

"Fear not," said Norna, "it will come to man's use. See, there come carrion-crows, of scent as keen as thine own."

She spoke truly; for several of the people from the hamlet of Jarlshof were now hastening along the beach, to have their share in the spoil. The pedlar beheld them approach with a deep groan. "Ay, ay," he said, "the folk of Jarlshof, they will make clean wark; they are kend for that far and wide; they winna leave the value of a rotten ratlin; and what's waur, there isna ane o' them has mense or sense enough to give thanks for the mercies when they have gotten them. There is the auld Ranzelman, Neil Ronaldson, that canna walk a mile to hear the minister, but he will hirple ten if he hears of a ship embayed."

Norna, however, seemed to possess over him so complete an ascendancy, that he no longer hesitated to take the man, who now gave strong symptoms of reviving existence, upon his shoulders; and, assisted by Mordaunt, trudged along the sea-beach with his burden, without farther remonstrance. Ere he was borne off, the stranger pointed to the chest, and attempted to mutter something, to which Norna replied, "Enough. It shall be secured."

Advancing towards the passage called Erick's Steps, by which they were to ascend the cliffs, they met the people from Jarlshof, hastening in the opposite direction. Man and woman, as they passed, reverently made room for Norna, and saluted her—not without an expression of fear upon some of their faces. She passed them a few paces, and then turning back, called aloud to the Ranzelman, who (though the practice was more common than legal) was attending the rest of the hamlet upon this plundering expedition. "Neil Ronaldson," she said, "mark my words. There stands yonder a chest, from which the lid has been just prized off. Look it be brought down to your own house at Jarlshof, just as it now is. Beware of moving or touching the slightest article. He were better in his grave, that so much as looks at the contents. I speak not for nought, nor in aught will I be disobeyed."

"Your pleasure shall be done, mother," said Ronaldson. "I warrant we will not break bulk, since sic is your bidding."

Far behind the rest of the villagers, followed an old woman, talking to herself, and cursing her own decrepitude, which kept her the last of the party, yet pressing forward with all her might to get her share of the spoil.

When they met her, Mordaunt was astonished to recognise his father's old housekeeper. "How now," he said, "Swertha, what make you so far from home?"

"Just e'en daikering out to look after my auld master and your honor," replied Swertha, who felt like a criminal caught in the manner; for on more occasions than one, Mr. Mertoun had intimated his high disapprobation of such excursions as she was at present engaged in.

But Mordaunt was too much engaged with his

own thoughts to take much notice of her delinquency. "Have you seen my father?" he said.

"And that I have," replied Swertha—"The gude gentleman was ganging to hisel himself down Erick's Steps, whilk would have been the ending of him, that is in no way a cragsman. Sae I e'en gat him wiled away hame—and I was just seeking you that you may gang after him to the hall-house, for, to my thought, he is far frae weel."

"My father unwell?" said Mordaunt, remembering the faintness he had exhibited at the commencement of that morning's walk.

"Far frae weel—far frae weel," groaned out Swertha, with a piteous shake of the head—"white o' the gills—white o' the gills—and him to think of coming down the riva!"

"Return home, Mordaunt," said Norna, who was listening to what had passed. "I will see all that is necessary done for this man's relief, and you will find him at the Ranzelman's, when you list to inquire. You cannot help him more than you already have done."

Mordaunt felt this was true, and, commanding Swertha to follow him instantly, betook himself to the path homeward.

Swertha hobbled reluctantly after her young master in the same direction, until she lost sight of him on his entering the cleft of the rock; then instantly turned about, muttering to herself, "Haste home, in good sooth?—haste home, and lose the best chance of getting a new rokelay and overlay that I have had these ten years? by my certie, na—It's seldom sic rich godsend comes on our shore—no since the Jenny and James came ashore in King Charlie's time."

So saying she mended her pace as well as she could, and, a willing mind making amends for frail limbs, posted on with wonderful dispatch to put in for her share of the spoil. She soon reached the beach, where the Ranzelman, stuffing his own pouches all the while, was exhorting the rest to part things fair, and be neighborly, and to give to the auld and helpless a share of what was going, which, he charitably remarked, would bring a blessing on the shore, and send them "mair wrecks ere winter."*

* The ancient Zetlander looked upon the sea as the provider of his living, not only by the plenty produced by the fishings, but by the spoil of wrecks. Some particular islands have fallen off very considerably in their rent, since the commissioners of the light-houses have ordered lights on the Isle of Sunda and the Pentland Skerries. A gentleman, familiar with those seas, expressed surprise at seeing the farmer of one of the isles in a boat with a very old pair of sails. "Had it been His will"—said the man, with an affected deference to Providence, very inconsistent with the sentiment of his speech—"Had it been His will the light had not been placed yonder, I would have had enough o' new sails last winter."

CHAPTER VIII.

He was a lovely youth, I guess;
This panther in the wilderness
Was not so fair as he.
And when he chose to sport and play,
No dolphin ever was so gay
Upon the tropic sea.

WORDSWORTH.

THE light foot of Mordaunt Mertoun was not long of bearing him to Jarlshof. He entered the house hastily, for what he himself had observed that morning, corresponded in some degree with the ideas which Swertha's tale was calculated to excite. He found his father, however, in the inner apartment, reposing himself after his fatigue; and his first question satisfied him that the good dame had practised a little imposition to get rid of them both.

"Where is this dying man, whom you have so wisely ventured your own neck to relieve?" said the elder Mertoun to the younger.

"Norna, sir," replied Mordaunt, "has taken him under her charge; she understands such matters."

"And is quack as well as witch?" said the elder Mertoun. "With all my heart—it is a trouble saved. But I hastened home, on Swertha's hint, to look out for lint and bandages; for her speech was of broken bones."

Mordaunt kept silence, well knowing his father would not persevere in his inquiries upon such a matter, and not willing either to prejudice the old governante, or to excite his father to one of those excesses of passion into which he was apt to burst, when, contrary to his wont, he thought proper to correct the conduct of his domestic.

It was late in the day ere old Swertha returned from her expedition, heartily fatigued, and bearing with her a bundle of some bulk, containing, it would seem, her share of the spoil. Mordaunt instantly sought her out, to charge her with the deceits she had practised on both his father and himself; but the accused matron lacked not her reply.

"By her troth," she said, "she thought it was time to bid Mr. Mertoun gang hame and get bandages, when she had seen, with her ain twa een, Mordaunt ganging down the cliff like a wildcat—it was to be thought broken bones would be the end, and lucky if bandages wad do any good;—and, by her troth, she might weel tell Mordaunt his father was quaily, and him looking sae white in the gills (whilk, she wad die upon it, was the very word she used), and it was a thing that couldna be denied by man at this very moment."

"But, Swertha," said Mordaunt, as soon as her clamorous defence gave him time to speak in reply, "how came you, that should have been busy with your housewifery and your spinning, to be out this morning at Erick's Steps, in order to take all this unnecessary care of my father and me?—And what is in that bundle, Swertha? for I fear, Swertha, you have been transgressing the

law, and have been out upon the wrecking system."

