THE ROMANCE OF WAR, VOLUME 1

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Title: The Romance of War, Volume 1 (of 3)
or, The Highlanders in Spain

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Release Date: June 15, 2017 [eBook #54918]

Language: English

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Produced by Al Haines.

THE ROMANCE OF WAR:

OR,

THE HIGHLANDERS IN SPAIN

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.

Late 62nd Regiment.

"In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come;
Our loud-sounding pipe breathes the true martial strain,
And our hearts still the old Scottish valour retain."

Lt.-Gen. Erskine.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1846.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MAURICE AND CO., HOWFORD BUILDINGS,
FENCHURCH STREET.

PREFACE.

Notwithstanding the numerous volumes which have been given to the public relative to the glorious operations of the British Army, for rescuing Portugal and Spain from the grasp of the invader, the Author of this work flatters himself that

it will not be found deficient in novelty or interest. He acknowledges that, according to precedent, scenes and incidents have been introduced into it which are purely imaginary, and whether he ought to apologize for these, or to make a merit of them, he must leave his readers to decide, according to their individual tastes and predilections.

It will need no great sagacity to discriminate between this portion and the veritable historical and military details, the result of the experience of one,[*] who had the honour of serving in that gallant corps to which these volumes more especially relate, during the whole of its brilliant course of service in the Peninsula, and who participated in all the proud feelings which arose when contemplating the triumphant career of an army, whose deeds and victories are unsurpassed in the annals of war.

[*] A near relation of the author.

Most of the military operations, and many of the characters, will be familiar to the survivors of the second division, and brother-officers will recognise many old associates in the convivialities of the mess-table, and in the perils of the battle-field. The names of others belong to history, and with them the political or military reader will be already acquainted.

It is impossible for a writer to speak of his own productions, without exposing himself to imputations of either egotism or affected modesty; the Author therefore will merely add, that he trusts that most readers may discover something to attract in these volumes, which depict from the life the stirring events and all the romance of warfare, with the various lights and shades of military service, the principal characters being members of one of those brave regiments, which, from their striking garb, national feelings, romantic sentiments, and *esprit de corps*, are essentially different from the generality of our troops of the line.

EDINBURGH,

Nov. 1846.

CONTENTS

Chapter

I. Introductory
II. Interviews
III. A True Highlander
IV. The Departure
V. Edinburgh Castle
VI. Foreign Service
VII. Merida
VIII. An Adventure
IX. Donna Catalina
X. Flirtation
XI. Alice Lisle.—News from Home
XII. The Condé
XIII. The Duel
XIV. Muleteers
XV. The Banditti
XVI. A Siege
XVII. A Meeting

THE ROMANCE OF WAR.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"Still linger in our northern clime
Some remnants of the good old time;
And still within our valleys here
We hold the kindred title dear;
Even though perchance its far-fetched claim,
To Southron ear, sounds empty name;
For course of blood, our proverbs deem,
Is warmer than the mountain stream."
Marmion, canto vi.

In the Highlands of Perthshire a deadly feud had existed, from time immemorial, between the Lisles of Inchavon and the Stuarts of Lochisla. In the days when the arm of the law was weak, the proprietors had often headed their kinsmen and followers in encounters with the sword, and for the last time during the memorable civil war of 1745-6. But between the heads of the families, towards the latter end of the last century, (the period when our tale commences,) although the era of feudal ideas and outrages had passed away, the spirit of transmitted hatred, proud rivalry and revenge, lurked behind, and a feeling of most cordial enmity existed between Stuart and Lisle, who were ever engaged in vexatious lawsuits on the most frivolous pretences, and constantly endeavouring to cross each other's interests and intentions,—quarrelling at public meetings,—voting on opposite sides,—prosecuting for trespasses, and opposing each other every where, "as if the world was not wide enough for them both;" and on one occasion a duel would have ensued but for the timely interference of the sheriff.

