V.

THE LYKEWAKE.

CHAPTER.

> Why start at Death? Where is he?
> Death arrived, is past; not come or gone, he's never here.
>
> YOUNG.

I KNOW no place where one may be brought acquainted with the more credulous beliefs of our forefathers at a less expense of inquiry and exertion than in a country lykewake. The house of mourning is naturally a place of sombre thoughts and ghostly associations. There is something, too, in the very presence and appearance of death that leads one to think of the place and state of the dead. Cowper has finely said that the man and the beast who stand together side by side on the same hill-top, are, notwithstanding their proximity, the denizens of very different worlds. And I have felt the remark to apply still more strongly when sitting beside the dead. The world of intellect and feeling in which we ourselves are, and of which the lower propensities of our nature form a province, may be regarded as including, in part at least, that world of passion and instinct in which the brute lives; and we have but to analyze and abstract a little, to form for ourselves ideas of this latter world from even our own experi-

ence. But by what process of thought can we bring experience to bear on the world of the dead? It lies entirely beyond us, a *terra incognita* of cloud and darkness; and yet the thing at our side — the thing over which we can stretch our hand, the thing dead to us but living to it — has entered upon it; and, however uninformed or ignorant before, knows more of its dark, and to us inscrutable mysteries, than all our philosophers and all our divines. Is it wonder that we would fain put it to the question; that we would fain catechise it, if we could, regarding its newly-acquired experience; that we should fill up the gaps in the dialogue, which its silence leaves to us, by imparting to one another the little we know regarding its state and its place; or that we should send our thoughts roaming in long excursions, to glean from the experience of the past all that it tells us of the occasional visits of the dead, and all that in their less taciturn and more social moments they have communicated to the living? And hence, from feelings so natural and a train of associations so obvious, the character of a country lykewake, and the cast of its stories. I say a *country* lykewake; for in at least all our larger towns, where a cold and barren scepticism has chilled the feelings and imaginations of the people, without, I fear, much improving their judgments, the conversation on such occasions takes a lower and less interesting range.

I once spent a night with a friend from the south — a man of an inquiring and highly philosophic cast of mind — at a lykewake in the upper part of the parish of Cromarty. I had excited his curiosity by an incidental remark or two of the kind I have just been dropping; and, on his expressing a wish that I should introduce him, by way of illustration, to some such scene as I had been describing, we had

set out together to the wake of an elderly female who had died that morning. Her cottage, an humble erection of stone and lime, was situated beside a thick fir-wood, on the edge of the solitary Mullbuoy, one of the dreariest and most extensive commons in Scotland. We had to pass in our journey over several miles of desolate moor, sprinkled with cairns and tumuli — the memorials of some forgotten conflict of the past; we had to pass, too, through a thick, dark wood, with here and there an intervening marsh, whitened over with moss and lichens, and which, from this circumstance, are known to the people of the country as the white bogs. Nor was the more distant landscape of a less gloomy character. On the one hand there opened an interminable expanse of moor, that went stretching onwards mile beyond mile — bleak, dreary, uninhabited and uninhabitable — till it merged into the far horizon. On the other there rose a range of blue, solitary hills, towering, as they receded, into loftier peaks and bolder acclivities, till they terminated on the snow-streaked Ben Weavis. The season, too, was in keeping with the scene. It was drawing towards the close of autumn; and, as we passed through the wood, the falling leaves were eddying round us with every wind, or lay in rustling heaps at our feet.

"I do not wonder," said my companion, "that the superstitions of so wild a district as this should bear in their character some marks of a corresponding wildness. Night itself, in a populous and cultivated country, is attended with less of the stern and the solemn than mid-day amid solitudes like these. Is the custom of watching beside the dead of remote antiquity in this part of the country?"

"Far beyond the reach of history or tradition," I said. "But it has gradually been changing its character, as the people have been changing theirs, and is now a very dif-

ferent thing from what it was a century ago. It is not yet ninety years since lykewakes in the neighboring Highlands used to be celebrated with music and dancing; and even here, on the borders of the low country, they used invariably, like the funerals, to be the scenes of wild games and amusements never introduced on any other occasion. You remember how Sir Walter describes the funeral of Athelstane? The Saxon ideas of condolence were the most natural imaginable. If grief was hungry, they supplied it with food; if thirsty, they gave it drink. Our simple ancestors here seem to have reasoned by a similar process. They made their seasons of deepest grief their times of greatest merriment; and the more they regretted the deceased, the gayer were they at his wake and his funeral. A friend of mine, now dead, a very old man, has told me that he once danced at a lykewake in the Highlands of Sutherland. It was that of an active and a very robust man, taken away from his wife and family in the prime of life; and the poor widow, for the greater part of the evening, sat disconsolate beside the fire, refusing every invitation to join the dancers. She was at length, however, brought out by the father of the deceased. 'Little, little did he think,' he said, 'that we should be the last to dance at poor Rory's lykewake.'"

We reached the cottage and went in. The apartment in which the dead lay was occupied by two men and three women. Every little piece of furniture it contained was hung in white, and the floor had recently been swept and sanded; but it was on the bed where the body lay, and on the body itself, that the greatest care had been lavished. The curtains had been taken down, and their places supplied by linen white as snow; and on the sheet that served as a counterpane the body was laid out in a dress of white,

fantastically crossed and re-crossed in every direction by scalloped fringes, and fretted into a species of open work, at least intended to represent alternate rows of roses and tulips. A plate containing a little salt was placed over the breast of the corpse. As we entered one of the women rose, and, filling two glasses with spirits, presented them to us on a salver. We tasted the liquor, and sat down on chairs placed for us beside the fire. The conversation, which had been interrupted by our entrance, began to flow apace; and an elderly female, who had lived under the same roof with the deceased, began to relate, in answer to the queries of one of the others, some of the particulars of her last illness and death.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF ELSPAT M'CULLOCH.