"Fair fa' your sonsy face, and the blessing of Saint Ronald upon you!" said Swertha, in a tone betwixt coaxing and jesting; "would you keep a puir body frae mending hersel, and sae muckle gear lying on the loose sand for the lifting?—Hout, Maister Mordaunt, a ship ashore is a sight to wile the minister out of his very pu'p'it in the middle of his preaching, muckle mair a puir auld ignorant wife frae her rock and her tow. And little did I get for my day's wark—just some rags o' cambric things, and a bit or twa of coarse clath, and sic like—the strong and the hearty get a' thing in this world."

"Yes, Swertha," replied Mertoun, "and that is rather hard, as you must have your share of punishment in this world and the next, for robbing the poor mariners."

"Hout, callant, wha wad punish an auld wife like me for a wheen duds?—Folk speak muckle black ill of Earl Patrick; but he was a freend to the shore, and made wise laws against ony body helping vessels that were like to gang on the breakers.*—And the mariners, I have heard Bryce Jagger say, lose their right frae the time keel touches sand; and, moreover, they are dead and gane, poor souls—dead and gane, and care little about warld's wealth now—Nay, nae mair than the great Jarls and Sea-kings, in the Norse days, did about the treasures that they buried in the tombs and sepulchres auld langsyne. Did I ever tell you the sang, Maister Mordaunt, how Olaf Tryguarson garr'd hide five gold crowns in the same grave with him?"

"No, Swertha," said Mordaunt, who took pleasure in tormenting the cunning old plunderer—"You never told me that; but I tell you, that the stranger whom Norna has taken down to the town, will be well enough to-morrow, to ask where you have hidden the goods that you have stolen from the wreck."

"But wha will tell him a word about it, hinnie?" said Swertha, looking slyly up in her young master's face—"The mair by token, since I maun tell ye, that I have a bonny remnant of silk among the lave, that will make a dainty waistcoat to yourself, the first merry-making ye gang to."

Mordaunt could no longer forbear laughing at the cunning with which the old dame proposed to bribe off his evidence by imparting a portion of her plunder; and, desiring her to get ready what provision she had made for dinner, he returned to his father, whom he found still sitting in the same place, and nearly in the same posture, in which he had left him.

When their hasty and frugal meal was finished, Mordaunt announced to his father his purpose of going down to the town, or hamlet, to look after the shipwrecked sailor.

The elder Mertoun assented with a nod.

* This was literally true.

"He must be ill-accommodated there, sir," added his son—a hint which only produced another nod of assent. "He seemed, from his appearance," pursued Mordaunt, "to be of very good rank—and admitting these poor people do their best to receive him, in his present weak state, yet—"

"I know what you would say," said his father, interrupting him; "we, you think, ought to do something towards assisting him. Go to him, then—if he lacks money, let him name the sum, and he shall have it; but, for lodging the stranger here and holding intercourse with him, I neither can, nor will do so. I have retired to this farthest extremity of the British isles, to avoid new friends, and new faces, and none such shall intrude on me either their happiness or their misery. When you have known the world half a score of years longer, your early friends will have given you reason to remember them, and to avoid new ones for the rest of your life. Go then—why do you stop?—rid the country of the man—let me see no one about me but those vulgar countenances, the extent and character of whose petty knavery I know, and can submit to, as to an evil too trifling to cause irritation." He then threw his purse to his son, and signed to him to depart with all speed.

Mordaunt was not long before he reached the village. In the dark abode of Neil Rolandson, the Ranzelman, he found the stranger seated by the peat-fire, upon the very chest which had excited the cupidity of the devout Bryce Snailsfoot, the pedlar. The Ranzelman himself was absent, dividing, with all due partiality, the spoils of the wrecked vessel amongst the natives of the community; listening to and redressing their complaints of inequality; and (if the matter in hand had not been, from beginning to end, utterly unjust and indefensible) discharging the part of a wise and prudent magistrate, in all the details. For at this time, and probably until a much later period, the lower orders of the islanders entertained an opinion, common to barbarians also in the same situation, that whatever was cast on their shores, became their indisputable property.

Margery Bimbister, the worthy spouse of the Ranzelman, was in the charge of the house, and introduced Mordaunt to her guest, saying, with no great ceremony, "This is the young tacksman—You will maybe tell him your name, though you will not tell it to us. If it had not been for his four quarters, it's but little you would have said to any body, sea lang as life lasted."

The stranger arose, and shook Mordaunt by the hand, observing, he understood that he had been the means of saving his life and his chest. "The rest of the property," he said, "is, I see, walking the plank; for they are as busy as the devil in a gale of wind."

"And what was the use of your seamanship, then," said Margery, "that you couldna keep off the Sumburgh-head? It would have been lang ere Sumburgh-head had come to you."

"Leave us for a moment, good Margery Bimbister," said Mordaunt; "I wish to have some private conversation with this gentleman."

"Gentleman!" said Margery, with an emphasis; "not but the man is well enough to look at," she added, again surveying him; "but I doubt if there is muckle of the gentleman about him."

Mordaunt looked at the stranger, and was of a different opinion. He was rather above the middle size, and formed handsomely as well as strongly. Mordaunt's intercourse with society was not extensive; but he thought his new acquaintance, to a bold sun-burnt handsome countenance, which seemed to have faced various climates, added the frank and open manners of a sailor. He answered cheerfully the inquiries which Mordaunt made after his health; and maintained that one night's rest would relieve him from all the effects of the disaster he had sustained. But he spoke with bitterness of the avarice and curiosity of the Ranzelman and his spouse.

"That chattering old woman," said the stranger, "has persecuted me the whole day for the name of the ship. I think she might be contented with the share she has had of it. I was the principal owner of the vessel that was lost yonder, and they have left me nothing but my wearing apparel. Is there no magistrate or justice of the peace, in this wild country, that would lend a hand to help one when he is among the breakers?"

Mordaunt mentioned Magnus Troil, the principal proprietor, as well as the Fowd, or provincial judge, of the district, as the person from whom he was most likely to obtain redress; and regretted that his own youth, and his father's situation as a retired stranger, should put it out of their power to afford him the protection he required.

"Nay, for your part, you have done enough," said the sailor; "but if I had five out of the forty brave fellows that are fishes' food by this time, the devil a man would I ask to do me the right that I could do for myself!"

"Forty hands!" said Mordaunt; "you were well manned for the size of the ship."

"Not so well as we needed to be. We mounted ten guns, besides chasers; but our cruise on the main had thinned us of men, and lumbered us up with goods. Six of our guns were in ballast—Hands! if I had had enough of hands, we would never have miscarried so infernally. The people were knocked up with working the pumps, and so took to their boats, and left me with the vessel, to sink or swim. But the dogs had their pay, and I can afford to pardon them—The boats swamped in the current—all were lost—and here am I."

"You had come north about then, from the West Indies?" said Mordaunt.

"Ay, ay; the vessel was the Good Hope of Bristol, a letter of marque. She had fine luck

down on the Spanish main, both with commerce and privateering, but the luck's ended with her now. My name is Clement Cleveland, captain, and part owner, as I said before—I am a Bristolman born—my father was well known on the Tollsell—old Clem Cleveland of the College-Green."

