of oaths and exclamations rose from within, and the inmates came pouring out pell-mell at the door, to throttle and pummel one another, in inextricable confusion. A gray-headed old man, of great apparent strength, who seemed by far the most formidable of the combatants, was engaged in desperate battle with two young fellows from the remote Highlands, while all the others were matched

man to man. Thomson, whose residence in England had taught him very different notions of fair play and the ring, was on the eve of forgetting his caution and interfering, but the interference proved unnecessary. Ere he had stepped up to the combatants, the old man, with a vigor little lessened by age, had shaken off both his opponents; and, though they stood glaring at him like tiger-cats, neither of them seemed in the least inclined to renew the attack.

“Twa mean, pitiful kerns,” exclaimed the old man, “to tak odds against ane auld enough to be their father; and that, too, after burning my loof wi’ the het airn! But I hae noited their twa heads thegither! Sic a trick! — to bid me stir up the fire after they had heated the wrang end o’ the poker! Deil, but I hae a guid mind to gie them baith mair o’t yet!”

Ere he could make good his threat, however, his daughter, a delicate-looking girl of nineteen, came rushing up to him through the crowd. “Father!” she exclaimed, “dearest father! let us away. For my sake, if not your own, let these wild men alone. They always carry knives; and, besides, you will bring all of their clan upon you that are at the tryst, and you will be murdered.”

“No muckle danger frae that, Lillias,” said the old man. “I hae little fear frae ony ane o’ them; an’ if they come by twasome, I hae my friends here too. The ill-deedy wratches, to blister a’ my loof wi’ the poker! But come awa, lassie; your advice is, I dare say, best after a’.”

The old man quitted the place with his daughter, and for the time Thomson saw no more of him. As the night approached, the Highlanders became more noisy and turbulent; they drank, and disputed, and drove their very bargains at the dirk’s point; and as the salmon-fisher

passed through the village for the last time, he could see the waving of bludgeons, and hear the formidable war-cry of one of the clans, with the equally formidable "Hilloa! help for Cromarty!" echoing on every side of him. He kept coolly on his way, however, without waiting the result; and, while yet several miles from the shores of Udoll, daylight had departed, and the moon at full had risen, red and huge in the frosty atmosphere, over the bleak hill of Nigg.

He had reached the Burn of Newhall, — a small stream which, after winding for several miles between its double row of alders and its thickets of gorse and hazel, falls into the upper part of the bay, — and was cautiously picking his way, by the light of the moon, along a narrow pathway which winds among the bushes. There are few places in the country of worse repute among believers in the supernatural than the Burn of Newhall; and its character seventy years ago was even worse than it is at present. Witch meetings without number have been held on its banks, and dead-lights have been seen hovering over its deeper pools; sportsmen have charged their fowling-pieces with silver when crossing it in the night-time; and I remember an old man who never approached it after dark without fixing a bayonet on the head of his staff. Thomson, however, was but little influenced by the beliefs of the period; and he was passing under the shadow of the alders, with more of this world than of the other in his thoughts, when the silence was suddenly broken by a burst of threats and exclamations, as if several men had fallen a-fighting, scarcely fifty yards away, without any preliminary quarrel; and with the gruffer voices there mingled the shrieks and entreaties of a female. Thomson grasped his stick, and sprang forward. He reached an opening among the bushes,

