

IV.

THE WIDOW OF DUNSKAITH.

CHAPTER I.

“ Oh, mony a shriek, that wae fu' night,
Rose frae the stormy main ;
An' mony a bootless vow was made,
An' mony a prayer vain ;
An' mithers wept, an' widows mourned,
For mony a weary day ;
An' maidens, ance o' blithest mood,
Grew sad, an' pined away.”

THE northern Sutor of Cromarty is of a bolder character than even the southern one, abrupt and stern and precipitous as that is. It presents a loftier and more unbroken wall of rock ; and, where it bounds on the Moray Frith, there is a savage magnificence in its cliffs and caves, and in the wild solitude of its beach, which we find nowhere equalled on the shores of the other. It is more exposed, too, in the time of tempest. The waves often rise, during the storms of winter, more than a hundred feet against its precipices, festooning them, even at that height, with wreaths of kelp and tangle ; and for miles within the bay we may hear, at such seasons, the savage uproar that maddens amid its cliffs and caverns, coming booming over the lashings of the nearer waves like a roar of artillery. There is a sublimity of desolation on its shores, the effects

of a conflict maintained for ages, and on a scale so gigantic. The isolated spire-like crags that rise along its base are so drilled and bored by the incessant lashings of the surf, and are ground down into shapes so fantastic, that they seem but the wasted skeletons of their former selves; and we find almost every natural fissure in the solid rock hollowed into an immense cavern, whose very ceiling, though the head turns as we look up to it, owes, evidently, its comparative smoothness to the action of the waves. One of the most remarkable of these recesses occupies what we may term the apex of a lofty promontory. The entrance, unlike most of the others, is narrow and rugged, though of great height; but it widens within into a shadowy chamber, perplexed, like the nave of a cathedral, by uncertain cross-lights, that come glimmering into it through two lesser openings which perforate the opposite sides of the promontory. It is a strange, ghostly-looking place. There is a sort of moonlight greenness in the twilight which forms its noon, and the denser shadows which rest along its sides; a blackness, so profound that it mocks the eye, hangs over a lofty passage which leads from it, like a corridor, still deeper into the bowels of the hill; the light falls on a sprinkling of half-buried bones, the remains of animals that in the depth of winter have crept into it for shelter and to die; and when the winds are up, and the hoarse roar of the waves comes reverberated from its inner recesses, or creeps howling along its roof, it needs no over-active fancy to people its avenues with the shapes of beings long since departed from every gayer and softer scene, but which still rise uncalled to the imagination, in those by-corners of nature which seem dedicated, like this cavern, to the wild, the desolate, and the solitary.

There is a little rocky bay a few hundred yards to the

west, which has been known for ages to all the seafaring men of the place as the Cova Green. It is such a place as we are sometimes made acquainted with in the narrative of disastrous shipwrecks. First, there is a broad semi-circular strip of beach, with a wilderness of insulated piles of rock in front; and so steep and continuous is the wall of precipices which rises behind, that, though we may see directly over head the grassy slopes of the hill, with here and there a few straggling firs, no human foot ever gained the nearer edge. The bay of the Cova Green is a prison to which the sea presents the only outlet; and the numerous caves which open along its sides, like the arches of an amphitheatre, seem but its darker cells. It is in truth a wild, impressive place, full of beauty and terror, and with none of the squalidness of the mere dungeon about it. There is a puny littleness in our brick and lime receptacles of misery and languor, which speaks as audibly of the feebleness of man as of his crimes or his inhumanity; but here all is great and magnificent, and there is much, too, that is pleasing. Many of the higher cliffs, which rise beyond the influence of the spray, are tapestried with ivy. We may see the heron watching on the ledges beside her bundle of withered twigs, or the blue hawk darting from her cell. There is life on every side of us; life in even the wild tumbling of the waves, and in the stream of pure water which, rushing from the higher edge of the precipice in a long white cord, gradually untwists itself by the way, and spatters ceaselessly among the stones over the entrance of one of the caves. Nor does the scene want its old story to strengthen its hold on the imagination.