Mordaunt had no right to inquire farther, and yet it seemed to him as if his own mind was but half satisfied. There was an affectation of bluntness, a sort of defiance, in the manner of the stranger, for which circumstances afforded no occasion. Captain Cleveland had suffered injustice from the islanders, but from Mordaunt he had only received kindness and protection; yet he seemed as if he involved all the neighborhood in the wrongs he complained of. Mordaunt looked down and was silent, doubting whether it would be better to take his leave, or to proceed farther in his offers of assistance. Cleveland seemed to guess at his thoughts, for he immediately added, in a conciliating manner,—"I am a plain man, Master Mertoun, for that I understand is your name; and I am a ruined man to boot, and that does not mend one's good manners. But you have done a kind and friendly part by me, and it may be I think as much of it as if I thanked you more. And so before I leave this place, I'll give you my fowling-piece; she will put a hundred swan-shot through a Dutchman's cap at eighty paces—she will carry ball too—I have hit a wild bull within a hundred-and-fifty yards—but I have two pieces that are as good, or better, so you may keep this for my sake."

"That would be to take my share of the wreck," answered Mordaunt, laughing.

"No such matter," said Cleveland, undoing a case which contained several guns and pistols,—"you see I have saved my private arm-chest, as well as my clothes—that the tall old woman in the dark rigging managed for me. And, between ourselves, it is worth all I have lost; for," he added, lowering his voice, and looking round, "when I speak of being ruined in the hearing of these land-sharks, I do not mean ruined stock and block. No, here is something will do more than shoot sea-fowl." So saying, he pulled out a great ammunition-pouch, marked *Swan-shot*, and showed Mordaunt, hastily, that it was full of Spanish pistols and Portagues (as the broad Portugal pieces were then called). "No, no," he added, with a smile, "I have ballast enough to trim the vessel again; and now, will you take the piece?"

"Since you are willing to give it me," said Mordaunt, laughing, "with all my heart. I was just going to ask you, in my father's name," he added, showing his purse, "whether you wanted any of that same ballast?"

"Thanks, but you see I am provided—take my old acquaintance, and may she serve you as well as she has served me; but you will never make so good a voyage with her. You can shoot, I suppose?"

"Tolerably well," said Mordaunt, admiring

the piece, which was a beautiful Spanish-barrelled gun, inlaid with gold, small in the bore, and of unusual length, such as is chiefly used for shooting sea-fowl, and for ball-practice.

"With slugs," continued the donor, "never gun shot closer; and with single ball, you may kill a seal two hundred yards at sea from the top of the highest peak of this iron-bound coast of yours. But I tell you again that the old rattler will never do you the service she has done me."

"I shall not use her so dexterously, perhaps," said Mordaunt.

"Umph!—perhaps not," replied Cleveland; "but that is not the question. What say you to shooting the man at the wheel, just as we run aboard of a Spaniard? So the Don was taken aback, and we laid him athwart the hawse, and carried her cutlass in hand; and worth the while she was—stout brigantine—El Santo Francisco—bound for Porto Bello, with gold and negroes. That little bit of lead was worth twenty thousand pistoles."

"I have shot at no such game as yet," said Mordaunt.

"Well, all in good time; we cannot weigh till the tide makes. But you are a tight, handsome, active young man. What is to ail you to take a trip after some of this stuff?" laying his hand on the bag of gold.

"My father talks of my travelling soon," replied Mordaunt, who, born to hold men-of-wars-men in great respect, felt flattered by this invitation from one who appeared a thorough-bred seaman.

"I respect him for the thought," said the Captain; "and I will visit him before I weigh anchor. I have a consort off these islands, and be cursed to her. She'll find me out somewhere, though she parted company in the bit of a squall, unless she is gone to Davy Jones too. Well, she was better found than we, and not so deep loaded—she must have weathered it. We'll have a ham-mock slung for you aboard, and make a sailor and a man of you in the same trip."

"I should like it well enough," said Mordaunt, who eagerly longed to see more of the world than his lonely situation had hitherto permitted; "but then my father must decide."

"Your father? pooh!" said Captain Cleveland; "but you are very right," he added, checking himself; "Gad, I have lived so long at sea, that I cannot think anybody has a right to think except the captain and the master. But you are very right. I will go up to the old gentleman this instant, and speak to him myself. He lives in that handsome, modern-looking building, I suppose, that I see a quarter of a mile off?"

"In that old half-ruined house," said Mordaunt, "he does indeed live; but he will see no visitors."

"Then you must drive the point yourself, for I can't stay in this latitude. Since your father is no magistrate, I must go to see this same Magnus—how call you him?—who is not justice of peace, but something else that will do the turn as well

These fellows have got two or three things that I must and will have back—let them keep the rest and be d—d to them. Will you give me a letter to him, just by way of commission?"

"It is scarce needful," said Mordaunt. "It is enough that you are shipwrecked, and need his help;—but yet I may as well furnish you with a letter of introduction."

"There," said the sailor, producing a writing-case from his chest, "are your writing-tools.—Meantime, since bulk has been broken, I will nail down the hatches, and make sure of the cargo."

While Mordaunt, accordingly, was engaged in writing to Magnus Troil a letter, setting forth the circumstances in which Captain Cleveland had been thrown upon their coast, the Captain, having first selected and laid aside some wearing apparel and necessaries enough to fill a knapsack, took in hand hammer and nails, employed himself in securing the lid of his sea-chest, by fastening it down in a workman-like manner, and then added the corroborating security of a cord, twisted and knotted with nautical dexterity. "I leave this in your charge," he said, "all except this," showing the bag of gold, "and these," pointing to a cutlass and pistols, "which may prevent all further risk of my parting company with my Portagues."

"You will find no occasion for weapons in this country, Captain Cleveland," replied Mordaunt; "a child might travel with a purse of gold from Sumburgh-head to the Scaw of Unst, and no soul would injure him."

"And that's pretty boldly said, young gentleman, considering what is going on without doors at this moment."

"Oh," replied Mordaunt, a little confused, "what comes on land with the tide, they reckon their lawful property. One would think they had studied under Sir Arthegal, who pronounces—

'For equal right in equal things doth stand,
And what the mighty sea hath once possess'd,
And plucked quite from all possessors' hands,
Or else by wrecks that wretches have distress'd,
He may dispose by his resistless might,
As things at random left, to whom he list.'"

"I shall think the better of plays and ballads as long as I live, for these very words," said Captain Cleveland; "and yet I have loved them well enough in my day. But this is good doctrine, and more men than one may trim their sails to such a breeze. What the sea sends is ours, that's sure enough. However, in case that your good folks should think the land as well as the sea may present them with waifs and strays, I will make bold to take my cutlass and pistols.—Will you cause my chest to be secured in your own house till you hear from me, and use your influence to procure me a guide to show me the way, and to carry my kit?"

"Will you go by sea or land?" said Mordaunt, in reply.

"By sea!" exclaimed Cleveland. "What—in one of these cockleshells, and a cracked cockleshell

to boot? No, no—land, land, unless I knew my crew, my vessel, and my voyage."

They parted accordingly, Captain Cleveland being supplied with a guide to conduct him to Burgh-Westra, and, his chest being carefully removed to the mansion-house at Jarlishof.

CHAPTER IX.

This is a gentle trader, and a prudent,
He's no Autolycus, to bleed your eye,
With quips of worldly gauds and gamesome tees;
But seasons all his glittering merchandise
With wholesome doctrines suited to the use,
As men sauce goose with sage and rosemary.

OLD PLAY.

