

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Nae langer she wept,—her tears were a' spent,—  
Despair it was come, and she thought it content;  
She thought it content, but her cheek it grew pale,  
And she droop'd, like a lily broke down by the hail.

CONTINUATION OF AULD ROBIN GRAY.\*

THE condition of Minna much resembled that of the village heroine in Lady Ann Lindsay's beautiful ballad. Her natural firmness of mind prevented her from sinking under the pressure of the horrible secret, which haunted her while awake, and was yet more tormenting during her broken and hurried slumbers. There is no grief so dreadful as that which we dare not communicate, and in which we can neither ask nor desire sympathy; and when to this is added the burden of a guilty mystery to an innocent bosom, there is little wonder that Minna's health should have sunk under the burden.

To the friends around, her habits and manners, nay, her temper, seemed altered to such an extraordinary degree, that it is no wonder that some should have ascribed the change to witchcraft, and some to incipient madness. She became unable to bear the solitude in which she formerly delighted to spend her time; yet when she hurried into society, it was without either joining in, or attending to, what passed. Generally she appeared wrapped in sad, and even sullen abstraction, until her attention was suddenly roused by some casual mention of the name of Cleveland, or of Mordant Mertoun, at which she started, with the horror of one who sees the lighted match applied to a charged mine, and expects to be instantly involved in the effects of the explosion. And when she observed that the discovery was not yet made, it was so far from being a consolation, that she almost wished the worst was known, rather than endure the continued agonies of suspense.

Her conduct towards her sister was so variable, yet uniformly so painful to the kind-hearted Brenda, that it seemed to all around, one of the strongest features of her malady. Sometimes Minna was impelled to seek her sister's company, as if by the consciousness that they were common sufferers by a misfortune of which she herself alone could grasp the extent; and then suddenly the feeling of the injury which Brenda had received through the supposed agency of Cleveland, made her unable to bear her presence, and still less to endure the consolation which her sister, mistaking the nature of her malady, vainly endeavored to administer. Frequently, also, did it happen, that, while Brenda was imploring her sister to take comfort, she incautiously touched upon some subject which thrilled to the very centre of her

\* It is worth while saying, that this motto, and the ascription of the beautiful ballad from which it is taken to the Right Honorable Lady Ann Lindsay, occasioned the ingenious authoress's acknowledgment of the ballad, of which the Editor, by her permission, published a small impression, inserted to the Bannatyne Club.

soul; so that, unable to conceal her agony, Minna would rush hastily from the apartment. All these different moods, though they too much resembled, to one who knew not their real source, the caprices of unkind estrangement, Brenda endured with such prevailing and unruffled gentleness of disposition, that Minna was frequently moved to shed floods of tears upon her neck; and, perhaps, the moments in which she did so, though imbittered by the recollection that her fatal secret concerned the destruction of Brenda's happiness as well as her own, were still, softened as they were by sisterly affection, the most endurable moments of this most miserable period of her life.

The effects of the alterations of moping melancholy, fearful agitation, and bursts of nervous feeling, were soon visible on the poor young woman's face and person. She became pale and emaciated; her eye lost the steady quiet look of happiness and innocence, and was alternately dim and wild, as she was acted upon by a general feeling of her own distressful condition, or by some quicker and more poignant sense of agony. Her very features seemed to change, and become sharp and eager, and her voice, which, in its ordinary tones, was low and placid, now sometimes sunk in indistinct mutterings, and sometimes was raised beyond the natural key, in hasty and abrupt exclamations. When in company with others, she was sullenly silent, and when she ventured into solitude, was observed (for it was now thought very proper to watch her on such occasions) to speak much to herself.

The pharmacy of the islands was in vain resorted to by Minna's anxious father. Sages of both sexes, who knew the virtues of every herb which drinks the dew, and augmented these virtues by words of might, used while they prepared and applied the medicines, were attended with no benefit; and Magnus, in the utmost anxiety, was at last induced to have recourse to the advice of his kinswoman, Norma of the Fitful-head, although, owing to circumstances, noticed in the course of the story, there was at this time some estrangement between them. His first application was in vain—Norma was then at her usual place of residence, upon the sea-coast, near the headland from which she usually took her designation; but, although Eric Scambester himself brought the message, she refused positively to see him or to return any answer.

Magnus was angry at the slight put upon his messenger and message, but his anxiety on Minna's account, as well as the respect which he had for Norma's real misfortunes and imputed wisdom and power, prevented him from indulging, on the present occasion, his usual irritability of disposition. On the contrary, he determined to make an application to his kinswoman in his own person. He kept his purpose, however, to himself, and only desired his daughters to be in readiness to attend him upon a visit to a relation whom he had not seen for some time, and directed them, at

the same time, to carry some provisions along with them, as the journey was distant, and they might perhaps find their friend unprovided.

Unaccustomed to ask explanations of his pleasure, and hoping that exercise and the amusement of such an excursion might be of service to her sister, Brenda, upon whom all household and family charges now devolved, caused the necessary preparations to be made for the expedition; and on the next morning, they were engaged in tracing the long and tedious course of beach and of moorland, which, only varied by occasional patches of oats and barley, where a little ground had been selected for cultivation, divided Burgh-Westra from the northwestern extremity of the Mainland (as the principal island is called), which terminates in the cape called Fitful-head, as the southwestern point ends in the cape of Sumburgh.

On they went, through wild and over wold, the Udaller bestriding a strong, square-made, well-barrelled palfrey, of Norwegian breed, somewhat taller, and yet as stout, as the ordinary ponies of the country; while Minna and Brenda, famed, amongst other accomplishments, for their horsemanship, rode two of those hardy animals, which, bred and reared with more pains than is usually bestowed, showed, both by the neatness of their form and their activity, that the race, so much and so carelessly neglected, is capable of being improved into beauty without losing any thing of its spirit or vigor. They were attended by two servants on horseback, and two on foot, secure that the last circumstance would be no delay to their journey, because a great part of the way was so rugged, or so marshy, that the horses could only move at a foot pace; and that, whenever they met with any considerable tract of hard and even ground, they had only to borrow from the nearest herd of ponies the use of a couple for the accommodation of these pedestrians.

