

in his blunt manner might end in his actually carrying off one or other of the little darlings whom he appeared to covet so much. She kept hold of their hands, therefore, as if her feeble strength could have been of service, had any violence been intended, and saw with joy she could not disguise, the little party of horse countermarch, in order to descend the glen. Her feelings did not escape Stawarth Bolton. "I forgive you, dame," he said, "for being suspicious that an English falcon was hovering over your Scottish moor-brood. But fear not—those who have fewest children have fewest cares; nor does a wise man covet those of another household. Adieu, dame; when the black-eyed rogue is able to drive a foray from England, teach him to spare women and children, even for the sake of Stawarth Bolton.

"God be with you, gallant southern!" said Elspeth Glendinning, but not till he was out of hearing, spurring on his good horse to regain the head of his party, whose plumage and armour were now glancing and gradually disappearing in the distance, as they wended down the glen.

"Mother," said the elder boy, "I will not say amen to a prayer for a southern."

"Mother," said the younger, more reverentially, "is it right to pray for a heretic?"

"The God to whom I pray only knows," answered poor Elspeth; "but these two words, southern and heretic, have already cost Scotland ten thousand of her best and bravest, and me a husband, and you a father; and, whether blessing or banning, I never wish to hear them more.—Follow me to the Place, sir," she said to Britton, "and such as we have to offer you shall be at your disposal."

CHAPTER III.

They lighted down on Tweed water,
And blew their coals sae het,
And fired the March and Teviotdale,
All in an evening late.

Auld Mairland.

THE report soon spread through the patrimony of Saint Mary's and its vicinity, that the mistress of Glendearg had received assurance from the English Captain, and that her cattle were not to be driven off, or her corn burnt. Among others who heard this report, it reached the ears of a lady, who, once much higher in rank than Elspeth Glendinning, was now by the same calamity reduced to even greater misfortune.

She was the widow of a brave soldier, Walter Avenel, descended of a very ancient Border family, who once possessed immense estates in Eskdale. These had long since passed from them into other hands, but they still enjoyed an ancient Barony of considerable extent, not very far from the patrimony of St. Mary's and lying upon the same side of the river with the narrow vale of Glendearg, at the head of which was the little tower of the Glendinnings. Here they had lived, bearing a respectable rank amongst the gentry of their province, though neither wealthy nor powerful. This general regard had been much augmented by the skill, courage, and enterprise which had been displayed by Walter Avenel, the last Baron.

When Scotland began to recover from the dreadful shock she had sustained after the battle of Pinkie-Cleugh, Avenel was one of the first who, assembling a small force, set an example in those bloody and unsparing skirmishes, which showed that a nation, though conquered and overrun by invaders, may yet wage against them

such a war of detail as shall in the end become fatal to the foreigners. In one of these, however, Walter Avenel fell, and the news which came to the house of his fathers, was followed by the distracting intelligence, that a party of Englishmen were coming to plunder the mansion and lands of his widow, in order by this act of terror to prevent others from following the example of the deceased.

The unfortunate lady had no better refuge than the miserable cottage of a shepherd among the hills, to which she was hastily removed, scarce conscious where or for what purpose her terrified attendants were removing her and her infant daughter from her own house. Here she was tended with all the duteous service of ancient times by the shepherd's wife, Tibb Tacket, who in better days had been her own bower-woman. For a time the lady was unconscious of her misery; but when the first stunning effect of grief was so far passed away that she could form an estimate of her own situation, the widow of Avenel had cause to envy the lot of her husband in his dark and silent abode. The domestics who had guided her to her place of refuge, were presently obliged to disperse for their own safety, or to seek for necessary subsistence; and the shepherd and his wife, whose poor cottage she shared, were soon after deprived of the means of affording their late mistress even that coarse sustenance which they had gladly shared with her. Some of the English forayers had discovered and driven off the few sheep which had escaped the first researches of their avarice. Two cows shared the fate of the remnant of their stock; they had afforded the family almost their sole support, and now famine appeared to stare them in the face.

"We are broken and beggared now, out and out," said old Martin the shepherd—and he wrung his hands in the bitterness of agony, "the thieves, the harrying thieves! not a cloot left of the hail hirsel!"

"And to see poor Grizzy and Crummie," said his wife, turning back their necks to the byre, and routing

while the stony-hearted villains were brogging them on wi' their lances!"

"There were but four of them," said Martin, "and I have seen the day forty wad not have ventured this length. But our strength and manhood is gane with our puir maister!"

"For the sake of the holy-rood, whisht man!" said the good wife, "our leddy is half gane already, as ye may see by that fleightering of the ee-lid—a word mair and she's dead outright."

"I could almost wish," said Martin, "we were a' gane, for what to do passes my puir wit. I care little for mysell, or you, Tibb,—we can make a fend—work or want—we can do baith, but she can do neither."

They canvassed their situation thus openly before the lady, convinced by the paleness of her look, her quivering lip and dead-set eye, that she neither heard nor understood what they were saying.

