

CHAPTER XIV.

Syne he took out his little knife, let a' his duddies fa',
An' he was the brawest gentleman that was among them a'.

JAMES V.



ON the morning of the same day on which the three friends left Edinburgh for Kelpie Cleugh, the remains of feckless Phemie were borne to the narrow house appointed for all living. The heavy fall of snow which had been the means of drawing around the fireside of Kelpie Cleugh so large a circle of wanderers, had almost entirely ceased. Willie and Maggy had proceeded on their journey, but all the others remained to witness and assist in performing the funeral obsequies of poor Phemie. During the four days which elapsed between her death and funeral, the musician seemed sunk in a state of unconscious lethargy, and all attempts to arouse him from this condition were unsuccessful. His witless grandson endeavoured in vain to attract his attention. He was sorrowful, and refused to be comforted.

The remains of Phemie had been laid out in the small apartment usually occupied by Mary and her sister, who never appeared half so lovely in my eyes as when soliciting their mother's leave to resign their room for that purpose. The dead body of the poor sufferer, as it lay there wrapped in its last vestments of snowy white, was a perfect emblem of purity, a fit abode for a spirit which had just winged its way to heaven. Every one vied with another in expressions of kindness and affection for the deceased, and in anxiety to have justice done to her memory. Even the ungainly country undertaker found especial favour in the eyes of the Gaberlunzie, and drew a tear from the almost unconscious musician, when, crying like a child, he said—

“Puir Phemie, she was a’body’s body; she saftened a’ our hearts wi’ her sweet sangs. My ain bairns can croon naething else than the bits o’ ballants they picked up frae her singing. Mony a’ ane o’ high note might hae slipt awa that wadna hae been half sae muckle missed or lamented as puir feckless Phemie.”

From many miles round the farmers and cottars of the district came to attend her funeral; and as we wended our way over the lone muir the scene was calculated to awaken feelings of the most solemn description. The little windows of every hamlet we passed were filled with matrons and children, their eyes filled with tears, their hearts sad with grief for the loss of one who had been so generally beloved and familiarly known among them. In the rural districts of Scotland no one comes to the door when a funeral is passing. Such intrusive curiosity is considered indecent, and apt to disturb that frame of mind in which it is becoming and wholesome to accompany our friends to their last home. We deposited the remains of the poor child of sorrow and sentiment in the same graveyard which, a few days before, I had passed in company with the Gaberlunzie; and as the old man and his friend the musician stood bare-headed on the brink of that grave which they were themselves so soon to fill, no one could have looked on them without a feeling of veneration, nay, even of awe. On the melancholy ceremony being completed, the Gaberlunzie took the musician by the arm, and we resumed our way homeward. Not a word was spoken to break the expressive silence that prevailed; not a murmur interrupted the pleasing sadness that harmonized so well with the wild and sterile scene around us.

When we approached within sight of Kelpie Cleugh, a scene awaited us of which we little dreamt, and for which, in our present melancholy mood, we were but ill prepared. A chaise, to which were yoked two jaded and panting horses, stood at the foot of the road that led up to the house, the latter, from very weariness, being unable to drag the carriage out of a deep hole into which the hind wheels had sunk up to the axle. As we advanced towards the chaise, we saw emerging from it, to our utter astonishment, Laird Nairn, my uncle, and lastly, the thin spare form of aunt Matty, with her old-fashioned gown tucked up to her middle. What could have happened? There they were, the unmistakable figures of the inseparable three,

with their usual care, endeavouring to pick their steps through the roughly metalled and soft miry road. The Gaberlunzie rushed forward and offered my aunt his arm. While I was clutched at by my beloved uncle, the farmer shouldered up the lee-side of Naimn, and in this order we all made for the house, the three octogenarians sadly out of breath with their unwonted exertions. We had been also taken by surprise that we were seated in the farmer's own little room before the silence was broken, which it then was, for the first time, by the silvery voice of our landlady, who bade the strangers welcome.

"To what happy circumstance, madam," she said, addressing my aunt, "am I indebted for the honour of this visit at this season of the year? I fancy you have come for your nephew," she added laughingly; "you have been afraid I intended keeping him altogether."

"Na, na," said Matty, who had now recovered her breath, and was fully primed and loaded for the discharge of a half-hour's speech. "Na, na; ye may keep him a'thegither, gin ye like, an' muckle ye'll be made up wi' him. Whatever be the cause o' our visit, ye hae neither my nephew nor your fine roads to thank for't. Had I haen ony notion that ye were sae ill to get at, it wad hae been lang enough, I maun tell ye plainly, or I wad hae come to ye. Kelpie Cleugh! Od, your place is weel named. Nae ither kind o' beings but kelpies could find fitting amang sic dubs o' dirt and glaur. What wi' the rumblin' o' that auld shay ower the big round stanes, and its rough jogging thro' the peat tracks, to say naething o' us a' being obliged to come out an' walk whaur the vera brutes couldna find fitting, forby being a' nearly tumbled into a wall-ee—But what's the matter? What's the matter?" inquired she, looking round for the first time, and for the first time observing the sable weeds in which we were all clothed. "Hae ony o' your wee darlin' pets slipped awa, God help us, an' my tongne waggin' at this rate?"