The journey was a melancholy one, and little conversation passed, except when the Udaller, pressed by impatience and vexation, urged his pony to a quick pace, and again, recollecting Minna's weak state of health, slackened to a walk, and reiterated inquiries how she felt herself, and whether the fatigue was not too much for her. At noon the party halted, and partook of some refreshment, for which they had made ample provision, beside a pleasant spring, the pureness of whose waters, however, did not suit the Udaller's palate, until qualified by a liberal addition of right Nantz. After he had a second, yea, and a third time, filled a large silver travelling cup, embossed with a German Cupid smoking a pipe, and a German Bacchus emptying his flask down the throat of a bear, he began to become more talkative than vexation had permitted him to be during the early part of their journey, and thus addressed his daughters:—

"Well, children, we are within a league or two of Norma's dwelling, and we shall soon see how the old spell-mutterer will receive us."

Minna interrupted her father with a faint exclamation, while Brenda, surprised to a great degree, exclaimed, "Is it then to Norma that we are to make this visit?—Heaven forbid!"

"And wherefore should Heaven forbid?" said the Udaller, knitting his brows; "wherefore, I would gladly know, should Heaven forbid me to visit my kinswoman, whose skill may be of use to your sister, if any woman in Zetland, or man either, can be of service to her?—You are a fool, Brenda,—your sister has more sense. Cheer up, Minna!—thou wert ever wont to like her songs and stories, and used to hang about her neck, when little Brenda cried and ran from her like a Spanish merchantman from a Dutch caper."\*

"I wish she may not frighten me as much to-day, father," replied Brenda, desirous of indulging Minna in her taciturnity, and at the same time to amuse her father by sustaining the conversation; "I have heard so much of her dwelling, that I am rather alarmed at the thought of going there uninvited."

"Thou art a fool," said Magnus, "to think that a visit from her kinsfolks can ever come amiss to a kind, hearty, Hialtland heart, like my cousin Norma's.—And, now I think on't, I will be sworn that is the reason why she would not receive Eric Scambester!—It is many a long day since I have seen her chimney smoke, and I have never carried you thither—She hath indeed some right to call me unkind. But I will tell her the truth—and that is, that though such be the fashion, I do not think it is fair or honest to eat up the substance of lone women-folks, as we do that of our brother Udallers, when we roll about from house to house in the winter season, until we gather like a snowball, and eat up all wherever we come."

"There is no fear of our putting Norma to any distress just now," replied Brenda, "for I have ample provision of every thing that we can possibly need—fish, and bacon, and salted mutton, and dried geese—more than we could eat in a week, besides enough of liquor for you, father."

"Right, right, my girl!" said the Udaller; "a well-found ship makes a merry voyage—so we shall only want the kindness of Norma's roof, and a little bedding for you; for, as to myself, my sea-cloak, and honest dry boards of Norway deal, suit me better than your eider-down cushions and mattresses. So that Norma will have the pleasure of seeing us without having a stiver's worth of trouble."

"I wish she may think it a pleasure, sir," replied Brenda.

"Why, what does the girl mean, in the name of the Martyr?" replied Magnus Troil; "dost thou think my kinswoman is a heathen, who will not rejoice to see her own flesh and blood?—I would I were as sure of a good year's fishing!—

\* A light-armed vessel of the seventeenth century, adapted for privateering, and much used by the Dutch.

No, no! I only fear we may find her from home at present, for she is often a wanderer, and all with thinking over much on what can never be helped."

Minna sighed deeply as her father spoke, and the Udaller went on:—

"Dost thou sigh at that, my girl?—why 'tis the fault of half the world—let it never be thine own, Minna."

Another suppressed sigh intimated that the caution came too late.

"I believe you are afraid of my cousin as well as Brenda is," said the Udaller, gazing on her pale countenance; "if so, speak the word, and we will return back again as if we had the wind on our quarter, and were running fifteen knots by the line."

"Do, for Heaven's sake, sister, let us return!" said Brenda, imploringly; "you know—you remember—you must be well aware that Norma can do nought to help you."

"It is but too true," said Minna, in a subdued voice; "but I know not—she may answer a question—a question that only the miserable dare ask of the miserable."

"Nay, my kinswoman is no miser," answered the Udaller, who only heard the beginning of the word; "a good income she has, both in Orkney and here, and many a fair lispund of butter is paid to her. But the poor have the best share of it, and shame fall the Zetlander who begrudges them; the rest she spends, I wot not how, in her journeys through the islands. But you will laugh to see her house, and Nick Scrumpher, whom she calls Pacolet—many folks think Nick is the devil; but he is flesh and blood, like any of us—his father lived in Graemsay.—I shall be glad to see Nick again."

While the Udaller thus ran on, Brenda, who, in recompense for a less portion of imagination than her sister, was gifted with sound common sense, was debating with herself the probable effect of this visit on her sister's health. She came finally to the resolution of speaking with her father aside upon the first occasion which their journey should afford. To him she determined to communicate the whole particulars of their nocturnal interview with Norma, — to which, among other agitating causes, she attributed the depression of Minna's spirits,—and then make himself the judge whether he ought to persist in his visit to a person so singular, and expose his daughter to all the shock which her nerves might possibly receive from the interview.

Just as she had arrived at this conclusion, her father, dashing the crumbs from his laced waistcoat with one hand, and receiving with the other a fourth cup of brandy and water, drank devoutly to the success of their voyage, and ordered all to be in readiness to set forward. Whilst they were saddling their ponies, Brenda, with some difficulty, contrived to make her father understand she wished to speak with him in private—no small surprise to the honest Udaller who, though se-

cret as the grave in the very few things where he considered secrecy as of importance, was so far from practising mystery in general, that his most important affairs were often discussed by him openly in presence of his whole family, servants included.