"Elspat was aye," she said, "a retired body, wi' a cast o' decent pride aboot her; an', though bare and puirly aff sometimes in her auld days, she had never been chargeable to onybody. She had come o' decent, 'sponsible people, though they were a' low enough the day; ay, an' they were God-fearing people too, wha had gien plenty in their time, an' had aye plenty to gie. An' though they had been a' langsyne laid in the kirkyard, — a' except hersel', puir body, — she wouldna disgrace their gude name, she said, by takin' an alms frae ony ane. Her sma means fell oot o' her hands afore her last illness. Little had aye dune her turn, but the little failed at last; an' sair thocht

did it gie her for a while what was to come o' her. I could hear her, in the butt end o' the hoose, a'e mornin' mair earnest an' langer in her prayers than usual, though she never neglected them, puir body ; an' a' the early part o' that day she seemed to be no weel. She was aye up and down; an' I could ance or twice hear her gaunting at the fireside; but when I went ben to her, an' asked what was the matter wi' her, she said she was just in her ordinar'. She went oot for a wee; an' what did I do, but gang to her amry, for I jaloused a' wasna right there; an' oh! it was a sair sicht to see, neebors ; for there was neither a bit o' bread nor a grain of meal within its four corners, — naething but the sealed up graybeard wi' the whiskey that for twenty years an' mair she had been keepin' for her lyke-wake; an', ye ken, it was oot o' the question to think that she would meddle wi' it. Weel did I scold her, when she cam' in, for being sae close-minded. I asked her what harm I had ever done to her, that she wad rather hae died than hae trusted her wants to me? But though she said naething, I could see the tears in her e'e; an' sae I stopped, an' we took a late breakfast thegither at my fireside.

"She tauld me that mornin' that she weel kent she wouldna lang be a trouble to onybody. The day afore had been Sabbath; an' every Sabbath morning, for the last ten years, her worthy neeboor the elder, whom they had buried only four years afore, used to call on her, in the passing on his way to the kirk. 'Come awa, Elspat,' he would say ; an' she used to be aye decent an' ready, for she liked his conversation ; an' they aye gaed thegither to the kirk. She had been contracted, when a young lass, to a brither o' the elder's, a stout, handsome lad; but he had been ca'ed suddenly awa atween the contract an' the marriage, an' Elspat, though she had afterwards mony a gude

offer, had lived single for his sake. Weel, on the very mornin' afore, just sax days after the elder's death, an' four after his burial, when Elspat was sitting dowie aside the fire, thinkin' o' her gude auld neebor, the cry cam' to the door just as it used to do ; but, though the voice was the same, the words were a wee different. 'Elspat,' it said, 'mak' ready, an' come awa.' She rose hastily to the window, an' there, sure enough, was the elder, turning the corner, in his Sunday's bonnet an' his Sunday's coat. An' weel did she ken, she said, the meaning o' his call, an' kindly did she tak' it. An' if it was but God's will that she suld hae enough to put her decently under the ground, without going into any debt to any one, she would be weel content. She had already the linen for the dead-dress, she said ; for she had spun it for the purpose afore her contract wi' William ; an' she had the whiskey, too, for the wake ; but she had naething anent the coffin, an' the bedral.

"Weel, we took our breakfast, an' I did my best to comfort the puir body ; but she looked very down-hearted for a' that. About the middle o' the day, in cam' the minister's boy wi' a letter. It was directed to his master, he said ; but it was a' for Elspat ; an' there was a five-pound note in it. It was frae a man who had left the country mony, mony a year afore, a good deal in her faither's debt. You would hae thought the puir thing wad hae grat her een out when she saw the money ; but never was money mair thankfully received, or ta'en mair directly frae heaven. It sent her aboon the warld, she said ; an' coming at the time it did, an estate o' a thousand a year wadna be o' mair use to her. Next morning she didna rise, for her strength had failed her at once, though she felt nae meikle pain ; an' she sent me to get the note changed, an' to leave twenty

shillings o't wi' the wright for a decent coffin like her mither's, an' five shillings mair wi' the bedral, an' to tak' in necessaries for a sick-bed wi' some o' the lave. Weel, I did that; an' there's still twa pounds o' the note yonder in the little cupboard.

"On the fifth morning after she had been taken sae ill, I cam' in till ask after her; for my neebor here had relieved me o' that night's watchin', an' I had gotten to my bed. The moment I opened the door I saw that the haill room was hung in white, just as ye see it now; an' I'm sure it staid that way a minute or sae; but when I winked it went awa'. I kent there was a change no far off; and when I went up to the bed, Elspat didna ken me. She was wirkin' wi' her han' at the blankets, as if she were picking off the little motes; an' I could hear the beginning o' the dead-rattle in her throat. I sat at her bedside for a while wi' my neebor here; an' when she spoke to us, it was to say that the bed had grown hard an' uneasy, an' that she wished to be brought out to the chair. Weel, we indulged her, though we baith kent that it wasna in the bed the uneasiness lay. Her mind, puir body, was carried at the time. She just kent that there was to be a death an' a lykewake, but no that the death and the lykewake were to be her ain; an' when she looked at the bed, she bade us tak' down the black curtains an' put up the white; an' tauld us where the white were to be found.

"'But where is the corp?' she said; 'it's no there. Where is the corp?'

"'O, Elspat! it will be there vera soon,' said my neebor; an' that satisfied her.

"She cam' to hersel' an hour afore she departed. God had been very gude to her, she said, a' her life lang, an' he hadna forsaken her at the last. He had been gude to her

when he had gien her friens, an' gude to her when he took them to himsel'; an' she kent she was now going to baith him an' them. There wasna such a difference, she said, atween life an' death as folk were ready to think. She was sure that, though William had been ca'ed awa suddenly, he hadna been ca'ed without being prepared; an' now that her turn had come, an' that she was goin' to meet wi' him, it was maybe as weel that he had left her early; for, till she had lost him, she had been owre licht an' thochtless; an' had it been her lot to hae lived in happiness wi' him, she micht hae remained light an' thochtless still. She bade us baith fareweel, an' thanked an' blessed us; an' her last breath went awa' in a prayer no half an hour after. Puir, decent body! But she's no puir now."

"A pretty portrait," whispered my companion, "of one of a class fast wearing away. Nothing more interests me in the story than the woman's undoubting faith in the supernatural. She does not even seem to know that what she believes so firmly herself is so much as doubted by others. Try whether you can't bring up, by some means, a few other stories furnished with a similar machinery, — a story of the second sight, for instance."

"The only way of accomplishing that," I replied, "is by contributing a story of the kind myself."