"No, madam," answered the hostess. "Thank God, my family are all well. But death has been here, his symbols are upon us, as you see; and had you come a few hours sooner, you would have been in time to have witnessed, and taken share in, the funeral ceremony of her in whose fate you have been so warmly interested—poor feckless Phemie."

"Feckless Phemie!" exclaimed the three friends simultaneously, and in tones of sorrowful surprise.

"Yes," said the musician, coming forth from the corner of the apartment to which he had retired on his return from the funeral, and where he had occupied Phemie's favourite seat. "Yes," he said, addressing himself to Nairn, and for the first time since the death of his charge speaking coherently; "yes, yes, my kind friend, my poor heart-broken girl was too pure for this earth. Her spirit hath ascended to heaven. After a life of patient sorrow and suffering, she hath been relieved, and I am left alone."

"Immutable are all the ways and workings of Providence," said Nairn. "'Vengeance is mine, and I will claim it, saith the Lord.' Strange and mysterious coincidence! even at this present hour her destroyer is a condemned criminal, and his life is forfeited to the offended laws of the country."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Gaberlunzie, in a tone of voice in which indignation, disappointment, and pity were blended; "and has he escaped, and have I missed the opportunity of serving the cause of virtue, by teaching a villain to look into his own heart. Are all the hopes which I had fondly, and perhaps foolishly, cherished through a long period of years for ever blighted? Are those documents lost for ever, without which all effort on our own parts, all aid on that of our friends, is vain? Then, indeed, am I wretched, most wretched!" and a tear started to his eye, and rolled down his furrowed cheek.

"Tut, man, take it not so much to heart," said Nairn, gently slapping him on the shoulder. "Think ye that I would have come so far to have been the bearer of evil tidings to so dear a friend? Come with me into the next apartment, and you shall learn all the particulars connected with this singular business."

"In my humble opinion," exclaimed my aunt, "there's nae use in retiring ae step. A' round us here are friends, an' are mair or less interested in the matter. The business canna lang be kept a secret now, when the government has gotten a haud o't. Some o' their lang-tongued understrappers will set it abroad fast enough, I'll warrant ye. There's naebody here but what may be o' use in helping us to scour the kintry for what's wanted. It's no little that gaur's us three auld folk put at defiance the eerie winter weather, and the rough kintry roads, and leave our bit couthie biggins in Auld Reekie to gallop ower the Lang Whang. Gie ye the Gaberlunzie the

letter, Mr Nairn ; let him glance it ower, and he'll see that the sooner he enlists a' here in the service the better. This is the quarter whaur the thing wanted is to be found, and we maun mak a sicker search for't."

The Gaberlunzie hurriedly glanced over the letter, and while he did so appeared to be much excited and agitated. After a short pause he said—

"This is, indeed, important intelligence. I am of the same opinion with Miss Hepburn. There can now be no use for further concealment, and the sooner the whole matter is explained to our friends here, the sooner they will be able to render us efficient assistance. I perceive that the glistening eye of my old friend Peter is fixed on me with a most inquisitorial expression, and that the curiosity of my young friend is excited to a very high pitch. This being the case, I will enlighten you a little." Having so said, the old man rehearsed the whole history of the Hepburns, exactly as he had related it to my uncle and Nairn twenty years before in Johnnie Dowie's. He told of James Hepburn's private marriage—of his death at Culloden—of his infant daughter being left in charge of his friend John Melville—of her marriage with the son of that gentleman—of the fruit of that marriage, twin sons, left orphans in charge of their grandfather—of their grandfather's death—how the brothers fell in love with the same maiden—how one was preferred—of the disappearance of the rejected brother on the same day on which the marriage of his more favoured relative, the father of their hostess, took place.

"The puir auld sheep-farmer wha cam to the muir,
Wi' a daughter as fair as her father was puir."

"What?" exclaimed the farmer! breaking in upon the narrative; "my bonny wee wifie heiress to the high-souled and patriotic Hepburn o' Keith, gude be here! and her sharing toil and moil wi' me sae kindly and uncomplainingly a' this time. Ah! I see it a' now. This is the mystery that aye hung ower ye baith. This is what gaured her faither, even in his puir days, tread the yird wi' sae proud a step, and carry sae high a head. This accounts for the lang cracks that you twa used to hae at nights by the kitchen ingle, lang after we were a' in our beds. Ah! had I haen ony notion that she was come o' sic kith and

kin, I ne'er could hae had courage to hae asked her hand. But what way hae ye aye keepit it sae secret frae me?"