Sir Allan Lisle of Inchavon, a man of a quiet and most benevolent disposition, was heartily tired of the trouble given him by the petty jealousy of his neighbour Stuart, a proud and irritable Highlander, who would never stoop to reconciliation with a family whom his father (a grim *duinhe-wassal* of the old school) had ever declared to him were the hereditary foes of his race. The reader may consider it singular that such antiquated prejudices should exist so lately as the end of the last century; but it must be remembered that the march of intellect has not made such strides in the north country as it has done in the Lowlands, and many of the inhabitants of Perthshire will recognise a character well known to them, under the name of Mr. Stuart.

It must also be remembered, that he was the son of a man who had beheld the standard of the Stuarts unfurled in Glenfinan, and had exercised despotic power over his own vassals when the feudal system existed in its full force, before

the act of the British parliament abolished the feudal jurisdictions throughout Scotland, and absolved the unwilling Highlanders from allegiance to their chiefs.

Sir Allan Lisle (who was M.P. for a neighbouring county) was in every respect a man of superior attainments to Stuart,—being a scholar, the master of many modern accomplishments, and having made the grand tour. To save himself further annoyance, he would gladly have extended the right hand of fellowship to his stubborn neighbour, but pride forbade him to make the first advances.

The residence of this intractable Gael was a square tower, overgrown with masses of ivy, and bearing outwardly, and almost inwardly, the same appearance as when James the Fifth visited it once when on a hunting excursion. The walls were enormously thick; the grated windows were small and irregular; a corbelled battlement surmounted the top, from the stone bartizan of which the standard of the owner was, on great days, hoisted with much formality by Donald Iverach, the old piper, or Evan his son, two important personages in the household of the little tower.

This primitive fortalice was perched upon a projecting craig, which overhung the loch of Isla, a small but beautiful sheet of water, having in its centre an islet with the ruins of a chapel. The light-green birch and black sepulchral pine, flourishing wild and thickly, grew close to the edge of the loch, and cast their dark shadows upon its generally unruffled surface. Around, the hills rose lofty, precipitous, and abrupt from the margin of the lake; some were covered with foliage to the summit, and others, bare and bleak, covered only with the whin bush or purple heather, where the red roe and the black cock roved wild and free; while, dimly seen in the distance, rose the misty crest of Benmore, (nearly four thousand feet above the level of the sea,) the highest mountain, save one, in Perthshire.

A little *clachan*, or hamlet, consisting of about twenty green thatched cottages clustered together, with kail-yards behind, occupied the foot of the ascent leading to the tower; these were inhabited by the tenants, farm-servants, and herdsmen of Stuart. The graceful garb of the Gael was almost uniformly worn by the men; and the old wives, who in fine weather sat spinning on the turf-seats at the doors, wore the simple *mutch* and the varied tartan of their name. The wife of this Highland castellan had long been dead, as were their children excepting one son, who was almost the only near kinsman that Stuart had left.

Ronald was a handsome youth, with a proud dark eye, a haughty lip, and a bold and fearless heart,—possessing all those feelings which render the Scottish Highlander a being of a more elevated and romantic cast than his Lowland neighbours. He was well aware of the groundless animosity which his father nourished against Sir Allan Lisle; but as in the course of his lonely rambles, fishing, shooting, or hunting, he often when a boy encountered the younger members of the

Inchavon family, and as he found them agreeable companions and playmates, he was far from sharing in the feelings of his prejudiced father. He found Sir Allan's son, Lewis Lisle, an obliging and active youth, a perfect sportsman, who could wing a bird with a single ball, and who knew every corrie and chasm through which the wandering Isla flowed, and the deep pools where the best trout were always to be found.

In Alice Lisle Ronald found a pretty and agreeable playmate in youth, but a still more agreeable companion for a solitary ramble as they advanced in years; and he discovered in her splendid dark eyes and glossy black hair charms which he beheld not at home in his father's mountain tower.

During childhood, when the days passed swiftly and happily, the brother and sister, of a milder mood than Ronald Stuart, admired the activity with which he was wont to climb the highest craigs and trees, swinging himself, with the dexterity of a squirrel, from branch to branch, or rock to rock, seeking the nests of the eagle or raven, or flowers that grew in the clefts of Craigonan, to deck the dark curls of Alice. Still more were they charmed with the peculiarity of his disposition, which was deeply tinged with the gloomy and romantic,—a sentiment which exists in the bosom of every Highlander, imparted by the scenery amidst which he dwells, the lonely hills and silent shores of his lochs, pathless and solitary heaths, where cairns and moss-covered stones mark the tombs of departed warriors, pine-covered hills, frowning rocks, and solitary defiles,—all fraught with traditions of the past, or tales of mysterious beings who abide in them. These cause the Gaelic mountaineer to be a sadder and more thoughtful man than the dwellers in the low country, who inhabit scenes less grand and majestic.