ON the subsequent morning, Mordaunt, in answer to his father's inquiries, began to give him some account of the shipwrecked mariner, whom he had rescued from the waves. But he had not proceeded far in recapitulating the particulars which Cleveland had communicated, when Mr. Mertoun's looks became disturbed—he arose hastily, and after pacing twice or thrice across the room, he retired into the inner chamber to which he usually confined himself, while under the influence of his mental malady. In the evening he re-appeared, without any traces of his disorder; but it may be easily supposed that his son avoided recurring to the subject which had affected him.

Mordaunt Mertoun was thus left without assistance, to form at his leisure his own opinion respecting the new acquaintance which the sea had sent him; and upon the whole, he was himself surprised to find the result less favorable to the stranger than he could well account for. There seemed to Mordaunt to be a sort of repelling influence about the man. True, he was a handsome man, of a frank and prepossessing manner, but there was an assumption of superiority about him, which Mordaunt did not quite so much like. Although he was so keen a sportsman as to be delighted with his acquisition of the Spanish-barrelled gun, and accordingly mounted and dismantled it with great interest, paying the utmost attention to the most minute parts about the lock and ornaments, yet he was, upon the whole, inclined to have some scruples about the mode in which he had acquired it.

"I should not have accepted it," he thought; "perhaps Captain Cleveland might give it me as a sort of payment for the trifling service I did him; and yet it would have been churlish to refuse it in the way it was offered. I wish he had looked more like a man whom one would have chosen to be obliged to."

But a successful day's shooting reconciled him to his gun, and he became assured, like most young sportsmen in similar circumstances, that all other pieces were but pop-guns in comparison. But then, to be doomed to shoot gulls and seals, when there were Frenchmen and Spaniards to be come at—when there were ships to be boarded, and steersmen to be marked off, seemed but a dull

and contemptible destiny. His father had mentioned his leaving these islands, and no other mode of occupation occurred in his inexperience, save that of the sea, with which he had been conversant from his infancy. His ambition had formerly aimed no higher than at sharing the fatigues and dangers of a Greenland fishing expedition; for it was in that scene that the Zetlanders laid most of their perilous adventures. But war was again raging, the history of Sir Francis Drake, Captain Morgan, and other bold adventurers, an account of whose exploits he had purchased from Bryce Snailsfoot, had made much impression on his mind, and the offer of Captain Cleveland to take him to sea, frequently recurred to him, although the pleasure of such a project was somewhat damped by a doubt, whether, in the long run, he should not find many objections to his proposed commander. Thus much he already saw, that he was opinionative, and might probably prove arbitrary; and that, since even his kindness was mingled with an assumption of superiority, his occasional displeasure might contain a great deal more of that disagreeable ingredient than could be palatable to those who sailed under him. And yet, after counting all risks, could his father's consent but be obtained, with what pleasure, he thought, would he embark in quest of new scenes and strange adventures, in which he proposed to himself to achieve such deeds as should be the theme of many a tale to the lovely sisters of Burgh-Westra—tales at which Minna should weep and Brenda should smile, and both should marvel! And this was to be the reward of his labors and his dangers; for the hearth of Magnus Troil had a magnetic influence over his thoughts, and however they might traverse amid his day-dreams, it was the point where they finally settled.

There were times when Mordaunt thought of mentioning to his father the conversation he had held with Captain Cleveland, and the seaman's proposal to him; but the very short and general account which he had given of that person's history, upon the morning after his departure from the hamlet, had produced a sinister effect on Mr. Mertoun's mind, and discouraged him from speaking farther on any subject connected with it. It would be time enough, he thought, to mention Captain Cleveland's proposal, when his consort should arrive, and when he should repeat his offer in a more formal manner; and these he supposed events likely very soon to happen.

But days grew to weeks, and weeks were numbered into months, and he heard nothing from Cleveland; and only learned by an occasional visit from Bryce Snailsfoot, that the Captain was residing at Burgh-Westra, as one of the family. Mordaunt was somewhat surprised at this, although the unlimited hospitality of the islands, which Magnus Troil, both from fortune and disposition, carried to the utmost extent, made it almost a matter of course that he should remain in the family until he disposed of himself otherwise. Still, it seemed strange he had not gone to some

of the northern isles to inquire after his consort; or that he did not rather choose to make Lerwick his residence, where fishing vessels often brought news from the coasts and ports of Scotland and Holland. Again, why did he not send for the chest he had deposited at Jarlishof? and still farther, Mordaunt thought it would have been but polite if the stranger had sent him some sort of message in token of remembrance.

These subjects of reflection were connected with another still more unpleasant, and more difficult to account for. Until the arrival of this person, scarce a week had passed without bringing him some kind greeting, or token of recollection, from Burgh-Westra; and pretences were scarce ever wanting for maintaining a constant intercourse. Minna wanted the words of a Norse ballad; or desired to have, for her various collections, feathers, or eggs, or shells, or specimens of the rarer seaweeds; or Brenda sent a riddle to be resolved, or a song to be learned; or the honest old Udaller,—in a rude manuscript, which might have passed for an ancient Runic inscription,—sent his hearty greetings to his good young friend, with a present of something to make good cheer, and an earnest request he would come to Burgh-Westra as soon, and stay there as long, as possible. These kindly tokens of remembrance were often sent by special message; besides which, there was never a passenger or a traveller, who crossed from the one mansion to the other, who did not bring to Mordaunt some friendly greeting from the Udaller and his family. Of late, this intercourse had become more and more infrequent; and no messenger from Burgh-Westra had visited Jarlishof for several weeks. Mordaunt both observed and felt this alteration, and it dwelt on his mind, while he questioned Bryce as closely as pride and prudence would permit, to ascertain, if possible, the cause of the change. Yet he endeavored to assume an indifferent air while he asked the jagger whether there were no news in the country.

"Great news," the jagger replied; "and a gay mony of them. That crackbrained carle, the new factor, is for making a change in the *bismars* and the *ispunds*;* and our worthy Fowd, Magnus Troil, has sworn, that, sooner than change them for the still-yard, or aught else, he'll fling Factor Yellowley from Brassacraig."

"Is that all?" said Mordaunt, very little interested.

"All? and enough, I think," replied the pedlar. "How are folks to buy and sell, if the weights are changed on them?"

"Very true," replied Mordaunt; "but have you heard of no strange vessels on the coast?"

"Six Dutch doggers off Brassacraig; and, as I hear, a high-quartered galliot thing, with a gaff mainsail, lying in Scalloway Bay. She will be from Norway."

"No ships of war, or sloops?"

"None," replied the pedlar, "since the Kite

* These are weights of Norwegian origin, still used in Zetland.

Tender sailed with the impress men. If it was His will, and our men were out of her, I wish the deep sea had her!"

"Were there no news at Burgh-Westra?—Were the family all well?"

"A' weel, and weel to do—out-taken, it may be, something ower muckle daffing and laughing—dancing ilk night, they say, wi' the stranger captain that's living there—him that was ashore on Sumburgh-head the tother day—less daffing served him then."

"Daffing! dancing every night!" said Mordaunt, not particularly well satisfied—"Whom does Captain Cleveland dance with?"

"Ony body he likes, I fancy," said the jagger; "at ony rate, he gars a' body yonder dance after his fiddle. But I ken little about it, for I am no free in conscience to look upon thae finging-fancies. Folk should mind that life is made but of rotten yarn."