"Just because we were anxious not to awaken hopes that might never be realized," replied the Gaberlunzie. "Your kind disposition, as manifested in many charitable deeds at an early period of their residence in this neighbourhood, established you in the favour of both father and daughter, who showed their good sense and discrimination in making selection of an intelligent and industrious farmer in preference to an empty-pated fool, whose only boast might be that he could count kin with some family low in the scale of beggarly gentility. The virtues and personal charms of your wife, however, seemed to be the only dowry you was likely to get with her. Shortly after you were united, her father, on making inquiry after the certificate of Hepburn's marriage, learned that it had been destroyed in the No-Popery Riots in 1779. You are aware of the intimacy which during his latter days existed between him and me. When on his deathbed, I promised him that I would introduce his daughter to our friend Mr Nairn here, who, failing the evidence requisite to establish your wife's claim, was heir to his granduncle Hepburn of Keith. Report, he said, spoke well of that gentleman, and he regretted he had neglected to make himself known to him as his relative. Accordingly, as you are aware, I carried your wife to Edinburgh shortly after her father died, and found Mr Nairn all and more than he had been represented. I learned from him that the organist of the Roman Catholic chapel, who had been rescued from the flames by a stranger, had saved some papers, among which this certificate might likely be. Mr Nairn had long lost traces of him, but he was at length discovered in the person of our friend the fiddler here, who informed us that the document had been saved, and committed by him to the care of Mr Blackburn of Cairnielee, the father of feckless Phemie. This gentleman, who is some time dead, was swindled out of his estate by a villain, a Frenchman, who had been his guest, and the accepted lover of his daughter. Instantly on learning this from the musician," concluded the Gaberlunzie, "I set out in quest of the former. I went to London and to Paris in search of him, but without success, and had long given up all hopes of finding him, when behold it appears from this letter that he has been condemned for forgery, and has stated that he sold

the Hepburn certificate to some one in the neighbourhood of Carnwath. It is this intelligence that has brought our kind Edinburgh friends here just now; they hope to find some trace of the document in question, which is all that is now required to secure our host and his family a comfortable independency."

When the Gaberlunzie had concluded, our old friend, Peter the packman, who had hitherto remained a silent listener, came forward, and addressing Nairn, said—

"I canna understand, Nairn, how you should be sae anxious to find out this certificate that's to set sae muckle past you, nor why the government should pay ony attention to the declaration of a convicted criminal, to the skaith or prejudice o' a claimant like yourself, wha are in every respect sae fitting a representative of the patriotic Hepburn."

"Those who know me, Peter," said Nairn, with strong emphasis, "know well that I would sooner die than take possession of that which justly belongs to another. William Nairn is not the man to injure the interests of a family whose genuine worth and whose virtues are of themselves sufficient to shed a lustre over any station in life, however high. For twenty years my friend Mr Hepburn and I have kept the matter before government, not so much from any hopes of success, as to keep it open. I have always entertained a vague idea, that, in its own good time, Providence would aid in discovering the desired evidence; and now that the case has assumed its present shape, I am doubly anxious to recover the document alluded to. I would look upon it as a judgment on me should it turn out that some distant relative, who may prove to be my heir-at-law, should, in the absence of this important paper, reap the fruits of our exertions, and take possession of an estate which, there can be no moral doubt, belongs to this excellent family, whose many kindnesses I have heard you yourself Peter enlarging on in no measured terms."

"Yes," said the poor little fellow, with tears glistening in his eyes, "for many a long year their fireside has been open to me, and the best in their house at my command. In boyhood and in manhood, in sickness and in want, I aye found a hame at Kelpie Cleugh, and ne'er on any occasion left their hospitable house wi' either a hungry heart or a toom pouch. Yes, I owe them my life; and noo it delights me that I am able to requite their kindness in a way that will at once meet wi' the wishes,