"There is a way," said the shepherd, "but I kenna if she could bring her heart to it,—there's Simon Glendinning's widow of the glen yonder, has had assurance from the southern loons, and nae soldier to steer them for one cause or other. Now, if the leddie could bow her mind to take quarters with Elspeth Glendinning till better days cast up, nae doubt it wad be doing an honour to the like of her, but"——

"An honour!" answered Tibb, "ay, by my word, sic an honour as wad be pride to her kin mony a lang year after her banes were in the mould. Oh! gudeman, to hear ye even the lady of Avenel to seeking quarters wi' a Kirk-vassal's widow!"

"Loath should I be to wish her to it," said Martin; "but what may we do?—to stay here is mere starvation; and where to go, I'm sure I ken nae mair than ony tup I ever herded."

"Speak no more of it," said the widow of Avenel, suddenly joining in the conversation, "I will go to the Tower. Dame Elspeth is of good folk, a widow, and

the mother of orphans,—she will give us house-room until something be thought upon. These evil showers make the low bush better than no beild.”

“ See there, see there,” said Martin, “ you see the leddy has twice our sense.”

“ And natural it is,” said Tibb, “ seeing that she is convent-bred, and can lay silk broidery, forby white-seam and shell-work.”

“ Do you not think,” said the lady to Martin, still clasping her child to her bosom, and making it clear from what motives she desired the refuge, “ that Dame Glendinning will make us welcome ?”

“ Blithely welcome, blithely welcome, my leddy,” answered Martin cheerily, “ and we shall deserve a welcome at her hand. Men are scarce now, my leddy, with these wars, and gie me a thought of time to it, I can do as gude a day’s darg as ever I did in my life, and Tibb can sort cows with ony living woman.”

“ And muckle mair could I do,” said Tibb, “ were it in ony feasible house ; but there will be neither perlians to mend, nor pinners to busk up, in Elspeth Glendinning’s.”

“ Whisht wi’ your pride, woman,” said the shepherd ; “ enough ye can do, baith outside and inside, an ye set your mind to it ; and hard it is if we twa canna work for three folk’s meat, forby my dainty wee leddy there. Come awa, come awa, nae use in staying here langer ; we have five Scots miles over moss and muir, and that is nae easy walk for a leddy born and bred.”

Household stuff there was little or none to remove or care for ; an old pony which had escaped the plunderers, owing partly to its pitiful appearance, partly from the reluctance which it showed to be caught by strangers, was employed to carry the few blankets, and other trifles which they possessed. When Shagram came to his master’s well-known whistle, he was surprised to find the poor thing had been wounded, though slightly, by an arrow, which one of the forayers had shot off in anger after he had long chased it in vain.

“ Ay, Shagram,” said the old man as he applied something to the wound, “ must you rue the langbow as weel as all of us ?”

“ What corner in Scotland rues it not !” said the lady of Avenel.

“ Ay, ay, madam,” said Martin, “ God keep the kindly Scot from the cloth-yard shaft, and he will keep himself from the handy stroke. But let us go our way ; the trash that is left I can come back for. There is nae ane to stir it but the good neighbours, and they——”

“ For the love of God, gudeman,” said his wife in a remonstrating tone, “ haud your peace ! Think what ye’re saying, and we hae sae muckle wild land to go over before we win to the girth gate.”

The husband nodded acquiescence ; for it was deemed highly imprudent to speak of the fairies either by their title of *good neighbours* or by any other, especially when about to pass the places which they were supposed to haunt.¹¹

They set forward on their pilgrimage on the last day of October. “ This is thy birth-day, my sweet Mary,” said the mother, as a sting of bitter recollection crossed her mind. “ Oh, who could have believed that the head, which, a few years since, was cradled amongst so many rejoicing friends, may perhaps this night seek a cover in vain !”

The exiled family then set forward,—Mary Avenel, a lovely girl between five and six years old, riding gipsy fashion upon Shagram, betwixt two bundles of bedding ; the Lady of Avenel walking by the animal’s side ; Tibb leading the bridle, and old Martin walking a little before, looking anxiously around him to explore the way.

Martin’s task as guide, after two or three miles walking, became more difficult than he himself had expected, or than he was willing to avow. It happened that the extensive range of pasturage, with which he was conversant, lay to the west, and to get into the little valley of Glendearg he had to proceed easterly. In the wilder districts of Scotland, the passage from one vale to another

er, otherwise than by descending that which you leave, and reascending the other, is often very difficult. Heights and hollows, mosses and rocks intervene, and all those local impediments which throw a traveller out of his course. So that Martin, however sure of his general direction, became conscious, and at length was forced reluctantly to admit, that he had missed the direct road to Glendearg, though he insisted they must be very near it. "If we can but win across this wide bog," he said, "I shall warrant we are on the top of the tower."

But to get across the bog was a point of no small difficulty. The farther they ventured into it, though proceeding with all the caution which Martin's experience recommended, the more unsound the ground became, until, after they had passed some places of great peril, their best argument for going forward came to be, that they had to encounter equal danger in returning.

The Lady of Avenel had been tenderly nurtured, but what will not a woman endure when her child is in danger? Complaining less of the dangers of the road than her attendants, who had been inured to such from their infancy, she kept herself close by the side of the pony, watching its every footstep, and ready, if it should flounder in the morass, to snatch her little Mary from its back.

