

CHAPTER XVII.

I'll seek for other aid—Spirits they say,
Flit round invisible, as thick as motes
Dance in the sunbeam. If that spell
Or necromancer's sigil can compel them,
They shall hold council with me.

James Duff.

THE reader's attention must be recalled to Halbert Glendinning, who had left the tower of Glendearg immediately after his quarrel with its new guest Sir Piercie Shafton. As he walked with a rapid pace up the glen, old Martin followed him, beseeching him to be less hasty.

"Halbert," said the old man, "you will never live to have white hair, if you take fire thus at every spark of provocation."

"And why should I wish it, old man," said Halbert, "if I am to be the butt that every fool may aim a shaft of scorn against?—What avails it, old man, that you yourself move, sleep and wake, eat thy niggard meal, and repose on thy hard pallet?—Why art thou so well pleased that the morning should call thee up to daily toil, and the evening again lay thee down a wearied-out wretch? Were it not better sleep and wake no more, than to undergo this dull exchange of labour for insensibility, and of insensibility for labour?"

"God help me," answered Martin, "there may be truth in what thou sayest—but walk slower, for my old limbs cannot keep pace with your young legs—walk slower, and I will tell you why age, though unlovely, is yet endurable."

"Speak on then," said Halbert, slackening his pace; "but remember we must seek venison to refresh the fatigues of these holy men, who will this morning have

achieved a journey of ten miles; and if we reach not the Brocksburn head, we are scarce like to see an antler."

"Then know, my good Halbert," said Martin, "whom I love as my own son, that I am satisfied to live till death calls me, because my Maker wills it. Ay, and although I spend what men call a hard life, pinched with cold in winter, and burnt with heat in summer, though I feed hard and sleep hard, and am held mean and despised, yet I bethink me, that were I of no use on the face of this fair creation, God would withdraw me from it."

"Thou poor old man," said Halbert, "and can such a vain conceit as this of thy fancied use, reconcile thee to a world where thou playest so poor a part?"

"My part was nearly as poor," said Martin, "my person nearly as much despised, the day that I saved my mistress and her child from perishing in the wilderness."

"Right, Martin," answered Halbert; "there, indeed, thou didst what might be a sufficient apology for a whole life of insignificance."

"And do you account it for nothing, Halbert, that I should have the power of giving you a lesson of patience and submission to the destinies of Providence? Methinks there is use for the grey hairs on the old scalp, were it but to instruct the green head by precept and by example."

Halbert held down his face, and remained silent for a minute or two, and then resumed his discourse: "Martin, seest thou aught changed in me of late?"

"Surely," said Martin. "I have always known you hasty, wild, and inconsiderate, rude, and prompt to speak at the volley and without reflection; but now, methinks, your bearing, without losing its natural fire, has something in it of force and dignity which it had not before. It seems as if you had fallen asleep a carle, and awakened a gentleman."

"Thou can'st judge, then, of noble bearing?" said Halbert.

"Surely," answered Martin, "in some sort I can; for I have travelled through court, and camp, and city, with

my master Walter Avenel, although he could do nothing for me in the long run, but give me room for two score of sheep on the hill—and surely even now, while I speak with you, I feel sensible that my language is more refined than it is my wont to use, and that—though I know not the reason—the rude northern dialect, so familiar to my tongue, has given place to a more town-bred speech.”

“And this change in thyself and me, thou can’st by no means account for?” said young Glendinning.

“Change!” replied Martin, “by Our Lady, it is not so much a change which I feel, as a recalling and renewing sentiments and expressions which I had some thirty years since, ere Tibb and I set up our humble household. It is singular, that your society should have this sort of influence over me, Halbert, and that I should never have experienced it ere now.”

“Thinkest thou,” said Halbert, “thou seest in me aught that can raise me from this base, low, despised state, into one where I may rank with those proud men, who now despise my clownish poverty?”

Martin paused an instant, and then answered, “Doubtless you may, Halbert; as broken a ship has come to land. Heard ye never of Hughie Dun, who left this Halidome some thirty-five years gone by? A deliverly fellow was Hughie—could read and write like a priest, and could wield brand and buckler with the best of the riders. I mind him—the like of him was never seen in the Halidome of Saint Mary’s, and so was seen of the preferment that God sent him.”

“And what was that?” said Halbert, his eyes sparkling with eagerness.

“Nothing less,” answered Martin, “than body-servant to the Archbishop of Saint Andrews!”

Halbert’s countenance fell.—“A servant—and to a priest? Was this all that knowledge and activity could raise him to?”