and saw in the imperfect light the old robust Lowlander of the previous fray attacked by two men armed with bludgeons, and defending himself manfully with his staff. The old man's daughter, who had clung round the knees of one of the ruffians, was already thrown to the ground, and trampled under foot. An exclamation of wrath and horror burst from the high-spirited fisherman, as, rushing upon the fellow like a tiger from its jungle, he caught the stroke aimed at him on his stick, and, with a side-long blow on the temple, felled him to the ground. At the instant he fell, a gigantic Highlander leaped from among the bushes, and, raising his huge arm, discharged a tremendous blow at the head of the fisherman, who, though taken un-awares and at a disadvantage, succeeded, notwithstanding, in transferring it to his left shoulder, where it fell broken and weak. A desperate but brief combat ensued. The ferocity and ponderous strength of the Celt found their more than match in the cool, vigilant skill and leopard-like agility of the Lowland Scot; for the latter, after discharging a storm of blows on the head, face, and shoulders of the giant, until he staggered, at length struck his bludgeon out of his hand, and prostrated his whole huge length by dashing his stick end-long against his breast. At nearly the same moment the burly old farmer, who had grappled with his antagonist, had succeeded in flinging him, stunned and senseless, against the gnarled root of an alder; and the three ruffians — for the first had not yet recovered — lay stretched on the grass. Ere they could secure them, however, a shrill whistle was heard echoing from among the alders, scarcely a hundred yards away. "We had better get home," said Thomson to the old man, "ere these fellows are reinforced by their brother ruffians in the wood." And, supporting the maiden with his one

hand, and grasping his stick with the other, he plunged among the bushes in the direction of the path, and gaining it, passed onward, lightly and hurriedly, with his charge: the old man followed more heavily behind; and in somewhat less than an hour after they were all seated beside the hearth of the latter, in the farm-house of Meikle Farness.

It is now more than forty years since the last stone of the very foundation has disappeared; but the little grassy eminence on which the house stood may still be seen. There is a deep wooded ravine behind, which, after winding through the table-land of the parish, like a huge crooked furrow, the bed, evidently, of some antediluvian stream, opens far below to the sea; an undulating tract of field and moor, with here and there a thicket of bushes and here and there a heap of stone, spreads in front. When I last looked on the scene, 'twas in the evening of a pleasant day in June. One half the eminence was bathed in the red light of the setting sun; the other lay brown and dark in the shadow. A flock of sheep were scattered over the sunny side. The herd-boy sat on the top, solacing his leisure with a music famous in the pastoral history of Scotland, but well-nigh exploded, that of the *stock* and *horn*; and the air seemed filled with its echoes. I stood picturing to myself the appearance of the place ere all the inmates of this evening, young and old, had gone to the churchyard, and left no successors behind them; and, as I sighed over the vanity of human hopes, I could almost fancy I saw an apparition of the cottage rising on the knoll. I could see the dark turf-walls; the little square windows, barred below and glazed above; the straw roof, embossed with moss and stone-crop; and, high over head, the row of venerable elms, with their gnarled trunks

and twisted branches, that rose out of the garden-wall. Fancy gives an interest to all her pictures, — yes, even when the subject is but an humble cottage; and when we think of human enjoyment, of the pride of strength and the light of beauty, in connection with a few mouldering and nameless bones hidden deep from the sun, there is a sad poetry in the contrast which rarely fails to affect the heart. It is now two thousand years since Horace sung of the security of the lowly, and the unfluctuating nature of their enjoyments; and every year of the two thousand has been adding proof to proof that the poet, when he chose his theme, must have thrown aside his philosophy. But the inmates of the farm-house thought little this evening of coming misfortune. Nor would it have been well if they had; their sorrow was neither heightened nor hastened by their joy.

Old William Stewart, the farmer, was one of a class well-nigh worn out in the southern Lowlands, even at this period, but which still comprised, in the northern districts, no inconsiderable portion of the people, and which must always obtain in countries only partially civilized and little amenable to the laws. Man is a fighting animal from very instinct; and his second nature, custom, mightily improves the propensity. A person naturally courageous, who has defended himself successfully in half a dozen different frays, will very probably begin the seventh himself; and there are few who have fought often and well for safety and the right who have not at length learned to love fighting for its own sake. The old farmer had been a man of war from his youth. He had fought at fairs and trysts and weddings and funerals; and, without one ill-natured or malignant element in his composition, had broken more heads than any two men in the country-side. His late

quarrel at the tryst, and the much more serious affair among the bushes, had arisen out of this disposition; for though well-nigh in his sixtieth year, he was still as warlike in his habits as ever. Thomson sat fronting him beside the fire, admiring his muscular frame, huge limbs, and immense structure of bone. Age had grizzled his hair and furrowed his cheeks and forehead; but all the great strength, and well-nigh all the activity of his youth, it had left him still. His wife, a sharp-featured little woman, seemed little interested in either the details of his adventure or his guest, whom he described as the "brave, hardy chield, wha had beaten twasome at the cudgel, — the vera littlest o' them as big as himsel'."