"The vision of the room hung in white," I said, "reminds me of a story related, about a hundred and fifty years ago, by a very learned and very ingenious countryman of ours, George, first Earl of Cromarty. His lordship, a steady Royalist, was engaged, shortly before the Restoration (he was then, by the way, only Sir George Mackenzie), in raising troops for the king on his lands on the western coast of Ross-shire. There came on one of those days of rain and tempest so common in the district,

and Sir George, with some of his friends, were storm-bound, in a solitary cottage, somewhere on the shores of Loch-broom. Towards evening one of the party went out to look after their horses. He had been sitting beside Sir George, and the chair he had occupied remained empty. On Sir George's servant, an elderly Highlander, coming in, he went up to his master, apparently much appalled, and, tapping him on the shoulder, urged him to rise. 'Rise!' he said, 'rise! There's a dead man sitting on the chair beside you.' The whole party immediately started to their feet; but they saw only the empty chair. The dead man was visible to the Highlander alone. His head was bound up, he said, and his face streaked with blood, and one of his arms hung broken by his side. Next day, as a party of horsemen were passing along the steep side of a hill in the neighborhood, one of the horses stumbled and threw its rider; and the man, grievously injured by the fall, was carried in a state of insensibility to the cottage. His head was deeply gashed and one of his arms was broken, — though he ultimately recovered, — and, on being brought to the cottage, he was placed, in a death-like swoon, in the identical chair which the Highlander had seen occupied by the spectre. Sir George relates the story, with many a similar story besides, in a letter to the celebrated Robert Boyle."

"I have perused it with much interest," said my friend, "and wonder our booksellers should have suffered it to become so scarce. Do you not remember the somewhat similar story his lordship relates of the Highlander, who saw the apparition of a troop of horse ride over the brow of a hill and enter a field of oats, which, though it had been sown only a few days before, the horsemen seemed to cut down with their swords? He states that, a few

months after, a troop of cavalry actually entered the same field, and carried away the produce for fodder to their horses. He tells, too, if I remember aright, that on the same expedition to which your story belongs, one of his Highlanders, on entering a cottage, started back with horror. He had met in the passage, he said, a dead man in his shroud, and saw people gathering for a funeral. And, as his lordship relates, one of the inmates of the cottage, who was in perfect health at the time of the vision, died suddenly only two days after."

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF DONALD GAIR.

"The second sight," said an elderly man who sat beside me, and whose countenance had struck me as highly expressive of serious thought, "is fast wearing out of this part of the country. Nor should we much regret it perhaps. It seemed, if I may so speak, as something outside the ordinary dispositions of Providence, and, with all the horror and unhappiness that attended it, served no apparent good end. I have been a traveller in my youth, masters. About thirty years ago, I served for some time in the navy. I entered on the first breaking out of the Revolutionary war, and was discharged during the short peace of 1801. One of my chief companions on shipboard, for the first few years, was a young man, a native of Sutherland, named Donald Gair. Donald, like most of his

countrymen, was a staid, decent lad, of a rather melancholy cast; and yet there were occasions when he could be gay enough too. We sailed together in the Bedford, under Sir Thomas Baird; and, after witnessing the mutiny at the Nore, — neither of us did much more than witness it, for in our case it merely transferred the command of the vessel from a very excellent captain to a set of low Irish doctor's-list men, — we joined Admiral Duncan, then on the Dutch station. We were barely in time to take part in the great action. Donald had been unusually gay all the previous evening. We knew the Dutch had come out, and that there was to be an engagement on the morrow; and, though I felt no fear, the thought that I might have to stand in a few brief hours before my Maker and my Judge had the effect of rendering me serious. But my companion seemed to have lost all command of himself. He sung and leaped and shouted, not like one intoxicated, — there was nothing of intoxication about him, — but under the influence of a wild, irrepressible flow of spirits. I took him seriously to task, and reminded him that we might both at that moment be standing on the verge of death and judgment. But he seemed more impressed by my remarking that, were his mother to see him, she would say he was *fey*.

"We had never been in action before with our captain Sir Thomas. He was a grave, and, I believe, God-fearing man, and much a favorite with at least all the better seamen. But we had not yet made up our minds on his character, — indeed, no sailor ever does with regard to his officers till he knows how they fight, — and we were all curious to see how the parson, as we used to call him, would behave himself among the shot. But truly we might have had little fear for him. I have sailed with

Nelson, and not Nelson himself ever showed more courage or conduct than Sir Thomas in that action. He made us all lie down beside our guns, and steered us, without firing a shot, into the very thickest of the fight; and when we did open, masters, every broadside told with fearful effect. I never saw a man issue his commands with more coolness or self-possession.

"There are none of our continental neighbors who make better seamen, or who fight more doggedly, than the Dutch. We were in a blaze of flame for four hours. Our rigging was slashed to pieces, and two of our ports were actually knocked into one. There was one fierce, ill-natured Dutchman, in particular, — a fellow as black as night, without so much as a speck of paint or gilding about him, save that he had a red lion on the prow, — that fought us as long as he had a spar standing; and when he struck at last, fully one half the crew lay either dead or wounded on the decks, and all his scupper-holes were running blood as freely as ever they had done water at a deck-washing. The Bedford suffered nearly as severely. It is not in the heat of action that we can reckon on the loss we sustain. I saw my comrades falling around me, — falling by the terrible cannon-shot as they came crashing in through our sides; I felt, too, that our gun wrought more heavily as our numbers were thinning around it; and at times, when some sweeping chain-shot or fatal splinter laid open before me those horrible mysteries of the inner man which nature so sedulously conceals, I was conscious of a momentary feeling of dread and horror. But in the prevailing mood, an unthinking anger, a dire thirsting after revenge, a dogged, unyielding firmness, were the chief ingredients. I strained every muscle and sinew; and, amid the smoke and the thunder and the

frightful carnage, fired and loaded, and fired and loaded, and, with every discharge, sent out, as it were, the bitterness of my whole soul against the enemy. But very different were my feelings when victory declared in our favor, and, exhausted and unstrung, I looked abroad among the dead. As I crossed the deck my feet literally splashed in blood; and I saw the mangled fragments of human bodies sticking in horrid patches to the sides and the beams above. There was a fine little boy aboard with whom I was an especial favorite. He had been engaged, before the action, in the construction of a toy ship, which he intended sending to his mother; and I used sometimes to assist him, and to lend him a few simple tools; and, just as we were bearing down on the enemy, he had come running up to me with a knife which he had borrowed from me a short time before.

"'Alick, Alick,' he said, 'I have brought you your knife; we are going into action, you know, and I may be killed, and then you would lose it.'

