

With these, and such thoughts, half rolling in his bosom, half expressed in indistinct hints and murmurs, the pirate Cleveland returned to the mansion of Burgh-Westra.

CHAPTER XXIII.

There was shaking of hands, and sorrow of heart,
For the hour was approaching when merry folks must part:
So we call'd for our horses, and ask'd for our way,
While the jolly old landlord said, "Nothing's to pay."

LILLIPUT, A POEM.

We do not dwell upon the festivities of the day, which had nothing in them to interest the reader particularly. The table groaned under the usual plenty, which was disposed of by the guests with the usual appetite—the bowl of punch was filled and emptied with the same celerity as usual—the men quaffed, and the women laughed—Claud Halcro rhymed, punned, and praised John Dryden—the Udaller bumpered and sung choruses—and the evening concluded, as usual, in the Rigging-loft, as it was Magnus Troll's pleasure to term the dancing apartment.

It was then and there that Cleveland, approaching Magnus where he sat betwixt his two daughters, intimated his intention of going to Kirkwall in a small brig, which Bryce Snailsfoot, who had disposed of his goods with unprecedented celerity, had freighted thither, to procure a supply.

Magnus heard the sudden proposal of his guest with surprise, not unmingled with displeasure, and demanded sharply of Cleveland, how long it was since he had learned to prefer Bryce Snailsfoot's company to his own? Cleveland answered, with his usual bluntness of manner, that time and tide tarried for no one, and that he had his own particular reasons for making his trip to Kirkwall sooner than the Udaller proposed to set sail—that he hoped to meet with him and his daughters at the great fair, which was now closely approaching, and might perhaps find it possible to return to Zetland along with them.

While he spoke this, Brenda kept her eye as much upon her sister as it was possible to do, without exciting general observation. She remarked that Minna's pale cheek became yet paler while Cleveland spoke, and that she seemed by compressing her lips, and slightly knitting her brows, to be in the act of repressing the effects of strong interior emotion. But she spoke not; and when Cleveland, having bidden adieu to the Udaller, approached to salute her, as was then the custom, she received his farewell without trusting herself to attempt a reply.

Brenda had her own trial approaching; for Mordant Mertoun, once so much loved by her father, was now in the act of making his cold parting from him, without receiving a single look of friendly regard. There was, indeed, sarcasm in the tone with which Magnus wished the youth a good journey, and recommended to him, if he met a bonny lass by the way, not to dream that

she was in love, because she chanced to jest with him. Mertoun colored at what he felt as an insult, though it was but half intelligible to him; but he remembered Brenda, and suppressed every feeling of resentment. He proceeded to take his leave of the sisters. Minna, whose heart was considerably softened towards him, received his farewell with some degree of interest; but Brenda's grief was so visible in the kindness of her manner, and the moisture which gathered in her eye, that it was noticed even by the Udaller, who exclaimed, half angrily, "Why, ay, lass, that may be right enough, for he was an old acquaintance; but mind! I have no will that he remain one."

Mertoun, who was slowly leaving the apartment, half overheard this disparaging observation, and half turned round to resent it. But his purpose failed him when he saw that Brenda had been obliged to have recourse to her handkerchief to hide her emotion, and the sense that it was excited by his departure, obliterated every thought of her father's unkindness. He retired—the other guests followed his example; and many of them, like Cleveland and himself, took their leave over night, with the intention of commencing their homeward journey on the succeeding morning.

That night, the mutual sorrow of Minna and Brenda, if it could not wholly remove the reserve which had estranged the sisters from each other, at least melted all its frozen and unkindly symptoms. They wept in each other's arms; and though neither spoke, yet each became dearer to the other; because they felt that the grief which called forth these drops, had a source common to them both.

It is probable that, though Brenda's tears were most abundant, the grief of Minna was most deeply seated; for, long after the younger had sobbed herself asleep, like a child, upon her sister's bosom, Minna lay awake, watching the dubious twilight, while tear after tear slowly gathered in her eye, and found a current down her cheek, as soon as it became too heavy to be supported by her long black silken eyelashes. As she lay, bewildered among the sorrowful thoughts which supplied these tears, she was surprised to distinguish, beneath the window, the sounds of music. At first she supposed it was some freak of Claud Halcro, whose fantastic humor sometimes indulged itself in such serenades. But it was not the *guc* of the old minstrel, but the guitar, that she heard; an instrument which none in the island knew how to touch except Cleveland, who had learned, in his intercourse with the South American Spaniards, to play on it with superior execution. Perhaps it was in these climates also that he had learned the song, which, though he now sung it under the window of a maiden of Thule, had certainly never been composed for the native of a climate so northerly and so severe, since it spoke of productions of the earth and skies which are there unknown.

1.

"Love wakes and weeps
While Beauty sleeps:
O for Music's softest numbers,
To prompt a theme,
For Beauty's dream,
Soft as the pillow of her slumbers!"

2.

"Through groves of palm
Sigh gales of balm,
Fire-flies on the air are wheeling
While through the gloom
Comes soft perfume,
The distant beds of flowers revealing."

3.

"O wake and live,
No dream can give
A shadow'd bliss, the real excelling;
No longer sleep,
From lattice peep,
And list the tale that Love is telling!"

The voice of Cleveland was deep, rich, and manly, and accorded well with the Spanish air, to which the words, probably a translation from the same language, had been adapted. His invocation would not probably have been fruitless, could Minna have arisen without awakening her sister. But that was impossible; for Brenda, who, as we have already mentioned, had wept bitterly before she had sunk into repose, now lay with her face on her sister's neck, and one arm stretched around her, in the attitude of a child which has cried itself asleep in the arms of its nurse. It was impossible for Minna to extricate herself from her grasp without awakening her; and she could not, therefore, execute her hasty purpose of donning her gown, and approaching the window to speak with Cleveland, who, she had no doubt, had resorted to this contrivance to procure an interview. The restraint was sufficiently provoking, for it was more than probable that her lover came to take his last farewell; but that Brenda, inimical as she seemed to be of late towards Cleveland, should awake and witness it, was a thought not to be endured.

There was a short pause, in which Minna endeavored more than once, with as much gentleness as possible, to unclasp Brenda's arm from her neck; but whenever she attempted it, the slumberer muttered some little pettish sound, like a child disturbed in its sleep, which sufficiently showed that perseverance in the attempt would awaken her fully.

To her great vexation, therefore, Minna was compelled to remain still and silent; when her lover, as if determined upon gaining her ear by music of another strain, sung the following fragment of a sea-ditty:—

"Farewell! Farewell! the voice you hear,
Has left its last soft tone with you,—
Its next must join the seaward cheer,
And shout among the shouting crew."

"The accents which I scarce could form
Beneath your frown's controlling check,
Must give the word, above the storm,
To cut the mast, and clear the wreck."

"The timid eye I dared not raise,—
The hand that shook when press'd to thine,
Must point the guns upon the chase,—
Must bid the deadly cutlass shine."