I am wretchedly uncertain in my dates; but it must have been some time late in the reign of Queen Anne,

that a fishing yawl, after vainly laboring for hours to enter the bay of Cromarty, during a strong gale from the west, was forced at nightfall to relinquish the attempt, and take shelter in the Cova Green. The crew consisted of but two persons, — an old fisherman and his son. Both had been thoroughly drenched by the spray, and chilled by the piercing wind, which, accompanied by thick snow showers, had blown all day through the opening from off the snowy top of Ben Wyvis; and it was with no ordinary satisfaction that, as they opened the little bay on their last tack, they saw the red gleam of a fire flickering from one of the caves, and a boat drawn upon the beach.

“It must be some of the Tarbet fishermen,” said the old man, “wind-bound, like ourselves, but wiser than us in having made provision for it. I shall feel willing enough to share their fire with them for the night.”

“But see,” remarked the younger, “that there be no unwillingness on the other side. I am much mistaken if that be not the boat of my cousins the Macinlas, who would so fain have broken my head last Rhorichie Tryst. But, hap what may, father, the night is getting worse, and we have no choice of quarters. Hard up your helm, or we shall barely clear the skerries. There, now; every nail an anchor.” He leaped ashore, carrying with him the small hawser attached to the stern, which he wound securely round a jutting crag, and then stood for a few seconds, until the old man, who moved but heavily along the thwarts, had come up to him. All was comparatively calm under the lee of the precipices; but the wind was roaring fearfully in the woods above, and whistling amid the furze and ivy of the higher cliff; and the two boatmen, as they entered the cave, could see the flakes of

a thick snow shower, that had just begun to descend, circling round and round in the eddy.

The place was occupied by three men, who were sitting beside the fire on blocks of stone which had been rolled from the beach. Two of them were young, and comparatively commonplace-looking persons; the third was a gray-headed old man, apparently of great muscular strength, though long past his prime, and of a peculiarly sinister cast of countenance. A keg of spirits, which was placed end up in front of them, served as a table; there were little drinking measures of tin on it; and the mask-like, stolid expressions of the two younger men showed that they had been indulging freely. The elder was apparently sober. They all started to their feet on the entrance of the fisherman, and one of the younger, laying hold of the little cask, pitched it hurriedly into a dark corner of the cave.

“His peace be here!” was the simple greeting of the elder fisherman as he came forward. “Eachen Macinla,” he continued, addressing the old man, “we have not met for years before, — not, I believe, since the death o’ my puir sister, when we parted such ill friends; but we are short-lived creatures oursels, Eachen; surely our anger should be short-lived too; and I have come to crave from you a seat by your fire.”

“William Beth,” replied Eachen, “it was no wish of mine we should ever meet; but to a seat by the fire you are welcome.”

Old Macinla and his sons resumed their seats; the two fishermen took their places fronting them; and for some time neither party exchanged a word.

A fire, composed mostly of fragments of wreck and drift-wood, threw up its broad, cheerful flame towards the roof; but so spacious was the cavern, that, except where here

and there a whiter mass of stalactites or bolder projection of cliff stood out from the darkness, the light seemed lost in it. A dense body of smoke, which stretched its blue level surface from side to side, and concealed the roof, went rolling outwards like an inverted river.

“This is but a gousty lodging-place,” remarked the old fisherman, as he looked round him; “but I have seen a worse. I wish the folk at hame kent we were half sae snug; and then the fire, too,—I have always felt something companionable in a fire, something consolable, as it were; it appears, somehow, as if it were a creature like ourselves, and had life in it.” The remark seemed directed to no one in particular, and there was no reply. In a second attempt at conversation, the fisherman addressed himself to the old man.

“It has vexed me,” he said, “that our young folk shouldna, for my sister’s sake, be on more friendly terms, Eachen. They hae been quarrelling, an’ I wish to see the quarrel made up.” The old man, without deigning a reply, knit his gray, shaggy brows, and looked doggedly at the fire.

“Nay, now,” continued the fisherman, “we are getting auld men, Eachen, an’ wauld better bury our hard thoughts o’ ane anither afore we come to be buried ourselves. What if we were sent to the Cova Green the night, just that we might part friends!”

Eachen fixed his keen, scrutinizing glance on the speaker,—it was but for a moment,—there was a tremulous motion of the under lip as he withdrew it, and a setting of the teeth,—the expression of mingled hatred and anger; but the tone of his reply savored more of sullen indifference than of passion.