"Poor little fellow! The first body I recognized was his. Both his arms had been fearfully shattered by a cannon-shot, and the surgeon's tourniquets, which had been fastened below the shoulders, were still there; but he had expired ere the amputating knife had been applied. As I stood beside the body, little in love with war, masters, a comrade came up to me to say that my friend and countryman, Donald Gair, lay mortally wounded in the cockpit. I went instantly down to him. But never shall I forget, though never may I attempt to describe, what I witnessed that day in that frightful scene of death and suffering. Donald lay in a low hammock, raised not a foot over the deck; and there was no one beside him, for the surgeons had seen at a glance the hopelessness of his case, and were

busied about others of whom they had hope. He lay on his back, breathing very hard, but perfectly insensible; and in the middle of his forehead there was a round little hole without so much as a speck of blood about it, where a musket-bullet had passed through his brain. He continued to breathe for about two hours; and when he expired I wrapped the body decently up in a hammock, and saw it committed to the deep. The years passed; and, after looking death in the face in many a storm and many a battle, peace was proclaimed, and I returned to my friends and my country.

"A few weeks after my arrival, an elderly Highland woman, who had travelled all the way from the further side of Loch Shin to see me, came to our door. She was the mother of Donald Gair, and had taken her melancholy journey to hear from me all she might regarding the last moments and death of her son. She had no English, and I had not Gaelic enough to converse with her; but my mother, who had received her with a sympathy all the deeper from the thought that her own son might have been now in Donald's place, served as our interpreter. She was strangely inquisitive, though the little she heard served only to increase her grief; and you may believe it was not much I could find heart to tell her; for what was there in the circumstances of my comrade's death to afford pleasure to his mother? And so I waived her questions regarding his wound and his burial as best I could.

"'Ah,' said the poor woman to my mother, 'he need not be afraid to tell me all. I know too, too well that my Donald's body was thrown into the sea; I knew of it long ere it happened; and I have long tried to reconcile my mind to it, tried when he was a boy even; and so you need not be afraid to tell me now.'

"'And how,' asked my mother, whose curiosity was excited, 'could you have thought of it so early?'

"'I lived,' rejoined the woman, 'at the time of Donald's birth, in a lonely shieling among the Sutherland hills, — a full day's journey from the nearest church. It was a long, weary road, over moors and mosses. It was in the winter season, too, when the days are short; and so, in bringing Donald to be baptized, we had to remain a night by the way in the house of a friend. We there found an old woman of so peculiar an appearance that, when she asked me for the child, I at first declined giving it, fearing she was mad and might do it harm. The people of the house, however, assured me she was incapable of hurting it, and so I placed it on her lap. She took it up in her arms, and began to sing to it; but it was such a song as none of us had ever heard before.

"'Poor little stranger!' she said, 'thou hast come into the world in an evil time. The mists are on the hills, gloomy and dark, and the rain lies chill on the heather; and thou, poor little thing, hast a long journey through the sharp, biting winds, and thou art helpless and cold. Oh, but thy long after-journey is as dreary and dark! A wanderer shalt thou be, over the land and the ocean; and in the ocean shalt thou lie at last. Poor little thing, I have waited for thee long. I saw thee in thy wanderings, and in thy shroud, ere thy mother brought thee to the door; and the sounds of the sea and of the deadly guns are still ringing in my ears. Go, poor little thing, to thy mother. Bitterly shall she yet weep for thee, and no wonder; but no one shall ever weep over thy grave, or mark where thou liest amid the deep green, with the shark and the seal.'

"'From that evening,' continued the mother of my friend, 'I have tried to reconcile my mind to what was to

happen Donald. But oh, the fond, foolish heart! I loved him more than any of his brothers, because I was to lose him soon; and though when he left me I took farewell of him for ever, — for I knew I was never, never to see him more, — I felt, till the news reached me of his fall in battle, as if he were living in his coffin. But oh! do tell me all you know of his death. I am old and weak, but I have travelled far, far to see you, that I might hear all; and surely, for the regard you bore to Donald, you will not suffer me to return as I came.'

"But I need not dwell longer on the story. I imparted to the poor woman all the circumstances of her son's death as I have done to you; and, shocking as they may seem, I found that she felt rather relieved than otherwise."

"This is not quite the country of the second sight," said my friend; "it is too much on the borders of the Lowlands. The gift seems restricted to the Highlands alone, and it is now fast wearing out even there."

"And weel it is," said one of the men, "that it should be sae. It is surely a miserable thing to ken o' coming evil, if we just merely ken that it is coming, an' that come it must, do what we may. Hae ye ever heard the story o' the kelpie that wons in the Conon?"

My friend replied in the negative.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE DOOMED RIDER.

"The Conon," continued the man, "is as bonny a river as we hae in a' the north country. There's mony a sweet

sunny spot on its banks; an' mony a time an' aft hae I waded through its shallows, when a boy, to set my little scantling-line for the trouts an' the eels, or to gather the big pearl-mussels that lie sae thick in the fords. But its bonny wooded banks are places for enjoying the day in, no for passing the nicht. I kenna how it is: it's nane o' your wild streams, that wander desolate through desert country, like the Avon, or that come rushing down in foam and thunder, owre broken rocks, like the Foyers, or that wallow in darkness, deep, deep in the bowels o' the earth, like the fearfu' Auldgraunt; an' yet no ane o' these rivers has mair or frightfuler stories connected wi' it than the Conon. Ane can hardly saunter owre half a mile in its course frae where it leaves Contin till where it enters the sea, without passing owre the scene o' some frightful auld legend o' the kelpie or the water-wraith. And ane o' the maist frightful-looking o' these places is to be found among the woods o' Conon House. Ye enter a swampy meadow, that waves wi' flags an' rushes like a cornfield in harvest, an' see a hillock covered wi' willows rising like an island in the midst. There are thick mirk woods on ilka side: the river, dark an' awesome, an' whirling round and round in mossy eddies, sweeps away behind it; an' there is an auld burying-ground, wi' the broken ruins o' an auld Papist kirk on the tap. Ane can still see among the rougher stanes the rose-wrought mullions of an arched window an' the trough that ance held the holy water. About twa hunder years ago, — a wee mair, maybe, or a wee less, for ane canna be very sure o' the date o' thae auld stories, — the building was entire; an' a spot near it, where the wood now grows thickest, was laid out in a cornfield. The marks o' the furrows may still be seen amang the trees. A party o' Highlanders were busily engaged a'e day in