"To all I love, or hope, or fear,—
Honor, or own, a long adieu!
To all that life has soft and dear,
Farewell! save memory of you!" *

He was again silent; and again she, to whom the serenade was addressed, strove in vain to arise without arousing her sister. It was impossible; and she had nothing before her but the unhappy thought that Cleveland was taking leave in his desolation, without a single glance, or a single word. He, too, whose temper was so fiery, yet who subjected his violent mood with such sedulous attention to her will,—could she but have stolen a moment to say adieu—to caution him against new quarrels with Mertoun—to implore him to detach himself from such comrades as he had described,—could she but have done this, who could say what effect such parting admonitions might have had upon his character—may, upon the future events of his life? "

Tantalized by such thoughts, Minna was about to make another and decisive effort, when she heard voices beneath the window, and thought she could distinguish that they were those of Cleveland and Mertoun, speaking in a sharp tone, which, at the same time, seemed cautiously suppressed, as if the speakers feared being overheard. Alarm now mingled with her former desire to rise from the bed, and she accomplished at once the purpose which she had so often attempted in vain. Brenda's arm was unloosed from her sister's neck, without the sleeper receiving more alarm than provoked two or three unintelligible murmurs; while, with equal speed and silence, Minna put on some part of her dress, with the intention to steal to the window. But, ere she could accomplish this, the sound of the voices without was exchanged for that of blows and struggling, which terminated suddenly by a deep groan.

Terrified at this last signal of mischief, Minna sprung to the window, and endeavored to open it, for the persons were so close under the walls of the house that she could not see them, save by putting her head out of the casement. The iron hasp was stiff and rusted, and, as generally happens, the haste with which she labored to undo it only rendered the task more difficult. When it was accomplished, and Minna had eagerly thrust her body half out at the casement, those who had created the sounds which alarmed her were become invisible, excepting that she saw a shadow cross the moonlight, the substance of which must have been turning a corner, which concealed it from her sight. The shadow moved slowly, and seemed that of a man who supported another upon his shoulders; an indication which put the climax to Minna's agony of mind. The window

* I cannot suppress the pride of saying, that these lines have been beautifully set to original music, by Mrs. Arkwright, of Derbyshire.

was not above eight feet from the ground, and she hesitated not to throw herself from it hastily, and to pursue the object which had excited her terror.

But when she came to the corner of the buildings from which the shadow seemed to have been projected, she discovered nothing which could point out the way that the figure had gone; and, after a moment's consideration, became sensible that all attempts at pursuit would be alike wild and fruitless. Besides all the projections and recesses of the many-angled mansion, and its numerous offices—besides the various cellars, store-houses, stables, and so forth, which defied her solitary search, there was a range of low rocks, stretching down to the haven, and which were, in fact, a continuation of the ridge which formed its pier. These rocks had many indentures, hollows, and caverns, into any one of which the figure to which the shadow belonged might have retired with his fatal burden; for fatal, she feared, it was most likely to prove.

A moment's reflection, as we have said, convinced Minna of the folly of farther pursuit. Her next thought was to alarm the family; but what tale had she to tell, and of whom was that tale to be told!—On the other hand, the wounded man—if indeed he were wounded—alas, if indeed he were not mortally wounded, might not be past the reach of assistance; and, with this idea, she was about to raise her voice, when she was interrupted by that of Claud Halcro, who was returning apparently from the haven, and singing, in his manner, a scrap of an old Norse ditty, which might run thus in English:—

"And you shall deal the funeral dole;
Ay, deal it, mother mine,
To weary body, and to heavy soul,
The white bread and the wine.

"And you shall deal my horses of pride;
Ay, deal them, mother mine;
And you shall deal my lands so wide,
And deal my castles nine.

"But deal not vengeance for the dead,
And deal not for the crime;
The body to its place, and the soul to Heaven's grace,
And the rest in God's own time."

The singular adaptation of these rhymes to the situation in which she found herself, seemed to Minna like a warning from Heaven. We are speaking of a land of omens and superstitions, and perhaps will scarce be understood by those whose limited imagination cannot conceive how strongly these operate upon the human mind during a certain progress of society. A line of Virgil, turned up casually, was received in the seventeenth century, and in the court of England,* as an intimation of future events; and no wonder that a maiden of the distant and wild isles of Zetland should have considered as an injunction from Heaven, verses which happened to

* The celebrated *Sortes Virgilianæ* were resorted to by Charles I. and his courtiers, as a mode of prying into futurity.

convey a sense analogous to her present situation.

"I will be silent," she muttered,—“I will seal my lips—

‘The body to its place, and the soul to Heaven's grace,
And the rest in God's own time.’”

“Who speaks there?” said Claud Halcro, in some alarm; for he had not, in his travels in foreign parts, been able by any means to rid himself of his native superstitions. In the condition to which fear and horror had reduced her, Minna was at first unable to reply; and Halcro, fixing his eyes upon the female white figure, which he saw indistinctly (for she stood in the shadow of the house, and the morning was thick and misty), began to conjure her in an ancient rhyme which occurred to him, as suited for the occasion, and which had in its gibberish a wild and unearthly sound, which may be lost in the ensuing translation:—

“Saint Magnus control thee, that martyr of treason;
Saint Ronan rebuke thee, with rhyme and with reason;
By the mass of Saint Martin, the might of Saint Mary,
Be thou gone, or thy weird shall be worse if thou tarry!

If of good, go hence and hallow thee,—
If of ill, let the earth swallow thee,—
If thou'rt of air, let the gray mist fold thee,—
If of earth, let the swart mine hold thee,—
If a Pixie, seek thy ring,—
If a Nixie, seek thy spring;—
If on middle earth thou'st been
Slave of sorrow, shame, and sin,
Hast eat the bread of toil and strife,
And dreed'd the lot which men call life,

Begone to thy stone! for thy coffin is scant of thee,
The worm, thy play-fellow, waits for the want of thee,—
Hence, houseless ghost! let the earth hide thee,
Till Michael shall blow the blast, see that there thou bide thee!—
Phantom, fly hence! take the Cross for a token,
Hence pass till Hallowmass!—my spell is spoken.”

“It is I, Halcro,” muttered Minna, in a tone so thin and low, that it might have passed for the faint reply of the conjured phantom.

“You!—you!” said Halcro, his tone of alarm changing to one of extreme surprise; “by this moonlight, which is waning, and so it is!—Who could have thought to find you, my most lovely Night, wandering abroad in your own element!—But you saw them, I reckon, as well as I?—bold enough in you to follow them, though.”

“Saw whom?—follow whom?” said Minna, hoping to gain some information on the subject of her fears and her anxiety.

“The corpse-lights which danced at the haven,” replied Halcro; “they bode no good, I promise you—you wot well what the old rhyme says—

‘Where corpse-light
Dances bright,
Be it day or night,
Be it by light or dark,
There shall corpse lie stiff and stark.’

I went half as far as the haven to look after them, but they had vanished. I think I saw a boat put off, however,—some one bound for the Haaf, I suppose,—I would we had good news of this fish

ing—there was Norna left us in anger,—and then these corpse-lights!—Well, God help the while! I am an old man, and can but wish that all were well over.—But how now, my pretty Minna? tears in your eyes!—And, now that I see you in the fair moonlight, barefooted too, by Saint Magnus!—Were there no stockings of Zetland wool soft enough for these pretty feet and ankles, that glance so white in the moonbeam?—What, silent!—angry, perhaps,” he added, in a more serious tone, “at my nonsense? For shame, silly maiden!—Remember I am old enough to be your father, and have always loved you as my child.”