In the merry laugh and the gentle voice of Alice, Ronald found a charm to wean him from the tower of Lochisla, and the hours which he spent in her society, or in watching the windows of her father's house, were supposed to be spent in search of the black cock and the fleet roes of Benmore; and many a satirical observation he endured, in consequence of bringing home an empty game-bag, after a whole day's absence with his gun.

Ronald enjoyed but little society at the tower. His father, in consequence of the death of his wife and younger children, and owing to many severe losses which he had sustained in the course of his long series of litigations, had become a moody and silent man, spending his days either in reading, or in solitary rides and rambles. His voice, which, when he did speak, was authoritative enough and loud, was seldom heard in the old tower, where the predominant sounds were the grunting tones of Janet, the aged housekeeper, who quarrelled continually with Donald Iverach, the piper, whenever the latter could find time, from his almost constant occupations of piping and drinking, to enjoy a skirmish with her.

As years crept on, the friendship between the young people strengthened, and in the breasts of Alice and Ronald Stuart became a deeper and a more absorbing feeling, binding them "heart to heart and mind to mind," and each became all the world unto the other. To them there was something pleasing and even romantic in the strange secrecy they were necessitated to use; believing that, should their intercourse ever come to the ears of their parents, effectual means would be taken to put a stop to it.

CHAPTER II.

INTERVIEWS.

"And must I leave my native isle—
Fair friendship's eye—affection's smile—
The mountain sport—the angler's wile—
The birch and weeping willow, O!
The Highland glen—the healthy gale—
The gloaming glee—the evening tale—
And must I leave my native vale,
And brave the boisterous billow, O!"
Hogg's Forest Minstrel.

"Alice! my own fair Alice! my hard destiny ordains that I must leave you," was the sorrowful exclamation of Ronald one evening, as he joined Alice at their usual place of meeting, a solitary spot on the banks of the Isla, where the willow and alder bush, overhanging the steep rocks, swept the dark surface of the stream.

"Leave me! O Ronald, what can you mean?" was the trembling reply of the fair girl, as she put her arm through his, and gazed anxiously on the troubled countenance of her lover.

"That I must go—far from you and the bonnie banks of the Isla. Yes, Alice; but it is only for a short time, I trust. Of the embarrassed state of my father's affairs, by his long law-suits and other matters, I have acquainted you already, and it has now become necessary for me to choose some profession. My choice has been the army: what other could one, possessing the true spirit of a Highland gentleman, follow?"

"O Ronald! I ever feared our happiness was too great to last long. Ah! you must not leave me."

"Alice," replied the young Highlander, his cheek flushing while he spoke, "our best and bravest men are going forth in thousands to meet the enemies of our country, drenching in their blood the fatal Peninsula; and can I remain behind, when so many of my name and kindred have fallen in the service of the king? Never has the honour of Scotland been tarnished by the few who have returned, nor lost by those who have fallen, in every clime, where the British standard has been unfurled against an enemy. An ensigncy has been promised me—and in a Highland regiment, wearing the garb, inheriting the spirit of the Gael, and commanded by a grandson of the great Lochiel; and I cannot shrink when my father bids me go, although my heart should almost burst at leaving you behind, my own—own Alice!" and he pressed to his bosom the agitated girl, who seemed startled at the vehemence with which he had spoken.

"But hold, Alice," he added, on perceiving tears trembling on her dark eyelashes; "you must not give way thus. I will return, and all will yet be well. Only imagine what happiness will then be ours, should the families be on good terms, and I, perhaps, Sir Ronald Stewart, and knight of I know not how many orders?"