harvest in cutting down the corn o' that field; an' just aboot noon, when the sun shone brightest, an' they were busiest in the work, they heard a voice frae the river exclaim, 'The hour, but not the man, has come.' Sure enough, on looking round, there was the kelpie standin' in what they ca' a fause ford, just fornent the auld kirk. There is a deep, black pool baith aboon an' below, but i' the ford there's a bonny ripple, that shows, as ane might think, but little depth o' water; an, just i' the middle o' that, in a place where a horse might swim, stood the kelpie. An' it again repeated its words, 'The hour, but not the man, has come'; an' then, flashing through the water like a drake, it disappeared in the lower pool. When the folk stood wondering what the creature might mean, they saw a man on horseback come spurring down the hill in hot haste, making straight for the fause ford. They could then understand her words at ance; an' four o' the stoutest o' them sprang oot frae amang the corn, to warn him o' his danger an' keep him back. An' sae they tauld him what they had seen an heard, an' urged him either to turn back an' tak' anither road or stay for an hour or sae where he was. But he just wadna hear them, for he was baith unbelieving an' in haste, an' would hae ta'en the ford for a' they could say hadna the Highlanders, determined on saving him whether he would or no, gathered round him an' pulled him frae his horse, an' then, to make sure o' him, locked him up in the auld kirk. Weel, when the hour had gone by, — the fatal hour o' the kelpie, — they flung open the door, an' cried to him that he might noo gang on his journey. Ah! but there was nae answer, though; an' sae they cried a second time, an' there was nae answer still; an' then they went in, and found him lying stiff an' cauld on the floor, wi' his face buried in the water o' the very stane trough

that we may still see amang the ruins. His hour had come, an' he had fallen in a fit, as 'twould seem, head foremost amang the water o' the trough, where he had been smothered; an' sae, ye see, the prophecy o' the kelpie availed nothing."

"The very story," exclaimed my friend, "to which Sir Walter alludes, in one of the notes to 'The Heart of Mid-Lothian.' The kelpie, you may remember, furnishes him with a motto to the chapter in which he describes the gathering of all Edinburgh to witness the execution of Porteous, and their irrepressible wrath on ascertaining that there was to be no execution, — 'The hour, but not the man, is come.'"

"I remember making quite the same discovery," I replied, "about twelve years ago, when I resided for several months on the banks of the Conon, not half a mile from the scene of the story. One might fill a little book with legends of the Conon. The fords of the river are dangerous, especially in the winter season; and about thirty years ago, before the erection of the fine stone bridge below Conon House, scarcely a winter passed in which fatal accidents did not occur; and these were almost invariably traced to the murderous malice of the water-wraith."

"But who or what is the water-wraith?" said my friend. "We heard just now of the kelpie, and it is the kelpie that Sir Walter quotes."

"Ah," I replied, "but we must not confound the kelpie and the water-wraith, as has become the custom in these days of incredulity. No two spirits, though they were both spirits of the lake and the river, could be more different. The kelpie invariably appeared in the form of a young horse; the water-wraith in that of a very tall woman, dressed in green, with a withered, meagre counte-

nance ever distorted by a malignant scowl. It is the water-wraith, not the kelpie, whom Sir Walter should have quoted; and yet I could tell you curious stories of the kelpie too."

"We must have them all," said my friend, "ere we part. Meanwhile, I should like to hear some of your stories of the Conon.

"As related by me," I replied, "you will find them rather meagre in their details. In my evening walks along the river, I have passed the ford a hundred times out of which, only a twelvemonth before, as a traveller was entering it on a moonlight night, the water-wraith started up, not four yards in front of him, and pointed at him with her long skinny fingers, as if in mockery. I have leaned against the identical tree to which a poor Highlander clung when, on fording the river by night, he was seized by the goblin. A lad who accompanied him, and who had succeeded in gaining the bank, strove to assist him, but in vain. The poor man was dragged from his hold into the current, where he perished. The spot has been pointed out to me, too, in the opening of the river, where one of our Cromarty fishermen, who had anchored his yawl for the night, was laid hold of by the spectre when lying asleep on the beams, and almost dragged over the gunwale into the water. Our seafaring men still avoid dropping anchor, if they possibly can, after the sun has set, in what they term the *fresh*; that is, in those upper parts of the frith where the waters of the river predominate over those of the sea.

"The scene of what is deemed one of the best authenticated stories of the water-wraith lies a few miles higher up the river. It is a deep, broad ford, through which horsemen coming from the south pass to Brahan Castle. A thick wood hangs over it on the one side; on the other it

is skirted by a straggling line of alders and a bleak moor. On a winter night, about twenty-five years ago, a servant of the late Lord Seaforth had been drinking with some companions till a late hour, in a small house in the upper part of the moor; and when the party broke up, he was accompanied by two of them to the ford. The moon was at full, and the river, though pretty deep in flood, seemed noway formidable to the servant. He was a young, vigorous man, and mounted on a powerful horse; and he had forded it, when half a yard higher on the bank, twenty times before. As he entered the ford, a thick cloud obscured the moon; but his companions could see him guiding the animal. He rode in a slanting direction across the stream until he had reached nearly the middle, when a dark, tall figure seemed to start out of the water and lay hold of him. There was a loud cry of distress and terror, and a frightful snorting and plunging of the horse. A moment passed, and the terrified animal was seen straining towards the opposite bank, and the ill-fated rider struggling in the stream. In a moment more he had disappeared."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF FAIRBURN'S GHOST.

"I SULD weel keen the Conon," said one of the women, who had not yet joined in the conversation. "I was born no a stane's-cast frae the side o't. My mither lived in her last days beside the auld Tower o' Fairburn, that stands sae like a ghaist aboon the river, an' looks down on a' its

turns and windings frae Contin to the sea. My faither, too, for a twelvemonth or sae afore his death, had a boat on ane o' its ferries, for the crossing, on weekdays, o' passengers, an' o' the kirkgoing folks on Sunday. He had a little bit farm beside the Conon, an' just got the boat by way o' eiking out his means; for we had aye eneugh to do at rent-time, an' had maybe less than plenty through a' the rest o' the year besides. Weel, for the first ten months or sae the boat did brawly. The Castle o' Brahan is no half a mile frae the ferry, an' there were aye a hantle o' gran' folk comin' and gangin' frae the Mackenzie, an' my faither had the crossin' o' them a'. An' besides, at Marti'mas, the kirk-going people used to send him firlots o' bear an' pecks o' oatmeal; an' he soon began to find that the bit boat was to do mair towards paying the rent o' the farm than the farm itsel'.