“I am not angry,” said Minna, constraining herself to speak—“but heard you nothing?—saw you nothing?—They must have passed you.”

“They?” said Claud Halcro; “what mean you by they?—is it the corpse-lights?—No, they did not pass by me, but I think they have passed by you,—and blighted you with their influence, for you are as pale as a spectre.—Come, come, Minna,” he added, opening a side-door of the dwelling, “these moonlight walks are fitter for old poets than for young maidens—And so lightly clad as you are! Maiden, you should take care how you give yourself to the breezes of a Zetland night, for they bring more sleet than odors upon their wings.—But, maiden, go in; for, as glorious John says—or, as he does not say—for I cannot remember how his verse chimes—but, as I say myself, in a pretty poem, written when my muse was in her teens,—

‘Mensural maiden ne'er should rise,
Till the first beam tinge the skies;
Silk-fringed eyelids still should close
Till the sun has kiss'd the rose;
Maiden's foot we should not dew,
Mark'd with thy print on dew,
Till the opening flowerets spread
Carpet meet for beauty's tread.’

Stay, what comes next?—let me see.”

When the spirit of recitation seized on Claud Halcro, he forgot time and place, and might have kept his companion in the cold air for half an hour, giving poetical reasons why she ought to have been in bed. But she interrupted him by the question, earnestly pronounced, yet in a voice which was scarcely articulate, holding Halcro, at the same time, with a trembling and convulsive grasp, as if to support herself from falling.—“Saw you no one in the boat which put to sea but now?”

“Nonsense,” replied Halcro; “how could I see any one, when light and distance only enabled me to know that it was a boat, and not a grampus?”

“But there must have been some one in the boat?” repeated Minna, scarce conscious of what she said.

“Certainly,” answered the poet; “boats seldom work to windward of their own accord.—But come, this is all folly; and so, as the Queen says, in an old play, which was revived for the stage by rare Will D'Avenant, ‘To bed—to bed—to bed!’”

They separated, and Minna's limbs conveyed her with difficulty, through several devious passages, to her own chamber, where she stretched herself cautiously beside her still sleeping sister, with a mind harassed with the most agonizing apprehensions. That she had heard Cleveland, she was positive—the tenor of the songs left her no doubt on that subject. If not equally certain that she had heard young Mertoun's voice in hot quarrel with her lover, the impression to that effect was strong on her mind. The groan, with which the struggle seemed to terminate—the fearful indication from which it seemed that the conqueror had borne off the lifeless body of his victim—all tended to prove that some fatal event had concluded the contest. And which of the unhappy men had fallen?—which had met a bloody death?—which had achieved a fatal and a bloody victory?—These were questions to which the still small voice of interior conviction answered, that her lover Cleveland, from character, temper, and habits, was most likely to have been the survivor of the fray. She received from the reflection an involuntary consolation, which she almost detested herself for admitting, when she recollected that it was at once darkened with her lover's guilt, and embittered with the destruction of Brenda's happiness for ever.

“Innocent, unhappy sister!” such were her reflections; “thou that art ten times better than I, because so unpretending—so unassuming in thine excellence! How is it possible that I should cease to feel a pang, which is only transferred from my bosom to thine?”

As these cruel thoughts crossed her mind, she could not refrain from straining her sister so close to her bosom, that, after a heavy sigh, Brenda awoke.

“Sister,” she said, “is it you?—I dreamed I lay on one of those monuments which Claud Halcro described to us, where the effigy of the inhabitant beneath lies carved in stone upon the sepulchre. I dreamed such a marble form lay by my side, and that it suddenly acquired enough of life and animation to fold me to its cold, moist bosom—and it is yours, Minna, that is indeed so chilly. You are ill, my dearest Minna! for God's sake, let me rise and call Euphane Fea.—What ails you? has Norna been here again?”

“Call no one hither,” said Minna, detaining her; “nothing ails me for which any one has a remedy—nothing but apprehensions of evil worse than even Norna could prophesy. But God is above all, my dear Brenda; and let us pray to Him to turn, as he only can, our evil into good.”

They did jointly repeat their usual prayer for strength and protection from on high, and again composed themselves to sleep, suffering no word, save “God bless you,” to pass betwixt them, when their devotions were finished; thus scrupulously dedicating to Heaven their last waking words, if human frailty prevented them from commanding their last waking thoughts. Brenda slept first, and Minna, strongly resisting the dark

and evil presentiments which again began to crowd themselves upon her imagination, was at last so fortunate as to slumber also.

The storm which Halcro had expected began about daybreak,—a squall, heavy with wind and rain, such as is often felt, even during the finest part of the season, in these latitudes. At the whistle of the wind, and the clatter of the rain on the shingle-roofing of the fishers' huts, many a poor woman was awakened, and called on her children to hold up their little hands, and join in prayer for the safety of the dear husband and father, who was even then at the mercy of the disturbed elements. Around the house of Burgh-Westra, chimneys howled, and windows clashed. The props and rafters of the higher parts of the building, most of them formed out of wreck-wood, groaned and quivered, as fearing to be again dispersed by the tempest. But the daughters of Magnus Troil continued to sleep as softly and as sweetly as if the hand of Chantrey had formed them out of statuary marble. The squall had passed away, and the sunbeams, dispersing the clouds which drifted to leeward, shone full through the lattice, when Minna first started from the profound sleep into which fatigue and mental exhaustion had lulled her, and raising herself on her arm, began to recall events, which, after this interval of profound repose, seemed almost to resemble the baseless visions of the night. She almost doubted if what she recalled of horror, previous to her starting from her bed, was not indeed the fiction of a dream, suggested, perhaps, by some external sounds.

"I will see Claud Halcro instantly," she said; "he may know something of these strange noises as he was stirring at the time."

With that she sprung from bed, but hardly stood upright on the floor, ere her sister exclaimed, "Gracious Heaven! Minna, what ails your foot—your ankle?"

She looked down, and saw with surprise, which amounted to agony, that both her feet, but particularly one of them, was stained with dark crimson, resembling the color of dried blood.

Without attempting to answer Brenda, she rushed to the window, and cast a desperate look on the grass beneath, for there she knew she must have contracted the fatal stain. But the rain, which had fallen there in treble quantity, as well from the heavens, as from the eaves of the house, had washed away that guilty witness, if indeed such had ever existed. All was fresh and fair, and the blades of grass, overcharged and bent with rain-drops, glittered like diamonds in the bright morning sun.

While Minna stared upon the spangled verdure, with her full dark eyes fixed and enlarged to circles by the intensity of her terror, Brenda was hanging about her, and with many an eager inquiry, pressed to know whether or how she had hurt herself?

"A piece of glass cut through my shoe," said Minna, bethinking herself that some excuse was

necessary to her sister; "I scarce felt it at the time."