"Ah, Ronald! but think of how many have left their happy homes with hearts beating high with hope and pride, and left them never to return. Did not the three sons of your cousin of Strathonan leave their bones on the red sands of Egypt? and many more can I name. Ah! how I tremble to think of the scenes that poor soldiers must behold,—scenes of which I cannot form even the slightest conception."

"These are sad forebodings," replied the young man, smiling tenderly, "and from the lips of one less young and less beautiful than yourself, might have been considered as omens of mischance. I trust, however, that I, who have so often shot the swiftest red roes in Strathisla, slept whole nights on the frozen heather, and know so well the use of the target and claymore, (thanks to old Iverach,) shall make no bad soldier or campaigner, and endure the hardships incident to a military life infinitely better than the fine gentlemen of the Lowland cities. The proud Cameron who is to command me will, I am sure, be my friend; he will not forget that his grandsire's life was saved by mine at Culloden, and he will regard me with the love of the olden time, for the sake of those that are dead and gone. Oh, Alice! I could view the bright prospect which is before me with tumultuous joy, but for the sorrow of leaving you, my white-haired father, and the bonnie braes and deep corries of Isla. But if with Heaven's aid I escape, promise, Alice, that when I return you will be mine,—mine by a dearer title than ever I could call you heretofore."

"Ronald—dearest Ronald! I will love you as I have ever done," she said in

a soft yet energetic tone; "and I feel a secret voice within me which tells that the happy anticipations of the past will—will yet be accomplished." The girl laid her blushing cheek on the shoulder of the young man, and her dark thick curls, becoming free from the little cap or bonnet which had confined them, fell over his breast in disorder.

At that exciting moment of passion and mental tumult, Ronald's eye met a human countenance observing them sternly from among the leaves of the trees that flourished near them. The foliage was suddenly pushed aside, and Sir Allan Lisle appeared, scanning the young offenders with a stern glance of displeasure and surprise. He was a tall thin man, in the prime of life, with a fine countenance expressive of mildness and benevolence. He wore his hair thickly powdered, and tied in a queue behind. He carried a heavy hunting-whip in his hand, which he grasped ominously as he turned his keen eye alternately from the young man to his trembling daughter, who, leaning against a tree, covered her face with her handkerchief and sobbed hysterically. Ronald Stuart stood erect, and returned Sir Allan's glance as firmly and as proudly as he could, but he felt some trouble in maintaining his self-possession. His smart blue bonnet had fallen off, fully revealing his strongly-marked and handsome features, where Sir Allan read at once that he was a bold youth, with whom proud looks and hard words would little avail.

"How now, sir!" said he at length. "What am I to understand by all this? Speak, young gentleman," he added, perceiving that Ronald was puzzled, "answer me truly: as the father of this imprudent girl, I am entitled to a reply."

Ronald was about to stammer forth something.

"You are, I believe, the son of Stuart of Lochisla?" interrupted Sir Allan sternly, "who is far from being a friend to me or mine. How long is it since you have known my daughter? and what am I to understand from the scene you have acted here?"

"That I love Miss Lisle with the utmost tenderness that one being is capable of entertaining for another," replied Ronald, his face suffusing with a crimson glow at the earnest confession. "Sir Allan, if you have seen what passed just now, you will perceive that I treat her with that respect and delicacy which the beauties of her mind and person deserve."

"This is indeed all very fine, sir! and very romantic too; but rather unexpected—upon my honour rather so," replied the baronet sarcastically, as he drew the arm of the weeping Alice through his. "But pray, Master Stuart, how long has this clandestine matter been carried on? how long have you been acquainted?"

"From our earliest childhood, sir,—indeed I tell you truly,—from the days in which we used to gather wild flowers and berries together as little children.

We have been ever together; a day has scarcely elapsed without our seeing each other, and there is not a dingle of the woods, a dark corrie of the Isla, or a spot on the braes of Strathonan, where we have not wandered hand in hand, since the days when Alice was a laughing little girl with flaxen curls until now, when she is become tall, beautiful, and almost a woman, with ringlets as black as the wing of the muircock. But your son Lewis will tell all these things better than I can, as I am rather confused just now, Sir Allan."

"'Tis very odd this matter has been concealed from me so long," said the other, softened by the earnest tone of the young man, who felt how much depended upon the issue of the present unlooked-for interview; "and if my ears have not deceived me, I think I heard you offer marriage to my foolish daughter on your return from somewhere?"

