

CHAPTER VII.

The Laird maun hae his ain again,
 The Laird shall hae his ain again ;
 Let us loup an' lilt fu' fain,
 The Laird will hae his ain again.

Jacobite Song.



EXT morning, when Nairn, my uncle, and the Gaberlunzie met, their hopes were less sanguine, and they talked of their prospects in a much less confident strain than they had done under the excitement of the previous evening. Many obstacles thrust themselves in the way which they foresaw would not be easily surmounted. Britain was at that time struggling with a colonial and a continental war ; and, like all other knights-errant, was so busy redressing the grievances of others that she had no leisure to look after her own. It was therefore useless to appeal to the government at such a time. But the experienced veterans, Nairn and my uncle, knew well that every general movement must have a local beginning, and that the best time to ask a favour from a man is when you can do something for him in return. Accordingly, they resolved to have the dinner and ball on the occasion of the member's canvass for his seat, and, until that time arrived, to keep the agitation alive in their own immediate locality. They were aware that a running stream gathers strength, and that if once the sympathies of even a small portion of the community are fairly enlisted in any cause, such a feeling is sure sooner or later to attract the attention of the legislature.

The united influence of these worthy men was accordingly exerted in spreading among their own immediate friends sentiments of pity for the expatriated families connected with the rebellion ; and it was of great service in forwarding their pro-

ject, that a man so much respected as Nairn was one of those who had suffered for the mistaken zeal and loyalty of his ancestors.

At the various Council and canvassing dinners which preceded the election of the civic dignitaries, who were not only to rule over the city but to return the member to parliament, the two friends, who were generally invited to all these parties, contrived to have the subject of the forfeited estates always in some way or other introduced and talked over. Opportunities, as if by chance, occurred for my uncle to propose Nairn's health, with which he never failed to join a wish that he might speedily be restored to the title and estate of his ancestors. This sentiment, which was generally well received, was acknowledged by the staid old gentleman with becoming modesty and dignity; and, in returning thanks, he often dwelt on it with a delight and unction that suggested the idea of the old gentleman's having renewed his youth—an idea strengthened by his adding, as he frequently did, that he might yet marry, and keep up the old house and the old name. All the bantering on this point the veteran bore with great patience and good humour; and as his friend, my uncle, seemed to delight in insinuating some such notion, it was shrewdly suspected by some of their fain-would-be-wise companions, that my relative was either about to follow his friend's example, or that my aunt was to be the favoured Lady Nairn.

My aunt herself blew the coal with a somewhat windy bellows. At the numerous tea-parties which she attended, and where the wives of the provost and bailies generally echoed the sentiments of their husbands, Laird Nairn and his expectations afforded an excellent subject for speculation. "Will he get the estate?" was the question of the old ladies—"Will he marry?" that of the young. Both queries did my aunt answer in the affirmative, amid the suppressed titters and half-concealed simpers of her fair neighbours. Nods and winks were slyly exchanged, and such exclamations whispered as "Heh sirs, does she expect to be Lady Nairn?" "There's ower mony nicks in her horn, I doot." "Gin the Laird marry, he'll marry a young wife." "Gin the Laird get the estate, he'll like an heir till't." And then a blush might have been seen crimsoning the face of some young beauty, who had the secret consciousness of having exchanged sweet and kind looks with

the Laird at some bailie's ball, where he had done her the honour of dancing a reel with her.

Thus did Nairn and his expectations become the topic of general conversation; and, although no one could trace the origin of the rumour, or assign any cause for its occupying so large a share of the public attention, when the great man did come to take a new seven years' lease of his parliamentary honours, he found the name of Nairn in everybody's mouth. When the grand Nairn ball, as it was called, was announced with all due formality, it came in excellent time to confirm the impression previously made; and this impression was further strengthened, when it was generally understood that the member had graciously condescended to accept the Laird's hospitality, and was to honour with his presence the last grand ball and dinner that would in all probability ever be celebrated within the precincts of the ancient Mint of Scotland.