"I fancy that it is to keep them in mind of that wholesome truth, that you deal in such tender wares, Bryce," replied Mordaunt, dissatisfied as well with the tenor of the reply, as with the affected scruples of the respondent.

"That's as muckle as to say, that I suld hae minded you was a fiddler and a fiddler yourself, Maister Mordaunt; but I am an auld man, and maun unburden my conscience. But ye will be for the dance, I sall warrant, that's to be at Burgh-Westra, on John's Even (*Saunt John's* as the blinded creatures ca' him), and nae doubt ye will be for some worldly braws—hose, waistcoats, or sic like? I hae pieces frae Flanders"—With that he placed his movable warehouse on the table, and began to unlock it.

"Dance!" repeated Mordaunt—"Dance on Saint John's Even?—Were you desired to bid me to it, Bryce?"

"Na—But ye ken weel enough ye wad be welcome, bidden, or no bidden. This captain—how-ca'-ye-him—is to be skudler, as they ca't—the first of the gang, like."

"The devil take him!" said Mordaunt, in impatient surprise.

"A' in gude time," replied the jagger; "hurry no man's cattle—the devil will hae his due, I warrant ye, or it winna be for lack of seeking. But it's true I'm telling you, for a' ye stare like a wildcat; and this same Captain,—I wat-na-his-name—bought aye of the very waistcoats that I am ganging to show ye—purple, wi' a gowd binding, and bonnily broidered; and I hae a piece for you, the neighbor of it, wi' a green grund; and if ye mean to streek yourself up beside him, ye maun e'en buy it, for it's gowd that glances in the lasses een now-a-days. See—look till't," he added, displaying the pattern in various points of view; "look till't through the light, and till the light through it—wi' the grain, and *against* the grain—it shows ony gate—cam frae Antwerp a' the gate—four dollars is the price;—and you captain was sae weel pleased that he flang down a twenty shilling Jacobus, and bade me keep the

change and be d—d—poor silly profane creature, I pity him."

Without inquiring whether the pedlar bestowed his compassion on the worldly imprudence or the religious deficiencies of Captain Cleveland, Mordaunt turned from him, folded his arms, and paced the apartment, muttering to himself, "Not asked—A stranger to be king of the feast!"—Words which he repeated so earnestly, that Bryce caught a part of their import.

"As for asking, I am almaist bauld to say, that ye will be asked, Maister Mordaunt."

"Did they mention my name, then?" said Mordaunt.

"I canna preceesely say that," said Bryce Snailsfoot; "but ye needna turn away your head sae sourly, like a sealgh when he leaves the shore; for, do you see, I heard distinctly that a' the revellers about are to be there; and is't to be thought they would leave out you, an auld kend freend, and the lightest foot at sic frolics (Heaven send you a better praise in His ain gude time!) that ever flang at a fiddle-squeak, between this and Unst? Sae I consider ye altogether the same as invited—and ye had best provide yourself wi' a waistcoat, for brave and brisk will every man be that's there—the Lord pity them!"

He thus continued to follow with his green glazen eyes the motions of young Mordaunt Mertoun, who was pacing the room in a very pensive manner, which the jagger probably misinterpreted, as he thought, like Claudio, that if a man is sad, it must needs be because he lacks money. Bryce, therefore, after another pause, thus accosted him: "Ye needna be sad about the matter, Maister Mordaunt; for although I got the just price of the article from the captain-man, yet I maun deal freendly wi' you, as a kend freend and customer, and bring the price, as they say, within your purse-mouth—or it's the same to me to let it lie ower till Martinmas, or e'en to Candlemas. I am decent in the warld, Maister Mordaunt—forbid that I should hurry ony body, far mair a freend that has paid me siller afore now. Or I wad be content to swap the garment for the value in feathers or sea-otters' skins, or ony kind of peltrie—name kens better than yourself how to come by sic ware—and I am sure I hae furnished you wi' the primest o' powder. I dianna ken if I tell'd ye it was out o' the kist of Captain Plunket, that perished on the Scaw of Unst, wi' the armed brig Mary, sax years synce. He was a prime fowler himself, and luck it was that the kist came ashore dry. I sell that to name but gude marksmen. And so, I was saying, if ye had ony wares ye liked to coup* for the waistcoat, I wad be ready to trock wi' you, for assuredly ye will be wanted at Burgh-Westra, on Saint John's Even; and ye wadna like to look waur than the Captain—that wadna be setting."

"I will be there, at least, whether wanted or not," said Mordaunt, stopping short in his walk,

* Barter.

and taking the waistcoat-piece hastily out of the pedlar's hand; "and, as you say, will not disgrace them."

"Hand a care—hand a care, Maister Mordaunt," exclaimed the pedlar; "ye handle it as it were a bale of coarse wadmaal—ye'll fray't to bits—ye might weel say my ware is tender—and ye'll mind the price is four dollars—Sall I put ye in my book for it?"

"No," said Mordaunt, hastily; and, taking out his purse, he flung down the money.

"Grace to ye to wear the garment," said the joyous pedlar, "and to me to guide the siller; and protect us from earthly vanities and earthly covetousness; and send you the white linen raiment, whilk is mair to be desired than the muslins, and cambrics, and lawns, and silks of this world; and send me the talents which avail more than much fine Spanish gold, or Dutch dollars either—and—but God guide the callant, what for is he wrapping the silk up that gate, like a wisp of hay?"

At this moment, old Swertha, the housekeeper, entered, to whom, as if eager to get rid of the subject, Mordaunt threw his purchase, with something like careless disdain; and, telling her to put it aside, snatched his gun, which stood in the corner, threw his shooting accoutrements about him, and, without noticing Bryce's attempt to enter into conversation upon the "braw sealskin, as soft as doe-leather," which made the sling and cover of his fowling-piece, he left the apartment abruptly.

The jagger, with those green, goggling, and gain-descriing kind of optics, which we have already described, continued gazing for an instant after the customer, who treated his wares with such irreverence.

Swertha also looked after him with some surprise. "The callant's in a creel," guoth she.

"In a creel!" echoed the pedlar; "he will be as wowf as ever his father was. To guide in that gate a bargain that cost him four dollars!—very, very flifish, as the east-country fisherfolk say."

"Four dollars for that green rag!" said Swertha, catching at the words which the jagger had unwarily suffered to escape—"that was a bargain indeed! I wonder whether he is the greater fule, or you the mair rogue, Bryce Snailsfoot?"

"I didna say it cost him preceesely four dollars," said Snailsfoot; "but if it had, the lad's siller's his ain, I hope; and he is auld enough to make his ain bargains. Mair by token the gudes are weel worth the money, and mair."

"Mair by token," said Swertha, coolly, "I will see what his father thinks about it."

"Ye'll no be sae ill-natured, Mistress Swertha," said the jagger; "that will be but cauld thanks for the bonny overlay that I hae brought you a' the way frae Lerwick."

"And a bonny price ye'll be setting on't," said Swertha; "for that's the gate your good deeds end."

"Ye sall hae the fixing of the price yourself, or it may lie ower till ye're buying something for the house, or for your master, and it can make a' ae count."