“William Beth,” he said, “ye hae tricked my boys out o’ the bit property that suld hae come to them by their

mother ; it's no lang since they barely escaped being murdered by your son. What more want you ? But ye perhaps think it better that the time should be passed in making hollow lip. professions of good-will, than that it suld be employed in clearing off an old score."

"Ay," hickuped out the elder of the two sons ; "the houses might come my way then ; an', besides, gin Helen Henry were to lose her a'e jo, the ither might hae a better chance. Rise, brither ! rise, man ! an' fight for me an' your sweet-heart." The younger lad, who seemed verging towards the last stage of intoxication, struck his clenched fist against his palm, and attempted to rise.

"Look ye, uncle," exclaimed the younger fisherman, — a powerful-looking and very handsome stripling, — as he sprang to his feet ; "your threat might be spared. Our little property was my grandfather's, and naturally descended to his only son ; and as for the affair at Rhorichie, I dare either of my cousins to say the quarrel was of my seeking. I have no wish to raise my hand against the sons or the husband of my aunt ; but if forced to it, you will find that neither my father nor myself are wholly at your mercy."

"Whisht, Earnest," said the old fisherman, laying his hand on the hand of the young man ; "sit down ; your uncle mann hae ither thoughts. It is now fifteen years, Eachen," he continued, "since I was called to my sister's deathbed. You yoursel' canna forget what passed there. There had been grief an' cauld an' hunger beside that bed. I'll no say you were willingly unkind, — few folk are that, but when they hae some purpose to serve by it, an' you could have none, — but you laid no restraint on a harsh temper, and none on a craving habit that forgets everything but itsel' ; and so my puir sister perished in the middle o' her days, a wasted, heart-broken thing. It's no that I wish to

hurt you. I mind how we passed our youth thegither among the wild buccaneers. It was a bad school, Eachen; an' I owre often feel I havena unlearned a' my ain lessons, to wonder that you shouldna hae unlearned a' yours. But we're getting old men Eachen, an' we have now, what we hadna in our young days, the advantage o' the light. Dinna let us die fools in the sight o' Him who is so willing to give us wisdom; dinna let us die enemies. We have been early friends, though maybe no for good, we have fought afore now at the same gun; we have been united by the luv o' her that's now in the dust; an' there are our boys, — the nearest o' kin to ane anither that death has spared. But what I feel as strongly as a' the rest, Eachen, we hae done meikle ill thegither. I can hardly think o' a past sin without thinking o' you, an' thinking, too, that if a creature like me may hope he has found pardon, you shouldna despair. Eachen, we maun be friends."

The features of the stern old man relaxed. "You are perhaps right, William," he at length replied; "but ye were aye a luckier man than me, — luckier for this world, I'm sure, an' maybe for the next. I had aye to seek, an' aften without finding, the good that came in your gate o' itsel'. Now that age is coming upon us, ye get a snug rental frae the little houses, an' I hae naething; an' ye hae character an' credit; but wha would trust me, or cares for me? Ye hae been made an elder o' the kirk, too, I hear, an' I am still a reprobate; but we were a' born to be just what we are, an' sae maun submit. An' your son, too, shares in your luck. He has heart an' hand, an' my whelps hae neither; an' the girl Henry, that scouts that sot there, likes him; but what wonder o' that? But you are right, William; we maun be friends. Pledge me." The little cask was produced; and, filling the measures, he nodded

to Earnest and his father. They pledged him, when, as if seized by a sudden frenzy, he filled his measure thrice in hasty succession, draining it each time to the bottom, and then flung it down with a short, hoarse laugh. His sons, who would fain have joined with him, he repulsed with a firmness of manner which he had not before exhibited. "No, whelps," he said; "get sober as fast as ye can."

"We had better," whispered Earnest to his father, "not sleep in the cave to-night."

"Let me hear now o' your quarrel, Earnest," said Echan; "your father was a more prudent man than you; and, however much he wronged me, did it without quarrelling."

"The quarrel was none of my seeking," replied Earnest. "I was insulted by your sons, and would have borne it for the sake of what they seemed to forget; but there was another whom they also insulted, and that I could not bear."

"The girl Henry. And what then?"

"Why, my cousins may tell the rest. They were mean enough to take odds against me, and I just beat the two spiritless fellows that did so."