At length they came to a place where the guide greatly hesitated, for all around him was broken lumps of heath, divided from each other by deep sloughs of black tenacious mire. After great consideration, Martin, selecting what he thought the safest path, began himself to lead forward Shagram, in order to afford greater security to the child. But Shagram snorted, laid his ears back, stretched his two feet forward, and drew his hind feet under him, so as to adopt the best possible posture for obstinate resistance, and refused to move one yard in the direction indicated. Old Martin much puzzled, now hesitated whether to exert his absolute authority, or to defer to the contumacious obstinacy of Shagram, and was not greatly comforted by his wife's observation, who

seeing Shagram stare with his eyes, distend his nostrils, and tremble with terror, hinted that "he surely saw more than they could see."

In this dilemma, the child suddenly exclaimed—"Bonny leddy signs to us to come yon gate." They all looked in the direction where the child pointed, but saw nothing, save a wreath of rising mist, which fancy might form into a human figure; but which afforded to Martin only the sorrowful conviction, that the danger of their situation was about to be increased by a heavy fog. He once more essayed to lead forward Shagram; but the animal was inflexible in its determination not to move in the direction Martin recommended. "Take your awn way for it then," said Martin, "and let us see what you can do for us."

Shagram, abandoned to the discretion of his own free will, set off boldly in the direction the child had pointed. There was nothing wonderful in this, nor in its bringing them safe to the other side of the dangerous morass; for the instinct of these animals in traversing bogs is one of the most curious parts of their nature, and is a fact generally established. But it was remarkable, that the child more than once mentioned the beautiful lady and her signals, and that Shagram seemed to be in the secret, always moving in the same direction which she indicated. The Lady of Avenel took little notice at the time, her mind being probably occupied by the instant danger; but her attendants exchanged expressive looks with each other more than once.

"All-Hallow eve!" said Tibb, in a whisper to Martin.

"For the mercy of Our Lady, not a word of that now!" said Martin in reply. "Tell your beads, woman, if you cannot be silent."

When they got once more on firm ground, Martin recognized certain land-marks, or cairns, on the tops of the neighbouring hills, by which he was enabled to guide his

course, and ere long they arrived at the Tower of Glendearg.

It was at the sight of this little fortalice that the misery of her lot pressed hard on the poor Lady of Avenel. When by any accident they had met at church, market, or other place of public resort, she remembered the distant and respectful air with which the wife of the warlike baron was addressed by the spouse of the humble feuar. And now, so much was her pride humbled, that she was to ask to share the precarious safety of the same feuar's widow, and her pittance of food, which might perhaps be yet more precarious. Martin probably guessed what was passing in her mind, for he looked at her with a wistful glance, as if to deprecate any change of resolution; and answering to his looks, rather than his words, she said, while the sparkle of subdued pride once more glanced from her eye, "If it were for myself alone, I could but die—but for this infant—the last pledge of Avenel"——

"True, my lady," said Martin hastily; and, as if to prevent the possibility of her retracting, he added, "I will step on and see Dame Elspeth—I kene her husband weel, and have bought and sold with him, for as great a man as he was."

Martin's tale was soon told, and met all acceptance from her companion in misfortune. The Lady of Avenel had been meek and courteous in her prosperity; in adversity, therefore, she met with the greatest sympathy. Besides, there was a point of pride in sheltering and supporting a woman of such superior birth and rank; and not to do Elspeth Glendinning injustice, she felt sympathy for a woman whose fate resembled her own in so many points, yet was so much more severe. Every species of hospitality was gladly and respectfully extended to the distressed travellers, and they were kindly requested to stay as long at Glendearg as their circumstances rendered necessary, or their inclination prompted.

CHAPTER IV.

Ne'er be I found by thee unawed,
On that thrice hallow'd eve abroad,
When goblins haunt from flood and fen,
The steps of men.

Collins's Ode to Fear.

As the country became more settled, the Lady of Avenel would have willingly returned to her husband's mansion. But that was no longer in her power. It was a reign of minority, when the strongest had the best right, and when acts of usurpation were frequent amongst those who had much power and little conscience.

Julian Avenel, the younger brother of the deceased Walter, was a person of this description. He hesitated not to seize upon his brother's house and land, so soon as the retreat of the English permitted him. At first he occupied the property in the name of his niece, but when the lady proposed to return with her child to the mansion of its fathers, he gave her to understand that Avenel being a male fief, descended to the brother, instead of the daughter, of the last possessor. The ancient philosopher declined a dispute with the emperor who commanded twenty legions, and the widow of Walter Avenel was in no condition to maintain a contest with the leader of twenty moss-troopers. Julian was also a man of service, who could back a friend in case of need, and was sure, therefore, to find protectors among the ruling powers. In short, however clear the little Mary's right to the possessions of her father, her mother saw the necessity of giving way, at least for the time, to the usurpation of her uncle.

Her patience and forbearance was so far attended with advantage, that Julian, for very shame's sake, could no longer suffer her to be absolutely dependent on the char-