But far greater was his astonishment, when, remaining purposely with his daughter Brenda, a little in the wake, as he termed it, of the other riders, he heard the whole account of Norma's visit to Burgh-Westra, and of the communication with which she had then astounded his daughters. For a long time he could utter nothing but interjections, and ended with a thousand curses on his kinswoman's folly in telling his daughters such a history of horror.

"I have often heard," said the Udaller, "that she was quite mad, with all her wisdom, and all her knowledge of the seasons; and, by the bones of my namesake, the Martyr, I begin now to believe it most assuredly! I know no more how to steer than if I had lost my compass. Had I known this before we set out, I think I had remained at home; but now that we have come so far, and that Norma expects us—"

"Expects us, father!" said Brenda; "how can that be possible?"

"Why, that I know not—but she that can tell how the wind is to blow, can tell which way we are designing to ride. She must not be provoked;—perhaps she has done my family this ill for the words I had with her about that lad Mordaunt Mertoun, and if so, she can undo it again:—and so she shall, or I will know the cause wherefore. But I will try fair words first."

Finding it thus settled that they were to go forward, Brenda endeavored next to learn from her father whether Norma's tale was founded in reality. He shook his head, groaned bitterly, and in a few words acknowledged that the whole, so far as concerned her intrigue with a stranger, and her father's death, of which she became the accidental and most innocent cause, was a matter of sad and indisputable truth. "For her infant," he said, "he could never, by any means, learn what became of it."

"Her infant!" exclaimed Brenda; "she spoke not a word of her infant!"

"Then I wish my tongue had been blistered," said the Udaller, "when I told you of it!—I see that, young and old, a man has no better chance of keeping a secret from you women, than an ee to keep himself in his hold when he is sniggled with a loop of horse-hair—sooner or later the fisher teases him out of his hole, when he has once the noose round his neck."

"But the infant, my father," said Brenda, still insisting on the particulars of this extraordinary story, "what became of it?"

"Carried off, I fancy, by the blackguard Vaughan," answered the Udaller, with a gruff accent, which plainly betokened how weary he was of the subject.

"By Vaughan?" said Brenda, "the lover of

poor Norma, doubtless—what sort of man was he, father?"

"Why, much like other men, I fancy," answered the Udaller; "I never saw him in my life.—He kept company with the Scottish families at Kirkwall; and I with the good old Norse folk—Ah! if Norma had dwelt always amongst her own kin, and not kept company with her Scottish acquaintance, she would have known nothing of Vaughan, and things might have been otherwise.—But then I should have known nothing of your blessed mother, Brenda—and that," he said, his large blue eyes shining with a tear, "would have saved me a short joy and a long sorrow."

"Norma could but ill have supplied my mother's place to you, father, as a companion and a friend—that is, judging from all I have heard," said Brenda, with some hesitation. But Magnus, softened by recollections of his beloved wife, answered her with more indulgence than she expected.

"I would have been content," he said, "to have wedded Norma at that time. It would have been the soldering of an old quarrel—the healing of an old sore. All our blood relations wished it, and, situated as I was, especially not having seen your blessed mother, I had little will to oppose their counsels. You must not judge of Norma or of me by such an appearance as we now present to you—She was young and beautiful, and I game-some as a Highland buck, and little caring what haven I made for, having, as I thought, more than one under my lee. But Norma preferred this man Vaughan, and, as I told you before, it was, perhaps, the best kindness she could have done to me."

"Ah, poor kinswoman!" said Brenda. "But believe you, father, in the high powers which she claims—in the mysterious vision of the dwarf—in the—"

She was interrupted in these questions by Magnus, to whom they were obviously displeasing.

"I believe, Brenda," he said, "according to the belief of my forefathers—I pretend not to be a wiser man than they were in their time,—and they all believed that, in cases of great worldly distress, Providence opened the eyes of the mind, and afforded the sufferers a vision of futurity. It was but a trimming of the boat, with reverence,—here he touched his hat reverentially;—"and after all the shifting of ballast, poor Norma is as heavily loaded in the bows as ever was an Orkneyman's yawl at the dog-fishing—she has more than affliction enough on board to balance whatever gifts she may have had in the midst of her calamity. They are as painful to her, poor soul, as a crown of thorns would be to her brows, though it were the badge of the empire of Denmark. And do not you, Brenda, seem to be wiser than your fathers. Your sister Minna, before she was so ill, had as much reverence for whatever was produced in Norse, as if it had been in the Pope's bull, which is all written in pure Latin."

"Poor Norma!" repeated Brenda; "and her child—was it never recovered?"

"What do I know of her child?" said the Udaller, more gruffly than before, "except that she was very ill, both before and after the birth, though we kept her as merry as we could with pipe and harp, and so forth;—the child had come before its time into this bustling world, so it is likely it has been long dead.—But you know nothing of all these matters, Brenda; so get along for a foolish girl, and ask no more questions about what it does not become you to inquire into."

So saying, the Udaller gave his sturdy little palfrey the spur, and cantering forward over rough and smooth, while the pony's accuracy and firmness of step put all difficulties of the path at secure defiance, he placed himself soon by the side of the melancholy Minna, and permitted her sister to have no farther share in his conversation than as it was addressed to them jointly. She could but comfort herself with the hope, that, as Minna's disease appeared to have its seat in the imagination, the remedies recommended by Norma might have some chance of being effectual, since, in all probability, they would be addressed to the same faculty.

Their way had hitherto held chiefly over moss and moor, varied occasionally by the necessity of making a circuit around the heads of those long lagoons, called voes, which run up into and indent the country in such a manner, that, though the Mainland of Zetland may be thirty miles or more in length, there is, perhaps, no part of it which is more than three miles distant from the salt water. But they had now approached the north-western extremity of the isle, and travelled along the top of an immense ridge of rocks, which had for ages withstood the rage of the Northern Ocean, and of all the winds by which it is buffeted.