Martin, in his turn, looked with wistful surprise in the face of his young friend. “And to what could fortune lead him farther?” answered he. “The son of a

kirk-feuar is not the stuff that lords and knights are made of. Courage and school-craft cannot change churl’s blood into gentle blood, I trow. I have heard, forby, that Hughie Dun left a good five hundred pounds of Scots money to his only daughter, and that she married the Baillie of Pittenweem.”

At this moment, and while Halbert was embarrassed with devising a suitable answer, a deer bounded across their path. In an instant the cross-bow was at the youth’s shoulder, the bolt whistled, and the deer, after giving one bound upright, dropt dead on the greensward.

“There lies the venison our dame wanted,” said Martin; “who would have thought of an out-lying stag being so low down the glen at this season?—And it is a hart of grease too, in full season, and three inches of fat on the brisket. Now this is all your luck, Halbert, that follows you, go where you like. Were you to put in for it, I would warrant you were made one of the Abbot’s yeomen-prickers, and ride about in a purple doublet as bold as the best.”

“Tush, man,” answered Halbert, “I will serve the Queen, or no one. Take thou care to have down the venison to the tower, since they expect it. I will on to the moss. I have two or three bird-bolts at my girdle, and it may be I shall find wild-fowl.”

He hastened his pace, and was soon out of sight. Martin paused for a moment, and looked after him. “There goes the making of a right gallant strippling, an ambition have not the spoiling of him—Serve the Queen! said he. By my faith, and she hath worse servants, from all that I e’er heard of him. And wherefore should he not keep a high head? They that ettle to the top of the ladder will at least get up some rounds. They that mint* at a gown of gold, will always get a sleeve of it. But come, sir, (addressing the stag) you shall go to Glendearg on my two legs somewhat more slowly than

* *Mint*—aim at.

you were frisking it even now on your own four nimble shanks. Nay by my faith, if you be so heavy, I will content me with the best of you, and that's the haunch and the nombles, and e'en heave up the rest on the old oak-tree yonder, and come back for it with one of the yaulds."*

While Martin returned to Glendearg with the venison, Halbert prosecuted his walk, breathing more easily since he was free of his companion. "The domestic of a proud and lazy priest—body-squire to the Archbishop of Saint Andrews," he repeated to himself; "and this, with the privilege of allying his blood with the Baillie of Pittenweem, is thought a preferment worth a brave man struggling for;—nay more, a preferment which, if allowed, should crown the hopes, past, present, and to come, of the son of a kirk-vassal! By Heaven, but that I find in me a reluctance to practise their acts of nocturnal rapine, I would rather take the Jack and lance, and join with the Border-riders.—Something I will do. Here, degraded and dishonoured, I will not live the scorn of each whiffling stranger from the South, because, forsooth, he wears tinkling spurs on a tawny boot. This thing—this phantom, be it what it will, I will see it once more. Since I spoke with her, and touched her hand, thoughts and feelings have dawned on me, of which my former life had not even dreamed; but shall I, who feel my father's glen too narrow for my expanding spirit, brook to be bearded in it by this vain gewgaw of a courtier, and in the sight too of Mary Avenel? I will not stoop to it, by Heaven!"

As he spoke thus he arrived in the sequestered glen of Corrinan-shian, as it verged upon the hour of noon. A few moments he remained looking upon the fountain, and doubting in his own mind with what countenance the White Lady might receive him. She had not indeed expressly forbidden his again evoking her; but yet there

* *Yaulds*—horses; more particularly horses of labour.

was something like such a prohibition implied in the farewell, which recommended him to wait for another guide.

Halbert Glendinning did not long, however, allow himself to pause. Hardihood was the natural characteristic of his mind; and under the expansion and modification which his feelings had lately undergone, it had been augmented rather than diminished. He drew his sword, undid the buskin from his foot, bowed three times with deliberation towards the fountain, and as often towards the tree, and repeated the same rhyme as formerly.—

"Thrice to the holly brake—
Thrice to the well :—
I bid thee awake,
White Maid of Avenel.
Noon gleams on the lake—
Noon glows on the fell—
Wake thee, O wake,
White Maid of Avenel."

His eye was on the holly bush as he spoke the last line; and it was not without an involuntary shuddering that he saw the air betwixt his eye and that object become more dim, and condense as it were into the faint appearance of a form, through which, however, so thin and transparent was the first appearance of the phantom, he could discern the outline of the bush, as through a veil of fine crape. But, gradually, it darkened into a more substantial appearance, and the White Lady stood before him with displeasure on her brow. She spoke, and her speech was still song, or rather measured chant; but, as if now more familiar, it flowed occasionally in modulated blank-verse, and at other times in the lyrical measure which she had used at their former meeting.