and accord with the interests o' my other friend and benefactor, Mr Nairn. Langsyne, when a boy in Edinburgh, when I used to rin errands between the Gaberlunzie and fiddler and your houses, Maisters Hepburn and Nairn, I wondered what was the mysterious connexion between the former twa, but couldna find it out, sae weel had ye guarded a' your sayings; but haeing aye an inquisitive disposition, I at length fand out that Mr Nairn was applying for the Keith estates. I was aye anxious to ken how his suit was coming on, and just the last summer there, I learned frae a bit keen Whig body o' a factor, that you, Mr Hepburn, had gien Mr Nairn a gude lift, an' that it was likely he wad soon get the estate. Shortly after I came out here awa, and ae night, when sitting by the ingle lowe o' a howff down by in Carnwath, whaur beggar bodies put up, there cam to the door a puir broken-doun looking foreigner; his face was a' covered wi' coal black hair; his coat an' hat were o' the macaroni clip, and the edging, although white and bare, retained some tattered fragments o' the original lace wi' whilk they had been ornamented. He askit for lodgings in husky tones, and was a' shiverin' and shakin' wi' the cauld. It was a practice with the keeper o' the lodging to demand the price o' their quarters frae a' his lodgers as they cam in, an' this puir wretch having naething wherewith to meet this demand, was ordered off. He cast a wistfu' eye to the fire, and then at me, as if to say, 'Will ye no tak pity on me, and pay for me?' I was wae for the puir wretch, an' told him that gif he had onything that was worth selling, since he had nae siller, I wad advance a shilling or twa on't. He shook his head at first, but then, as if recollecting himsel', took out a black set o' cards, shuffled them through his cauld shivering hands, and said he wad play for onything I likit, gin I wad lend him the amount o' the stake. I told him that we didna play at that game hereawa; and that if I did begin to gamble, I wad like to play wi' an opponent who could pay his losses.

"I ne'er saw sic a pair o' een or sic a pair o' eebrows in my life, as the chield had: the tane flashed, and the tither scowled on me sae, that I canna think on't yet but it gaur me a' grue. Then, as if a thought had suddenly struck him, the cluds cleared awa frae his forehead, and drawing frae the breast pocket o' his auld tattered coat a bundle o' papers, he said he wad pledge them wi' me. I cast my een ower them, and saw

on the back o' the tapmost the words, 'Certificate of marriage, Hepburn of Keith, 1740,' and kennin', Mr Nairn, that you were Hepburn's heir, and were petitioning to have his estate restored to you, I thocht these papers might possibly be o' some use to ye; so I askit him in a careless kind o' way how sic a document cam into his possession, and o' what use it could be to onybody? He replied, 'That this marriage was not generally known, and that he had kept this certificate in the expectation of being able to make handsomely by it. He had lately,' he said, 'learned that the government seriously contemplated the restoration of the attainted estates; in which case,' he added, 'the certificate would be worth a good round sum to the applicant for the Keith estate. But now,' continued he, 'time and hunger press me; I must be off to-morrow before dawn. You may as well have this bargain as another, and you shall have it for as much as will procure me food and lodging for the night, with a trifle to help me on my way to-morrow.'

"The exhausted and emaciated appearance of the miserable wretch smote me to the heart. I gave him what he asked, and got the document from him in return. I have not since had an opportunity of seeing you till now, Mr Nairn, and I wished to deliver it into your own hands personally. And now," concluded the Pedlar, drawing out the double bottom of his pack, and taking therefrom the identical certificate, and presenting it to Mrs Braxholme, "I have the pleasure of resigning it into the hands of our kind and amiable hostess, wishing her long life, health, and happiness to enjoy the estate, which I trust this will be the means of restoring to its rightful owner."

It is impossible, by any merely written description, to convey to my readers an idea of the joy which was manifested by all present at this most unexpected and happy disclosure. My uncle and Nairn threw their cocked hats up in the air, then ran to the Pedlar, threw their arms about him, and hugged him almost to death. The farmer rubbed his eyes with his hands, looked at his wife, then gazed in his children's faces till they bent before him, and now his wife sank into his arms, in a transport of joy; her husband looked up to Heaven, and thus the whole family formed a group emblematic of the high and holy nature of domestic affection. The Gaberlunzie and organist stood in the background, a flood of joyous tears rolling down

their cheeks ; and the grandchild of the musician, who, poor witless boy, seemed to be momentarily impressed with the joyous nature of the scene, slipped his grandfather's fiddle out of the bag, and began to play "The Auld Stuarts back again."

This awoke the company from their dream of joy, and to me, alas ! it appeared but a dream, which was destined to be of but short duration. Under this impression, and anxious to disabuse their minds as quickly as possible of the false opinion on which, it seemed to me, their exultation was founded, and being, moreover, desirous to show my uncle the immense extent of my legal knowledge, and to add to my importance in the eyes of Mary and her relations, I addressed the Gaberlunzie thus :—

"Did you not, sir, in the course of your story, inform us that our hostess had an uncle who disappeared somewhat suddenly, and who has not since been heard of? Now, this person may be still alive, or may have been married, and may have left sons; in either of which cases, our friends here, I am sorry to say, have no claim whatever to the Keith estate. Thus, until you can prove the death of the person alluded to, and that he died without male issue, you may rely on it: the government will postpone, for an indefinite period, the restoration of the estate to the family of Braxholme."