"And yet see how it has bled," said her sister. "Sweet Minna," she added, approaching her with a wetted towel, "let me wipe the blood off—the hurt may be worse than you think of."

But as she approached Minna, who saw no other way of preventing discovery that the blood which she was stained had never flowed in her own veins, harshly and hastily repelled the proffered kindness. Poor Brenda, unconscious of any offence which she had given to her sister, drew back two or three paces on finding her service thus unkindly refused, and stood gazing at Minna with looks in which there was more of surprise and mortified affection than of resentment, but which had yet something also of natural displeasure.

"Sister," said she, "I thought we had agreed but last night, that happen to us what might, we would at least love each other."

"Much may happen betwixt night and morning," answered Minna, in words rather wrenched from her by her situation, than flowing forth the voluntary interpreters of her thoughts.

"Much may indeed have happened in a night so stormy," answered Brenda; "for see where the very wall around Euphane's plant-a-cruive has been blown down; but neither wind, nor rain, nor aught else, can cool our affection, Minna."

"But that may chance," replied Minna, "which may convert it into—"

The rest of the sentence she muttered in a tone so indistinct, that it could not be apprehended; while, at the same time, she washed the blood-stains from her feet and left ankle. Brenda, who still remained looking on at some distance, endeavored in vain to assume some tone which might re-establish kindness and confidence betwixt them.

"You were right," she said, "Minna, to suffer no one to help you to dress so simple a scratch—standing where I do, it is scarce visible."

"The most cruel wounds," replied Minna, "are those which make no outward show—Are you sure you see it at all?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Brenda, framing her answer as she thought would best please her sister; "I see a very slight scratch; nay, now you draw on the stocking, I can see nothing."

"You do indeed see nothing," answered Minna, somewhat wildly; "but the time will soon come that all—ay, all—will be seen and known."

So saying, she hastily completed her dress, and led the way to breakfast, where she assumed her place amongst the guests; but with a countenance so pale and haggard, and manners and speech so altered and so bewildered, that it excited the attention of the whole company, and the utmost anxiety on the part of her father Magnus Troil. Many and various were the conjectures of the guests, concerning a distemperature which seemed rather mental than corporeal. Some hinted that the maiden had been struck with an evil

eye, and something they muttered about Norna of the Fitful-head; some talked of the departure of Captain Cleveland, and murmured, "it was a shame for a young lady to take on so after a land-louper, of whom no one knew any thing;" and this contemptuous epithet was in particular bestowed on the Captain by Mistress Baby Yellowley, while she was in the act of wrapping round her old skinny neck the very handsome overlay (as she called it) wherewith the said Captain had presented her. The old Lady Glowrowrum had a system of her own, which she hinted to Mistress Yellowley, after thanking God that her own connexion with the Burgh-Westra family was by the lass's mother, who was a canny Scotswoman, like herself.

"For, as to these Troils, you see, Dame Yellowley, for as high as they hold their heads, they say that ken" (winking sagaciously), "that there is a bee in their bonnet;—that Norna, as they call her, for it's not her right name neither, is at whiles far beside her right mind,—and they that ken the cause, say the Fowd was some gate or other linked in with it, for he will never hear an ill word of her. But I was in Scotland then, or I might have kend the real cause, as well as other folk. At ony rate, there is a kind of wildness in the blood. Ye ken very weel daft folk dinna bide to be contradicted; and I'll say that for the Fowd—he likes to be contradicted as ill as ony man in Zetland. But it shall never be said that I said ony ill of the house that I am sae nearly connected wi'. Only ye will mind, dame, it is through the Sinclairs that we are akin, not through the Troils,—and the Sinclairs are kend far and wide for a wise generation, dame.—But I see there is a stirrup-cup coming round."

"I wonder," said Mistress Baby to her brother, as soon as the Lady Glowrowrum turned from her, "what gars that muckle wife dame, dame, dame, that gale at me? She might ken the blude of the Clinkscalses is as gude as ony Glowrowrum's amang them."

The guests, meanwhile, were fast taking their departure, scarcely noticed by Magnus, who was so much engrossed with Minna's indisposition, that, contrary to his hospitable wont, he suffered them to go away unsaluted. And thus concluded, amidst anxiety and illness, the festival of Saint John, as celebrated on that season at the house of Burgh-Westra; adding another caution to that of the Emperor of Ethiopia,—with how little security man can reckon upon the days which he destines to happiness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

But this sad evil which doth her infect,
Doth course of natural cause far exceed,
And housed is within her hollow breast,
That either seems some cursed witch's deed,
Or evil spright that in her doth such torment breed.

FAINY QUEEN, Book III. Canto III.

THE term had now elapsed, by several days, when Mordaunt Mertoun, as he had promised at

his departure, should have returned to his father's abode at Jarlshof, but there were no tidings of his arrival. Such delay might, at another time, have excited little curiosity, and no anxiety; for old Swertha, who took upon her the office of thinking and conjecturing for the little household, would have concluded that he had remained behind the other guests upon some party of sport or pleasure. But she knew that Mordaunt had not been lately in favor with Magnus Troil; she knew that he proposed his stay at Burgh-Westra should be a short one, upon account of his father's health, to whom, notwithstanding the little encouragement which his filial piety received, he paid uniform attention. Swertha knew all this, and she became anxious. She watched the looks of her master, the elder Mertoun; but wrapt in dark and stern uniformity of composure, his countenance, like the surface of a midnight lake, enabled no one to penetrate into what was beneath. His studies, his solitary meals, his lonely walks, succeeded each other in unvaried rotation, and seemed undisturbed by the least thought about Mordaunt's absence.

At length such reports reached Swertha's ear, from various quarters, that she became totally unable to conceal her anxiety, and resolved, at the risk of provoking her master into fury, or perhaps that of losing her place in his household, to force upon his notice the doubts which afflicted her own mind. Mordaunt's good-humor and goodly person must indeed have made no small impression on the withered and selfish heart of the poor old woman, to induce her to take a course so desperate, and from which her friend the Ranzelman endeavored in vain to deter her. Still, however, conscious that a miscarriage in the matter, would, like the loss of Trinulo's bottle in the horse-pool, be attended not only with dishonor, but with infinite loss, she determined to proceed on her high emprise with as much caution as was consistent with the attempt.

We have already mentioned, that it seemed a part of the very nature of this reserved and unsociable being, at least since his retreat into the utter solitude of Jarlshof, to endure no one to start a subject of conversation, or to put any question to him, that did not arise out of urgent and pressing emergency. Swertha was sensible, therefore, that in order to open the discourse favorably which she proposed to hold with her master, she must contrive that it should originate with himself.

To accomplish this purpose, while basted in preparing the table for Mr. Mertoun's simple and solitary dinner-meal, she formally adorned the board with two covers instead of one, and made all her other preparations, as if he was to have a guest or companion at dinner.

The artifice succeeded; for Mertoun, on coming from his study, no sooner saw the table thus arranged, than he asked Swertha, who, waiting the effect of her stratagem as a fisher watches his ground-baits, was fiddling up and down the room

"Whether Mordaunt was not returned from Burgh-Westra?"