"The Tower o' Fairburn is aboot a mile and a half aboon the ferry. It stands by itsel' on the tap o' a heathery hill, an' there are twa higher hills behind it. Beyond there spreads a black, dreary desert, where ane micht wander a lang simmer's day withoot seeing the face o' a human creature, or the kindly smoke o' a lum. I dare say nane o' you hae heard hoo the Mackenzies o' Fairburn an' the Chisholms o' Strathglass parted that bit o' kintra atween them. Nane o' them could tell where the lands o' the ane ended or the ither began, an' they were that way for generations, till they at last thocht them o' a plan o' division. Each o' them gat an auld wife o' seventy-five, an' they set them aff a'e Monday at the same time, the ane frae Erchless Castle an' the ither frae the Tower, warning them aforehand that the braidness o' their maisters' lands depended on their speed; for where the twa would meet amang the hills, there would be the boundary.

"You may be sure that neither o' them lingered by the way that morning. They kent there was mony an e'e on them, an' that their names would be spoken o' in the kintra-side lang after themsels were dead an' gane; but it sae happened that Fairburn's carline, wha had been his nurse, was ane o' the slampest women in a' the north of Scotland, young or auld; an', though the ither did weel, she did sae meikle better that she had got owre twenty lang Highland miles or the ither had got owre fifteen. They say it was a droll sicht to see them at the meeting, — they were baith tired almost to fainting; but no sooner did they come in sicht o' ane anither, at the distance o' a mile or sae, than they began to run. An' they ran, an' better ran, till they met at a little burnie; an' there wad they hae focht, though they had ne'er seen ane anither atween the een afore, had they had strength eneugh left them; but they had neither pith for fechtin' nor breath for scoldin', an' sae they just sat down an' girned at ane anither across the stripe. The Tower o' Fairburn is naething noo but a dismal ruin o' five broken stories, the ane aboon the ither, an' the lands hae gane oot o' the auld family; but the story o' the twa auld wives is a weel-kent story still.

"The laird o' Fairburn, in my faither's time, was as fine an open-hearted gentleman as was in the haill country. He was just particular gude to the puir; but the family had ever been that; ay, in their roughest days, even whan the Tower had neither door nor window in the lower story, an' only a wheen shot-holes in the story aboon. There wasna a puir thing in the kintra but had reason to bless the laird; an' at a'e time he had nae fewer than twelve puir orphans living about his house at ance. Nor was he in the least a proud, haughty man. He wad chat for hours thegither wi' ane o' his puirest tenants; an' ilka time he

crossed the ferry, he wad tak' my faither wi' him, for company just, maybe half a mile on his way out or hame. Weel, it was a'e nicht about the end o' May, — a bonny nicht, an hour or sae after sundown, — an' my faither was mooring his boat, afore going to bed, to an auld oak tree, whan wha does he see but the laird o' Fairburn coming down the bank? Od, thocht he, what can be takin' the laird frae hame sae late as this? I thocht he had been no weel. The laird cam' steppin' into the boat, but, instead o' speakin' frankly, as he used to do, he just waved his hand, as the proudest gentleman in the kintra micht, an' pointed to the ither side. My faither rowed him across; but, oh! the boat felt unco dead an' heavy, an' the water stuck around the oars as gin it had been tar; an' he had just eneugh ado, though there was but little tide in the river, to mak' oot the ither side. The laird stepped oot, an' then stood, as he used to do, on the bank, to gie my faither time to fasten his boat, an' come alang wi' him; an' were it no for that, the puir man wadna hae thocht o' going wi' him that nicht; but as it was, he just moored his boat an' went. At first he thocht the laird must hae got some bad news that made him sae dull, an' sae he spoke on to amuse him, aboot the weather an' the markets; but he found he could get very little to say, an' he felt as are an' eerie in passin' through the woods as gin he had been passin' alane through a kirkyard. He noticed, too, that there was a fearsome flichtering an' shriekin' amang the birds that lodged in the tree-taps aboon them; an' that, as they passed the *Talisoe*, there was a collie on the tap o' a hillock, that set up the awfulest yowling he had ever heard. He stood for a while in sheer consternation, but the laird beckoned him on, just as he had done at the riverside, an' sae he gaed a bittie further alang the wild, rocky

glen that opens into the deer-park. But oh, the fright that was amang the deer! They had been lyin' asleep on the knolls, by sixes an' sevens; an' up they a' started at ance, and gaed driving aff to the far end o' the park as if they couldna be far eneugh frae my faither an' the laird. Weel, my faither stood again, an' the laird beckoned an' beckoned as afore; but, Gude tak' us a' in keeping! whan my faither looked up in his face, he saw it was the face o' a corp: it was white an' stiff, an' the nose was thin an' sharp, an' there was nae winking wi' the wide-open een. Gude preserve us! my faither didna ken where he was stan'in, — didna ken what he was doin'; an', though he kept his feet, he was just in a kind o' swarf like. The laird spoke twa or three words to him, — something about the orphans, he thocht; but he was in such a state that he couldna tell what; an' when he cam' to himsel' the apparition was awa'. It was a bonny clear nicht when they had crossed the Conon; but there had been a gatherin' o' black cluds i' the lift as they gaed, an' there noo cam' on, in the clap o' a han', ane o' the fearsomest storms o' thunder an' lightning that was ever seen in the country. There was a thick gurly aik smashed to shivers owre my faither's head, though nane o' the splinters steered him; an' whan he reached the river, it was roaring frae bank to brae like a little ocean; for a water-spout had broken amang the hills, an' the trees it had torn doun wi' it were darting alang the current like arrows. He crossed in nae little danger, an' took to his bed; an', though he raise an' went aboot his wark for twa or three months after, he was never, never his ain man again. It was found that the laird had departed no five minutes afore his apparition had come to the ferry; an' the very last words he had spoken — but his mind was carried at the time — was something aboot my faither."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE LAND FACTOR.