"Och, gudeman," was her concluding remark, "ye aye stick to the auld trade, bad though it be; an' I'm feared that or ye mend ye maun be aulder yet. I'm sure ye ne'er made your ain money o't."

"Nane o' yer nonsense," rejoined the farmer. "Bring butt the bottle an' your best cheese."

"The gudewife an' I dinna aye agree," continued the old man, turning to Thomson. "She's baith near-gaun an' new-fangled; an' I like aye to hae routh o' a' things, an' to live just as my faithers did afore me. Why sould I bother my head wi' *improvidments*, as they ca' them? The country's gane clean gite wi' pride, Thomson! Naething less sairs folk noo, forsooth, than carts wi' wheels to them; an' it's no a fortnight syne sin' little Sandy Martin, the trifling cat, jeered me for yoking my owson to the plough by the tail. What ither did they get tails for?"

Thomson had not sufficiently studied the grand argument of design, in this special instance, to hazard a reply.

"The times hae gane clean oot o' joint," continued the man. "The law has come a' the length o' Cromarty noo;

an' for breaking the head o' an impudent fallow, ane runs the risk o' being sent aff the plantations. Faith, I wish oor Parliamenters had mair sense. What do they ken about us or oor country? Deil haet difference doo they mak' atween the shire o' Cromarty an' the shire o' Lunnon; just as if we could be as quiet beside the red-wud Hielan-man here, as they can be beside the queen. Na, na,—naething like a guid cudgel; little wad their law hae dune for me at the Burn o' Newhall the night."

Thomson found the character of the old man quite a study in its way; and that of his wife—a very different, and, in the main, inferior sort of person, for she was mean-spirited and a niggard—quite a study too. But by far the most interesting inmate of the cottage was the old man's daughter, the child of a former marriage. She was a pale, delicate, blue-eyed girl, who, without possessing much positive beauty of feature, had that expression of mingled thought and tenderness which attracts more powerfully than beauty itself. She spoke but little. That little, however, was expressive of gratitude and kindness to the deliverer of her father; sentiments which, in the breast of a girl so gentle, so timid, so disposed to shrink from the roughnesses of active courage, and yet so conscious of her need of a protector, must have mingled with a feeling of admiration at finding in the powerful champion of the recent fray a modest, sensible young man, of manners nearly as quiet and unobtrusive as her own. She dreamed that night of Thomson; and her first thought, as she awakened next morning, was, whether, as her father had urged, he was to be a frequent visitor at Meikle Farness. But an entire week passed away, and she saw no more of him.

He was sitting one evening in his cottage, poring over a book. A huge fire of brushwood was blazing against the

earthen wall, filling the upper part of the single rude chamber of which the cottage consisted with a dense cloud of smoke, and glancing brightly on the few rude implements which occupied the lower, when the door suddenly opened, and the farmer of Meikle Farness entered, accompanied by his daughter."

"Ha! Allan, man," he said, extending his large hand, and grasping that of the fisherman; "if you winna come an' see us, we maun just come and see you. Lillias an' mysel' were afraid the gudewife had frightened you awa, for she's a near-gaun sort o' body, an' maybe no owre kind-spoken; but ye maun just come an' see us whiles, an' no mind her. Except at counting-time, I never mind her mysel'." Thomson accommodated his visitors with seats. "Yer life maun be a gay lonely ane here, in this eerie bit o' a glen," remarked the old man, after they had conversed for some time on different subjects; "but I see ye dinna want company a'thegither, such as it is," — his eye glancing, as he spoke, over a set of deal shelves, occupied by some sixty or seventy volumes. "Lillias there has a liking for that kind o' company too, an' spends some days mair o' her time amang her books than the gudewife or mysel' would wish."