"Troth and that's true, Bryce Snailsfoot, I am thinking we'll want some napery sune—for it's nae to be thought we can spin, and the like, as if there was a mistress in the house; and sae we make nane at hame."

"And that's what I ca' walking by the word," said the jagger. "Go unto those that buy and sell; there's muckle profit in that text."

"There's a pleasure in dealing wi' a discreet man, that can make profit of anything," said Swertha; "and now that I take another look at that daft callant's waistcoat-piece, I think it is honestly worth four dollars."

CHAPTER X.

I have possessed the regulation of the weather and the distribution of the seasons. The sun has listened to my dictates, and passed from tropic to tropic by my direction; the clouds, at my command, have poured forth their waters.

RASSERAS.

ANY sudden cause for anxious and mortifying reflection, which, in advanced age, occasion sullen and pensive inactivity, stimulates youth to eager and active exertion; as if, like the hurt deer, they endeavored to drown the pain of the shaft by the rapidity of motion. When Mordaunt caught up his gun and rushed out of the house of Jarlishof, he walked on with great activity, over waste and wild, without any determined purpose, except that of escaping, if possible, from the smart of his own irritation. His pride was effectually mortified by the report of the jagger, which coincided exactly with some doubts he had been led to entertain, by the long and unkind silence of his friends at Burgh-Westra.

If the fortunes of Caesar had doomed him, as the poet suggests, to have been

"But the best wrestler on the green,"

it is nevertheless to be presumed, that a foil from a rival, in that rustic exercise, would have mortified him as much as a defeat from a competitor, when he was struggling for the empery of the world. And even so Mordaunt Mertoun, degraded in his own eyes from the height which he had occupied as the chief amongst the youth of the island, felt vexed and irritated, as well as humbled. The two beautiful sisters, also, whose smiles all were so desirous of acquiring, with whom he had lived on terms of such familiar affection, that, with the same ease and innocence, there was unconsciously mixed a shade of deeper though undefined tenderness than characterizes fraternal love,—they also seemed to have forgotten him. He could not be ignorant, that, in the universal opinion of all Dunrossness, nay, of the whole Mainland, he might have had every chance of being the favored lover of either; and now at once, and without any failure on his part, he was become so little to them, that he had lost ever

the consequence of an ordinary acquaintance. The old Udaller, too, whose hearty and sincere character should have made him more constant in his friendships, seemed to have been as fickle as his daughters, and poor Mordaunt had at once lost the smiles of the fair, and the favor of the powerful. These were uncomfortable reflections, and he doubled his pace, that he might outstrip them if possible.

Without exactly reflecting upon the route which he pursued, Mordaunt walked briskly on through a country where neither hedge, wall, nor enclosure of any kind, interrupts the steps of the wanderer, until he reached a very solitary spot, where, embosomed, among steep heathy hills, which sunk suddenly down on the verge of the water, lay one of those small fresh-water lakes which are common in the Zetland isles, whose outlets form the sources of the small brooks and rivulets by which the country is watered; and serve to drive the little mills which manufacture their grain.

It was a mild summer day; the beams of the sun, as is not uncommon in Zetland, were moderated and shaded by a silvery haze, which filled the atmosphere, and, destroying the strong contrast of light and shade, gave even to noon the sober livery of the evening twilight. The little lake, not three-quarters of a mile in circuit, lay in profound quiet; its surface undimpled, save when one of the numerous water-fowl, which glided on its surface, dived for an instant under it. The depth of the water gave the whole that cerulean tint of bluish green, which occasioned its being called the Green Loch; and at present, it formed so perfect a mirror to the bleak hills by which it was surrounded, and which lay reflected on its bosom, that it was difficult to distinguish the water from the land; nay, in the shadowy uncertainty occasioned by the thin haze, a stranger could scarce have been sensible that a sheet of water lay before him. A scene of more complete solitude, having all its peculiarities heightened by the extreme serenity of the weather, the quiet gray composed tone of the atmosphere, and the perfect silence of the elements, could hardly be imagined. The very aquatic birds who frequented the spot in great numbers, forbore their usual flight and screams, and floated in profound tranquillity upon the silent water.

Without taking any determined aim—without having any determined purpose—almost without thinking what he was about, Mordaunt presented his fowling-piece, and fired across the lake. The large swan-shot dimpled its surface like a partial shower of hail—the hills took up the noise of the report, and repeated it again, and again, and again, to all their echoes; the water-fowl took to wing in eddying and confused wheel, answering the echoes with a thousand varying screams, from the deep note of the swan, or swartback, to the querulous cry of the turrack and kittiewake.

Mordaunt looked for a moment on the clamorous crowd with a feeling of resentment, which he

felt disposed at the moment to apply to all nature, and all her objects, animate or inanimate, however little concerned with the cause of his internal mortification.

"Ay, ay," he said, "wheel, dive, scream, and clamor as you will, and all because you have seen a strange sight, and heard an unusual sound. There is many a one like you in this round world. But you, at least, shall learn," he added, as he reloaded his gun, "that strange sights and strange sounds, ay, and strange acquaintances to boot, have sometimes a little shade of danger connected with them—But why should I wreak my own vexation on these harmless sea-gulls?" he subjoined, after a moment's pause; "they have nothing to do with the friends that have forgotten me.—I loved them all so well,—and to be so soon given up for the first stranger whom chance threw on the coast!"

As he stood resting upon his gun, and abandoning his mind to the course of these unpleasant reflections, his meditations were unexpectedly interrupted by some one touching his shoulder. He looked around, and saw Norna of the Fitful-head, wrapped in her dark and ample mantle. She had seen him from the brow of the hill, and had descended to the lake, through a small ravine which concealed her, until she came with noiseless step so close to him that he turned round at her touch.

Mordaunt Mertoun was by nature neither timorous nor credulous, and a course of reading more extensive than usual had, in some degree, fortified his mind against the attacks of superstition; but he would have been an actual prodigy, if, living in Zetland in the end of the seventeenth century, he had possessed the philosophy which did not exist in Scotland generally, until at least two generations later. He doubted in his own mind the extent, nay, the very existence, of Norna's supernatural attributes, which was a high flight of incredulity in the country where they were universally received; but still his incredulity went no farther than doubts. She was unquestionably an extraordinary woman, gifted with an energy above others, acting upon motives peculiar to herself, and apparently independent of mere earthly considerations. Impressed with these ideas, which he had imbibed from his youth, it was not without something like alarm, that he beheld this mysterious female standing on a sudden so close beside him, and looking upon him with such sad and severe eyes, as those with which the Fatal Virgins, who, according to northern mythology, were called the *Valkyriur*, or "Choosers of the Slain," were supposed to regard the young champions whom they selected to share the banquet of Odin.

It was, indeed, reckoned unlucky, to say the least, to meet with Norna suddenly alone, and in a place remote from witnesses; and she was supposed, on such occasions, to have been usually a prophetic of evil, as well as an omen of misfortune, to those who had such a rencontre. There

were few or none of the islanders, however familiarized with her occasional appearance in society, that would not have trembled to meet her on the solitary banks of the Green Loch.

"I bring you no evil, Mordaunt Mertoun," she said, reading perhaps something of this superstitious feeling in the looks of the young man. "Evil from me you never felt, and never will."

"Nor do I fear any," said Mordaunt, exerting himself to throw aside an apprehension which he felt to be unmanly. "Why should I, mother? You have been ever my friend."