At length exclaimed Magnus to his daughters, "There is Norma's dwelling!—Look up, Minna, my love; for if this does not make you laugh, nothing will.—Saw you ever any thing but an osprey that would have made such a nest for herself as that is?—By my namesake's bones, there is not the like of it that living thing ever dwelt in (having no wings and the use of reason), unless it chanced to be the Frawa-Stack off Papa, where the King's daughter of Norway was shut up to keep her from her lovers—and all to little purpose, if the tale be true,\* for, maidens, I would have you to wot that it is hard to keep flax from the lowe." †

\* The *Frawa-Stack*, or Maiden-Rock, an inaccessible cliff, divided by a narrow gulf from the island of Papa, has on the summit some ruins, concerning which there is a legend similar to that of Danaë.

† *Love, flame.*

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Thrice from the cavern's darksome womb  
Her groaning voice arose;  
And come, my daughter, fearless come,  
And fearless tell thy woes

MEIKLE.

The dwelling of Norna, though none but a native of Zetland, familiar, during his whole life, with every variety of rock-scenery, could have seen any thing ludicrous in this situation, was not unaptly compared by Magnus Troil to the eyry of the osprey, or sea-eagle. It was very small, and had been fabricated out of one of those dens which are called Burghs and Picts-houses in Zetland, and Duns on the mainland of Scotland and the Hebrides, and which seem to be the first effort at architecture—the connecting link between a fox's hole in a cairn of loose stones and an attempt to construct a human habitation out of the same materials, without the use of lime or cement of any kind,—without any timber, so far as can be seen from their remains,—without any knowledge of the arch or of the stair. Such as they are, however, the numerous remains of these dwellings, for there is one found on every headland, islet, or point of vantage, which could afford the inhabitants additional means of defence, tend to prove that the remote people by whom these Burghs were constructed, were a numerous race, and that the islands had then a much greater population, than, from other circumstances, we might have been led to anticipate.

The Burgh of which we at present speak had been altered and repaired at a later period, probably by some petty despot, or sea-rover, who, tempted by the security of the situation, which occupied the whole of a projecting point of rock, and was divided from the mainland by a rent or chasm of some depth, had built some additions to it in the rudest style of Gothic defensive architecture;—had plastered the inside with lime and clay, and broken out windows for the admission of light and air; and finally, by roofing it over, and dividing it into stories by means of beams of wreckwood, had converted the whole into a tower, resembling a pyramidal dovecot, formed by a double wall, still containing within its thickness that set of circular galleries, or concentric rings, which is proper to all the forts of this primitive construction, and which seem to have constituted the only shelter which they were originally qualified to afford to their shivering inhabitants.\*

\* The Pictish Burgh, a fort which Norna is supposed to have converted into her dwelling-house, has been fully described in the Notes upon Ivanhoe, vol. 1, p. 181, of this edition. An account of the celebrated Castle of Mousa is there given, to afford an opportunity of comparing it with the Saxon Castle of Coningsburgh. It should, however, have been mentioned, that the Castle of Mousa underwent considerable repairs at a comparatively recent period. Accordingly, Torfaer assures us that even this ancient pigeon-house, composed of dry-stones, was fortified enough, not indeed to hold out a ten years' siege, like Troy in similar circumstances, but to wear out the patience of the besiegers. Erland, the son of Harold the Fair-spoken, had carried off a beautiful woman, the mother of a Norwegianian

This singular habitation, built out of the loose stones which lay scattered around, and exposed for ages to the vicissitudes of the elements, was as gray, weatherbeaten, and wasted, as the rock on which it was founded, and from which it could not easily be distinguished, so completely did it resemble in color, and so little did it differ in regularity of shape from, a pinnacle or fragment of the cliff.

Minna's habitual indifference to all that of late had passed around her, was for a moment suspended by the sight of an abode, which at another and happier period of her life, would have attracted at once her curiosity and her wonder. Even now she seemed to feel interest as she gazed upon this singular retreat, and recollected it was that of certain misery, and probable insanity, connected, as its inhabitant asserted, and Minna's faith admitted, with power over the elements, and the capacity of intercourse with the invisible world.

"Our kinswoman," she muttered, "has chosen her dwelling well, with no more of earth than a sea-fowl might rest upon, and all around sightless tempests and raging waves. Despair and magical power could not have a fitter residence."

Brenda, on the other hand, shuddered when she looked on the dwelling to which they were advancing, by a difficult, dangerous, and precarious path, which sometimes, to her great terror, approached to the verge of the precipice; so that, Zetlander as she was, and confident as she had reason to be, in the steadiness and sagacity of the sure-footed pony, she could scarce suppress an inclination to giddiness, especially at one point, when, being foremost of the party, and turning a sharp angle of the rock, her feet, as they projected from the side of the pony, hung for an instant sheer over the ledge of the precipice, so that there was nothing save empty space betwixt the sole of her shoe, and the white foam of the vexed ocean, which dashed, howled, and foamed, five hundred feet below. What would have driven a maiden of another country into delirium, gave her but a momentary uneasiness, which was instantly lost, in the hope that the impression which the scene appeared to make on her sister's imagination might be favorable to her cure.

She could not help looking back to see how

earl, also called Harold, and sheltered himself with his fair prize in the Castle of Mousa. Earl Harold followed with an army, and, finding the place too strong for assault, endeavored to reduce it by famine; but such was the length of the siege, that the offended Earl found it necessary to listen to a treaty of accommodation, and agreed that his mother's honor should be restored by marriage. This transaction took place in the beginning of the thirteenth century, in the reign of William the Lion of Scotland.\* It is probable that the improvements adopted by Erland on this occasion, were those which finished the parapet of the castle, by making it project outwards, so that the tower of Mousa rather resembles the figure of a dice-box, whereas others of the same kind have the form of a truncated cone. It is easy to see how the projection of the highest parapet would render the defence more easy and effectual.

\* See Torfaer Orcadas, p. 131.