But why record the quarrels of this unfortunate evening? An hour or two passed away in disagreeable bickerings, during which the patience of even the old fisherman was worn out, and that of Earnest had failed him altogether. They both quitted the cave, boisterous as the night was, — and it was now stormier than ever, — and, heaving off their boat till she rode at the full length of her swing from the shore, sheltered themselves under the sail. The Macinlas returned next evening to Tarbet; but, though the wind moderated during the day, the yawl of William Beth did not enter the Bay of Cromarty. Weeks passed away,

during which the clergyman of the place corresponded regarding the missing fisherman with all the lower parts of the Frith, but they had disappeared, as it seemed, for ever.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE the northern Sutor sinks into the low sandy tract that nearly fronts the town of Cromarty, there is a narrow grassy terrace raised but a few yards over the level of the beach. It is sheltered behind by a steep, undulating bank ; for, though the rock here and there juts out, it is too rich in vegetation to be termed a precipice. It is a sweet little spot, with its grassy slopes, that recline towards the sun, partially covered with thickets of wild rose and honeysuckle, and studded in their season with violets and daisies and the delicate rock geranium. Towards its eastern extremity, with the bank rising immediately behind, and an open space in front, which seemed to have been cultivated at one time as a garden, there stood a picturesque little cottage. It was that of the widow of William Beth. Five years had now elapsed since the disappearance of her son and husband, and the cottage bore the marks of neglect and decay. The door and window, bleached white by the sea-winds, shook loosely to every breeze ; clusters of chickweed luxuriated in the hollows of the thatch, or mantled over the eaves ; and a honeysuckle, that had twisted itself round the chimney, lay withering in a tangled mass at the foot of the wall.

But the progress of decay was more marked in the widow

herself than in her dwelling. She had had to contend with grief and penury; a grief not the less undermining in its effects from the circumstance of its being sometimes suspended by hope; a penury so extreme that every succeeding day seemed as if won by some providential interference from absolute want. And she was now, to all appearance, fast sinking in the struggle. The autumn was well-nigh over. She had been weak and ailing for months before, and had now become so feeble as to be confined for days together to her bed. But, happily, the poor solitary woman had at least one attached friend in the daughter of a farmer of the parish, a young and beautiful girl, who, though naturally of no melancholy temperament, seemed to derive almost all she enjoyed of pleasure from the society of the widow. Helen Henry was in her twenty-first year, but she seemed older in spirit than in years. She was thin and pale, though exquisitely formed. There was a drooping heaviness in her fine eyes, and a cast of pensive thought on her forehead, that spoke of a longer experience of grief than so brief a portion of life might be supposed to have furnished. She had once lovers, but they had gradually dropped away in the despair of moving her, and awed by a deep and settled pensiveness, which, in the gayest season of youth, her character had suddenly but permanently assumed. Besides, they all knew her affections were already engaged, and had come to learn, though late and unwillingly, that there are cases in which no rival can be more formidable than a dead one.

Autumn, I have said, was near its close. The weather had given indications of an early and severe winter; and the widow, whose worn-out and delicate frame was affected by every change of atmosphere, had for a few days been more than usually indisposed. It was now long past noon,

and she had but just risen. The apartment, however, bore witness that her young friend had paid her the accustomed morning visit ; the fire was blazing on a clean, comfortable-looking hearth, and every little piece of furniture it contained was arranged with the most scrupulous care. Her devotions were hardly over when the well-known tap was again heard at the door.

“Come in, my lassie,” said the widow ; and then lowering her voice, as the light foot of her friend was heard on the threshold, “God,” she said, “has been ever kind to me ; far, very far, aboon my best deservings ; and oh, may he bless and reward her who has done so meikle, meikle for me !” The young girl entered and took her seat beside her.

“You told me, mother,” she said, “that to-morrow is Earnest’s birthday. I have been thinking of it all last night, and feel as if my heart were turning into stone. But when I am alone it is always so. There is a cold, death-like weight at my breast, that makes me unhappy ; though, when I come to you, and we speak together, the feeling passes away, and I become cheerful.”