"Yet, Mordaunt, thou art not of our region; but to none of Zetland blood, no, not even to those who sit around the hearth-stone of Magnus Troil, the noble descendants of the ancient Jarls of Orkney, am I more a well-wisher, than I am to thee, thou kind and brave-hearted boy. When I hung around thy neck that gifted chain, which all in our isles know was wrought by no earthly artist, but by the Drows,* in the secret recesses of their caverns, thou wert then but fifteen years old; yet thy foot had been on the Maiden-skerrie of Northmaven, known before but to the webbed sole of the swartback, and thy skiff had been in the deepest cavern of Brinnastir, where the *haaf-fish* † had before slumbered in dark obscurity. Therefore I gave thee that noble gift; and well thou knowest, that since that day, every eye in these isles has looked on thee as a son, or as a brother, endowed beyond other youths, and the favored of those whose hour of power is when the night meets with the day."

"Alas! mother," said Mordaunt, "your kind gift may have given me favor, but it has not been able to keep it for me, or I have not been able to keep it for myself.—What matters it? I shall learn to set as little by others as they do by me. My father says that I shall soon leave these islands, and therefore, Mother Norna, I will return to you your fairy gift, that it may bring more lasting luck to some other than it has done to me."

"Despise not the gift of the nameless race," said Norna, frowning; then suddenly changing her tone of displeasure to that of mournful solemnity, she added,— "Despise them not, but, O Mordaunt, court them not! Sit down on that gray stone—thou art the son of my adoption, and I will doff, as far as I may, those attributes that

* The Drows, or Trows, the legitimate successors of the northern *dværgar*, and somewhat allied to the fairies, reside, like them, in the interior of green hills and caverns, and are most powerful at midnight. They are curious artificers in iron, as well as in the precious metals, and are sometimes propitious to mortals, but more frequently capricious and malevolent. Among the common people of Zetland, their existence still forms an article of universal belief. In the neighboring isles of Ferøe, they are called *Foddenskeend*, or subterranean people; and Lucas Jacobson Debes, well acquainted with their nature, assures us that they inhabit those places which are polluted with the effusion of blood, or the practice of any crying sin. They have a government, which seems to be monarchical.

† The larger seal, or sea-calf, which seeks the most solitary recesses for its abode. See Dr. EDMONSTONE'S *Zetland*, vol. II, p. 294.

sever me from the common mass of humanity, and speak with you as a parent with a child."

There was a tremulous tone of grief which mingled with the loftiness of her language and carriage, and was calculated to excite sympathy, as well as to attract attention. Mordaunt sat down on the rock which she pointed out, a fragment which, with many others that lay scattered around, had been torn by some winter storm from the precipice at the foot of which it lay, upon the very verge of the water. Norna took her own seat on a stone at about three feet distance, adjusted her mantle so that little more than her forehead, her eyes, and a single lock of her gray hair, were seen from beneath the shade of her dark wadmaal cloak, and then proceeded in a tone in which the imaginary consequence and importance so often assumed by lunacy, seemed to contend against the deep workings of some extraordinary and deep-rooted mental affliction.

"I was not always," she said, "that which I now am. I was not always the wise, the powerful, the commanding, before whom the young stand abashed, and the old uncover their gray heads. There was a time when my appearance did not silence mirth, when I sympathized with human passion, and had my own share in human joy or sorrow. It was a time of helplessness—it was a time of folly—it was a time of idle and unfruitful laughter—it was a time of causeless and senseless tears;—and yet, with its follies, and its sorrows, and its weaknesses, what would Norna of Fitful-head give to be again the unmarked and happy maiden that she was in her early days! Hear me, Mordaunt, and bear with me; for you hear me utter complaints which have never sounded in mortal ears, and which in mortal ears shall never sound again. I will be what I ought," she continued, starting up and extending her lean and withered arm, "the queen and protectress of these wild and neglected isles,—I will be her whose foot the wave wets not, save by her permission; ay, even though its race be at its wildest madness—whose robe the whirlwind respects, when it rends the house-rigging from the roof-tree. Bear me witness, Mordaunt Mertoun,—you heard my words at Harfra—you saw the tempest sink before them—Speak, bear me witness!"

To have contradicted her in this strain of high-toned enthusiasm, would have been cruel and unavailing, even had Mordaunt been more decidedly convinced than he was, that an insane woman, not one of supernatural power, stood before him.

"I heard you sing," he replied, "and I saw the tempest abate."

"Abate!" exclaimed Norna, striking the ground impatiently with her staff of black oak; "thou speakest it but half—it sunk at once—sunk in shorter space than the child that is hushed to silence by the nurse.—Enough, you know my power—but you know not—mortal man knows not, and never shall know, the price which I paid to attain it. No, Mordaunt, never for the widest!

sway that the ancient Norsemen boasted, when their banners waved victorious from Bergen to Palestine—never, for all that the round world contains, do thou barter thy peace of mind for such greatness as Norna's." She resumed her seat upon the rock, drew the mantle over her face, rested her head upon her hands, and by the convulsive motion which agitated her bosom, appeared to be weeping bitterly.

"Good Norna," said Mordaunt, and paused, scarce knowing what to say that might console the unhappy woman—"Good Norna," he again resumed, "if there be aught in your mind that troubles it, were you not best to go to the worthy minister at Durossness?—Men say you have not for many years been in a Christian congregation—that cannot be well, or right. You are yourself well known as a healer of bodily disease; but when the mind is sick, we should draw to the Physician of our souls."

Norna had raised her person slowly from the stooping posture in which she sat; but at length she started up on her feet, threw back her mantle, extended her arm, and while her lip foamed, and her eye sparkled, exclaimed in a tone resembling a scream,—“Me did you speak—me did you bid seek out a priest!—Would you kill the good man with horror?—Me in a Christian congregation!—Would you have the roof to fall on the sackless assembly, and mingle their blood with their worship? I—I seek to the good Physician!—Would you have the fiend claim his prey openly before God and man?”

The extreme agitation of the unhappy speaker naturally led Mordaunt to the conclusion, which was generally adopted and accredited in that superstitious country and period. “Wretched woman,” he said, “if indeed thou hast leagued thyself with the Powers of Evil, why should you not seek even yet for repentance? But do as thou wilt, I cannot, dare not, as a Christian, abide longer with you; and take again your gift,” he said, offering back the chain, “good can never come of it, if indeed evil hath not come already.”

“Be still and hear me, thou foolish boy,” said Norna, calmly, as if she had been restored to reason by the alarm and horror which she perceived in Mordaunt’s countenance; “hear me, I say. I am not of those who have leagued themselves with the Enemy of Mankind, or derive skill or power from his ministry. And although the unearthly powers were propitiated by a sacrifice which human tongue can never utter, yet, God knows, my guilt in that offering was no more than that of the blind man who falls from the precipice which he could neither see nor shun. Oh, leave me not—shun me not—in this hour of weakness! Remain with me till the temptation be passed, or I will plunge myself into that lake, and rid myself at once of my power and my wretchedness!”

Mordaunt, who had always looked up to this singular woman with a sort of affection, occasioned no doubt by the early kindness and dis-

tion which she had shown to him, was readily induced to reassume his seat, and listen to what she had farther to say, in hopes that she would gradually overcome the violence of her agitation. It was not long ere she seemed to have gained the victory her companion expected, for she addressed him in her usual steady and authoritative manner.