"This is the day when the fairy kind
Sit weeping alone for their hopeless lot,
And the wood-maiden sighs to the sighing wind,
And the mer-maiden weeps in her crystal grot :
For this is the day that a deed was wrought,
In which we have neither part nor share,

For the children of clay was salvation bought,
But not for the forms of sea or air!
And ever the mortal is most forlorn,
Who meeteth our race on the Friday morn."

"Spirit," said Halbert Glendinning, boldly, "it is bootless to threaten one who holds his life at no rate. Thine anger can but slay; nor do I think thy power extendeth, or thy will stretcheth, so far. The terrors which your race produce upon others, are vain against me. My heart is hardened against fear, as by a sense of despair. If I am, as thy words infer, of a race more peculiarly the care of Heaven than thine, it is mine to call, it must be thine to answer. I am the nobler being."

As he spoke, the figure looked upon him with a fierce and ireful countenance, which, without losing the similitude of that which it usually exhibited, had a wilder and more exaggerated cast of features. The eyes seemed to contract and become more fiery, and slight convulsions passed over the face, as if it was about to be transformed into something hideous. The whole appearance resembled those faces which the imagination summons up when it is disturbed by laudanum, but which do not remain under the visionary's command, and, beautiful in their first appearance, become wild and grotesque ere we can arrest them.

But when Halbert had concluded his bold speech, the White Lady stood before him with the same pale, fixed, and melancholy aspect which she usually bore. He had expected the agitation which she exhibited would conclude in some frightful metamorphosis. Folding her arms on her bosom, the phantom replied,—

"Daring youth! for thee it is well,
Here calling me in haunted dell,
That thy heart has not quail'd,
Nor thy courage fail'd,
And that thou could'st brook
The angry look
Of Her of Avenel,

Did one limb shiver,
Or an eyelid quiver,
Thou wert lost forever.
Though I am form'd from the ether blue,
And my blood is of the unfallen dew,
And thou art fram'd of mud and dust,
'Tis thine to speak, reply I must."

"I demand of thee, then," said the youth, "by what charm it is that I am thus altered in mind and in wishes—that I think no longer of deer or dog, of bow or bolt—that my soul spurns the bounds of this obscure glen—that my blood boils at an insult from one by whose stirrup I would some days since have run for a whole summer's morn, contented and honoured by the notice of a single word? Why do I now seek to mate me with princes and knights and nobles?—Am I the same, who but yesterday, as it were, slumbered in contented obscurity, but who am to-day awakened to glory and ambition?—Speak—tell me, if thou canst, the meaning of this change?—Am I spell-bound—or have I till now been under the influence of a spell, that I feel as another being, yet am conscious of remaining the same? Speak, and tell me, is it to thy influence that the change is owing?"

The White Lady replied,—

"A mightier wizard far than I
Wields o'er the universe his power;
Him owns the eagle in the sky,
The turtle in the bower.
Changeful in shape, yet mightiest still,
He wields the heart of man at will,
From ill to good, from good to ill,
In cot and castle-tower."

"Speak not thus darkly," said the youth, colouring so deeply, that face, neck, and hands were in a sanguine glow; "make me sensible of thy purpose."

The spirit answered,—

“ Ask thy heart, whose secret cell
Is fill'd with Mary Avenel !
Ask thy pride, why scornful look
In Mary's view it will not brook ?
Ask it, why thou seek'st to rise
Among the mighty and the wise,—
Why thou spurn'st thy lowly lot,—
Why thy pastimes are forgot,—
Why thou would'st in bloody strife
Mend thy luck or lose thy life ?
Ask thy heart and it shall tell,
Sighing from its secret cell,
'Tis for Mary Avenel.”

“ Tell me, then,” said Halbert, his cheek still deeply crimsoned, “ thou who hast said to me that which I dared not to say myself, by what means shall I urge my passion—by what means make it known ?”

The White Lady replied,—

“ Do not ask me;
On doubts like these thou can'st not task me.
We only see the passing show
Of human passions' ebb and flow ;
And view the pageant's idle glance
As mortals eye the northern dance,
When thousand streamers, flashing bright,
Career it o'er the brow of night,
And gazers mark their changeful gleams,
But feel no influence from their beams.

“ Yet, thine own fate,” replied Halbert, “ unless men greatly err, is linked with that of mortals ?”

