

CHAPTER IV.

Yes, life hath left him—every busy thought,
 Each fiery passion, every strong affection,
 All sense of outward ill and inward sorrow,
 Are fled at once from the pale trunk before me;
 And I have given that which spoke and moved,
 Thought, acted, suffered as a living man,
 To be a ghastly form of bloody clay,
 Soon the foul food for reptiles.

Old Play.

I BELIEVE few successful duellists (if the word successful can be applied to a superiority so fatal,) have beheld their dead antagonist stretched on the earth at their feet, without wishing they could redeem with their own blood that which it has been their fate to spill. Least of all could such indifference be the lot of so young a man as Halbert Glendinning, who, unused to the sight of human blood, was not only struck with sorrow, but with terror, when he beheld Sir Piercie Shafton lie stretched on the greensward before him, vomiting gore as if impelled by the strokes of a pump. He threw his bloody sword on the ground, and hastened to kneel down and support him, vainly striving, at the same time, to stanch his wound, which seemed rather to bleed inwardly than externally.

The unfortunate Knight spoke at intervals, when the syncope would permit him, and his words, so far as intelligible, partook of his affected and conceited, yet not ungenerous character.

“Most rustical youth,” he said, “thy fortune hath prevailed over knightly skill—and Audacity hath overcome Condescension, even as the kite hath sometimes hawked at and struck down the falcon-gentle.—Fly and save thyself!—Take my purse—it is in the nether pocket of my carnation-coloured hose—and is worth a clown’s

acceptance. See that my mails, with my vestments, be sent to the Monastery of Saint Mary’s—(here his voice grew weak, and his mind and recollection seemed to waver)—I bestow the cut velvet jerkin, with close breeches conforming—for—oh!—the good of my soul.”

“Be of good comfort, sir,” said Halbert, half-distracted with his agony of pity and remorse. “I trust you shall yet do well—O for a leech!”

“Were there twenty physicians, O most generous Audacity, and that were a grave spectacle—I might not survive—my life is ebbing fast.—Commend me to the rustical nymph whom I called my Discretion—O Claridiana!—true empress of this bleeding heart—which now bleedeth in sad earnest!—Place me on the ground at my length, most rustical victor, born to quench the pride of the burning light of the most felicitous court of Feliciania—O saints and angels—knights and ladies—masques and theatres—quaint devices—chain-work and broidery—love, honour, and beauty!”—

While muttering these last words, which slid from him, as it were unawares, while doubtless he was recalling to mind the glories of the English court, the gallant Sir Piercie Shafton stretched out his limbs—groaned deeply, shut his eyes, and became motionless.

The victor tore his hair for very sorrow, as he looked on the pale countenance of his victim. Life, he thought, had not utterly fled, but without better aid than his own, he saw not how it could be preserved.

“Why,” he exclaimed, in vain penitence, “why did I provoke him to an issue so fatal! Would to God I had submitted to the worst insult man could receive from man, rather than be the bloody instrument of this bloody deed—and doubly cursed be this evil-boding spot, which, haunted as I knew it to be by a witch or a devil, I yet chose for the place of combat! In any other place, save this, there had been help to be gotten by speed of foot, or by uplifting of voice—but here there is no one to be found by search, no one to hear my shouts, save the evil

before and very near to him, a person, whose dress, as he viewed it hastily, resembled that of a pilgrim.

He was a man in advanced life, and wearing a long beard, having on his head a large slouched hat, without either band or brooch. His dress was a tunic of black serge, which, like those commonly called hussar-cloaks, had an upper part, which covered the arms and fell down on the lower; a small scrip and bottle, which hung at his back, with a stout staff in his hand, completed his equipage. His step was feeble, like that of one exhausted by a toilsome journey.

“Save ye, good father!” said the youth. “God and Our Lady have sent you to my assistance!”

“And in what, my son, can so frail a creature as I am be of service to you?” said the old man, not a little surprised at being thus accosted by so handsome a youth, his features discomposed by anxiety, his face flushed with exertion, his hands and much of his dress stained with blood.

“A man bleeds to death in the valley here, hard by. Come with me—come with me! You are aged—you have experience—you have at least your senses—and mine have well nigh left me.”

“A man, and bleeding to death—and here in this desolate spot?” said the stranger.