It has formerly been stated that Nairn was a staunch Jacobite, and it may be inferred, from the circumstance of his differing so much from my uncle in politics, that he was a good, old-fashioned, high Tory. This being the case, the consequence was that the dignitaries of the city, at that time on the same side of politics, feasted him in all quarters, and made it a point to have him at every one of their festive meetings. Frequently, indeed, my uncle shared in the invitations given to his friend Nairn; but then he had an old sister, and at parties where ladies were present the brother could not be asked without the sister. Besides, he was a Whig, and rather a fierce one at times over his toddy, delighting rather much in avowing his political principles. He was thus scarcely a fit guest to be associated at a party with the city member, whom the host looked to for a place to his promising son, who was either designed for the bar or expected to "wag his pow in a poopit." Nairn, on the contrary, was not only of the same political creed with the majority of his entertainers, but was also looked upon with friendly eyes by their good dames, any of whom, who had a marriageable daughter to dispose of, would have been proud, indeed, to have secured for her the title of Lady Nairn. The idea of marrying, however, had never occurred to the honest Laird, who was in the habit of patting or kissing the cheeks of the young ladies as a father would his children; and if a blush did arise in the face of a young beauty, he generally attributed

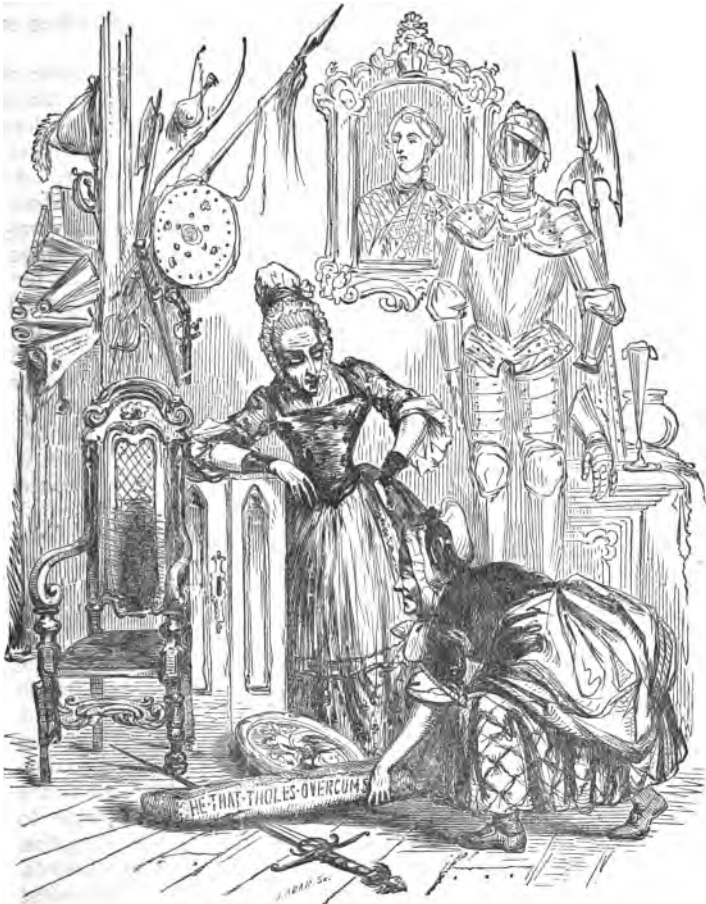
it to childish simplicity or maiden bashfulness. Thus Laird Nairn, who stood in the enviable situation of a wealthy bachelor, who had no relations to partake of his wealth or share his affections, was a regular diner-out, without being either asked or expected to give parties in return.

It may easily be imagined with what satisfaction the circle of Nairn's acquaintance heard of his intended party. Many threw themselves in his way, in hope of getting an invitation to a fête that promised to eclipse anything of the kind which had taken place in their day within the precincts of the ancient city. At that time the difference of female fashion and costume which had formerly distinguished the various classes of society was just beginning to be abolished, and the wives of the leading tradesmen and merchants were assuming the dress which formerly had been worn only by ladies of quality. The expected presence of the member of parliament, too, made the fair dames more anxious to show themselves off to advantage; and the silk mercers' shops were overwhelmed with demands for new fashions, new dresses, and new ornamental trimmings. Nay, even amid the sage debates of the Council Chamber, there was now and then introduced some chance allusion to Nairn's dinner or Nairn's ball, showing how much the worthy councillors rejoiced in the impending entertainment; which they had no doubt would be at once savoury and satisfactory.

The Gaberlunzie and his fair charge left Edinburgh some weeks previously to the time appointed for the grand ball; and my aunt and Nanny set about making preparations on a great scale, for the purpose of giving it an imposing effect.