Minna should pass the point of peril, which she herself had just rounded; and could hear the strong voice of the Udaller, though to him such rough paths were familiar as the smooth sea-beach, call, in a tone of some anxiety, "Take heed, jarto,"\* as Minna, with an eager look, dropped her bride, and stretched forward her arms, and even her body, over the precipice, in the attitude of the wild swan, when, balancing itself, and spreading its broad pinions, it prepares to launch from the cliff upon the bosom of the winds. Brenda felt, at that instant, a pang of unutterable terror, which left a strong impression on her nerves, even when relieved, as it instantly was, by her sister recovering herself and sitting upright on her saddle, the opportunity and temptation (if she felt it) passing away, as the quiet steady animal which supported her rounded the projecting angle, and turned its patient and firm step from the verge of the precipice.

They now attained a more level and open space of ground, being the flat top of an isthmus of projecting rock, narrowing again towards a point, where it was terminated by the chasm which separated the small peak, or *Stack*, occupied by Norna's habitation, from the main ridge of cliff and precipice. This natural fosse, which seemed to have been the work of some convulsion of nature, was deep, dark, and irregular, narrower towards the bottom, which could not be distinctly seen, and widest at top, having the appearance as if that part of the cliff occupied by the building had been half rent away from the isthmus which it terminated,—an idea favored by the angle at which it seemed to recede from the land, and lean towards the sea, with the building which crowned it.

This angle of projection was so considerable, that it required recollection to dispel the idea that the rock, so much removed from the perpendicular, was about to precipitate itself seaward, with its old tower: and a timorous person would have been afraid to put foot upon it, lest an addition of weight, so inconsiderable as that of the human body, should hasten a catastrophe which seemed at every instant impending.

Without troubling himself about such fantasies, the Udaller rode towards the tower, and there dismounting along with his daughters, gave the ponies in charge to one of their domestics, with directions to disencumber them of their burdens, and turn them out for rest and refreshment upon the nearest heath. This done, they approached the gate, which seemed formerly to have been connected with the land by a rude drawbridge, some of the apparatus of which was still visible. But the rest had been long demolished, and was replaced by a stationary foot-bridge, formed of barrel-staves covered with turf, very narrow and ledgeless, and supported by a sort of arch, constructed out of the jaw-bones of the whale. Along this "brigg of dread" the Udaller stepped with his usual portly majesty of stride, which threaten-

\* *Jarto*, my dear.

ed its demolition and his own at the same time; his daughters trode more lightly and more safely after him, and the whole party stood before the low and rugged portal of Norna's habitation.

"If she should be abroad after all," said Magnus, as he plied the black oaken door with repeated blows;—"but if so, we will at least lie by a day for her return, and make Nick Strumpfer pay the demurrage in bland and brandy."

As he spoke, the door opened, and displayed, to the alarm of Brenda, and the surprise of Minna herself, a square-made dwarf, about four feet five inches high, with a head of most portentous size, and features correspondent—namely, a huge mouth, a tremendous nose, with large black nostrils, which seemed to have been slit upwards, blubber lips of an unconscionable size, and huge wall eyes, with which he leered, sneered, grinned, and goggled on the Udaller as an old acquaintance, without uttering a single word. The young women could hardly persuade themselves that they did not see before their eyes the very demon Troil, who made such a distinguished figure in Norna's legend. Their father went on addressing this uncouth apparition in terms of such condescending friendship as the better sort apply to their inferiors, when they wish, for any immediate purpose, to conciliate or coax them,—a tone, by the by, which generally contains, in its very familiarity, as much offence as the more direct assumption of distance and superiority.

"Ha, Nick! honest Nick!" said the Udaller, "here you are, lively and lovely as Saint Nicholas your namesake, when he is carved with an axe for the headpiece of a Dutch dogger. How dost thou do, Nick, or Pacolet, if you like that better? Nicholas, here are my two daughters, nearly as handsome as thyself thou seest."

Nick grinned, and did a clumsy obeisance by way of courtesy, but kept his broad misshapen person firmly placed in the doorway.

"Daughters," continued the Udaller, who seemed to have his reasons for speaking this Cerberus fair, at least according to his own notions of propitiation,— "this is Nick Strumpfer, maidens, whom his mistress calls Pacolet, being a light-limbed dwarf, as you see, like him that went to fly about, like a *Scourie*, on his wooden hobby-horse, in the old story-book of Valentine and Orson, that you, Minna, used to read whilst you were a child. I assure you he can keep his mistress's counsel, and never told one of her secrets in his life—ha, ha, ha!"

The ugly dwarf grinned ten times wider than before, and showed the meaning of the Udaller's jest, by opening his immense jaws, and throwing back his head, so as to discover, that in the immense cavity of his mouth, there only remained the small shrivelled remnant of a tongue, capable, perhaps, of assisting him in swallowing his food, but unequal to the formation of articulate sounds. Whether this organ had been curtailed by cruelty, or injured by disease, it was impossible to guess; but that the unfortunate being had not been

originally dumb, was evident from his retaining the sense of hearing. Having made this horrible exhibition, he repaid the Udaller's mirth with a loud, horrid, and discordant laugh, which had something in it the more hideous than his mirth seemed to be excited by his own misery. The sisters looked on each other in silence and fear, and even the Udaller appeared disconcerted.

"And how now?" he proceeded after a minute's pause. "When didst thou wash that throat of thine, that is about the width of the Pentland Frith, with a cup of brandy? Ha, Nick! I have that with me which is sound stuff, boy, ha!"

The dwarf bent his beetle-brows, shook his misshapen head, and made a quick sharp indication, throwing his right hand up to his shoulder, with the thumb pointed backwards.

"What! my kinswoman," said the Udaller, comprehending the signal, "will be angry? Well, shalt have a flask to carouse when she is from home, old acquaintance;—lips and throats may swallow though they cannot speak."

Pacolet grinned a grim assent.

"And now," said the Udaller, "stand out of the way, Pacolet, and let me carry my daughters to see their kinswoman. By the bones of Saint Magnus, it shall be a good turn in thy way—nay, never shake thy head, man; for if thy mistress be at home, see her we will."

The dwarf again intimated the impossibility of their being admitted, partly by signs, partly by mumbling some uncoth and most disagreeable sounds, and the Udaller's mood began to arise.