"It is very true, sir," replied the young man modestly.

"And pray, young sir! what are your pretensions to the hand of Miss Lisle?"

"Sir!" ejaculated Ronald, his cheek flushing and his eye sparkling at the angry inquiry of the other.

"I ask you, Mr Stuart, what are they? Your father I know to be an almost ruined man, whose estates are deeply dipped and overwhelmed by bonds, mortgages, and what not. He has moreover been a deadly enemy to me, and has most unwarrantably——"

"Oh, pray, papa! dear papa!" urged the young lady imploringly.

"Sir Allan Lisle," cried Ronald with a stern tone, while his heart beat tumultuously, "Lowland lawyers and unlooked-for misfortunes are, I know, completing our ruin, and the pen and parchment have made more inroads upon us than ever your ancestors could have done with all Perthshire at their back; but, truly, it ill becomes a gentleman of birth and breeding to speak thus slightingly of an old and honourable Highland family. If my father, inheriting as he does ancient prejudices, has been hostile to your interests, I, Sir Allan, never have been so; and the time was once, when a Lisle dared not have spoken thus tauntingly to a Stuart of the house of Lochisla."

Sir Allan admired the proud and indignant air with which the youth spoke; but he wished to humble him if possible, and deemed that irony was a better weapon than anger to meet the fiery young Highlander with. He gave a sort of tragi-comic start, and was about to make some sarcastic reply, when his foot caught the root of a tree; he reeled backward, and fell over the rocky bank into the Isla, which formed a deep, dark, and noiseless pool below.

A loud and startling cry burst from Alice, as her father suddenly disappeared from her side.

"Save him, save him, Ronald! Oh, Ronald! if you love me, save my father!" she cried in accents at once soul-stirring and imploring, while she threw herself

upon her knees, and, not daring to look upon the stream, covered her eyes with her hands, calling alternately upon Heaven and her lover, in tones which defy the power of language to describe, to save her father.

"Dearest Alice, calm yourself; be pacified,—he shall not perish," cried Ronald, whose presence of mind had never once forsaken him, as he cast aside his bonnet and short sporting coat, and gazed over the bank upon the rapid river running between two abrupt walls of rock, against the dark sides of which the spray and foam raised by Sir Allan's struggles was dashed. The latter was beating the water fruitlessly in the centre of the pool, where it was deep and the current strong; yet he made no outcry, as if unwilling to add to the distress which he knew his daughter already experienced.

He bestowed one look of terror and agony on Ronald, who instantly sprang off the precipitous rock, and swimming round him, strongly and vigorously in wide circles, caught him warily by the hair, and holding his head above the surface of the stream, swam down the current to a spot where the bank was less steep, and with some exertion landed him safely on the green turf, where he lay long speechless; while Alice wrung her hands, and wept in an ecstasy of terror, embracing her father and his preserver by turns. The latter, who was nothing the worse for his ducking, put on his bonnet and upper garment with perfect *sang froid*; but it was some time before Sir Allan recovered himself so far as to be able to thank his preserver, who poured down his throat as he lay prostrate the contents of a metal hunting-flask, which he generally carried about with him filled with the best brandy, procured, by means unknown, duty free at Lochisla.

Shortly and emphatically did Sir Allan thank Ronald for the aid he had rendered, as he must inevitably have perished, being unable to swim, and having to contend with a strong current, which would soon have carried him over the high cascade of Corrie-avon. Ronald inwardly blessed the accident which had rendered Sir Allan so much his debtor, and wrought such a happy change of sentiment in his favour. He accompanied Alice and her father to one of the gate-lodges of Inchavon, and there resisting an earnest invitation to the house, he returned with all speed home, not ill pleased with the issue of the day's adventures.

CHAPTER III.

A TRUE HIGHLANDER.

"Not much his new ally he loved,
Yet when he saw what hap had proved,
He greeted him right heartilie;
He would not waken old debate,
For he was void of rancorous hate,
Though rude, and scant of courtesy."
The Last Minstrel, canto v.