Aided by my aunt's little servant, they were to be seen late and early at work, polishing, scrubbing, and turning Nairn's old mansion upside down. His immense collection of antique curiosities, which lay scattered in confusion through every room in the house, were bundled up to the attics. Carved oaken doors, and stone-lintels with quaint inscriptions, did the indefatigable Nanny, with much bodily fatigue, manage to remove. Elizabethan carvings, Roman casts, and Egyptian coins, old helmets, cuirasses, coats of mail, Ferrara swords, Highland guns, short dirks, and a thousand old marrowless warlike weapons, were thrust by the active dames into out-of-the-way corners. Old family portraits, which had stood with their faces turned to the walls for years, were scoured and hung up,

and looked smilingly down once more, as if rejoicing to be present on such a festive occasion. The Laird's huge mass



of mouldy parchments and papers, which had accumulated in his sitting parlour till they had nearly filled the room from floor

to ceiling, he began to arrange himself ; but soon growing weary of the task, he consigned it to the hands of his female assistants, who very unceremoniously pitched the ancient documents into a dark closet. The huge, old-fashioned kitchen, which had not been used for a number of years, was cleaned thoroughly out ; the spacious fireplace, with a chimney large enough to turn a coach and six in, was also put in readiness for cooking. The old fashioned spit, which had been somewhat rusted and out of order, was repaired ; the walls were whitewashed ; and the old dish-covers, newly burnished, shone like silver on the white walls, where they hung in readiness for use. Norie, the celebrated ornamental painter, was engaged to decorate the rooms with the choicest specimens of his art, and performed his task admirably. So great altogether was the change produced, that Nairn declared he scarcely knew his own house ; and my uncle whispered in his ear, " My sang, the women are gaun to dance a bonny jig, let wha likes pay the piper ! "

As usual, the gentlemen only were invited to dinner, the arrangement being that the ladies should join them at the ball and supper. The afternoon at last arrived on which so many hearts had been set, towards which so many eyes had been strained ; and when the guests arrived and were admitted into the dining-room they seemed electrified, so much did the scene surpass their expectations. The massive oak dining-table, which had not been used since the death of the Laird's father, was spread out in all its amplitude, and tottered beneath the burden of good things with which it was laden. Bright points of light from wax-candles set in tall, deep, richly-chased silver candlesticks studded the tables like stars. The heavy oaken chairs, which were ranged closely together, were genuine antiques, having high sloping backs and low cushioned seats, covered with morocco. The room was rather low in the ceiling, but rose up in the centre to a cone, surrounded by a fine hand-modelled cornice of Grecian ornament, with large scallop shells supporting and enriching the arc corners of the rising cone. The panelled walls were tastefully decorated with arabesques, which were said to have been executed by some French artist who flourished in Edinburgh about the beginning of last century. In these arabesque panels, light graceful wreaths and bouquets of flowers were intermingled with groups of Cupids, while the one above the mantelpiece contained a landscape

painted with great brilliancy. Nairn's arm-chair was decorated with branches of laurel, while the chair at the other end of the table, into which Aunt Matty was placed, was finely trimmed up with autumnal flowers; and when the company were all seated, with their venerable host at the foot of the table, and my Queen Elizabeth-looking aunt at the head, there never perhaps was seen in Edinburgh at any period a gayer dinner party than that which graced the old apartment in the old Mint on this memorable occasion.

The company were all select, and, although chiefly belonging to a class, were not without variety of character. The city member and Lord Provost occupied the right and left of my aunt. My uncle and the deacon convener of the trades sat on the right and left of Nairn. There were the old and new bailies of the town, the baron bailies of the barony burghs of Portsburgh and Canongate, and the deacons of the incorporated trades—all great men in their own proper localities. There they all sat, their blushing honours thick upon them. One or two gray heads and grave countenances, paled with thought, gleamed with a gentle light among some whose highly-coloured faces bloomed in all the perfection of full-fed maturity. Young aspirants to civic honours were there, their budding beauty rather highly tinted with bashfulness or mock modesty. Gold chains were seen dangling round almost every neck; and if there were a few who wanted them, they were evidently happy in the comfortable assurance that, at no distant date, their necks would also be graced with similar badges of distinction.