“Stay not to question it, father,” said the youth, “but come instantly to his rescue. Follow me—follow me, without an instant’s delay.”

“Nay, but my son,” said the old man, “we do not lightly follow the guides who present themselves thus suddenly in the bosom of a howling wilderness. Ere I follow thee, thou must expound to me thy name, thy purpose, and the cause.”

“There is no time to expound any thing,” said Halbert; “I tell thee a man’s life is at stake, and thou must come to aid him, or I will carry thee thither by force!”

“Nay, thou shalt not need,” said the traveller; “if it indeed be as thou sayest, I will follow thee of free-will—the rather that I am not wholly unskilled in leech-craft,

and have in my scrip that which may do thy friend a service—Yet walk more slowly, I pray thee, for I am already well nigh forespent with travel.”

With the indignant impatience of the fiery steed when compelled by his rider to keep pace with some slow drudge upon the highway, Halbert accompanied the wayfarer, burning with anxiety which he endeavoured to subdue, that he might not alarm his companion, who was obviously afraid to trust him. When they reached the place where they were to turn off the wider glen into the Corri, the traveller made a doubtful pause as if unwilling to leave the broader path—“Young man,” he said, “if thou meanest aught but good to these grey hairs, thou wilt gain little by thy cruelty—I have no earthly treasure to tempt either robber or murderer.”

“And I,” said the youth, “am neither—and yet—God of Heaven! I *may* be a murderer, unless your aid comes in time to this wounded wretch!”

“Is it even so?” said the traveller; “and do human passions disturb the breast of nature even in her deepest solitude?—Yet why should I marvel that where darkness abides the works of darkness should abound?—By its fruits is the tree known.—Lead on, unhappy youth, I follow thee!”

And with better will to the journey than he had evinced hitherto, the stranger exerted himself to the uttermost, and seemed to forget his own fatigue in his efforts to keep pace with his impatient guide.

What was the surprise of Halbert Glendinning, when, upon arriving at the fatal spot, he saw no appearance of the body of Sir Piercie Shafton! The traces of the fray were otherwise sufficiently visible. The Knight’s cloak had indeed vanished as well as the body, but his doublet remained where he had laid it down, and the turf on which he had been stretched was stained with blood in many a dark crimson spot.

As he gazed round him in terror and astonishment, Halbert’s eyes fell upon the place of sepulture which had so lately appeared to gape for a victim. It was no

mined on flight. The Stranger's company and his promised protection came in aid of that resolution; but he was unable to reconcile the invitation which the old man gave him to accompany him for safety to the Castle of Avenel, with the connexions of Julian, the present usurper of that inheritance. "Good father," he said, "I fear that you mistake the man with whom you wish me to harbour. Avenel guided Piercie Shafton into Scotland, and his hench-man, Christie of the Clint-hill, brought the southron hither."

"Of that," said the old man, "I am well aware. Yet if thou wilt trust to me, as I have shown no reluctance to confide in thee, thou shalt find with Julian Avenel welcome, or at least safety."

"Father," replied Halbert, "though I can ill reconcile what thou sayest with what Julian Avenel hath done, yet, caring little about the safety of a creature so lost as myself, and as thy words seem those of truth and honesty, and finally, as thou didst render thyself frankly up to my conduct, I will return the confidence thou hast shown, and accompany thee to the Castle of Avenel by a road which thou thyself couldst never have discovered." He led the way, and the old man followed for some time in silence.

CHAPTER V.

'Tis when the wound is stiffening with the cold,
The warrior first feels pain—'tis when the heat
And fiery fever of his soul is passed,
The sinner feels remorse.

Old Play.

THE feelings of compunction with which Halbert Glendinning was visited upon this painful occasion, were deeper than belonged to an age and country in which hu-

man life was held so cheap. They fell far short certainly of those which might have afflicted a mind regulated by better religious precepts, and more strictly trained under social laws; but still they were deep and severely felt, and divided in Halbert's heart even the regret with which he parted from Mary Avenel and the tower of his fathers.

The old traveller walked silently by his side for some time, and then addressed him.—"My son, it has been said that sorrow must speak or die—Why art thou so much cast down?—Tell me thy unhappy tale, and it may be that my grey head may devise counsel and aid for your young life."