"There maun hae been something that weighed on his mind," remarked one of the women, "though your faither had nae power to get it frae him. I mind that, when I was a lassie, there happened something o' the same kind. My faither had been a tacksman on the estate o' Blackhall; an' as the land was sour an' wat, an' the seasons for a while backward, he aye contrived — for he was a hard-working, carefu' man — to keep us a' in meat and claith, and to meet wi' the factor. But, waes me! he was sune ta'en frae us. In the middle o' the seed-time there cam' a bad fever intil the country; an' the very first that died o't was my puir faither. My mither did her best to keep the farm, an' haud us a' thegither. She got a carefu', decent lad to manage for her, an' her ain e'e was on everything; an' had it no been for the cruel, cruel factor, she micht hae dune gey weel. But never had the puir tenant a waur friend than Ranald Keilly. He was a toun writer, an' had made a sort o' living, afore he got the factorship, just as toun writers do in ordinar'. He used to be gettin' the haud o' auld wives' posies when they died; an' there were aye some litigeous, troublesome folk in the place, too, that kept him doing a little in the way o' troublin' their neebors; an' sometimes, when some daft, gowked man, o' mair means than sense, couldna mismanage his ain affairs eneugh, he got Keilly to mismanage them for him. An' sae he had

picked up a bare livin' in this way; but the factorship made him just a gentleman. But, oh, an ill use did he mak' o' the power that it gied him owre puir, honest folk! Ye maun ken that, gin they were puir, he liked them a' the waur for being honest; but, I dare say, that was natural eneugh for the like o' him. He contrived to be baith writer an' factor, ye see; an' it wad just seem that his chief aim in a'e the capacity was to find employment for himsel' in the ither. If a puir tenant was but a day behind-hand wi' his rent, he had creatures o' his ain that used to gang half-an'-half wi' him in their fees; an' them he wad send aff to poind him; an' then, if the expenses o' the poinding werena forthcoming, as weel as what was owing to the master, he wad hae a roup o' the stocking twa or three days after, an' anither account, as a man o' business, for that. An' when things were going dog-cheap, — as he took care that they should sometimes gang, — he used to buy them in for himsel,' an' part wi' them again for maybe twice the money. The laird was a quiet, silly, good-natured man; an', though he was tauld weel o' the factor at times, ay, an' believed it too, he just used to say: 'Oh, puir Keilly, what wad he do gin I were to part wi' him? He wad just starve.' An' oh, sirs, his pity for him was bitter cruelty to mony, mony a puir tenant, an' to my mither amang the lave.

"The year after my faither's death was cauld an' wat, an' oor stuff remained sae lang green that we just thocht we wouldna get it cut ava. An' when we did get it cut, the stacks, for the first whilie, were aye heatin' wi' us; an' when Marti'mas came, the grain was still saft an' milky, an' no fit for the market. The term cam' round, an' there was little to gie the factor in the shape o' money, though there was baith corn and cattle; an' a' that we wanted was just a

little time. Ah, but we had fa'en into the hands o' ane that never kent pity. My mither hadna the money gin, as it were, the day, an' on the morn the messengers came to poind. The roup was no a week after; an' oh, it was a grievous sicht to see how the crop an' the cattle went for just naething. The farmers were a' puirly aff with the late ha'rst, an' had nae money to spare; an' sae the factor knocked in ilka thing to himsel', wi' hardly a bid against him. He was a rough-faced little man, wi' a red, hooked nose, a gude deal gi'en to whiskey, an' very wild an' desperate when he had ta'en a glass or twa aboon ordinar'; an' on the day o' the roup he raged like a perfect madman. My mither spoke to him again an' again, wi' the tear in her e'e, an' implored him, for the sake o' the orphan an' the widow, no to hurry hersel' an' her bairns; but he just cursed an' swore a' the mair, an' knocked down the stacks an' the kye a' the faster; an' whan she spoke to him o' the Ane aboon a', he said that Providence gied lang credit an' reckoned on a lang day, an' that he wald tak' him intil his ain hands. Weel, the roup cam' to an end, an' the sum o' the whole didna come to meikle mair nor the rent an' clear the factor's lang, lang account for expenses; an' at nicht my mither was a ruined woman. The factor staid up late an' lang, drinkin' wi' some creatures o' his ain; an' the last words he said on going to his bed was, that he hadna made a better day's wark for a twelvemonth. But, Gude tak' us a' in keeping! in the morning he was a corp, — a cauld lifeless corp, wi' a face as black as my bonnet.

"Weel, he was buried, an' there was a grand character o' him putten in the newspapers, an' we a' thocht we were to hear nae mair about him. My mither got a wee bittie o' a house on the farm o' a neebor, and there we lived dowie eneugh; but she was aye an eident, workin' woman

an' she now span late an' early for some o' her auld friends, the farmers' wives; an' her sair-won penny, wi' what we got frae kindly folk wha minded us in better times, kept us a' alive. Meanwhile, strange stories o' the dead factor began to gang aboot the kintra. First, his servants, it was said, were hearing arc, curious noises in his counting-office. The door was baith locked an' sealed, waiting till his friends would cast up, for there were some doots aboot them; but, locked an' sealed as it was, they could hear it opening an' shutting every nicht, an' hear a rustlin' among the papers, as gin there had been half a dozen writers scribblin' amang them at ance. An' then, Gude preserve us a'! they could hear Keilly himsel', as if he were dictating to his clerk. An', last o' a', they could see him in the gloamin', nicht an mornin', ganging aboot his house wringing his hands, an' aye, aye muttering to himsel' aboot roups and poindings. The servant girls left the place to himsel'; an' the twa lads that wrought his farm' an' slept in a hay-loft, were sae disturbed nicht after nicht, that they had just to leave it to himsel' too.

"My mither was a'e nicht wi' some a' her spinnin' at a neeborin' farmer's, — a worthy, God-fearing man, an' an elder o' the kirk. It was in the simmer time, an' the nicht was bricht an' bonny; but, in her backcoming, she had to pass the empty house o' the dead factor, an' the elder said that he would take a step hame wi' her, for fear she michtna be that easy in her mind. An' the honest man did sae. Naething happened them in the passin', except that a dun cow, ance a great favorite o' my mither's, cam' lowing up to them, puir beast, as gin she would hae better liked to be gaun hame wi' my mother than stay where she was. But the elder didna get aff sae easy in the back-coming. He was passin' beside a thick hedge, whan what