It would puzzle Meg Dods herself to describe, or even to enumerate, the various dishes of which the dinner was composed. All my aunt's genius and knowledge in the culinary art had been put in requisition. There were such soups as some of the guests had never seen or tasted before. There were fish, flesh, and fowl, tortured and twisted into a thousand shapes, and appearing in various picturesque arrangements and attitudes. There was a sucking-pig, decked out in all the flowery trimmings of the period, and shining in his coat of polished brown, with a large golden-coloured orange in his mouth. The national dish, the haggis, occupied the centre of the table, although few of the well-fed guests (with the exception of my uncle, and one or two of his old companions) seemed to think it deserving of their countenance. The wines

were of the most choice and varied description; while the quality of the stronger liquors, particularly the brandy, was so superlative, and the article itself so much in demand, that the member must either have set down Nairn and his guests as liberal contributors to the revenue, in the shape of excise duties, or have winked at the fact—of which he very possibly might have a knowledge—that the Edinburgh folks at that period had ways and means of getting at these very useful foreign commodities without paying duty at all. The great man stared—and well he might: such a sight he had never seen during the whole of his canvassing experience. The local dignitaries looked at each other—never on any council dinner occasion had they been so sumptuously entertained. The effect upon them seemed magical. They felt themselves elevated to the ranks of the aristocracy. No man there dared have called another by his ordinary everyday tittle of Mr. No; their manner of saluting and pledging each other was, “Bailie, the Provost pledges you:” “Convener, the Baron solicits the honour of drinking wine with you:” “Deacon, the Member requests a bumper,” &c. &c. Even my uncle fell into the general weakness, and bawled to Nairn, “Laird, the Old Convener pledges you.”

All present were well acquainted with the mysteries of the dining-table, and well qualified to enjoy the very sumptuous banquet which was set before them. At that time dining-out constituted a very important part of the duties of the magistracy. They had very frequently public council dinners, and all of them occasionally gave dinners at their own houses; so that there were always the same parties, the same jokes, the same songs, and the same stories. One would have thought so frequent a recurrence of the same thing would have satiated the worthy functionaries; but it seemed rather to have the effect of making them fonder of each other's society. A man, indeed, who is not in the habit of dining out, may feel somewhat nauseated by two or three consecutive visits to the same party, and by listening to the same stale remarks and thrice-told tales. But let him repeat the experiment, say for a dozen times, and the chances are ten to one that he will also get into the practice of repeating himself, of retailing the same idea twenty times over, and, like those around him, become also a vendor of small second-hand jokes and worn-out stories. A

man, to have a healthy intellect, must spend a considerable part of his time alone, and then, when he does come into company, he may say that which will be worth listening to. But I digress.

After the cloth had been removed, and my aunt had left the room, the provost, who had paid her every attention, and assisted her in her carving operations with much politeness, stepped lightly into her chair, and proposed her health. "The company," he said, "were aware how much they were indebted to the good lady who had just left them for the very sumptuous banquet of which they had partaken, and would, he had no doubt, join with him in thinking, that, where there was so much to be grateful for, such gratitude should have even the preference of loyalty. And," he continued, with an arch smile, which was meant to be a prelude to one of his wittiest points, "as that lady has shown herself so well qualified to grace the table of our excellent host, and to confer such honour on the very intelligent and respectable company here present, may we often have the pleasure of meeting her in a similar capacity. I beg leave to propose the healths of Miss Martha Hepburn and Mr William Nairn."

Although some of the elder dignitaries present had daughters who were to be at the ball that night, arrayed in such style as their fond parents hoped and believed would catch the eye and win the affections of the wealthy old laird, yet the provost was to them, next to the member, the greatest man in the kingdom, and they applauded his toast to the echo. The provost, indeed, well merited their approbation and esteem; for he had always shown a desire to improve himself and those around him. Even when first bailie, he had, when condemning a young thief to Bridewell for a month, imitated the judges in the Justiciary Court in capital cases, by finishing his sentence with "The Lord have mercy on your soul!" Since he had reached his present station he had been to London; had seen the king (at a distance); had been in the Houses of Parliament; talked of the forms of the House; and, some time after his return, had assumed, as nearly as he could, the attitude of the Lord Chancellor. He had also instructed his subordinates to abridge My Lord into My Lud, when addressing him; talked of getting up a church that would rival St Paul's, and throw old St Giles entirely into shade; of constructing public

promenades to vie with St James' Park ; bridges which would make that of Westminster look common ; and even at one time entertained the idea of changing the current of the Water of Leith, and leading it right through the centre of the city, in order that the sneer of visitors at its waterless bridges should no longer have either truth or point.*