One fine forenoon, a few days after the occurrences related in the last chapter, a horseman appeared riding along the narrow uneven road leading by the banks of Lochisla towards the tower. It was Sir Allan Lisle, who came along at a slow trot, managing his nag with the ease and grace of a perfect rider, never making use of either whip or spur, but often drawing in his rein to indulge the pleasure and curiosity with which he beheld (though accustomed to the splendid scenery of Perthshire) this secluded spot, which he had never seen before,—the black and solitary tower, the dark blue waveless loch, and the wild scenery by which it was surrounded.

As he advanced up the ascent towards the tower, his horse began to snort, shake its mane, and grow restive, as its ears were saluted by a noise to which they were unaccustomed.

Donald Iverach, the old piper of the family, (which office his ancestors had held since the days of Robert the Second, according to his own account,) was pacing with a stately air to and fro before the door of the fortalice, with the expanded bag of the piob mhor under his arm, blowing from its long chaunter and three huge drones "a tempest of dissonance;" while he measured with regular strides the length of the barbican or court, at one end of which stood a large stoup of whisky, (placed on the end of a cask,) to which he applied himself at every turn of his promenade to wet his whistle.

The piper, though of low stature, was of a powerful, athletic, and sinewy form, and although nearly sixty, was as fresh as when only sixteen; his face was rough and purple, from drinking and exposure to the weather; his huge red whiskers curled round beneath his chin and grew up to his eyes, which twinkled and glittered beneath their shaggy brows; a smart blue bonnet set jauntily, very much over the right eye, gave him a knowing look, and his knees, "which had never known covering from the day of his birth," where exposed by the kilt were hairy and rough as the hide of the roe-buck; his plaid waved behind, and a richly mounted dirk, eighteen inches long, hanging on his right side, completed his attire.

Great was the surprise of the Celt when, on turning in his march, he sud-

denly beheld Sir Allan Lisle, whom he had not seen since the last year, when by the laird's orders he had endeavoured, by the overwhelming noise of his pipe, to drown a speech which the baronet was addressing to the electors of the county. But what earthly errand, thought Donald, could bring a Lisle up Strathisla, where one of the race had not been seen since the father of the present Sir Allan had beleagured the tower in 1746 with a party of the Scottish Fusileers. The chaunter fell from the hand of the astonished piper, and the wind in the bag of his instrument escaped with an appalling groan.

"My good friend, I am glad you have ceased at last," said Sir Allan; "I expected every moment that my horse would have thrown me. This fortress of yours will be secure against cavalry while you are in it, I dare swear."

"I dinna ken, sir," replied the piper, touching his bonnet haughtily; "but when pare-leggit gillies and red coats tried it in the troublesome times, they aye gat the tead man's share o' the deep loch below."

"Is your master—is Lochisla at home?"

"His honour the laird is within," replied Iverach, as Sir Allan dismounted and desired him to hold his horse.

"Lochisla's piper will hold nae man's bridle-rein, his honour's excepted," said the indignant Highlander; "put a common gillie may do tat. Holloa! Alpin Oig Stuart! Dugald! Evan! come an' hold ta shentleman's praw sheltie," shouted he, making the old barbican ring.

"One will do, I dare say," said Sir Allan, smiling as he resigned his nag to Evan, Iverach's son, a powerful young mountaineer, who appeared at his father's shout.

Preceded by Donald, Sir Allan ascended the winding staircase of the tower, and was ushered into the hall, or principal apartment it contained, the roof of which was a stone arch. At one side yawned a large fire-place, on the mouldered lintel of which appeared the crest and badge-flower of the Stuarts,—a thistle, and underneath was the family motto, "*Omne solum forti patria*." At each end of the chamber was a window of moderate size, with a stone mullion in the form of a cross; one commanded a view of the loch and neighbouring forests of birch and pine, and the other the distant outline of the high Benmore. The walls were adorned with apparatus for hunting, fishing, shooting, and sylvan trophies, intermixed with targets, claymores, Lochaber axes, old muskets, matchlocks, &c.