The phantom answered,—

“ By ties mysterious linked, our fated race
Holds strange connexion with the sons of men,
The star that rose upon the House of Avenel,
When Norman Ulrick first assumed the name,
That star, when culminating in its orbit,
Shot from its sphere a drop of diamond dew,
And this bright font received it—and a Spirit
Rose from the fountain, and her date of life
Hath co-existence with the House of Avenel,
And with the star that rules it.”

“ Speak yet more plainly,” answered young Glendinning ; “ of this I can understand nothing. Say, what hath forged thy wierded* link of destiny with the House of Avenel ? Say, especially, what fate now overhangs that house ?”

The White Lady replied,—

“ Look on my girdle—on this thread of gold—
'Tis fine as web of lightest gossamer,
And, but there is a spell on't, would not bind,
Light as they are, the folds of my thin robe.
But when 'twas donn'd, it was a massive chain
Such as might bind the champion of the Jews,
Even when his locks were longest—it hath dwindled,
Hath minished in its substance and its strength
As sunk the greatness of the House of Avenel.
When this frail thread gives way, I to the elements
Resign the principles of life they lent me.
Ask me no more of this !—the stars forbid it.”

“ Then canst thou read the stars,” answered the youth, “ and mayst tell me the fate of my passion, if thou canst not aid it ?”

The White Lady again replied,—

“ Dim burns the once bright star of Avenel,
Dim as the beacon when the morn is nigh,
And the o'er-wearied warder leaves the light-house ;
There is an influence sorrowful and fearful,
That dogs its downward course. Disastrous passion,
Fierce hate and rivalry, are in the aspect
That lowers upon its fortunes.”

“ And rivalry ?” repeated Glendinning ; “ it is then as I feared !—But shall that English silk-worm presume to beard me, in my father's house, and in the presence of Mary Avenel ?—Give me to meet him, spirit—give me to do away the vain distinction of rank on which he refuses me the combat. Place us on equal terms, and

* *Wierded*—fated.

gleam the stars with what aspect they will, the sword of my father shall control their influences."

She answered as promptly as before,—

"Complain not of me, child of clay,
If to thy harm I yield the way.
We, who soar thy sphere above,
Know not aught of hate or love;
As will or wisdom rules thy mood,
My gifts to evil turn or good."

"Give me to redeem my honour," said Halbert Glendinning—"give me to retort on my proud rival the insults he has thrown on me, and let the rest fare as it will. If I cannot revenge my wrong, I shall sleep quiet, and know nought of my disgrace."

The phantom failed not to reply,—

"When Piercie Shafton boasteth high,
Let this token meet his eye.
The sun is westering from the dell,
Thy wish is granted—fare thee well!"

As the White Ladyspoke or chanted these last words, she undid from her locks a silver bodkin, around which they were twisted, and gave it to Halbert Glendinning; then shaking her dishevelled hair till it fell like a veil around her, the outlines of her form gradually became as diffuse as her flowing tresses, her countenance grew pale as the moon in her first quarter, her features became indistinguishable, and she melted into the air.

Habit inures us to wonders; but the youth did not find himself alone by the fountain, without experiencing, though in a much less degree, the revulsion of spirits which he had felt upon the phantom's former disappearance. A doubt strongly pressed upon his mind, whether it were safe to avail himself of the gifts of a spirit, which did not even pretend to belong to the class of angels, and might for aught he knew, have a much worse lineage than that which she was pleased to avow. "I will speak of it," he said, "to Edward, who is clerkly learned, and

will tell me what I should do. And yet, no—Edward is scrupulous and wary. I will prove the effect of her gift on Sir Piercie Shafton, if he again braves me; and by the issue, I will be myself a sufficient judge whether there is danger in resorting to her counsel. Home, then, home—and we shall soon learn whether that home shall longer hold me; for not again will I brook insult, with my father's sword by my side, and Mary for the spectator of my disgrace."

CHAPTER XVIII.

I give thee eighteenpence a-day,
And my bow shalt thou bear,
And over all the north country,
I make thee the chief rydere.
And I thirteerpence a-day, quoth the queen,
By god and by my faye;
Come fetch thy payment when thou wilt,
No man shall say thee nay.

William of Cloudesley.

THE manners of the age did not permit the inhabitants of Glendearg to partake of the collation which was placed in the spence of that ancient tower, before the Lord Abbot and his attendants, and Sir Piercie Shafton. Dame Glendinning was excluded, both by inferiority of rank and by sex; for, (though it was a rule often neglected,) the superior of Saint Mary's was debarred from taking his meals in female society. To Mary Avenel the latter, and to Edward Glendinning the former, incapacity attached; but it pleased his lordship to require their presence in the apartment, and to say sundry kind words to them upon the ready and hospitable reception which they had afforded him.