Lillias blushed at the charge, and hung down her head. It gave, however, a new turn to the conversation; and Thomson was gratified to find that the quiet, gentle girl, who seemed so much interested in him, and whose gratitude to him, expressed in a language less equivocal than any spoken one, he felt to be so delicious a compliment, possessed a cultivated mind and a superior understanding. She had lived under the roof of her father in a little paradise of thoughts and imaginations, the spontaneous growth of her own mind; and as she grew up to womanhood, she

had recourse to the companionship of books; for in books only could she find thoughts and imaginations of a kindred character.

It is rarely that the female mind educates itself. The genius of the sex is rather fine than robust; it partakes rather of the delicacy of the myrtle than the strength of the oak; and care and culture seem essential to its full development. Who ever heard of a female Burns or Bloomfield? And yet there have been instances, though rare, of women working their way from the lower levels of intellect to well-nigh the highest, — not wholly unassisted, 'tis true; the age must be a cultivated one, and there must be opportunities of observation; but, if not wholly unassisted, with helps so slender, that the second order of masculine minds would find them wholly inefficient. There is a quickness of perception and facility of adaptation in the better class of female minds — an ability of catching the tone of whatever is good from the sounding of a single note, if I may so express myself — which we almost never meet with in the mind of man. Lillias was a favorable specimen of the better and more intellectual order of women; but she was yet very young, and the process of self-cultivation carrying on in her mind was still incomplete; and Thomson found that the charm of her society arose scarcely more from her partial knowledge than from her partial ignorance. The following night saw him seated by her side in the farm-house of Meikle Farness; and scarcely a week passed during the winter in which he did not spend at least one evening in her company.

Who is it that has not experienced the charm of female conversation, — that poetry of feeling which develops all of tenderness and all of imagination that lies hidden in our

nature? When following the ordinary concerns of life, or engaged in its more active businesses, many of the better faculties of our minds seem overlaid: there is little of feeling, and nothing of fancy; and those sympathies which should bind us to the good and fair of nature lie repressed and inactive. But in the society of an intelligent and virtuous female there is a charm that removes the pressure. Through the force of sympathy, we throw our intellects for the time into the female mould; our tastes assimilate to the tastes of our companion; our feelings keep pace with hers; our sensibilities become nicer and our imaginations more expansive; and, though the powers of our mind may not much excel, in kind or degree, those of the great bulk of mankind, we are sensible that for the time we experience some of the feelings of genius. How many common men have not female society and the fervor of youthful passion sublimed into poets? I am convinced the Greeks displayed as much sound philosophy as good taste in representing their muses as beautiful women.

Thomson had formerly been but an admirer of the poets. He now became a poet. And had his fate been a kindlier one, he might perhaps have attained a middle place among at least the minor professors of the incommunicable art. He was walking with Lillias one evening through the wooded ravine. It was early in April, and the day had combined the loveliest smiles of spring with the fiercer blasts of winter. There was snow in the hollows; but where the sweeping sides of the dell reclined to the south, the violet and the primrose were opening to the sun. The drops of a recent shower were still hanging on the half-expanded buds, and the streamlet was yet red and turbid; but the sun, nigh at his setting, was streaming in golden glory along the field, and a lark was carolling high in the

air as if its day were but begun. Lillias pointed to the bird, diminished almost to a speck, but relieved by the red light against a minute cloudlet.

“Happy little creature!” she exclaimed; “does it not seem rather a thing of heaven than of earth? Does not its song frae the clouds mind you of the hymn heard by the shepherds! The blast is but just owre, an’ a few minutes syne it lay cowering and chittering in its nest; but its sorrows are a’ gane, an’ its heart rejoices in the bonny blink, without a’e thought o’ the storm that has passed or the night that comes on. Were you a poet, Allan, like ony o’ your twa namesakes, — he o’ ‘The Seasons,’ or he o’ ‘The Gentle Shepherd,’ — I would ask you for a song on that bonnie burdie.” Next time the friends met, Thomson produced the following verses:—

TO THE LARK.