“Ah, my bairn,” replied the old woman, “I fear I’m no your friend, meikle as I love you. We speak owre, owre often o’ the lost, for our foolish hearts find mair pleasure in that than in anything else ; but ill does it fit us for being alone. Weel do I ken your feeling, — a stone deadness o’ the heart, — a feeling there are no words to express, but that seems as it were insensibility itself turning into pain ; and I ken, too, my lassie, that it is nursed by the very means ye tak to flee from it. Ye maun learn to think mair o’ the living, and less o’ the dead. Little, little does it matter how a puir worn-out creature like me passes the few broken days o’ life that remains to her ; but ye are

young, my Helen, an' the world is a' before you; and ye maun just try an' live for it."

"To-morrow," rejoined Helen, "is Earnest's birthday. Is it no strange that, when our minds make pictures o' the dead, it is always as they looked best an' kindest an' maist life-like; I have been seeing Earnest all night long, as when I saw him on his last birthday; an' oh, the sharpness o' the pang, when, every now an' then, the back o' the picture is turned to me, an' I see him as he is, — dust!"

The widow grasped her young friend by the hand. "Helen," she said, "you will get better when I am taken from you; but so long as we continue to meet, our thoughts will aye be running the one way. I had a strange dream last night, an' must tell it to you. You see yon rock to the east, in the middle o' the little bay, that now rises through the back draught o' the sea, like the hull o' a ship, an' is now buried in a mountain o' foam? I dreamed I was sitting on that rock, in what seemed a bonny summer's morning. The sun was glancin' on the water, an' I could see the white sand far down at the bottom, wi' the reflection o' the little wavyies running o'er it in long curls o' goud. But there was no way o' leaving the rock, for the deep waters were round an' round me; an' I saw the tide covering one wee bittie after another, till at last the whole was covered. An' yet I had but little fear; for I remembered that baith Earnest an' William were in the sea afore me; an' I had the feeling that I could hae rest nowhere but wi' them. The water at last closed o'er me, an' I sank frae aff the rock to the sand at the bottom. But death seemed to have no power given him to hurt me; an' I walked as light as ever I hae done on a gowany brae, through the green depths o' the sea. I saw the silvery glitter o' the trout an' the salmon shining to the sun, far,

far aboon me, like white pigeons in the lift; an' around me there were crimson star-fish an' sea-flowers an' long trailing plants, that waved in the tide like streamers; an' at length I came to a steep rock, wi' a little cave like a tomb in it. 'Here,' I said, 'is the end o' my journey. William is here, an' Earnest.' An', as I looked into the cave, I saw there were bones in it, an' I prepared to take my place beside them. But, as I stooped to enter, some one called me, an', on looking up, there was William. 'Lillias,' he said, 'it is not night yet, nor is that your bed; you are to sleep, not with me, but with Earnest. Haste you home, for he is waiting you.' 'Oh, take me to him!' I said; an' then all at once I found myself on the shore, dizzied an' blinded wi' the bright sunshine; for at the cave there was a darkness like that o' a simmer's gloamin'; an' when I looked up for William, it was Earnest that stood before me, life-like an' handsome as ever; an' you were beside him."

The day had been gloomy and lowering, and, though there was little wind, a tremendous sea, that, as the evening advanced, rose higher and higher against the neighboring precipice, had been rolling ashore since morning. The wind now began to blow in long hollow gusts among the cliffs, and the rain to patter against the widow's casement.

"It will be a storm from the sea," she said; "the scarts an' gulls hae been flying landward sin' daybreak, an' I hae never seen the ground-swell come home heavier against the rocks. Wae's me for the puir sailors!"

"In the lang stormy nights," said Helen, "I canna sleep for thinking o' them, though I have no one to bind me to them now. Only look how the sea rages among the rocks, as if it were a thing o' life an' passion! That last wave rose to the crane's nest. An' look, yonder is a boat round-

ing the rock wi' only a'e man in it. It dances on the surf as if it were a cork ; an' the wee bittie o' sail, sae black an' weet, seems scarcely bigger than a napkin. Is it no bearing in for the boat-haven below ? ”

“ My poor old eyes,” replied the widow, “ are growing dim, an' surely no wonder ; but yet I think I should ken that boatman. Is it no Eachen Macinla o' Tarbet ? ”

“ Hard-hearted, cruel old man ! ” exclaimed the maiden ; “ what can be takin' him here ? Look how his skiff shoots in like an arrow on the long roll o' the surf ! an' now she is high on the beach. How unfeeling it was o' him to rob you o' your little property in the very first o' your grief ! But see, he is so worn out that he can hardly walk over the rough stones. Ah me ! he is down ; wretched old man, I must run to his assistance. But no ; he has risen again. See, he is coming straight to the house ; an' now he is at the door.” In a moment after, Eachen entered the cottage.