Nairn felt highly honoured in having his name coupled with that of my aunt in such a manner by so great a man, and, in returning thanks, said he was proud to see the merits of Miss Hepburn so justly appreciated, and so handsomely acknowledged. "He was happy to add," he said, "his humble testimony to her worth. Her brother," he concluded, "had long been the same as a brother to him ; and if ever the tie should be drawn closer by the agency of such an admirable sister, it would tend so much the more to his gratification."

The provost chuckled ; he had brought out an acknowledgment ; he had unravelled the secret of the Laird's affection. The usual loyal toasts followed ; and Nairn rose to propose the health of the city member. Long and intimate had been his connection with "The Gude Town," much had she flourished under the auspices of him and his family, and he begged leave to propose the health of the honourable member, with all the honours.

The honourable member returned thanks. "It had been the chief pride and glory of his life," he said, "to represent

* This rage for improvement on the part of the provost is by no means singular, and doubtless proceeds from the love of fame inherent in all those who hold such stations. In Edinburgh especially, there has been no provost since the time of the immortal George Drummond who has not been anxious to have his name associated with some fancied improvement. If he has missed the honour of being knighted, then it becomes indispensably necessary that he should have his name on some street, however obscure ; which street will probably have an inscription stating that the foundation-stone was laid in such and such a year, So-and-So Lord Provost. To such a ridiculous extent has this been carried, that foundation-stones have been laid where the buildings have never risen, and several streets destined to be dignified with the name of certain provosts have never yet been built, although some twenty years have elapsed since the great man gave the three 'mystic strokes, and, in all the pomp and pageantry of a masonic procession, deposited a foundation-stone containing his own immortal name. O ! this love of fame, what tricks it plays us ! Local distinction is everything to a small mind, and the love of local distinction makes even sensible men guilty of strange vagaries.

the capital of his native country in the House of Commons; and this honour was enhanced by the circumstance, that he could look back to a long line of ancestors who had stood in a similar situation with himself, and between whom and the excellent Town Council the utmost harmony of feeling at all times subsisted." This was treading on my uncle's corny toe. The member saw it, and concluded by saying, "Gentlemen, I return you again my best thanks, and beg to assure you, that, whether in or out of office, I shall always be proud to be among the ranks of such enlightened and patriotic citizens as yourselves, who are all endeavouring to advance the prosperity of our beautiful and romantic city. I beg, therefore, to propose the City of Edinburgh, and the healths of the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Council."

The Lord Provost having returned thanks, continued thus, addressing the member: "I beg to assure you, sir, that the high office which I fill, and the important duties which I have to perform, are rendered comparatively easy by the assistance which I receive from those you see around me. Need I say, sir (here he laid his hand on his heart), how grateful I feel for your kind attention to our wants at all times. I had an opportunity when in London of experiencing such kindness at your hands as I shall never forget. But when the bill, which I then submitted to you, and which, through your exertions, passed the legislature, shall come into operation, and the proposed four inches and a-half shall be taken off the centre of the High Street, your name will be hallowed and embalmed in the memory of all good citizens. I again, in my own name, and in that of my colleagues, return you our best thanks; and before I sit down, allow me to claim a bumper to the ancient baronies of Portsburgh and Canongate, coupled with the health of the barons, both of whom I am delighted to see present."

Both barons rose at once, but the Canongate baron had dipped rather deeply, and could but nod to his Portsburgh brother for a speech. The baron of Portsburgh, however, stuttered when he spoke, and consequently was unable to make a speech, but instead sung the following song, in praise of his own locality:—



THE AULD WEST PORT.

THE days are sair changed wi' the auld West Port,
Whaur ance a wee loon I gat schulin' an' sport ;
Now far wearing through, though few fouters care for't
Yet dear to my soul is the auld West Port.

Ilka auld water-wife wi' her stoups at the well,
Ilka laigh half shop-door, wi' its wee tinklin bell,
Ilka howff whaur wee callants were wont to resort,
Are a' stannin' yet in the auld West Port.