This question was the cue for Swertha, and she answered in a voice of sorrowful anxiety, half real, half affected, "Na, na!—nae sic divot had dunted at their door. It wad be blithe news indeed to ken that young Maister Mordaunt, puir dear bairn, were safe at hame."

"And, if he had not been at home, why should you lay a cover for him, you dotting fool?" replied Mertoun, in a tone well calculated to stop the old woman's proceedings. But she replied boldly, "That, indeed, somebody should take thought about Maister Mordaunt; a' that she could do was to have seat and plate ready for him when he came. But she thought the dear bairn had been over long awa; and, if she maun speak out, she had her ain fears when and whether he might ever come hame."

"Your fears!" said Mertoun, his eyes flashing as they usually did when his hour of ungovernable passion approached; "do you speak of your idle fears to me, who know that all of your sex, that is not fickleness, and folly, and self-conceit, and self-will, is a bundle of idiotical fears, vapors, and tremors? What are your fears to me, you foolish old hag?"

It is an admirable quality in womankind, that, when a breach of the laws of natural affection comes under their observation, the whole sex is in arms. Let a rumor arise in a street of a parent that has misused a child, or a child that has insulted a parent, — I say nothing of the case of husband and wife, where the interest may be accounted for in sympathy, and all the women within hearing will take animated and decided part with the sufferer. Swertha, notwithstanding her greed and avarice, had her share of the generous feeling which does so much honor to her sex, and was, on this occasion, so much carried on by its impulse, that she confronted her master, and upbraided him with his hard-hearted indifference, with a boldness at which she herself was astonished.

"To be sure it wasna her that suld be fearing for her young maister, Maister Mordaunt, even although he was, as she might weel say, the very sea-calf of her heart; but ony other father, but his honor himself, wad have had speerings made after the poor lad, and him gane this eight-days from Burgh-Westra, and naeboddy kend when or where he had gane. There wasna a bairn in the howff but was maining for him; for he made all their bits of boats with his knife; there wadna be a dry eye in the parish, if anght worse than weal should befall him, — na, no ane, unless it might be his honor's ain."

Mertoun had been much struck, and even silenced, by the insolent volubility of his insurgent housekeeper; but, at the last sarcasm, he imposed on her silence in her turn with an audible voice, accompanied with one of the most terrific glances which his dark eye and stern features could express. But Swertha, who, as she after-

wards acquainted the Ranzelman, was wonderfully supported during the whole scene, would not be controlled by the loud voice and ferocious look of her master, but proceeded in the same tone as before.

"His honor," she said, "had made an unco wark because a when bits of kists and duds, that naeboddy had use for, had been gathered on the beach by the poor bodies of the township; and here was the bravest lad in the country lost, and cast away, as it were, before his een, and nae ane asking what was come o' him."

"What should come of him but good, you old fool," answered Mr. Mertoun, "as far, at least, as there can be good in any of the follies he spends his time in?"

This was spoken rather in a scornful than an angry tone, and Swertha, who had got into the spirit of the dialogue, was resolved not to let it drop, now that the fire of her opponent seemed to slacken.

"O ay, to be sure I am an auld fule,—but if Maister Mordaunt should have settled down in the Roost, as mair than ae boat has been lost in that wearifu' squall the other morning—by good luck it was short as it was sharp, or naething could have lived in it—or if he were drowned in a loch coming hame on foot, or if he were killed by miss of footing on a craig—the hail island kend how venturesome he was—who," said Swertha, "will be the auld fule then?" And she added a pathetic ejaculation, that "God would protect the poor motherless bairn! for if he had had a mother, there would have been search made after him before now."

This last sarcasm affected Mertoun powerfully, —his jaw quivered, his face grew pale, and he muttered to Swertha to go into his study (where she was scarcely ever permitted to enter), and fetch him a bottle which stood there.

"Oh ho!" quoth Swertha to herself, as she hastened on the commission, "my master knows where to find a cup of comfort to qualify his water with upon fitting occasions."

There was indeed a case of such bottles as were usually employed to hold strong waters, but the dust and cobwebs in which they were enveloped showed that they had not been touched for many years. With some difficulty Swertha extracted the cork of one of them, by the help of a fork—for corkscrew there was none at Jarlshof—having ascertained by smell, and, in case of any mistake, by a moderate mouthful, that it contained wholesome Barbadoes-waters, she carried it into the room, where her master still continued to struggle with his faintness. She then began to pour a small quantity into the nearest cup that she could find, wisely judging, that, upon a person so much unaccustomed to the use of spiritous liquors, a little might produce a strong effect. But the patient signed to her impatiently to fill the cup, which might hold more than the third of an English pint measure, up to the very brim and swallowed it down without hesitation.

"Now the sannts above have a care on us!" said Swertha; "he will be drunk as weel as mad, and wha is to guide him then, I wonder?"

But Mertoun's breath and color returned, without the slightest symptom of intoxication; on the contrary, Swertha afterwards reported, that, "Although she had always had a firm opinion in favor of a dram, yet she never saw one work such miracles—he spoke mair like a man of the middle world, than she had ever heard him do since she had entered his service."

"Swertha," he said, "you are right in this matter, and I was wrong. Go down to the Ranzelman directly, tell him to come and speak with me, without an instant's delay, and bring me special word what boats and people he can command; I will employ them all in the search, and they shall be plentifully rewarded."

Stimulated by the spur which maketh the old woman proverbially to trot, Swertha posted down to the hamlet, with all the speed of threescore, rejoicing that her sympathetic feelings were likely to achieve their own reward, having given rise to a quest which promised to be so lucrative, and in the profits whereof she was determined to have her share, shouting out as she went, and long before she got within hearing, the names of Niel Ronaldson, Sweyn Erickson, and the other friends and confederates who were interested in her mission. To say the truth, notwithstanding that the good dame really felt a deep interest in Mordaunt Mertoun, and was mentally troubled on account of his absence, perhaps few things would have disappointed her more than if he had at this moment started up in her path safe and sound, and rendered unnecessary, by his appearance, the expense and the bustle of searching after him.

Soon did Swertha accomplish her business in the village, and adjust with the senators of the township her own little share of percentage upon the profits likely to accrue on her mission; and speedily did she return to Jarlshof, with Niel Ronaldson by her side, schooling him to the best of her skill in all the peculiarities of her master.

"Aboon a' things," she said, "never make him wait for an answer; and speak loud and distinct as if you were hailing a boat,—for he downa bide to say the same thing twice over; and if he asks about distance, ye may make leagues for miles, for he kens naething about the face of the earth that he lives upon; and if he speak of siller, ye may ask dollars for shillings, for he minds them nae mair than slate-stanes."