Sweet minstrel of the April cloud,
 Dweller the flowers among,
 Would that my heart were formed like thine,
 And tuned like thine my song!
 Not to the earth, like earth’s low gifts,
 Thy soothing strain is given:
 It comes a voice from middle sky, —
 A solace breathed from heaven.

Thine is the morn; and when the sun
 Sinks peaceful in the west,
 The mild light of departing day
 Purples thy happy breast.
 And ah! though all beneath that sun
 Dire pains and sorrows dwell,
 Rarely they visit, short they stay,
 Where thou hast built thy cell.

When wild winds rave, and snows descend,
 And dark clouds gather fast,
 And on the surf-encircled shore
 The seaman’s barque is cast,

Long human grief survives the storm;
But thou, thrice happy bird!
No sooner has it passed away,
Than, lo! thy voice is heard.
When ill is present, grief is thine;
It flies, and thou art free;
But ah! can aught achieve for man
What nature does for thee?
Man grieves amid the bursting storm;
When smiles the calm he grieves;
Nor cease his woes, nor sinks his plaint,
Till dust his dust receives.

CHAPTER III.

As the latter month of spring came on the fisherman again betook himself to his wears, and nearly a fortnight passed in which he saw none of the inmates of the farmhouse. Nothing is so efficient as absence, whether self-imposed or the result of circumstances, in convincing a lover that he is truly such, and in teaching him how to estimate the strength of his attachment. Thomson had sat night after night beside Lillias Stewart, delighted with the delicacy of her taste and the originality and beauty of her ideas; delighted, too, to watch the still partially-developed faculties of her mind shooting forth and expanding into bud and blossom under the fostering influence of his own more matured powers. But the pleasure which arises from the interchange of ideas and the contemplation of mental beauty, or the interest which every thinking mind must feel in marking the aspirations of a superior intellect towards its proper destiny, is not love; and it was only now that Thomson ascertained the true scope and nature of his feelings.

“She is already my friend,” thought he. “If my schemes prosper, I shall be in a few years what her father is now; and may then ask her whether she will not be more. Till then, however, she shall be my friend, and my friend only. I find I love her too well to make her the wife of either a poor unsettled speculator, or still poorer laborer.”

He renewed his visits to the farm-house, and saw, with a discernment quickened by his feelings, that his mistress had made a discovery with regard to her own affections somewhat similar to his, and at a somewhat earlier period. She herself could have perhaps fixed the date of it by referring to that of their acquaintance. He imparted to her his scheme, and the uncertainties which attended it, with his determination, were he unsuccessful in his designs, to do battle with the evils of penury and dependence without a companion; and, though she felt that she could deem it a happiness to make common cause with him even in such a contest, she knew how to appreciate his motives, and loved him all the more for them. Never, perhaps, in the whole history of the passion, were there two lovers happier in their hopes and each other. But there was a cloud gathering over them.

Thomson had never been an especial favorite with the step-mother of Lillias. She had formed plans of her own for the settlement of her daughter with which the attentions of the salmon-fisher threatened materially to interfere; and there was a total want of sympathy between them besides. Even William, though he still retained a sort of rough regard for him, had begun to look askance on his intimacy with Lillias. His avowed love, too, for the modern, gave no little offence. The farm of Meikle Farness was obsolete enough in its usages and mode of tillage to have formed no uninteresting study to the antiquary. To-

wards autumn, when the fields vary most in color, it resembled a rudely-executed chart of some large island, — so irregular were the patches which composed it, and so broken on every side by a surrounding sea of moor that here and there went winding into the interior in long river-like strips, or expanded within into friths and lakes. In one corner there stood a heap of stones, in another a thicket of furze; here a piece of bog, there a broken bank of clay. The implements with which the old man labored in his fields were as primitive in their appearance as the fields themselves: there was the one-stilted plough, the wooden-toothed harrow, and the basket-woven cart with its rollers of wood. With these, too, there was the usual misproportion on the farm, to its extent, of lean, inefficient cattle, — four half-starved animals performing with incredible effort the work of one. Thomson would fain have induced the old man, who was evidently sinking in the world, to have recourse to a better system, but he gained wondrous little by his advice. And there was another cause which operated still more decidedly against him. A wealthy young farmer in the neighborhood had been for the last few months not a little diligent in his attentions to Lillias. He had lent the old man, at the preceding term, a considerable sum of money; and had ingratiated himself with the step-mother by chiming in on all occasions with her humor, and by a present or two besides. Under the auspices of both parents, therefore, he had paid his addresses to Lillias; and, on meeting with a repulse, had stirred them both up against Thomson.