"Tittle tattle, man!" said he; "trouble not me with thy gibberish, but stand out of the way, and the blame, if there be any, shall rest with me."

So saying, Magnus Troil laid his sturdy hand upon the collar of the recumbent dwarf's jacket of blue wadmaal, and, with a strong, but not a violent grasp, removed him from the doorway, pushed him gently aside and entered, followed by his two daughters, whom a sense of apprehension, arising out of all which they saw and heard, kept very close to him. A crooked and dusky passage through which Magnus led the way, was dimly enlightened by a shot-hole, communicating with the interior of the building, and originally intended, doubtless, to command the entrance by a hagbut or culverin. As they approached nearer, for they walked slowly and with hesitation, the light, imperfect as it was, was suddenly obscured; and on looking upward to discern the cause, Brenda was startled to observe the pale and obscurely-seen countenance of Norna gazing downward upon them, without speaking a word. There was nothing extraordinary in this, as the mistress of the mansion might be naturally enough looking out to see what guests were thus suddenly and unceremoniously intruding themselves on her presence. Still, however, the natural paleness of her features, exaggerated by the light in which they were at present exhibited,—the immovable

sternness of her look, which showed neither kindness nor courtesy of civil reception,—her dead silence, and the singular appearance of everything about her dwelling, augmented the dismay which Brenda had already conceived. Magnus Troil and Minna had walked slowly forward, without observing the apparition of their singular hostess.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

The witch then raised her wither'd arm,  
And waved her wand on high,  
And, while she spoke the mutter'd charm,  
Dark lightning filled her eye.

MEIKLE.

"This should be the stair," said the Udaller, blundering in the dark against some steps of irregular ascent—"This should be the stair, unless my memory greatly fail me; ay, and there she sits," he added, pausing at a half-open door, "with all her tackle about her as usual, and as busy, doubtless, as the devil in a gale of wind."

As he made this irreverent comparison, he entered, followed by his daughters, the darkened apartment in which Norna was seated, amidst a confused collection of books of various languages, parchment scrolls, tablets, and stones inscribed with the straight and singular characters of the Runic alphabet, and similar articles, which the vulgar might have connected with the exercise of the forbidden arts. There were also lying in the chamber, or hung over the rude and ill-contrived chimney, an old shirt of mail, with the headpiece, battle-axe, and lance, which had once belonged to it; and on a shelf were disposed, in great order, several of those curious stone axes, formed of green granite, which are often found in these islands, where they are called thunderbolts by the common people, who usually preserve them as a charm of security against the effects of lightning. There was, moreover, to be seen amid the strange collection, a stone sacrificial knife, used perhaps for immolating human victims, and one or two of the brazen implements called Celts, the purpose of which has troubled the repose of so many antiquaries. A variety of other articles, some of which had neither name nor were capable of description, lay in confusion about the apartment; and in one corner, on a quantity of withered seaweed, reposed, what seemed, at first view, to be a large unshapely dog, but, when seen more closely, proved to be a tame seal, which it had been Norna's amusement to domesticate.

This uncoth favorite bristled up in its corner upon the arrival of so many strangers, with an alertness similar to that which a terrestrial dog would have displayed on a similar occasion; but Norna remained motionless, seated behind a table of rough granite, propped up by misshapen feet of the same material, which, besides the old book with which she seemed to be busied, sustained a cake of the coarse unleavened bread, three parts oatmeal, and one the savdust of fir, which is

used by the poor peasants of Norway, beside which stood a jar of water.

Magnus Troil remained a minute in silence gazing upon his kinswoman, while the singularity of her mansion inspired Brenda with much fear, and changed, though but for a moment, the melancholy and abstracted mood of Minna, into a feeling of interest not unmixed with awe. The silence was interrupted by the Udaller, who, unwilling on the one hand to give his kinswoman offence, and desirous on the other to show that he was not daunted by a reception so singular, opened the conversation thus:—

"I give you good e'en, cousin Norna—my daughters and I have come far to see you."

Norna raised her eyes from her volume, looked full at her visitors, then let them quietly sit down on the leaf with which she seemed to be engaged.

"Nay, cousin," said Magnus, "take your own time—our business with you can wait your leisure. —See here, Minna, what a fair prospect here is of the cape, scarce a quarter of a mile off! you may see the billows breaking on it topmast high! Our kinswoman has got a pretty seal, too—Here, seal-chie, my man, whew, whew!"

The seal took no further notice of the Udaller's advances to acquaintance, than by uttering a low growl.

"He is not so well trained," continued the Udaller, affecting an air of ease and unconcern, "as Peter Mac-Raw's, the old piper of Stornoway, who had a seal that flapped its tail to the tune of *Caberfae*, and acknowledged no other whatever.\* —Well, cousin," he concluded, observing that Norna closed her book, "are you going to give us a welcome at last, or must we go farther than our blood-relation's house to seek one, and that when the evening is wearing late apace?"

"Ye dull and hard-hearted generation, as deaf as the adder to the voice of the charmer," answered Norna, addressing them, "why come ye to me? You have slighted every warning I could give of the coming harm, and now that it hath come upon you, ye seek my counsel when it can avail you nothing."

"Look you, kinswoman," said the Udaller, with his usual frankness, and boldness of manner and accent; "I must needs tell you that your courtesy is something of the coarsest and the coldest. I cannot say that I ever saw an adder, in regard there are none in these parts; but touching my own thoughts of what such a thing may be, it cannot be termed a suitable comparison to me or to my daughters, and that I would have you to know. For old acquaintance, and certain other reasons, I do not leave your house upon the instant; but as I came hither in all kindness and civility, so I pray you to receive me

\* The MacRaws were followers of the MacKenzies, whose chief has the name of *Caberfae*, or *Buckshead*, from the cognizance borne on his standards. Unquestionably the worthy piper trained the seal on the same principle of respect to the clan-term which I have heard has been taught to dogs, who, unused to any other air, dance after their fashion to the tune of *Caberfae*.

with the like, otherwise we will depart, and leave shame on your inhospitable threshold."