“It was not of myself, Mordaunt, that I proposed to speak, when I beheld you from the summit of yonder gray rock, and came down the path to meet with you. My fortunes are fixed beyond change, be it for weal or for woe. For myself I have ceased to feel much; but for those whom she loves, Norna of the Fitful-head has still those feelings which link her to her kind. Mark me. There is an eagle, the noblest that builds in these airy precipices, and into that eagle’s nest there has crept an adder—wilt thou lend thy aid to crush the reptile, and to save the noble brood of the lord of the north sky?”

“You must speak more plainly, Norna,” said Mordaunt, “if you would have me understand or answer you. I am no guesser of riddles.”

“In plain language, then, you know well the family of Burgh-Westra—the lovely daughters of the generous old Udaller, Magnus Troil,—Minna and Brenda, I mean? You know them, and you love them?”

“I have known them, mother,” replied Mordaunt, “and I have loved them—none knows it better than yourself.”

“To know them once,” said Norna, emphatically, “is to know them always. To love them once, is to love them for ever.”

“To have loved them once, is to wish them well for ever,” replied the youth; “but it is nothing more. To be plain with you, Norna, the family at Burgh-Westra have of late totally neglected me. But show me the means of serving them, I will convince you how much I have remembered old kindness, how little I resent late coldness.”

“It is well spoken, and I will put your purpose to the proof,” replied Norna. “Magnus Troil has taken a serpent into his bosom—his lovely daughters are delivered up to the machinations of a villain.”

“You mean the stranger, Cleveland?” said Mordaunt.

“The stranger who so calls himself,” replied Norna—“the same whom we found flung ashore, like a waste heap of sea-weed, at the foot of the Sumburgh-cape. I felt that within me, that would have prompted me to let him lie till the tide floated him off, as it had floated him on shore. I repent me I gave not way to it.”

“But,” said Mordaunt, “I cannot repent that I did my duty as a Christian man. And what right have I to wish otherwise? If Minna, Brenda, Magnus, and the rest, like that stranger better than me, I have no title to be offended; nay, I might well be laughed at for bringing myself in a comparison.”

CHAPTER XI.

— All your ancient customs
And long-descended usages, I’ll change.
Ye shall not eat, nor drink, nor speak, nor move,
Think, look, or walk, as ye were wont to do.
Even your marriage-beds shall know mutation,
The bride shall have the stock, the groom the wad,
For all old practices will I turn and change,
And call it reformation—marry, will I!

THE EVEN THAT WE’RE AT ODDS.

THE festal day approached, and still no invitation arrived for that guest, without whom, but a little space since, no feast could have been held in the island; while, on the other hand, such reports as reached them on every side spoke highly of the favor which Captain Cleveland enjoyed in the family of the old Udaller of Burgh-Westra. Swertha and the old Ranzelman shook their heads at these mutations, and reminded Mordaunt, by many a half-hint and innuendo, that he had incurred this eclipse by being so imprudently active to secure the safety of the stranger, when he lay at the mercy of the next wave beneath the cliffs of Sumburgh-head. “It is best to let saut water take its gate,” said Swertha; “luck never came of crossing it.”

“In troth,” said the Ranzelman, “they are wise folks that let wave and withy hand their rain—luck never came of a half-drowned man, or a half-hanged one either. Who was’t shot Will Paterson off the Noss?—the Dutchman that he saved from sinking, I trow. To fling a drowning man a plank or a tow, may be the part of a Christian; but I say, keep hands aff him, if ye wad live and thrive free frae his danger.”

“Ye are a wise man, Ranzelman, and a worthy,” echoed Swertha, with a groan, “and ken how and when to help a neighbor, as weel as ony man that ever drew a net.”

“In troth, I have seen length of days,” answered the Ranzelman, “and I have heard what the auld folk said to each other anent sic matters; and nae man in Zetland shall go farther than I will in any Christian service to a man on firm land; but if he cry ‘Help!’ out of the saut waves, that’s another story.”

“And yet, to think of this lad Cleveland standing in our Maister Mordaunt’s light,” said Swertha, “and with Magnus Troil, that thought him the flower of the island but on Whitsunday last, and Magnus, too, that’s both held (when he’s fresh, honest man) the wisest and wealthiest of Zetland!”

“He canna win by it,” said the Ranzelman, with a look of the deepest sagacity. “There’s whiles, Swertha, that the wisest of us (as I am sure I humbly confess mysell not to be) may be little better than gulls, and can no more win by doing deeds of folly than I can step over Sumburgh-head. It has been my own case once or twice in my life. But we shall see soon what ill it is come of all this, for good there cannot come.”

And Swertha answered, with the same tone of

“It is well, and I trust they merit thy unselfish friendship.”

“But I cannot perceive,” said Mordaunt, “in what you can propose that I should serve them. I have but just learned by Bryce the jagger, that this Captain Cleveland is all in all with the ladies at Burgh-Westra, and with the Udaller himself. I would like ill to intrude myself where I am not welcome, or to place my home-bred merit in comparison with Captain Cleveland’s. He can tell them of battles, when I can only speak of bird’s nests—can speak of shooting Frenchmen, when I can only tell of shooting seals—he wears gay clothes, and bears a brave countenance; I am plainly dressed, and plainly nurtured. Such gay gallants as he can noose the hearts of those he lives with, as the fowler nooses the guillemot with his rod and line.”

“You do wrong to yourself,” replied Norna, “wrong to yourself, and greater wrong to Minna and Brenda. And trust not the reports of Bryce—he is like the greedy chaffer-whale, that will change his course and dive for the most petty coin which a fisher can cast at him. Certain it is, that if you have been lessened in the opinion of Magnus Troil, that sordid fellow hath had some share in it. But let him count his vantage, for my eye is upon him.”

“And why, mother,” said Mordaunt, “do you not tell to Magnus what you have told to me?”

“Because,” replied Norna, “they who wax wise in their own conceit must be taught a bitter lesson by experience. It was but yesterday that I spoke with Magnus, and what was his reply?—‘Good Norna, you grow old.’ And this was spoken by one bounden to me by so many and such close ties—by the descendant of the ancient Norse earls—this was from Magnus Troil to me; and it was said in behalf of one, whom the sea flung forth as wreck-weed! Since he despises the counsel of the aged, he shall be taught by that of the young; and well that he is not left to his own folly. Go, therefore, to Burgh-Westra, as usual, upon the Baptist’s festival.”

“I have had no invitation,” said Mordaunt; “I am not wanted, not wished for, not thought of—perhaps I shall not be acknowledged if I go thither; and yet, mother, to confess the truth, thither I had thought to go.”

“It was a good thought, and to be cherished,” replied Norna; “we seek our friends when they are sick in health, why not when they are sick in mind, and surfeited with prosperity? Do not fail to go—it may be we shall meet there. Meanwhile our roads lie different. Farewell, and speak not of this meeting.”

They parted, and Mordaunt remained standing by the lake, with his eyes fixed on Norna, until her tall dark form became invisible among the windings of the valley down which she wandered, and Mordaunt returned to his father’s mansion, determined to follow counsel which coincided so well with his own wishes.