During the delivery of this speech, which I spoke with more flippancy than usual, my aunt stood looking at me with no very pleasant expression of countenance. When I had done, "Ye pilgarlic monkey," she broke out, "how daur ye try to throw cauld water on a warm-hearted moment like this? Is that a' the gude we're to get out o' ye in return for spending sae muckle siller in making a lawyer o' ye?"

"You must not find fault with your nephew, madam, for the remark he has made," said the Gaberlunzie. "For he is quite right, although it is very improbable that a man who has been amissing for forty years should make his appearance now. Besides, government knows nothing of such a person having ever existed, and there is no necessity for giving them that information."

"Yes," replied I, resolved now to show the wonderful extent of my professional skill ; "but the parish register, in which the date of the birth of the one brother is recorded, will also contain the date of the birth of the other, and the question will then be, what became of the missing brother? 'Tis an awkward question,



THE LAIRD OF KEITH.

*"I know that you respect and love the poor wandering Gaberlunzie,
and I am sure you will not love nor respect him less when he
avows himself to be James Hepburn Melville."*

and difficult to answer. I would we had evidence of his death!"

"Nay, my good young friend!" exclaimed the Gaberlunzie, gradually rising up to his full height, "you do not, cannot, must not, wish that from your heart. I know that you respect and love the puir wandering Gaberlunzie, and I am sure you will not love nor respect him less when he avows himself to be James Hepburn Melville, the uncle of our hostess, in whose gentle features you behold a mingled image of my beloved brother, and her beautiful mother, who was my first, last, and only love!"

Here was another extraordinary incident. Cheers, nay, shouts, in tones of wild excitement, burst from every one present. The old man pressed his niece to his heart, the children knelt around them in clusters, while the farmer stood looking on with the tears running down his cheeks. The musician began to draw his finger over the fiddle strings; Peter skipped about like one bewitched, till he met with my uncle bobbing in an opposite direction, when the two set to each other, and footed it away right merrily. Nairn and my aunt sat in the arm-chairs looking at each other, their eyes glistening, and their features animated with joy, until the fiddler seized his fiddle, and swept away in his best style, "The Auld Stuarts back again," when Nairn started up to his feet, gallantly led forth my aunt, and joined my uncle and Peter in their extraordinary evolutions.

After this storm of joy had somewhat subsided, the Gaberlunzie slightly touched on the principal events of his life; recapitulating at full length, and dwelling with great apparent interest on those early portions of it with which my readers are already familiar. In allusion to his unfortunate attachment to her who became the wife of his brother, he said,—

"I had loved to madness, and therefore felt the pangs of disappointment more keenly when my love was not returned. I dared not complain, neither had I any right to do so. The choice of the maiden had fallen on one whom I loved dearly as myself, my twin brother, and yet—strange, incomprehensible feeling!—I felt that I could with infinitely less regret have seen her go to the altar with any other! This feeling daily strengthened, until I felt as if I could not see my soul's idol the bride of my beloved brother, and survive. Every day that I remained at home after the intended marriage was duly

announced my spirit sunk into a deeper and yet deeper gloom. I would not for worlds have given my brother the slightest indication of the state of my mind. He loved me dearly; and as I knew he would have sacrificed his own happiness to secure mine, I determined on setting out for Edinburgh, and entering the army, in the hope that the stirring life of a soldier would relieve me from all regretful remembrances. When my grandfather's packet was opened, and I learned my descent from Hepburn, I felt my resolution strengthened, and on the very morning of my brother's bridal I left my home, intending it should be for ever. I reached Edinburgh on that memorable night on which the No-Popery Riot took place. When I arrived at the head of the West Port, the mob was assembling, and, as I passed onward, the living tide gradually swelled fuller and stronger. The whole scene was highly exciting to one in my mood. I had no definite purpose, no particular path to pursue, yet I felt myself carried along by the animated flood which was surging and heaving with the convulsions of sectarian frenzy and rage. When I reached the middle of the Cowgate, the smell of burning convinced me that the mob had been firing some building. I pushed my way onward, and when I reached Blackfriars' Wynd, learned from the execrations of those around me that the doomed house was the Catholic Chapel. The certificate rushed at once to my mind; I was aided by supernatural strength; I fought my way through the crowd with an energy there was no resisting; and when I reached to within a few paces of the building, heard a voice shrieking for aid. If the hope of saving the certificate had moved me in the first instance, the idea of rescuing a human being from speedy and certain destruction was yet more powerful in urging me to extraordinary efforts. I sprang up the stair through the flames, and rescued our friend here, alas! only to reserve him for greater suffering."