"Alas!" said Halbert Glendinning, "can you wonder why I am cast down?—I am at this instant a fugitive from my father's house, from my mother and from my friends, and I bear on my head the blood of a man who injured me but in idle words, which I have thus bloodily requited. My heart now tells me I have done evil—it were harder than these rocks if it could bear unmoved the thought, that I have sent this man to a long account, unhoused and unshrived!"

"Pause there, my son," said the traveller. "That thou hast defaced God's image in thy neighbour's person—that thou hast sent dust to dust in idle wrath or idler pride, is indeed a sin of the deepest dye—that thou hast cut short the space which Heaven might have allowed him for repentance, makes it yet more deadly—but for all this there is balm in Gilead."

"I understand you not, father," said Halbert, struck by the solemn tone which was assumed by his companion.

The old man proceeded. "Thou hast slain thine enemy—it was a cruel deed: thou hast cut him off perchance in his sins—it is a fearful aggravation. Do yet, by my counsel, and in lieu of him whom thou hast perchance consigned to the kingdom of Satan, let thine efforts wrest another subject from the reign of the Evil One."

spirit who has counselled this mischief. It is not her hour—I will essay the spell howsoever; and if she can give me aid, she *shall* do it, or know of what a madman is capable even against those of another world!"

He spurned his bloody shoe from his foot, and repeated the spell with which the reader is well acquainted; but there was neither voice, apparition, nor signal of answer. The youth, in the impatience of his despair, and with the rash hardihood which formed the basis of his character, shouted aloud "Witch—Sorceress—Fiend!—art thou deaf to my cries for help, and so ready to appear and answer those of vengeance? Arise and speak to me, or I will choke up thy fountain, tear down thy holly-bush, and leave thy haunt as waste and bare, as thy fatal assistance has made me waste of comfort and bare of counsel!"—This furious and raving invocation was suddenly interrupted by a distant sound, resembling a hollo, from the gorge of the ravine. "Now may Saint Mary be praised," said the youth, hastily fastening his sandal, "I hear the voice of some living man, who may give me counsel and help in this fearful extremity!"

Having donned his sandal, Halbert Glendinning, hallooing at intervals, in answer to the sound which he had heard, ran with the speed of a hunted buck down the rugged defile, as if paradise had been before him, hell and all her furies behind, and his eternal happiness or misery had depended upon the speed which he exerted. In a space incredibly short for any one but a Scottish mountaineer having his nerves strung by the deepest and most passionate interest, the youth reached the entrance of the ravine, through which the rill that flows down Corrinan-shian discharges itself, and unites with the brook that waters the little valley of Glendearg.

Here he paused, and looked around him upwards and downwards through the glen, without perceiving a human form. His heart sank within him. But the windings of the glen intercepted his prospect, and the person, whose voice he had heard, might, therefore, be at no great distance, though not obvious to his sight. The branches of

an oak-tree, which shot straight out from the face of a tall cliff, proffered to his bold spirit, steady head, and active limbs, the means of ascending it as a place of outlook, although the enterprize was what most men would have shrunk from. But by one bound from the earth, the active youth caught hold of the lower branch, and swung himself up into the tree, and in a minute more gained the top of the cliff, from which he could easily descry a human figure descending the valley. It was not that of a shepherd, or of a hunter, and scarcely any others used to traverse this deserted solitude, especially coming from the north, since the reader may remember that the brook took its rise from an extensive and dangerous morass which lay in that direction.

But Halbert Glendinning did not pause to consider who the traveller might be, or what might be the purpose of his journey. To know that he saw a human being, and might receive, in the extremity of his distress, the countenance and advice of a fellow-creature, was enough for him at the moment. He threw himself from the pinnacle of the cliff once more into the arms of the projecting oak-tree, whose boughs waved in middle air, anchored by the roots in a huge rift, or chasm of the rock. Catching at the branch which was nearest to him, he dropped himself from that height upon the ground; and such was the athletic springiness of his youthful sinews, that he pitched there as lightly, and with as little injury, as the falcon stooping from her wheel.

To resume his race at full speed up the glen, was the work of an instant; and as he turned angle after angle of the indented banks of the valley, without meeting that which he sought, he became half afraid that the form which he had seen at such a distance had already melted into thin air, and was either a deception of his own imagination, or of the elementary spirits by which the valley was supposed to be haunted.

But, to his inexpressible joy, as he turned round the base of a huge and distinguished crag, he saw, straight