The fisherman was engaged one evening in fishing his nets. The ebb was that of a stream tide, and the bottom of almost the entire bay lay exposed to the light of the setting sun, save that a river-like strip of water wound

through the midst. He had brought his gun with him, in the hope of finding a seal or otter asleep on the outer banks ; but there were none this evening ; and, laying down his piece against one of the poles of the wear, he was employed in capturing a fine salmon, that went darting like a bird from side to side of the inner enclosure, when he heard some one hailing him by name from outside the nets. He looked up, and saw three men — one of whom he recognized as the young farmer who was paying his addresses to Lillias — approaching from the opposite side of the bay. They were apparently much in liquor, and came staggering towards him in a zigzag track along the sands. A suspicion crossed his mind that he might find them other than friendly ; and, coming out of the enclosure, where, from the narrowness of the space and the depth of the water, he would have lain much at their mercy, he employed himself in picking off the patches of sea-weed that adhered to the nets, when they came up to him, and assailed him with a torrent of threats and reproaches. He pursued his occupation with the utmost coolness, turning round, from time to time, to repay their abuse by some cutting repartee. His assailants discovered they were to gain little in this sort of contest ; and Thomson found, in turn, that they were much less disguised in liquor than he at first supposed, or than they seemed desirous to make it appear. In reply to one of his more cutting sarcasms, the tallest of the three, a ruffian-looking fellow, leaped forward and struck him on the face ; and in a moment he had returned the blow with such hearty good-will that the fellow was dashed against one of the poles. The other two rushed in to close with him. He seized his gun, and, springing out from beside the nets to the open bank, dealt the farmer, with the butt-end, a tremendous blow on

the face, which prostrated him in an instant; and then, cocking the piece and presenting it, he commanded the other two, on peril of their lives, to stand aloof. Odds of weapons, when there is courage to avail one's self of them, forms a thorough counterbalance to odds of number. After an engagement of a brief half-minute, Thomson's assailants left him in quiet possession of the field; and he found, on his way home, that he could trace their route by the blood of the young farmer. There went abroad an exaggerated and very erroneous edition of the story, highly unfavorable to the salmon-fisher; and he received an intimation shortly after that his visits at the farm-house were no longer expected. But the intimation came not from Lillias.

The second year of his speculation had well-nigh come to a close, and, in calculating on the quantum of his shipments and the state of the markets, he could deem it a more successful one than even the first. But his agent seemed to be assuming a new and worse character. He rather substituted promises and apologies for his usual remittances, or neglected writing altogether; and, as the fisherman was employed one day in dismantling his wears for the season, his worst fears were realized by the astounding intelligence that the embarrassments of the merchant had at length terminated in a final suspension of payments!

"There," said he, with a coolness which partook in its nature in no slight degree of that insensibility of pain and injury which follows a violent blow, — "there go well-nigh all my hard-earned savings of twelve years, and all my hopes of happiness with Lillias!" He gathered up his utensils with an automaton-like carefulness, and, throwing them over his shoulders, struck across the sands in the direction of the cottage. "I must see her," he said, "once

more, and bid her farewell." His heart swelled to his throat at the thought; but, as if ashamed of his weakness, he struck his foot firmly against the sand, and, proudly raising himself to his full height, quickened his pace. He reached the door, and, looking wistfully, as he raised the latch, in the direction of the farm-house, his eye caught a female figure coming towards the cottage through the bushes of the ravine. "'Tis poor Lillias!" he exclaimed. "Can she already have heard that I am unfortunate, and that we must part?" He went up to her, and, as he pressed her hand between both his, she burst into tears.