"How!" said Norna, "dare you use such bold language in the house of one from whom all men—from whom you yourself—come to solicit counsel and aid? They who speak to the Reimkennar, must lower their voice to her before whom winds and waves hush both blast and billow."

"Blast and billow may hush themselves if they will," replied the peremptory Udaller, "but that will not I. I speak in the house of my friend as in my own, and strike sail to none."

"And hope ye," said Norna, "by this rudeness to compel me to answer to your interrogatories?"

"Kinswoman," replied Magnus Troil, "I know not so much as you of the old Norse sagas; but this I know, that when kempies were wont, long since, to seek the habitations of the gall-dragons and spae-woman, they came with their axes on their shoulders, and their good swords drawn in their hands, and compelled the power whom they invoked to listen to and to answer them, ay, were it Odin himself."

"Kinsman," said Norna, arising from her seat, and coming forward, "thou hast spoken well, and in good time for thyself and thy daughters; for hadst thou turned from my threshold without extorting an answer, morning's sun had never again shone upon you. The spirits who serve me are jealous, and will not be employed in aught that may benefit humanity, unless their service is commanded by the undaunted importunity of the brave and the free. And now speak, what wouldst thou have of me?"

"My daughter's health," replied Magnus, "which no remedies have been able to restore."

"Thy daughter's health?" answered Norna; "and what is the maiden's ailment?"

"The physician," said Troil, "must name the disease. All that I can tell thee of it is—"

"Be silent," said Norna, interrupting him, "I know all thou canst tell me, and more than thou thyself knowest. Sit down, all of you—and thou, maiden," she said, addressing Minna, "sit thou in that chair," pointing to the place she had just left, "once the seat of *Giervada*, at whose voice the stars hid their beams, and the moon herself grew pale."

Minna moved with slow and tremulous step towards the rude seat thus indicated to her. It was composed of stone, formed into some semblance of a chair by the rough and unskillful hand of some ancient Gothic artist.

Brenda, creeping as close as possible to her father, seated herself along with him upon a bench at some distance from Minna, and kept her eyes, with a mixture of fear, pity, and anxiety, closely fixed upon her. It would be difficult altogether to decipher the emotions by which this amiable and affectionate girl was agitated at that moment. Deficient in her sister's predominating quality of high imagination, and little credulous,

of course, to the marvellous, she could not but entertain some vague and indefinite fears on her own account, concerning the nature of the scene which was soon to take place. But these were in a manner swallowed up in her apprehensions on the score of her sister, who, with a frame so much weakened, spirits so much exhausted, and a mind so susceptible of the impressions which all around her was calculated to excite, now sat pensively resigned to the agency of one, whose treatment might produce the most baneful effects upon such a subject.

Brenda gazed at Minna, who sat in that rude chair of dark stone, her finely formed shape and limbs making the strongest contrast with its ponderous and irregular angles, her cheeks and lips as pale as clay, and her eyes turned upward, and lighted with the mixture of resignation and excited enthusiasm which belonged to her disease, and her character. The younger sister then looked on Norna, who muttered to herself in a low monotonous manner, as, gliding from one place to another, she collected different articles, which she placed one by one on the table. And lastly, Brenda looked anxiously to her father, to gather, if possible, from his countenance, whether he entertained any part of her own fears for the consequences of the scene which was to ensue, considering the state of Minna's health and spirits. But Magnus Troil seemed to have no such apprehensions; he viewed with stern composure Norna's preparations, and appeared to wait the event with the composure of one, who, confiding in the skill of a medical artist, sees him preparing to enter upon some important and painful operation, in the issue of which he is interested by friendship or by affection.

Norna, meanwhile, went onward with her preparations until she had placed on the stone table a variety of miscellaneous articles, and among the rest, a small chafing-dish full of charcoal, a crucible, and a piece of thin sheet-lead. She then spoke aloud—"It is well that I was aware of your coming hither—ay, long before you yourself had resolved it—how should I else have been prepared for that which is now to be done?—Maiden," she continued, addressing Minna, "where lies thy pain?"

The patient answered, by pressing her hand to the left side of her bosom.

"Even so," replied Norna, "even so—'tis the site of weal or woe.—And you, her father and her sister, think not this idle speech of one who talks by guess—if I can tell the ill, it may be that I shall be able to render that less severe, which may not, by any aid, be wholly amended.—The heart—ay, the heart—touch that, and the eye grows dim, the pulse falls, the wholesome stream of our blood is choked and troubled, our limbs decay like sapless sea-weed in a summer's sun; our better views of existence are past and gone; what remains is the dream of lost happiness, or the fear of inevitable evil. But the Reimkennar must to her work—well is it that I have prepared the means."

She threw off her long dark-colored mantle and stood before them in her short jacket of light blue wadmaal, with its skirt of the same stuff, fancifully embroidered with black velvet, and bound at the waist with a chain or girdle of silver, formed into singular devices. Norna next undid the fillet which bound her grizzled hair, and shaking her head wildly, caused it to fall in dishevelled abundance over her face and around her shoulders, so as almost entirely to hide her features. She then placed a small crucible on the chafing-dish already mentioned,—dropped a few drops from a vial on the charcoal below,—pointed towards it her wrinkled forefinger, which she had previously moistened with liquid from another small bottle, and said with a deep voice, "Fire, do thy duty;"—and the words were no sooner spoken, than, probably by some chemical combination of which the spectators were not aware, the charcoal which was under the crucible became slowly ignited; while Norna, as if impatient of the delay, threw hastily back her disordered tresses, and, while her features reflected the sparkles and red light of the fire, and her eyes flashed from amongst her hair like those of a wild animal from its cover, blew fiercely till the whole was in an intense glow. She paused a moment from her toil, and muttering that the elemental spirit must be thanked, recited, in her usual monotonous, yet wild mode of chanting, the following verses:—

"Thou so needful, yet so dread,  
With cloudy crest, and wing of red;  
Thou, without whose genial breath  
The North would sleep the sleep of death;  
Who deign'st to warm the cottage hearth,  
Yet hurl'st proud palaces to earth,—  
Brightest, keenest of the Powers,  
Which form and rule this world of ours,  
With my rhyme of Runic, I  
Thank thee for thy agency."