The wee merchant shops kept by tidy auld dames,
Wi' sign-brods sae worn ye could scarce read the names ;
When we gae the puir bodies their last sad escort,
No ae ee was dry in the auld West Port.

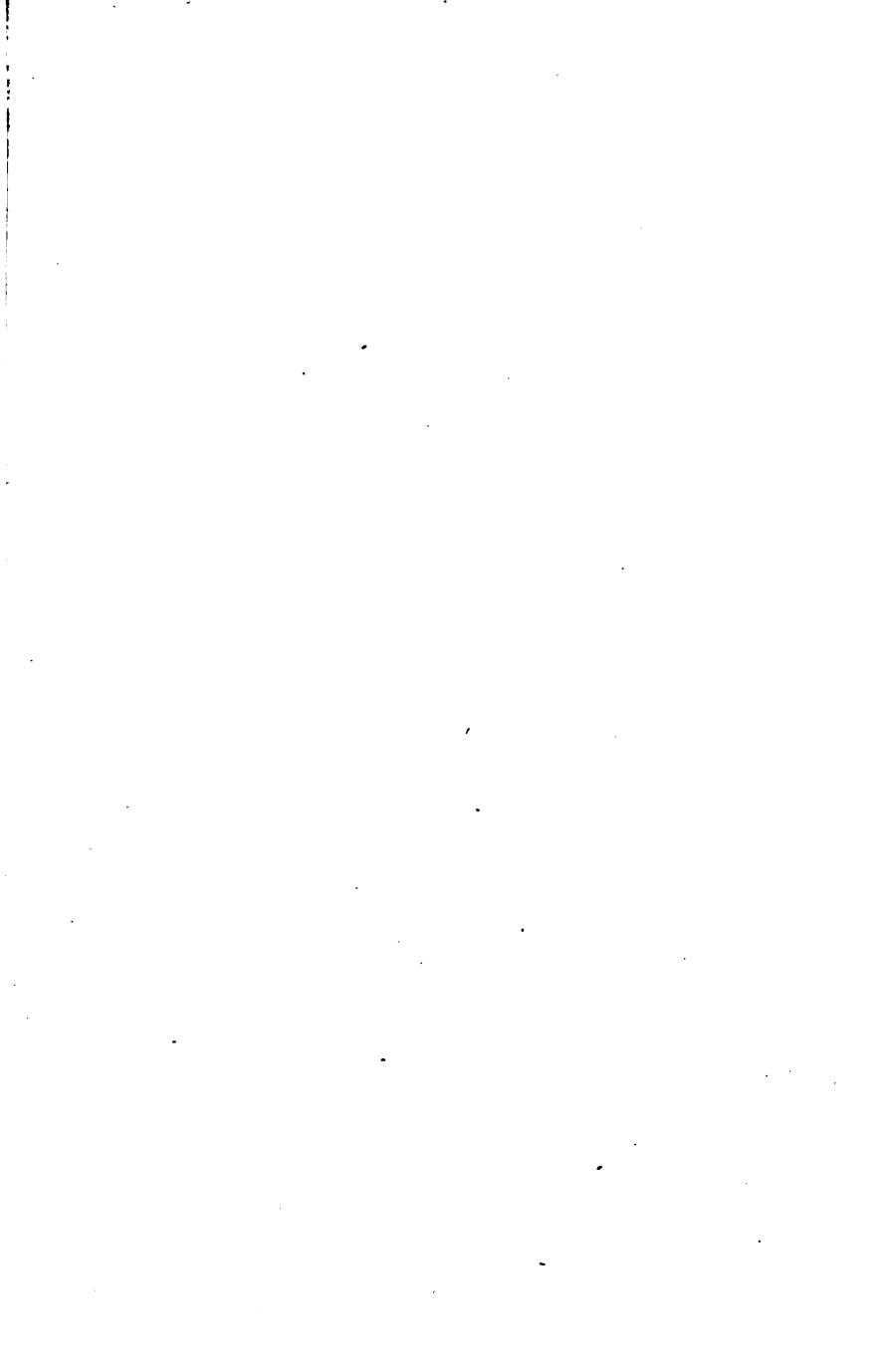
The stown licks o' sugar, the sair pykit bread,
The apple and gundy stands, ne'er frae our head,
The lang hungry kippins, the bawbees aye short,
We aye fand a hame in the auld West Port.