It was a sad meeting. Meetings must ever be such when the parties that compose them bring each a separate grief, which becomes common when imparted.

"I cannot tell you," said Lillias to her lover, "how unhappy I am. My step-mother has not much love to bestow on any one; and so, though it be in her power to deprive me of the quiet I value so much, I care comparatively little for her resentment. Why should I? She is interested in no one but herself. As for Simpson, I can despise without hating him. Wasps sting just because it is their nature; and some people seem born, in the same way, to be mean-spirited and despicable. But my poor father, who has been so kind to me, and who has so much heart about him, his displeasure has the bitterness of death to me. And then he is so wildly and unjustly angry with you. Simpson has got him, by some means, into his power, I know not how. My step-mother annoys him continually; and from the state of irritation in which he is kept, he is saying and doing the most violent things imaginable, and making me so unhappy by his threats." And she again burst into tears.

Thomson had but little of comfort to impart to her. In-

deed, he could afterwards wonder at the indifference with which he beheld her tears, and the coolness with which he communicated to her the story of his disaster. But he had not yet recovered his natural tone of feeling. Who has not observed that, while in men of an inferior and weaker cast, any sudden and overwhelming misfortune unsettles their whole minds, and all is storm and uproar, in minds of a superior order, when subjected to the same ordeal, there takes place a kind of freezing, hardening process, under which they maintain at least apparent coolness and self-possession? Grief acts as a powerful solvent to the one class; to the other it is as the waters of a petrifying spring.

“Alas, my Lillias!” said the fisherman, “we have not been born for happiness and each other. We must part, each of us to struggle with our respective evils. Call up all your strength of mind, the much in your character that has as yet lain unemployed, and so despicable a thing as Simpson will not dare to annoy you. You may yet meet with a man worthy of you; some one who will love you as well as — as one who can at least appreciate your value, and who will deserve you better.” As he spoke, and his mistress listened in silence and in tears, William Stewart burst in upon them through the bushes; and, with a countenance flushed, and a frame tremulous with passion, assailed the fisherman with a torrent of threats and reproaches. He even raised his hand. The prudence of Thomson gave way under the provocation. Ere the blow had descended, he had locked the farmer in his grasp, and, with an exertion of strength which scarcely a giant would be capable of in a moment of less excitement, he raised him from the earth, and forced him against the grassy side of the ravine, where he held him despite of his efforts. A

shriek from Lillias recalled him to the command of himself. "William Stewart," he said, quitting his hold and stepping back, "you are an old man, and the father of Lillias." The farmer rose slowly and collectedly, with a flushed cheek but a quiet eye, as if all his anger had evaporated in the struggle, and, turning to his daughter, —

"Come, Lillias, my lassie," he said, laying hold of her arm, "I have been too hasty; I have been in the wrong." And so they parted.

Winter came on, and Thomson was again left to the solitude of his cottage, with only his books and his own thoughts to employ him. He found little amusement or comfort in either. He could think only of Lillias, that she loved and yet was lost to him.

"Generous and affectionate and confiding," he has said, when thinking of her, "I know she would willingly share with me in my poverty; but ill would I repay her kindness in demanding of her such a sacrifice. Besides, how could I endure to see her subjected to the privations of a destiny so humble as mine? The same heaven that seems to have ordained me to labor, and to be unsuccessful, has given me a mind not to be broken by either toil or disappointment; but keenly and bitterly would I feel the evils of both were she to be equally exposed. I must strive to forget her, or think of her only as my friend." And, indulging in such thoughts as these, and repeating and re-repeating similar resolutions, — only however to find them unavailing, — winter, with its long, dreary nights, and its days of languor and inactivity, passed heavily away. But it passed.

He was sitting beside his fire, one evening late in February, when a gentle knock was heard at the door. He

started up, and, drawing back the bar, William Stewart entered the apartment.

"Allan," said the old man, "I have come to have some conversation with you, and would have come sooner, but pride and shame kept me back. I fear I have been much to blame."

Thomson motioned him to a seat, and sat down beside him.

"Farmer," he said, "since we cannot recall the past, we had perhaps better forget it."