She then covered a portion from the small mass of sheet-lead which lay upon the table, and, placing it in the crucible, subjected it to the action of the lighted charcoal, and, as it melted, she sung,

"Old Reimkennar, to thy art,  
Mother Hertha sends her part;  
She, whose gracious bounty gives  
Needful food for all that lives.  
From the deep mine of the North,  
Came the mystic metal forth,  
Doom'd, amidst disjointed stones,  
Long to cere a champion's bones,  
Disinhu'd my charms to aid—  
Mother Earth, my thanks are paid."

She then poured out some water from the jar into a large cup, or goblet, and sung once more, as she slowly stirred it round with the end of her staff:—

"Girdle of our islands dear,  
Element of Water, hear  
Thou whose power can overwhelm  
Broken mounds and ruin'd realm  
On the lowly Belgian strand;

All thy fiercest rage can never  
Of our soil a furlong sever  
From our rock-defended land  
Play then gently thou thy part,  
To assist old Norna's art."

She then, with a pair of pincers, removed the crucible from the chafing-dish, and poured the lead, now entirely melted, into the bowl of water, repeating at the same time,—

"Elements each other greeting,  
Gifts and powers attend your meeting!"

The melted lead, spattering as it fell into the water, formed, of course, the usual combination of irregular forms which is familiar to all who in childhood have made the experiment, and from which, according to our childish fancy, we may have selected portions bearing some resemblance to domestic articles—the tools of mechanics, or the like. Norna seemed to busy herself in some such researches, for she examined the mass of lead with scrupulous attention, and detached it into different portions, without apparently being able to find a fragment in the form which she desired.

At length she again muttered, rather as speaking to herself than to her guests, "He, the Viewless, will not be omitted,—he will have his tribute even in the work to which he gives nothing.—Stern compeller of the clouds, thou also shalt hear the voice of the Reimkennar."

Thus speaking, Norna once more threw the lead into the crucible, where, hissing and spattering as the wet metal touched the sides of the red-hot vessel, it was soon again reduced into a state of fusion. The sibyl meantime turned to a corner of the apartment, and opening suddenly a window which looked to the north-west, let in the fitful radiance of the sun, now lying almost level upon a great mass of red clouds, which, boding future tempest, occupied the edge of the horizon, and seemed to brood over the billows of the boundless sea. Turning to this quarter, from which a low hollow moaning breeze then blew, Norna addressed the Spirit of the Winds, in tones which seemed to resemble his own:—

"Thou, that over billows dark  
Safely send'st the fisher's bark,—  
Giving him a path and motion  
Through the wilderness of ocean;  
Thou, that when the billows brave ye,  
O'er the shelves can'st drive the navy,—  
Did'st thou chafe as one neglected,  
While thy brethren were respected?  
To appease thee, see I tear  
This full grasp of grizzled hair;  
Oft thy breath hath through it sung,  
Softening to my magic tongue,—  
Now, 'tis time to bid it fly  
Through the wide expanse of sky,  
'Mid the countless swarms to sail  
Of wild-fowl wheeling on thy gale;  
Take thy portion and rejoice,—  
Spirit, thou hast heard my voice!"

Norna accompanied these words with the action which they described, tearing a handful of hair with vehemence from her head, and strewing

it upon the wind as she continued her recitation. She then shut the casement, and again invoked the chamber in the dubious twilight, which best suited her character and occupation. The melted lead was once more emptied into the water, and the various whimsical conformations which it received from the operation were examined with great care by the sibyl, who at length seemed to intimate, by voice and gesture, that her spell had been successful. She selected from the fused metal a piece about the size of a small nut, bearing in shape a close resemblance to that of the human heart, and approaching Minna, again spoke in song,—

"She who sits by haunted well,  
Is subject to the Nixie's spell:  
She who walks on lonely beach,  
To the Mermaid's charmed speech;  
She who walks round ring of green,  
Offends the peevish Fairy Queen;  
And she who takes rest in the Dwarfie's cave,  
A weary weird of woe shall have.

"By ring, by spring, by cave, by shore,  
Minna Troil has heaved all this and more;  
And yet hath the root of her sorrow and ill  
A source that's more deep and more mystical still."

Minna, whose attention had been latterly something disturbed by reflections on her own secret sorrow, now suddenly recalled it, and looked eagerly on Norna as if she expected to learn from her rhymes something of deep interest. The northern sibyl, meanwhile, proceeded to pierce the piece of lead, which bore the form of a heart, and to fix in it a piece of gold wire, by which it might be attached to a chain or necklace. She then proceeded in her rhyme,—

"Thou art within a demon's hold,  
More wise than Helms, more strong than Troll;  
No siren sings so sweet as he,—  
No fay springs lighter on the sea;  
No elin power hath half the art  
To soothe, to move, to wing the heart,—  
Life-blood from the cheek to drain,  
Drench the eye, and dry the vein.  
Maiden, ere we farther go,  
Dost thou note me, ay, or no!"

Minna replied in the same rhythmical manner, which, in jest and earnest, was frequently used by the ancient Scandinavians,—

"I mark thee, my mother, both word, look, and sign,  
Speak on with the riddle—to read it be mine."

"Now, Heaven and every saint be praised!" said Magnus: "they are the first words to the purpose which she hath spoken these many days."

"And they are the last which she shall speak for many a month," said Norna, incensed at the interruption, "if you again break the progress of my spell. Turn your faces to the wall, and look not hitherward again, under penalty of my severe displeasure. You, Magnus Troil, from hard-hearted audacity of spirit, and you, Brenda, from wanton and idle disbelief in that which is beyond your bounded comprehension, are unworthy to look on this mystic work; and the glance of your