Thus tutored, Niel Ronaldson was introduced into the presence of Mertoun, but was utterly confounded to find that he could not act upon the system of deception which had been projected.—When he attempted, by some exaggeration of distance and peril, to enhance the hire of the boats and of the men (for the search was to be by sea and land), he found himself at once cut short by Mertoun, who showed not only the most perfect knowledge of the country, but of distances,

tides, currents, and all belonging to the navigation of those seas, although these were topics with which he had hitherto appeared to be totally unacquainted. The Ranzelman, therefore, trembled when they came to speak of the recompense to be afforded for their exertions in the search; for it was not more unlikely that Mertoun should be as well informed of what was just and proper upon this head as upon others; and Niel remembered the storm of his fury, when, at an early period after he had settled at Jarlshof, he drove Swertha and Sweyn Erickson from his presence. As, however, he stood hesitating betwixt the opposite fears of asking too much or too little, Mertoun stopped his mouth, and ended his uncertainty, by promising him a recompense beyond what he dared have ventured to ask, with an additional gratuity, in case they returned with the pleasing intelligence that his son was safe.

When this great point was settled, Niel Ronaldson, like a man of conscience, began to consider earnestly the various places where search should be made after the young man; and having undertaken faithfully that the inquiry should be prosecuted at all the houses of the gentry, both in this and the neighboring islands, he added, that, "after all, if his honor would not be angry, there was ane not far off, that, if anybody dared speer her a question, and if she liked to answer it, could tell more about Maister Mordaunt than anybody else could.—Ye will ken wha I mean, Swertha? Her that was down at the haven this morning." Thus, he concluded, addressing himself with a mysterious look to the housekeeper, which she answered with a nod and a wink.

"How mean you?" said Mertoun; "speak out short and open—whom do you speak of?"

"It is Norna of the Fitful-head," said Swertha, "that the Ranzelman is thinking about; for she has gone up to Saint Rinnan's Kirk this morning on business of her own."

"And what can this person know of my son?" said Mertoun; "she is, I believe, a wandering madwoman, or impostor."

"If she wanders," said Swertha, "it is for nae lack of means at hame, and that is weel known—plenty of a' thing has she of her ain, forby that the Fowd himself would let her want naething."

"But what is that to my son?" said Mertoun impatiently.

"I dinna ken—sne took unco pleasure in Maister Mordaunt from the time she first saw him, and mony a braw thing she gave him at ae time or another, forby the gowd chain that hangs about his bonny craig—folk say it is of fairy gold—I kenna what gold it is, but Bryce Snailsfoot says, that the value will mount to an hundred punds English, and that is nae deaf nuts."

"Go, Ronaldson," said Mertoun, "or else send some one to seek this woman out—if you think there be a chance of her knowing any thing of my son."

"She kens a' thing that happens in thae islands," said Niel Ronaldson, "muckle soonei-

than other folk, and that is Heaven's truth. But as to going to the kirk, or the kirkyard, to speer after her, there is not a man in Zetland will do it, for meed or for money—and that's Heaven's truth as weel as the other."

"Cowardly, superstitious fools!" said Mertoun.—"But give me my cloak, Swertha.—This woman has been at Burgh-Westra—she is related to Troil's family—she may know something of Mordant's absence and its cause—I will seek her myself—She is at the Cross-kirk, you say?"

"No, not at the Cross-kirk, but at the auld Kirk of Saint Ringan's—it's a dowie bit, and far frae being canny; and if your honor," added Swertha, "wad walk by my rule, I wad wait until she came back, and no trouble her when she may be mair busied wi' the dead, for onything that we ken, than she is wi' the living. The like of her carena to have other folk's een on them when they are, gude sains us! doing their ain particular turns."

Mertoun made no answer, but throwing his cloak loosely around him (for the day was misty, with passing showers), and leaving the decayed mansion of Jarlshof, he walked at a pace mugh faster than was usual with him, taking the direction of the ruinous church, which stood, as he well knew, within three or four miles of his dwelling.

The Ranzelman and Swertha stood gazing after him in silence, until he was fairly out of ear-shot, when looking seriously on each other, and shaking their sagacious heads in the same boding degree of vibration, they uttered their remarks in the same breath.

"Fools are aye fleet and fat," said Swertha.

"Fey folk run fast," added the Ranzelman; "and the thing that we are born to, we cannot win by.—I have known them that tried to stop folk that were fey. You have heard of Helen Emberson of Camsey, how she stopped all the boles and windows about the house, that her gudeman might not see daylight, and rise to the Haaf-fishing, because she feared foul weather; and how the boat he should have sailed in was lost in the Roost; and how she came back, rejoicing in her gudeman's safety—but ne'er may care, for there she found him drowned in his own masking-fat, within the wa's of his ain biggin; and more-over—"

But here Swertha reminded the Ranzelman that he must go down to the haven to get off the fishing-boats; "For both that my heart is sair for the bonny lad, and that I am fear'd he cast up of his ain accord before you are at sea; and as I have often told ye, my master may lead, but he winna drive; and if ye do not his bidding, and get out to sea, the never a bodle of boat-hire will ye see."

"Weel, weel, good dame," said the Ranzelman, "we will launch as fast as we can; and by good luck, neither Clawson's boat, nor Peter Grot's is out to the Haaf this morning, for a rabbit ran across the path as they were going on board, and they came back like wise men, kenning they wad e called to other wark this day. And a marvel t is to think, Swertha, how few real judicious

men are left in this land. There is our great Udal-ler is weel enough when he is fresh, but he makes over mony voyages in his ship and his yawl to be lang sae; and now, they say, his daughter, Mistress Minna, is sair out of sorte.—Then there is Norma, kens muckle mair than other folk, but wise woman ye cannot call her. Our tacksman here, Maister Mertoun, his wit is sprung in the bowsprit, I doubt—his son is a daft gowk; and I ken few of consequence hereabouts—excepting always myself, and may be you, Swertha—but what may, in some sense or other, be called fules."

"That may be, Niel Ronaldson," said the dame; "but if you do not hasten the faster to the shore, you will lose tide; and, as I said to my master some short time syne, wha will be the fule then?"

CHAPTER XXV.

I do love these ancient ruins—
We never tread upon them but we set
Our foot upon some reverend history;
And, questionless, here, in this open court
(Which now lies naked to the injuries
Of stormy wether), some men lie interr'd,
Loved the Church so well, and gave so largely to it,
They thought it should have canopied their bones
Till doomsday;—but all things have their end—
Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
Must have like death which we have.

DUCHESS OF MALBY.

The ruinous church of Saint Ninian had, in its time, enjoyed great celebrity; for that mighty system of Roman superstition, which spread its roots over all Europe, had not failed to extend them even to this remote archipelago, and Zetland had, in the Catholic times, her saints, her shrines, and her relics, which, though little known elsewhere, attracted the homage, and commanded the observance, of the simple inhabitants of Thule. Their devotion to this church of Saint Ninian, or, as he was provincially termed, Saint Ringan, situated, as the edifice was, close to the sea-beach, and serving, in many points, as a landmark to their boats, was particularly obstinate, and was connected with so much superstitious ceremonial and credulity, that the reformed clergy thought it best, by an order of the Church Courts, to prohibit all spiritual service within its walls, as tending to foster the rooted faith of the simple and rude people around in saint-worship, and other erroneous doctrines of the Romish Church.