The bare-fitted races, the twisted cowl knocks,
The clamberin' like goats up the high Castle rocks ;
The bools, paips, and piries, an' a' siccan sport,
Were aye played wi' birr in the auld West Port.

The rough snaw-ba' bickers, the twa-fisted rows,
The hard shinty peltings, an' bruised bluidy pows ;
The big fouter's couter, the wee loon's retort ;
I see them whiles yet in the auld West Port.

Then let a' her sons like true men play their parts,
Let a' her auld stories be linked round their hearts ;
An' the foul fa' the loon wha wad sneevil or snort
At the true Scottish pith o' the auld West Port.

O ! bright is the halo, an' glorious the blaze
That lights up the heart wi' the fire o' auld days ;
An' gin my heart twangs strong, O ! blame me na for't,
Mind, I gat it strung in the auld West Port.





THE NAIRN BALL

Never did the Mint witness a brighter galaxy of beauty than it beheld that night assembled within its precincts to grace the long-looked-for ball. Salon chairs came burdened with fair ladies who seemed to feel it incumbent on them to sustain on this last occasion the dignity of that ancient portion of the city.

By the time this song was completed, my uncle, who had been screwing his courage to the sticking point, got upon his feet, and, addressing the Lord Provost, thus proceeded :—

“ My Lord,—I am sure that I only anticipate your wishes, when I propose the health of our excellent host, my friend, Mr William Nairn. Of the same political creed with the most of you here, you must delight in his prosperity ; and although he and I do not sail in the same political boat, yet connected as he is with the house of Hepburn, to which I owe so much, it is natural that we all should wish to see him in possession of the property of his progenitors. While proposing his health, I take the liberty of suggesting to the honourable member for the city, that his parliamentary influence could not be better exerted than in endeavouring to advance the suit of so loyal a subject, and so true a man, who, although the nearest known heir to the Keith estate, can only at present boast of this old house as a lairdship, and ‘ The Laird of the Mint ’ as his title.”

Nairn returned thanks, and said, “ That although for himself he did not place a very high value on wealth, he thought that the descendants of the families who had been *out* in the cause of the Stuarts at the rebellion were now the best friends to the Hanoverian succession, and although indifferent, in so far as his own individual interests were concerned, yet he trusted that the city member would use his influence to obtain a general measure of pardon and indemnity to the unfortunate victims of the mistaken zeal and loyalty of their ancestors.”

This was rather much for the city member, whose sagacious and experienced eye saw at once that he had been invited here for the purpose of being drawn out or pledged on this particular matter, and he was about to frame an evasive answer, but was relieved from his embarrassment by the entrance of Aunt Matty, to announce the arrival of the ladies. The member of course led the van to the ball-room, followed by my uncle and the most of the junior part of the company. Nairn and a number of the old stagers sat still ; being, as they said, rather stiff at all times, and none the nimbler for the quantity of liquor they had swallowed.

Never did the Mint witness a brighter galaxy of beauty than it beheld that night assembled within its precincts to grace the long-looked for ball. It had been talked of so much over all the town as the last grand display likely to take place in that

vicinity, that people came from all quarters to witness it, and the street, as well as the close and court, was crowded with spectators. Sedan chairs came burdened with fair ladies, who seemed to feel it incumbent on them to sustain on this last occasion the dignity of that ancient portion of the city. In this anxiety to uphold the respectability of the Laird's turn-out, these fair ladies were well supported by the two matrons, Matty and Nanny, who were determined to make the affair go off as brilliantly as possible. Flambeau-bearers were stationed in the close, whose flaring lights put to shame the dull, dingy straggling lamps. Old, thin faced, and grey-haired men and women, who had been residents there for half a century, were seen popping their heads out at the low dark doors, or bending over the high windows with a joyful gaze, as if they had newly awakened from a long sleep, and were delighted and astonished to find the youthful days of themselves and their neighbourhood returned. The broad flag-stair which led up to Nairn's mansion was laid with carpeting. The Edinburgh arms were emblazoned in front of the house, and lighted up with party-coloured lamps. The boys in the vicinity, with whom Nairn was a great favourite, had brought from Bellevue that morning large boughs of trees, with laurel leaves and lilac flourishing, and with these formed a triumphal arch over the entrance to the Mint. Their bickerings with the Town Guard, whom the provost had secretly commissioned to keep order, were confined to mimicking the broken English of the staunch Celtic veterans, with whom, on the present occasion, the urchins seemed to be on a more friendly footing than usual. This good humour on the part of the boys was caused by their knowledge of the Laird's liberality, and the conviction that their exertions would not go unrequited. They were not disappointed, for a plentiful shower of coppers was scattered from the window amongst them, with which they scampered off to the High Street, and spent on such commodities as



ROSY CHEEKIT APPLES.