"Blame not yourself for that, my dear kind preserver," said the musician. "You saved me from a dreadful death, and although I have suffered much misery since, I have also experienced much happiness, and the present turn events have taken has amply recompensed me for long years of suffering and sorrow."

"But," said Nairn, addressing the Gaberlunzie, "what was your motive for running away after you had done so praise-

worthy a deed? Often and anxiously were you inquired after."

"Ah, sir," answered the Gaberlunzie, "at that time my heart was all a-flame, and I found that action, rapid energetic action, was the only sedative to the tempest that raged in my bosom. I was proud of having performed one good deed, and sallied forth expecting that some similar adventure would occur, and that my services would again be called forth in the cause of suffering humanity. The mob, ashamed of their violence, retired to their houses. The streets were as deserted as they had been crowded but a short time before. I felt faint and weary; my long walk, and the unwonted excitement of the previous hour, had fatigued me. I went into a house to procure some refreshment, and was shown into a room where sat a swaggering, drunken recruiting sergeant, with two or three raw recruits around him. One of them sat with his head buried between his hands on the table. The other two seemed very happy, and sat whiffing away at their tobacco pipes.

"'Come man, Jim, rouse yourself like your companions,' said the ruby-faced sergeant; 'see what merry and likely soldiers they are. They won't be long in having sergeant's strips on their arms, I'll warrant me; so take an example, and you'll get on too, no doubt of it. You are enlisted into a very ancient and honourable corps, and get five guineas of bounty-money. I only received a shilling when I enlisted. You young fellows have the time on't; so take courage, lad; by the time you have seen as many balls flying round you as I have, you'll be promoted, you may rely on't.'

"The poor youth, who had evidently been inveigled while in a state of intoxication, raised not his head, but continued sobbing, 'What will become of my poor mother!' In a short time a decent-looking woman came into the room; she wore a black ribboned bonnet and a widow's cap, and seemed sunk in sorrow.

"'Sergeant,' she said, 'I hae been unable to raise as muckle as pay the smart. I hae been in a pawn-shop the night for the first time in my life; but, alack, I couldna get as muckle on a' the orra articles o' clothing I could gather as will satisfy ye. Will ye no tak what I hae, an' let Jamie aff? He'll soon work for as muckle as will settle a' wi' ye; we'll pay ye it up at three shillings in the week, wi' as muckle

interest as ye like to lay on, gin ye'll only say the word, an' let him awa.'

" 'Nay, nay, my good mother black cap,' said the bully, 'James is a good carpenter, and will be very useful on a march in constructing bridges to cross rivers, and the like. Why, he's sure to make a fortune, and return to you a rich man.'

" 'Na, na,' said the poor woman, 'he'll ne'er come back to me in life. The same day that sees him leave Edinburgh wi' the sodgers, will see me in my grave. Is there nae hope?'

" 'None,' answered the brute, 'unless you can find me a six foot fellow who will go as a substitute. Jim is short, and I daresay our captain wouldn't object to a grenadier in his stead. The trifle of money you have about you might induce me to speak a favourable word for you, and if you could get some friendly fellow to do the other part, you'd be all right.'

" 'God help me!' said the widow, 'I have no other friend but *Him*.'

" God will help you, and all those who put their trust in Him, said I, coming forward. What say you, sergeant, to me for a substitute; will I serve you?

" The fellow eyed me from head to foot, took the pipe from his mouth, sipped his glass, then drawled out slowly, 'Why, I daresay with the addition of a few pounds you might.'

" Conduct me to your captain, said I, but touch not the widow's mite on your peril. You are not entitled to levy contributions in this way, more especially from the poor.'

" 'Oh ho, my fine spark,' replied the sergeant, 'are you commander already?'

" Oh no, said I, but if you don't lead me to your commander, this good woman shall, and I shall then conclude the bargain, without your assistance.'

" 'Well, well,' said the fellow, 'if you are willing to serve his Majesty, and take the shilling before these witnesses, I don't mind if I do encourage your desire for military glory. You seem to be a lad of mettle, and will do well in the army; but be seated. Good woman,' continued he, turning to the widow, 'you may now take your darling son home with you; this young man I accept as a substitute; if he passes the doctor, your son may go be d—d for Sergeant Blusterbomb.'

" The widow gave me her blessing, and I accepted it in the same spirit in which it was bestowed.