does he see, but a man inside the hedge, takin' step for step wi' him as he gaed! The man wore a dun coat, an had a hunting-whip under his arm, an' walked, as the elder thocht, very like what the dead factor used to do when he had gotten a glass or twa aboon ordinar. Weel, they cam' to a slap in the hedge, an' out cam' the man at the slap; an' Gude tak' us a' in keeping! it was sure enough the dead factor himsel'. There were his hook nose, an' his rough, red face, — though it was maybe bluer noo than red, — an' there were the boots an' the dun coat he had worn at my mither's roup, an' the very whip he had lashed a puir gangrel woman wi' no a week before his death. He was mutterin' something to himsel'; but the elder could only hear a wordie noo an' then. 'Poind an' roup,' he would say, — 'poind an' roup'; an' then there would come out a blatter o' curses. — 'Hell, hell! an' damn, damn! The elder was a wee fear-stricken at first, — as wha wadna? — but then the ill words an' the way they were said made him angry, — for he could never bear ill words without checking them, — an' sae he turned round wi' a stern brow, an' asked the appearance what it wanted, an' why it should hae come to disturb the peace o' the kintra, and to disturb him? It stood still at that, an' said, wi' an awsome grane, that it couldna be quiet in the grave till there was some justice done to Widow Stuart. It then tauld him that there were forty gowd guineas in a secret drawer in his desk, that hadna been found, an' tauld him where to get them, an' that he wad need gang wi' the laird an' the minister to the drawer, an' gie them a' to the widow. It couldna hae rest till then, it said, nor wad the kintra hae rest either. It willed that the lave o' the gear should be gien to the poor o' the parish; for nane o' the twa folk that laid claim to it had the shadow o' a right. An' wi'

that the appearance left him. It just went back through the slap in the hedge; an' as it stepped owre the ditch, vanished in a puff o' smoke.

"Weel, — but to cut short a lang story, — the laird and the minister were at first gay slow o' belief; no that they misdoubted the elder, but they thocht that he must hae been deceived by a sort o' wakin' dream. But they soon changed their minds, for, sure enough, they found the forty guineas in a secret drawer. An' the news they got frae the south about Keilly was just as the appearance had said; no ane mair nor anither had a richt to his gear, for he had been a foundlin', an' had nae friends. An' sae my mither got the guineas, an' the parish got the rest, an' there was nae mair heard o' the apparition. We didna get back oor auld farm; but the laird gae us a bittie that served oor turn as weel; an' or my mither was ca'ed awa frae us, we were a' settled in the warld, an' doin' for oorsels."

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF THE MEALMONGER.

"It is wonderful," remarked the decent-looking, elderly man who had contributed the story of Donald Gair, — "it is wonderful how long a recollection of that kind may live in the memory without one's knowing it is there. There is no possibility of one taking an inventory of one's recollections. They live unnoted and asleep, till roused by some likeness of themselves, and then up they start, and

answer to it, as 'face answereth to face in a glass.' There comes a story into my mind, much like the last, that has lain there all unknown to me for the last thirty years, nor have I heard any one mention it since; and yet when I was a boy no story could be better known. You have all heard of the dear years that followed the harvest of '40, and how fearfully they bore on the poor. The scarcity, doubtless, came mainly from the hand of Providence, and yet man had his share in it too. There were forestallers of the market, who gathered their miserable gains by heightening the already enormous price of victuals, thus adding starvation to hunger; and among the best known and most execrated of these was one M'Kechan, a residenter in the neighboring parish. He was a hard-hearted foul-spoken man; and often what he *said* exasperated the people as much against him as what he *did*. When, on one occasion, he bought up all the victuals in a market, there was a wringing of hands among the women, and they cursed him to his face; but when he added insult to injury, and told them, in his pride, that he had not left them an ounce to foul their teeth, they would that instant have taken his life, had not his horse carried him through. He was a mean, too, as well as a hard-hearted man, and used small measures and light weights. But he made money, and deemed himself in a fair way of gaining a character on the strength of that alone, when he was seized by a fever, and died after a few days' illness. Solomon tells us, that when the wicked perish there is shouting; there was little grief in the sheriffdom when M'Kechan died; but his relatives buried him decently; and, in the course of the next fortnight, the meal fell twopence the peck. You know the burying-ground of St. Bennet's: the chapel has long since been ruinous, and a row of wasted elms, with white

skeleton-looking tops, run around the enclosure and look over the fields that surround it on every side. It lies out of the way of any thoroughfare, and months may sometimes pass, when burials are unfrequent, in which no one goes near it. It was in St. Bennet's that M'Keehan was buried; and the people about the farm-house that lies nearest it were surprised, for the first month after his death, to see the figure of a man, evening and morning, just a few minutes before the sun had risen and a few after it had set, walking round the yard under the elms three times, and always disappearing when it had taken the last turn beside an old tomb near the gate. It was of course always clear daylight when they saw the figure; and the month passed ere they could bring themselves to suppose that it was other than a thing of flesh and blood, like themselves. The strange regularity of its visits, however, at length bred suspicion; and the farmer himself, a plain, decent man, of more true courage than men of twice the pretence, determined one evening on watching it. He took his place outside the wall a little before sunset; and no sooner had the red light died away on the elm-tops, than up started the figure from among the ruins on the opposite side of the burying-ground, and came onward in its round, muttering incessantly as it came, 'Oh, for mercy sake, for mercy sake, a handful of meal! I am starving, I am starving: a handful of meal!' And then, changing its tone into one still more doleful, 'Oh,' it exclaimed, 'alas for the little lippie and the little peck! alas for the little lippie and the little peck!' As it passed, the farmer started up from his seat; and there, sure enough, was M'Keehan, the corn-factor, in his ordinary dress, and, except that he was thinner and paler than usual, like a man suffering from hunger, presenting nearly his ordinary appearance. The

figure passed with a slow, gliding sort of motion ; and, turning the further corner of the burying-ground, came onward in its second round ; but the farmer, though he had felt rather curious than afraid as it went by, found his heart fail him as it approached the second time, and, without waiting its coming up, set off homeward through the corn. The apparition continued to take its rounds evening and morning for about two months after, and then disappeared for ever. Mealmongers had to forget the story, and to grow a little less afraid, ere they could cheat with their accustomed coolness. Believe me, such beliefs, whatever may be thought of them in the present day, have not been without their use in the past."

As the old man concluded his story, one of the women rose to a table in the little room and replenished our glasses. We all drank in silence.

"It is within an hour of midnight," said one of the men, looking at his watch. "We had better recruit the fire, and draw in our chairs. The air aye feels chill at a lykewake or a burial. At this time to-morrow we will be lifting the corpse."

There was no reply. We all drew in our chairs nearer the fire, and for several minutes there was a pause in the conversation ; but there were more stories to be told, and before the morning many a spirit was evoked from the grave, the vast deep, and the Highland stream.