“ I am perishing, Lillias,” he said, “ with cold an' hunger, an' can gang nae further ; surely ye'll no shut your door on me in a night like this.”

The poor widow had been taught in a far different school. She relinquished to the worn-out fisherman her seat by the fire, now hurriedly heaped with fresh fuel, and hastened to set before him the simple viands which her cottage afforded.

As the night darkened, the storm increased. The wind roared among the rocks like the rattling of a thousand carriages over a paved street ; and there were times when, after a sudden pause, the blast struck the cottage as if it were a huge missile flung against it, and pressed on its roof and walls till the very floor rocked, and the rafters strained and shivered like the beams of a stranded vessel. There was a ceaseless patter of mingled rain and snow, now

lower, now louder ; and the fearful thunderings of the waves, as they raged among the pointed crags, were mingled with the hoarse roll of the storm along the beach. The old man sat beside the fire, fronting the widow and her companion, with his head reclined nearly as low as his knee, and his hands covering his face. There was no attempt at conversation. He seemed to shudder every time the blast yelled along the roof ; and, as a fiercer gust burst open the door, there was a half-muttered ejaculation.

“Heaven itsel’ hae mercy on them ! for what can man do in a night like this ?”

“It is black as pitch,” exclaimed Helen, who had risen to draw the bolt ; “an’ the drift flies sae thick, that it feels to the hand like a solid snaw wreath. An’ oh, how it lightens !”

“Heaven itsel’ hae mercy on them !” again ejaculated the old man. “My two boys,” said he, addressing the widow, “are at the far Frith ; an’ how can an open boat live in a night like this ?”

There seemed something magical in the communication, — something that awakened all the sympathies of the poor bereaved woman ; and she felt she could forgive him every unkindness.

“Wae’s me !” she exclaimed ; “it was in such a night as this, an’ seareely sae wild, that my Earnest perished.”

The old man groaned and wrung his hands.

In one of the pauses of the hurricane there was a gun heard from the sea, and shortly after a second. “Some puir vessel in distress,” said the widow ; “but, alas ! where can succor come frae in sae terrible a night ? There is help only in Ane. Wae’s me ! would we no better light up a blaze on the floor, an’, dearest Helen, draw off the cover frae the window ? My puir Earnest has told me that my

light has aften showed him his bearing frae the deadly bed o' Dunskaith. That last gun," — for a third was now heard booming over the mingled roar of the sea and the wind, — "that last gun cam' frae the very rock-edge. Wae's me, wae's me! maun they perish, an' sae near!" Helen hastily lighted a bundle of more fir, that threw up its red sputtering blaze half way to the roof, and, dropping the covering, continued to wave it opposite the window. Guns were still heard at measured intervals, but apparently from a safer offing; and at last, as it sounded faintly against the wind, came evidently from the interior of the bay.

"She has escaped," said the old man. "It's a feeble hand that canna do good when the heart is willing. But what has mine been doin' a' life lang?" He looked at the window, and shuddered.

Towards morning the wind fell, and the moon, in her last quarter, rose red and glaring out of the Frith, lighting the melancholy roll of the waves, that still rose like mountains, and the broad white belt of surf that skirted the shores. The old fisherman left the cottage, and sauntered along the beach. It was heaped with huge wreaths of kelp and tangle, uprooted by the storm; and in the hollow of the rocky bay lay the scattered fragments of a boat. Each man stooped to pick up a piece of the wreck, in the fearful expectation of finding some known mark by which to recognize it, when the light fell full on the swollen face of a corpse that seemed staring at him from out a wreath of weed. It was that of his eldest son. The body of the younger, fearfully gashed and mangled by the rocks, lay a few yards further to the east.