"I need not rehearse the initiatory scenes of a soldier's life. They have been often described before, and to describe them again would neither be gratifying nor profitable. In a few weeks I was sent abroad along with a levy of raw half-drilled recruits, and having the advantage of most of my comrades, in being well educated, I was found useful, and made rapid progress in the good graces of my officers. A sanguinary battle was fought. I distinguished myself in it, and was promoted. Some time after, the regiment to which I belonged was drafted to India, where, on the capture of a town, several valuable prizes fell to my lot. After having remained nearly twenty years in the army, and seen many scenes, the description of which may one day serve to beguile you of a tedious hour, I longed to see old Scotland once more, sold my commission, and returned home. All the excitement and stir of a camp, and the turmoil of a soldier's life, were insufficient to keep my heart from sighing for a sight of my native country. I longed to tread once more her heath-clad hills, to pull her wild flowers, to climb her mountains, or wander through her lonely and sequestered dells. I never had written home, and now began to upbraid myself, not for my forgetfulness of my kindred, for they were never absent from my memory, but because I was ashamed of the uneasiness I must have caused them by my sudden disappearance. I was anxious, too, before making my existence known, to ascertain the fate of my brother and his beloved wife. Accordingly, I resolved to disguise myself, thinking they would not be able to recognise in the rough burly exterior of an old soldier the sentimental slip who had left them in youth, and determined on returning to their neighbourhood in the dress in which you now see me. I flattered myself that to behold my brother's family happy would render me so, when I would perhaps discover myself, adopt the children, and render the name of uncle nearly as dear to them as that of father. I longed also to wet with my tears the turf on my grandfather's grave, and to recall the incidents of my childhood on the spot where they had occurred. When at last, after a tedious sea voyage, my foot touched the shores of Caledonia, old associations thronged on me, my heart beat high with joy, and I set out for my brother's home, which my imagination had converted into an earthly paradise. Alas! I found him a widower, reduced in circumstances, and left with

an only child, my beloved niece here. His health was rapidly declining, and his affairs, through want of proper management, were in a disordered state. I introduced myself to him as a stranger, and it was some time before he began to suspect who I was. His recognition of me finally was a scene I can never forget. It never can be erased from the tablets of my memory. A thousand breathless questions were hurriedly asked and answered; we fell on each other's necks, and wept like children. At the very moment when this interesting scene took place, my niece came into the room, when we told her the secret of our birth and relationship, and from that hour to this she has been to me a daughter, and I to her a father.

“My brother's affairs, as I have already hinted, were embarrassed. I spent what little money I had at that time in assisting to extricate him from his difficulties; he sold off his small estate, and took and stocked this farm, which now, by the industry of our energetic host, has trebled its value. Shortly after they came here, I saw that my brother was rapidly sinking into the grave, and I became anxious to see my dear niece under the protection of one who had the heart to love her for her own merits, and the will and power to support her. Among the many suitors who came soliciting her hand, I saw none so well qualified to make her happy as our present host, and I was pleased to find that her choice was the same with mine. The preference generally given by the guardians of young females to young men who are possessed of rank and fortune, I considered injudicious, convinced, as I was by experience, that a man with a good head and a good heart, though without either rank or fortune, will seldom fail to advance himself in the world, while the former but too often loses his original position. My niece was subsequently married to her present husband, and after having seen her comfortably settled, and my brother well cared for and attended to, I resolved still to retain the character I had assumed, and to prosecute a project I had long entertained of exploring all the most remarkable districts of Scotland, and of making myself thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar characteristics of my countrymen. I had seen enough of human nature to be convinced that intimacy is the best bond of affection, and that he who explores a country must become one of the country people themselves.

“In early life I had been fond of associating with tinkers,

beggars, and others of the wandering fraternity. Habit becomes second nature ; and once familiarized with the casualities of travelling, I had much pleasure in my various peregrinations, and saw much virtue and good feeling in that grade of life which is absurdly believed to be without either. I continued my wanderings for some years, still making Kelpie Cleugh my headquarters. I daresay our friend must have thought me at times an impudent beggar ; but he respected me for the intimacy which subsisted between his wife's father and myself, while his good sense and discretion kept him from prying into the cause of that intimacy. My brother at last died, and although there was no probability of the evidence of our descent from Hepburn ever coming to light, in accordance with the wishes of my brother, I sought you out, Mr Nairn ; and for the purpose of proving to you that I was not an impostor, I brought with me my niece, whose strong resemblance to the old portraits of Keith is very remarkable, and the old family ring, which had been handed down from my grandfather Melville as belonging to Hepburn of Keith. The kind reception you then gave us, and the information with which you furnished us, have been the chief reasons why I cared for a prolonged life, and have caused me to extend my travels, by urging me to the pursuit of that document, which our good friend Peter here has been the means of recovering. I have thus acquired a considerable knowledge of the habits and feelings of my countrymen, and have filled my wallet with a variety of curious nick-nackets, in the shape of story and anecdote, which shall be freely communicated to you ; and if you shall have half the pleasure in listening to them that I have in reciting them, the benefit will be mutual. This wallet, however, contains something more than stories. Here is a substantial family piece, which forms another important point in the romantic history of my ancestors, and adds another incident to their family legend. This silver tankard," he continued, drawing forth from the bottom of his wallet a silver jug of ample dimensions, and of the most exquisite workmanship, "this tankard belonged to Robert Hepburn of Keith, the father of James Hepburn, who was imprisoned in the Tower of London for participating in the rebellion of 1715. He made his escape from the Tower, and although aware that his wife and family were in London, he knew not where to look for them, especially as they were