The old man bent forward his head till it rested almost on his knee, and for a few moments remained silent.

"I fear, Allan, I have been much to blame," he at length reiterated. "Ye maun come an' see Lillias. She is ill, very ill, an' I fear no very like to get better. Thomson was stunned by the intelligence, and answered he scarcely knew what. "She has never been richt hersel'," continued the old man, "sin' the unlucky day when you an' I met in the burn here; but for the last month she has been little out o' her bed. Since mornin' there has been a great change on her, an' she wishes to see you. I fear we havena meikle time to spare, an' had better gang." Thomson followed him in silence.

They reached the farm-house of Meikle Farness, and entered the chamber where the maiden lay. A bright fire of brushwood threw a flickering gloom on the floor and rafters; and their shadows, as they advanced, seemed dancing on the walls. Close beside the bed there was a small table, bearing a lighted candle, and with a Bible lying open upon it at that chapter of Corinthians in which the apostle assures us that the dead shall rise, and the mortal put on immortality. Lillias half sat, half reclined, in the upper part of the bed. Her thin and wasted features had already

the stiff rigidity of death; her cheeks and lips were colorless; and though the blaze seemed to dance and flicker on her half-closed eyes, they served no longer to intimate to the departing spirit the existence of external things.

“Ah, my Lillias!” exclaimed Thomson, as he bent over her, his heart swelling with an intense agony. “Alas! has it come to this!”

His well-known voice served to recall her as from the precincts of another world. A faint melancholy smile passed over her features, and she held out her hand.

“I was afraid,” she said, in a voice sweet and gentle as ever, though scarcely audible, through extreme weakness, — “I was afraid that I was never to see you more. Draw nearer; there is a darkness coming over me, and I hear but imperfectly. I may now say with a propriety which no one will challenge, what I durst not have said before. Need I tell you that you were the dearest of all my friends, the only man I have ever loved, the man whose lot, however low and unprosperous, I would have deemed it a happiness to be invited to share? I do not, however, I cannot reproach you. I depart, and forever; but oh! let not a single thought of me render you unhappy. My few years of life have not been without their pleasures, and I go to a better and brighter world. I am weak, and cannot say more; but let me hear you speak. Read to me the eighth chapter of Romans.”

Thomson, with a voice tremulous and faltering through emotion, read the chapter. Ere he had made an end, the maiden had again sunk into the state of apparent insensibility out of which she had been so lately awakened; though occasionally a faint pressure of his hand, which she still retained, showed him that she was not unconscious of his presence. At length, however, there was a total relaxation

of the grasp ; the cold damp of the stiffening palm struck a chill to his heart ; there was a fluttering of the pulse, a glazing of the eye ; the breast ceased to heave, the heart to beat ; the silver cord parted in twain, and the golden bowl was broken. Thomson contemplated for a moment the body of his mistress, and, striking his hand against his forehead, rushed out of the apartment.

He attended her funeral ; he heard the earth falling heavy and hollow on the coffin-lid ; he saw the green sod placed over her grave ; he witnessed the irrepressible anguish of her father, and the sad regret of her friends ; and all this without shedding a tear. He was turning to depart, when some one thrust a letter into his hand. He opened it almost mechanically. It contained a considerable sum of money, and a few lines from his agent, stating that, in consequence of a favorable change in his circumstances, he had been enabled to satisfy all his creditors. Thomson crumpled up the bills in his hand. He felt as if his heart stood still in his breast ; a noise seemed ringing in his ears ; a mist-cloud appeared, as if rising out of the earth and darkening around him. He was caught, when falling, by old William Stewart ; and, on awakening to consciousness and the memory of the past, found himself in his arms. He lived for about ten years after a laborious and speculative man, ready to oblige, and successful in all his designs ; and no one deemed him unhappy. It was observed, however, that his dark brown hair was soon mingled with masses of gray, and that his tread became heavy and his frame bent. It was remarked, too, that when attacked by a lingering epidemic, which passed over well-nigh the whole country, he of all the people was the only one that sunk under it.