After the church of Saint Ninian had been thus denounced as a seat of idolatry, and decried of course, the public worship was transferred to another church; and the roof, with its lead and its rafters, having been stripped from the little rude old Gothic building, it was left in the wilderness to the mercy of the elements. The fury of the uncontrolled winds, which howled along an exposed space, resembling that which we have described at Jarlshof, very soon choked up nave and aisle, and, on the north-west side, which was chiefly exposed to the wind, hid the outside walls more than half way up with the

mounds of drifted sand, over which the gable-ends of the building, with the little belfrey, which was built above its eastern angle, arose in ragged and shattered nakedness of ruin.

Yet, deserted as it was, the Kirk of Saint Ringan still retained some semblance of the ancient homage formerly rendered there. The rude and ignorant fishermen of Dronnessness observed a practice, of which they themselves had well-nigh forgotten the origin, and from which the Protestant Clergy in vain endeavored to deter them. When their boats were in extreme peril, it was common amongst them to propose to vow an *avmous*, as they termed it, that is, an alms, to Saint Ringan; and when the danger was over, they never failed to absolve themselves of their vow, by coming singly and secretly to the old church, and putting off their shoes and stockings at the entrance of the churchyard, walking thrice around the ruins, observing that they did so in the course of the sun. When the circuit was accomplished for the third time, the votary dropped his offering, usually a small silver coin, through the mullions of a lanceolated window, which opened into a side aisle, and then retired, avoiding carefully to look behind him till he was beyond the precincts which had once been hallowed ground; for it was believed that the skeleton of the saint received the offering in his bony hand, and showed his ghastly death's head at the window into which it was thrown.

Indeed, the scene was rendered more appalling to weak and ignorant minds, because the same stormy and eddying winds, which, on the one side of the church threatened to bury the ruins with sand, and had, in fact, heaped it up in huge quantities, so as almost to hide the side-wall with its buttresses, seemed in other places bent on uncovering the graves of those who had been laid to their long rest on the south-eastern quarter; and, after an unusually hard gale, the coffins, and sometimes the very corpses, of those who had been interred without the usual ceremonies, were discovered, in a ghastly manner, to the eyes of the living.

It was to this desolated place of worship that the elder Mertoun now proceeded, though without any of those religious or superstitious purposes with which the church of Saint Ringan was usually approached. He was totally without the superstitious fears of the country,—nay, from the sequestered and sullen manner in which he lived, withdrawing himself from human society, even when assembled for worship, it was the general opinion that he erred on the more fatal side, and believed rather too little than too much of that which the Church receives and enjoins to Christians.

As he entered the little bay on the shore, and almost on the beach of which the ruins are situated, he could not help pausing for an instant, and becoming sensible that the scene, as calculated to operate on human feelings, had been selected with much judgment as the site of a re-

ligious house.—In front lay the sea, into which two headlands, which formed the extremities of the bay, projected their gigantic causeways of dark and sable rocks, on the ledges of which the gulls, scouries, and other sea-fowl, appeared like flakes of snow; while, upon the lower ranges of the cliff, stood whole lines of cormorants, drawn up alongside of each other, like soldiers in their battle array, and other living thing was there none to see. The sea, although not in a tempestuous state, was disturbed enough to rush on these capes with a sound like distant thunder, and the billows, which rose in sheets of foam half-way up these sable rocks, formed a contrast of coloring equally striking and awful.

Betwixt the extremities, or capes, of these projecting headlands, there rolled, on the day when Mertoun visited the scene, a deep and dense aggregation of clouds, through which no human eye could penetrate, and which, bounding the vision, and excluding all view of the distant ocean, rendered it no unapt representation of the sea in the vision of Mirza, whose extent was concealed by vapors, and clouds, and storms. The ground rising steeply from the sea-beach, permitting no view into the interior of the country, appeared a scene of irretrievable barrenness, where scrubby and stunted heath, intermixed with the long-bent, or coarse grass, which first covers sandy soils, were the only vegetables that could be seen. Upon a natural elevation, which rose above the beach in the very bottom of the bay, and receded a little from the sea, so as to be without reach of the waves, arose the half-buried ruin which we have already described, surrounded by a wasted, half-ruinous, and mouldering wall, which, breached in several places, served still to divide the precincts of the cemetery. The mariners who were driven by accident into this solitary bay, pretended that the church was occasionally observed to be full of lights, and, from that circumstance, were used to prophecy shipwrecks and deaths by sea.

As Mertoun approached near to the chapel, he adopted, insensibly, and perhaps without much premeditation, measures to avoid being himself seen, until he came close under the walls of the burial-ground, which he approached, as it chanced, on that side where the sand was blowing from the graves, in the manner we have described.

Here, looking through one of the gaps in the wall, which time had made, he beheld the person whom he sought, occupied in a manner which assorted well with the ideas popularly entertained of her character, but which was otherwise sufficiently extraordinary.

She was employed beside a rude monument, on one side of which was represented the rough outline of a cavalier, or knight, on horseback, while, on the other, appeared a shield, with the armorial bearings so defaced as not to be intelligible; which escutcheon was suspended by one angle, contrary to the modern custom, which usually places them straight and upright. At the

foot of this pillar was believed to repose, as Mertoun had formerly heard, the bones of Ribolt Troil, one of the remote ancestors of Magnus, and a man renowned for deeds of valorous emprise in the fifteenth century. From the grave of this warrior Norna of the Fitful-head seemed busied in shovelling the sand, an easy task where it was so light and loose; so that it seemed plain that she would shortly complete what the rude winds had begun, and make bare the bones which lay there interred. As she labored, she muttered her magic song; for without the Runic rhyme no form of northern superstition was ever performed. We have perhaps preserved too many examples of these incantations; but we cannot help attempting to translate that which follows:—

"Champion, famed for warlike toil,
Art thou silent, Ribolt Troil?
Sand, and dust, and pebbly stones,
Are leaving bare thy giant bones.
Who dar'd touch the wild-bear's skin
Ye slumber'd on while life was in!—
A woman now, or babe, may come
And cast the covering from thy tomb.

"Yet be not wrathful, Chief, nor blight
Mine eyes or ears with sound or sight!
I come not, with unhallow'd tread,
To wake the slumbers of the dead,
Or lay thy giant relics bare;
But what I seek thou wilt canst spare.
Be it to my hand allow'd
To shear a merk's weight from thy shroud,
Yet leave thee sheeted lead enough
To shield thy bones from weather rough.

"See, I draw my magic knife—
Never while thou wert in life
Laid'st thou still for sloth or fear,
When point and edge were glittering near:
See, the ceremonies now I sever—
Waken now, or sleep for ever!
Thou wilt not wake the dead is done!—
The prize I sought is fairly won.

"Thanks, Ribolt, thanks—for this the sea
Shall smooth its ruffled crest for thee,—
And while afar its billows foam,
Subside to peace near Ribolt's tomb.
Thanks, Ribolt, thanks—for this the might
Of wild winds raging at their height,
When to thy place of slumber nigh,
Shall soften to a lullaby.

"She, the dame of doubt and dread,
Norna of the Fitful-head,
Mighty in her own despite—
Miserable in her might;
In despair and frenzy great,
In her greatness desolate;
Wiseest, wickedest who lives,
Well can keep the word she gives!"