The morning was as pleasant as the night had been boisterous; and except that the distant hills were covered with snow, and that a swell still continued to roll in from

the sea, there remained scarce any trace of the recent tempest. Every hollow of the neighboring hill had its little runnel, formed by the rains of the previous night, that now splashed and glistened to the sun. The bushes round the cottage were well-nigh divested of their leaves; but their red berries, hips and haws, and the juicy fruit of the honeysuckle, gleamed cheerfully to the light; and a warm steam of vapor, like that of a May morning, rose from the roof and the little mossy platform in front. But the scene seemed to have something more than merely its beauty to recommend it to a young man, drawn apparently to the spot, with many others, by the fate of the two unfortunate fishermen, and who now stood gazing on the rocks and the hills and the cottage, as a lover on the features of his mistress. The bodies had been carried to an old store-house, which may still be seen a short mile to the west; and the crowds that, during the early part of the morning, had been perambulating the beach, gazing at the wreck, and discussing the various probabilities of the accident, had gradually dispersed. But this solitary individual, whom no one knew, remained behind. He was a tall and swarthy, though very handsome man, of about five-and-twenty, with a slight scar on his left cheek. His dress, which was plain and neat, was distinguished from that of the common seaman by three narrow stripes of gold-lace on the upper part of one of the sleeves. He had twice stepped towards the cottage-door, and twice drawn back, as if influenced by some unaccountable feeling, — timidity, perhaps, or bashfulness; and yet the bearing of the man gave little indication of either. But at length, as if he had gathered heart, he raised the latch and went in.

The widow, who had had many visitors that morning, seemed to be scarcely aware of his entrance. She was

sitting on a low seat beside the fire, her face covered with her hands; while the tremulous rocking motion of her body showed that she was still brooding over the distresses of the previous night. Her companion, who had thrown herself across the bed, was fast asleep. The stranger seated himself beside the fire, which seemed dying amid its ashes; and, turning sedulously from the light of the window, laid his hand gently on the widow's shoulder. She started, and looked up.

“I have strange news for you,” he said. “You have long mourned for your husband and your son; but, though the old man has been dead for years, your son Earnest is still alive, and is now in the harbor of Cromarty. He is lieutenant of the vessel whose guns you must have heard during the night.”

The poor woman seemed to have lost all power of reply.

“I am a friend of Earnest's,” continued the stranger, “and have come to prepare you for meeting with him. It is now five years since his father and he were blown off to sea by a strong gale from the land. They drove before it for four days, when they were picked up by an armed vessel then cruising in the North Sea, and which soon after sailed for the coast of Spanish America. The poor old man sank under the fatigues he had undergone; though Earnest, better able, from his youth, to endure hardship, was little affected by them. He accompanied us on our Spanish expedition; indeed, he had no choice, for we touched at no British port after meeting with him; and, through good fortune, and what his companions call merit, he has risen to be the second man aboard, and has now brought home with him gold enough from the Spaniards to make his old mother comfortable. He saw your light yester-evening, and steered by it to the roadstead, blessing you all the way.

Tell me, for he anxiously wished me to inquire of you, whether Helen Henry is yet unmarried."

"It is Earnest! it is Earnest himself!" exclaimed the maiden, as she started from the widow's bed. In a moment after, she was locked in his arms. But why dwell on a scene which I feel myself unfitted to describe?

It was ill before evening with old Eachen Macinla. The fatigues of the present day, and the grief and horror of the previous night, had prostrated his energies, bodily and mental; and he now lay tossing, in a waste apartment of the storehouse, in the delirium of a fever. The bodies of his two sons occupied the floor below. He muttered unceasingly, in his ravings, of William and Earnest Beth. They were standing beside him, he said; and every time he attempted to pray for his poor boys and himself the stern old man laid his cold swollen hand on his lips.

"Why trouble me?" he exclaimed. "Why stare with your white dead eyes on me? Away, old man; the little black shells are sticking in your gray hairs; away to your place! Was it I who raised the wind on the sea? — was it I? — was it I? Uh, u! — no — no; you were asleep, — you were fast asleep, — and could not see me cut the *swing*; and, besides, it was only a piece of rope. Keep away; touch me not; I am a free man, and will plead for my life. Please your honor, I did not murder these two men; I only cut the rope that fastened their boat to the land. Ha! ha! ha! he has ordered them away, and they have both left me unskathed." At this moment Earnest Beth entered the apartment, and approached the bed. The miserable old man raised himself on his elbow, and, regarding him with a horrid stare, shrieked out, "Here is Earnest Beth, come for me a second time!" and, sinking back on the pillow, instantly expired.