COME awa, bairnie, for your bawbee
 Rosy cheekit apples ye shall hae three ;
 A' sae fou o' hinny, they drappit frae the tree,
 Like your bonny sel', a' the sweeter they are wee

Come awa, bairnie, dinna shake your head,
 Ye mind me o' my ain bairn, lang, lang dead ;
 Ah ! for lack o' nourishment he drappit frae the tree,
 Like your bonny sel', a' the sweeter he was wee.

O auld frail folks are like auld fruit-trees,
 They canna stand the gnarl o' the auld warl's breeze ;
 But Heaven taks the fruit, though earth forsake the tree,
 An' we mourn our fairy blossoms, a' the sweeter they were wee.

The ball-room had been entirely emptied of furniture. The windows were closed, and their deep recesses were lined and overarched with bays and flowers, and studded in the centre with lights, rendered still brighter by polished reflectors. My uncle had superintended the busking part of the operations, and a batch of boys from Heriot's Hospital, under his directions, had exhibited the perfection of their June-day flower-dressing on this joyous occasion. Norie had decorated the floor with fancy chalking ; and that witty old wag had quartered Nairn's arms with those of Hepburn's, a conceit with which the Laird seemed delighted ; whether intended as emblematic of a union between my aunt and him, or as indicating his family connections, the design was much admired and greatly praised. My uncle, with a bouquet of flowers in his breast, stood on the top of the stair, handing the ladies from their chairs, and arming them into the little lobby between the two rooms, where they were received and announced by my aunt with all due ceremony. The ladies were splendidly dressed ; but my aunt, with her elegant shape, rendered still more so by the antique dress which she wore, outshone them all. The young budding bailies and courting councillors were in the top of the fashion ; and many a fond look was exchanged, many a soft sigh echoed, and many a heart lost and won, even before the dancing commenced. The member for the city and my aunt, my uncle and the provost's lady, led off the ball—their example was

speedily followed by others; in a few minutes the floor was covered with dancers—the jesting and tittering went on—the dancers flew like light—the old floor sprang with elastic bound beneath its animated burden—the musician caught the enthusiasm, and played away delightfully, changing reels into strathspeys alternately, without a pause, or any appearance of weariness, till those on the floor were fairly worn out, when others rose to supply their places,—all shouted with excitement; they felt the music in their hearts and in their heels, and they leaped into the air in the madness of their joy.

In the meantime Nairn and his old friends were still in the dining-room, busily engaged in drinking healths, and making themselves merry in a way more congenial to the tastes of such veterans than dancing. Sentiment succeeded sentiment, toast followed toast, until their enthusiasm was roused to the highest pitch; the sounds were transmitted from the one room to the other through the thin wooden partition which divided them, so that the loud laugh and merry chuckle of the elders but served to quicken the mirth of the younger members of the party. The Laird at last attained that particular pitch of excitement which invariably elicited his favourite song, and he now, accordingly, struck up, in a fine clear mellow voice, “The auld Stuarts back again.” The musician stopped—the dancers stayed the dance, and all listened in breathless admiration as the clear tremulous notes ascended—the doors of both rooms were opened, to allow of the sounds passing more freely. The chorus was caught up by the whole company, and sung with an energy that made the roof-tree of the old Mint ring again—the fiddler sat apparently wrapped up in the melody, and seemingly much agitated, till, at the end of the chorus, he seized his bow and fiddle, and played over the tune with a bold, sweeping, thrilling effect. The Laird started, turned pale, stopped breathless in the middle of his song; his whole frame became convulsed, and exclaiming, “My God, the fiddler!” he sprung up, old as he was, leaped over the table, overturning glasses, jugs, and decanters, and reached the door just in time to see a figure glide through the lobby, and mingle with the crowd in the court. In this figure, though seen but for an instant, he recognised the very man whom he was most anxious to meet with; and grievously was he tantalised to find him thus eluding his grasp like a shadow, at the very instant when he seemed within his reach.