While Norna chanted the first part of this rhyme, she completed the task of laying bare a part of the leaden coffin of the ancient warrior, and severed from it, with much caution and apparent awe, a portion of the metal. She then reverentially threw back the sand upon the coffin; and by the time she had finished her song, no trace remained that the secrets of the sepulchre had been violated.

Mertoun remained gazing on her from behind

the churchyard wall during the whole ceremony, not from any impression of veneration for her or her employment, but because he conceived that to interrupt a madwoman in her act of madness, was not the best way to obtain from her such intelligence as she might have to impart. Meanwhile he had full time to consider her figure, although her face was obscured by her dishevelled hair, and by the hood of her dark mantle, which permitted no more to be visible than a Druidess would probably have exhibited at the celebration of her mystical rights. Mertoun had often heard of Norna before; nay, it is most probable that he might have seen her repeatedly, for she had been in the vicinity of Jarlishop more than once since his residence there. But the absurd stories which were in circulation respecting her, prevented his paying any attention to a person whom he regarded as either an impostor or a madwoman, or a compound of both. Yet, now that his attention was, by circumstances, involuntarily fixed upon her person and deportment, he could not help acknowledging to himself that she was either a complete enthusiast, or rehearsed her part so admirably, that no Pythoness of ancient times could have excelled her. The dignity and solemnity of her gesture—the sonorous, yet impressive tone of voice with which she addressed the departed spirit whose mortal relics she ventured to disturb, were such as failed not to make an impression upon him, careless and indifferent as he generally appeared to all that went on around him. But no sooner was her singular occupation terminated, than, entering the churchyard with some difficulty, by clambering over the disjointed ruins of the wall, he made Norna aware of his presence. Far from starting, or expressing the least surprise at his appearance in a place so solitary, she said, in a tone that seemed to intimate that he had been expected, "So—you have sought me at last?"

"And found you," replied Mertoun, judging he would best introduce the inquiries he had to make, by assuming a tone which corresponded to her own.

"Yes!" she replied, "found me you have, and in the place where all men must meet—amid the tabernacles of the dead."

"Here we must, indeed, meet at last," replied Mertoun, glancing his eyes on the desolate scene around, where headstones, half-covered in sand, and others, from which the same wind had stripped the soil on which they rested, covered with inscriptions, and sculptured with the emblems of mortality, were the most conspicuous objects,—"here, as in the house of death, all men must meet at length; and happy those that come soonest to the quiet haven."

"He that dares desire this haven," said Norna, "must have steered a steady course in the voyage of life. I dare not hope for such quiet harbor. Darest thou expect it? or has the course thou hast kept deserved it?"

"It matters not to my present purpose," re-

plied Mertoun; "I have to ask you what tidings you know of my son Mordaunt Mertoun?"

"A father," replied the sibyl, "asks of a stranger what tidings she has of his son! How should I know aught of him? the cormorant says not to the mallard, Where is my brood?"

"Lay aside this useless affectation of mystery," said Mertoun; "with the vulgar and ignorant it has its effect, but upon me it is thrown away. The people of Jarlishop have told me that you do know, or may know, something of Mordaunt Mertoun, who has not returned home after the festival of St. John's, held in the house of your relative, Magnus Troil. Give me such information, if indeed ye have it to give; and it shall be recompensed, if the means of recompense are in my power."

"The wide round of earth," replied Norna, "holds nothing that I would call a recompense for the slightest word that I throw away upon a living ear. But for thy son, if thou wouldst see him in life, repair to the approaching Fair of Kirkwall, in Orkney."

"And wherfore thither?" said Mertoun; "I know he had no purpose in that direction."

"We drive on the stream of fate," answered Norna, "without oar or rudder. You had no purpose this morning of visiting the Kirk of Saint Ringan, yet you are here;—you had no purpose but a minute hence of being at Kirkwall, and yet you will go thither."

"Not unless the cause is more distinctly explained to me. I am no believer, dame, in those who assert your supernatural powers."

"You shall believe in them ere we part," said Norna. "As yet you know but little of me, nor shall you know more. But I know enough of you, and could convince you with one word that I do so."

"Convince me, then," said Mertoun; "for unless I am so convinced, there is little chance of my following your counsel."

"Mark, then," said Norna, "what I have to say on your son's score, else what I shall say to you on your own will banish every other thought from your memory. You shall go to the approaching Fair at Kirkwall; and, on the fifth day of the Fair, you shall walk, at the hour of noon, in the outer aisle of the Cathedral of Saint Magnus, and there you shall meet a person who will give you tidings of your son."

"You must speak more distinctly, dame," returned Mertoun, scornfully, "if you hope that I shall follow your counsel. I have been fooled in my time by women, but never so grossly as you seem willing to gull me."

"Hearken, then!" said the old woman. "The word which I speak shall touch the nearest secret of thy life, and thrill thee through nerve and bone."

So saying, she whispered a word into Mertoun's ear, the effect of which seemed almost magical. He remained fixed and motionless with surprise, as, waving her arm slowly aloft, with an

air of superiority and triumph, Norna glided from him, turned round a corner of the ruins, and was soon out of sight.

Mertoun offered not to follow, or to trace her. "We fly from our fate in vain," he said, as he began to recover himself; and turning, he left behind him the desolate ruins with their cemetery. As he looked back from the very last point at which the church was visible, he saw the figure of Norna, muffled in her mantle, standing on the very summit of the ruined tower, and stretching out in the sea-breeze something which resembled a white pennon, or flag. A feeling of horror, similar to that excited by her last words, again thrilled through his bosom, and he hastened onwards with unwonted speed, until he had left the church of Saint Ninian with its bay of sand, far behind him.

Upon his arrival at Jarlishop, the alteration in his countenance was so great, that Swertha conjectured he was about to fall into one of those fits of deep melancholy which she termed his dark hour.

"And what better could be expected," thought Swertha, "when he must needs go visit Norna of the Fitful-head, when she was in the haunted Kirk of Saint Ringan's?"

But without testifying any other symptoms of an alienated mind, than that of deep and sullen dejection, her master acquainted her with his intention to go to the Fair of Kirkwall,—a thing so contrary to his usual habits, that the housekeeper well-nigh refused to credit her ears. Shortly after, he heard with apparent indifference, the accounts returned by the different persons who had been sent out in quest of Mordaunt, by sea and land, who all of them returned without any tidings. The equanimity with which Mertoun heard the report of their bad success, convinced Swertha still more firmly that in his interview with Norna, that issue had been predicted to him by the sibyl whom he had consulted.

The township was yet more surprised, when their tacksman, Mr. Mertoun, as if on sudden resolution, made preparations to visit Kirkwall during the Fair, although he had hitherto avoided sedulously all such places of public resort. Swertha puzzled herself a good deal, without being able to penetrate this mystery; and vexed herself still more concerning the fate of her young master. But her concern was much softened by the deposit of a sum of money, seeming, however moderate in itself, a treasure in her eyes, which her master put into her hands, acquainting her, at the same time, that he had taken his passage for Kirkwall, in a small bark belonging to the proprietor of the island of Mousa.