probably residing there under feigned names. In the meantime they had taken lodgings in a ground-floor in the vicinity of the Tower, and had put this piece of plate, which had long belonged to his family, and which was well known as 'The Keith Tankard,' in the window. The expedient was successful. It attracted, as they hoped it might, the notice of Hepburn, who, on entering the house, was received in the arms of his wife and children. He subsequently escaped to France, carrying the jug along with him, and there on my late visit I picked it up. This ancient family heir-loom we shall now baptize with a reaming jorum of toddy, and drink to the health of Thomas Braxholme, Esq. of Keith!"

"Gae awa wi' your esquires and your lairdships," said Tam; "I'm no fit to be a laird. I'll just gather my rent an' pay it ilka year either to you or some other laird. Od, I whiles think that gin we hadna the rent to mak up, we wad get lazy; and I hate a lazy man as I hate the devil."

"Weel, weel," said the Gaberlunzie, in his free and easy manner, "it matters little whether ye tak the name o't or me, but we maunna gut fish afore we catch them."

"There can now be little danger of catching them," replied Nairn, "for besides the letter I showed you, I was informed by a friend, as we came through the Grassmarket, that the bill for restoring the attainted estates had been read a first and second time in one day, and without opposition. There's expedition for you, Walter; when will your friends get through their work at that rate?"

"Yours hae ta'en twenty years to mak the bill ready, William," said my uncle; "they hae muckle need to mak up for lost time."

"Well, gentleman," here interposed the Gaberlunzie, "we are indebted to both parties. They seem to be more unanimous now than formerly—a state of matters that it would be better for the country if we saw oftener. There's one stipulation only that I wish to make with our friend Braxholme here,—it is, that if they give him an estate with an old castle on it, he must not allow his rage for improvements to carry him the length of taking down the old walls to build drystone dikes or sheep-stells with. We must remember that they have sheltered many brave hearts who defended their country in perilous times, and we ought to venerate every shrine where freedom has been or

can be worshipped. And now, Peter, what shall I say to you? you have shown yourself of the right stamp, and shall be rewarded. I never saw a man do another a good turn yet that he was not rewarded for it some day or other. So, Peter, ye may marry Nanny o' Langside when ye like; ye shanna want as muckle as will buy ye a gude biggin' o' stane an' lime to set up shop in."

"God bless ye, sir," said Peter, "and long may ye live to mak as many blythe in your high estate as ye did in the days o' your voluntary lowliness, when ye were wont to gather us round ye, and sing sic sangs anent 'Braxy Tam,' 'Patie the Packman,' 'Watty and Matty,' and others, as made us a' couthy and happy thegither."

"Well," said the Gaberlunzie, I suppose I must now assume the airs of a gentleman in my old days; and as we have had so much of sorrow in our cup lately, we should now endeavour to fill it brimful of joy. My young friend here has been very busy for these few days, insinuating himself into the good graces of my favourite little darling Mary. Nay, nay, an' ye blush; I will march you both together to the next room, and let you arrange preliminaries for the wedding."

"Wedding!" exclaimed my aunt, who had been silent much longer than usual; "what wad he do wi' a wife? The loon will ne'er be able to keep her. Lawyer Sickerpoint swears he'll ne'er be worth a bawbee at the law, and gude kens what we'll mak o' him."

"No danger of him," said the Gaberlunzie; "we'll soon make him a lawyer. He has nothing to do but shut his eyes, shake his head, look grave, and the trick's done. He shall have the title-deeds of the new estate to keep, which will make a beginning to his first charter-chest, and perhaps we may give him a small slice of ground to himself. He's not a bad boy, if he were but a little quicker in his movements. He'll gather wit as he gets older; so you must not refuse your consent. It must be a match; I've set my mind on't."

"Weel, weel, Watty," said my aunt, "I fancy we maun just agree."

"And," said Nairn, "although I am not connected with the family so nearly as I once expected to have been, and Miss Hepburn and I are not going to make fools of ourselves by marrying in our old age, I shall add my mite to the happiness of the

young couple by a marriage present. My darling Mary is now my heir, both by law and adoption; and if amid the few declining years I have yet to sojourn here, I shall have the felicity of laying my hands on the fair heads of my children's children, perhaps in after-life it may live in their remembrance, and they may drop a tear to the memory of

William Cairne.