The furniture was of oak, or old and black mahogany, massive and much dilapidated, presenting a very different appearance to that in the splendid modern drawing-room at Inchavon. A few old portraits hung on the blackened walls, and one in particular, that of a stern old Highlander, whose white beard flowed over his belted plaid, seemed to scowl on Sir Allan, who felt considerably embarrassed when he unexpectedly found himself in the habitation of one, whom he could not

consider otherwise than as his foe.

While awaiting the appearance of the proprietor, whom the piper was gone to inform of the visit, Sir Allan's eye often wandered to the portrait above the fireplace, and he remembered that it was the likeness of the father of the present Stuart, who at the battle of Falkirk had unhorsed, by a stroke of his broadsword, his (Sir Allan's) father, then an officer in the army of General Hawley. While Sir Allan mused over the tales he had heard of the grim Ian Mhor of Lochisla, the door opened, and Mr. Stuart entered.

Erect in person, stately in step, and graceful in deportment, strong and athletic of form, he appeared in every respect the genuine Highland gentleman. He was upwards of sixty, but his eye was clear, keen, and bright, and his weather-beaten cheek and expansive forehead were naturally tinged with a ruddy tint, which was increased to a flush by the excitement caused at this unlooked-for visit.

Unlike his servants, who wore the red tartan of their race, he was attired in the usual dress of a country gentleman, and wore his silver locks thickly and unnecessarily powdered, and clubbed in a thick queue behind.

The natural politeness and hospitable feeling of a Highlander had banished every trace of displeasure from his bold and unwrinkled brow, and he grasped Sir Allan's hand with a frankness at which the latter was surprised, as was old Janet the housekeeper, who saw through the keyhole what passed, though she was unable, in consequence of her deafness, to hear what was said.

"Be seated, Sir Allan," said Mr. Stuart, bowing politely, though he felt his stiffness and hauteur rising within him, and endeavoured to smother it. "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit? which, I must have the candour to acknowledge, is most unexpected."

"Lochisla," replied the other, addressing him in the Scottish manner by the name of his property, "to the gallantry of your brave boy, Ronald, but for whose exertions I should at this moment have been sleeping at the bottom of the Linn at Corrie-avon. I have deemed it incumbent upon me to visit Lochisla, to return my earnest thanks personally for the signal service he has rendered to me, and I regret that the terms on which you—on which we have lived, render, in your estimation, my visit rather an honour than a pleasure."

A shade crossed the brow of the Highlander, but on hearing the particulars he congratulated Sir Allan on his escape in a distant and polite manner, while the twinkle of his bright eyes showed how much satisfaction he enjoyed at the brave conduct of his son. While Sir Allan was relating the story, Mr. Stuart placed near him a large silver liqueur frame, containing six cut-glass bottles, the variously coloured contents of which sparkled behind their silver labels.

"Come, Sir Allan, fill your glass, and drink to my boy's health: one does not

experience so narrow an escape often, now-a-days at least. Come, sir, fill your glass,—there is sherry, brandy, port, and the purer dew of the hills; choose which you please."

"You Stuarts of Lochisla have long borne a name for hospitality, but it is rather early to taste strong waters,—'tis not meridian yet."

"Our hospitality was greater in the olden time than it is now; but it is not often that this old hall has within it one of the Lisles of the Inch, and you must positively drink with me," answered his host, compelling him to fill his glass from the decanter of purple port.

"Our visits have been fewer, and less friendly, than I trust they will be for the future. Your health Lochisla," he added, sipping his wine. "'Tis sixty years and more, I think, since my father came up the Strath with his followers, when—"

"We will not talk of these matters, Sir Allan," exclaimed Stuart, on whose features was gathering a stern expression which Sir Allan saw not, as he sat with his face to a window and looked through his glass with one eye closed, watching a crumb of the bee's wing floating on the bright liquor. "They are the last I would wish to think of when you are my guest."

"Pardon me, I had no wish to offend; we have ever been as strangers to each other, although our acres march. I have had every desire to live on amicable terms with you, Mr. Stuart; but you have ever been prejudiced against me, and truly without a cause."

"I am one of the few who inherit the feelings of a bygone age. But, Sir Allan Lisle, let us not, I intreat you, refer to the past," coldly replied the old Highlander, to whom two parts of his guest's last speech were displeasing. The recurrence to the past terms on which they had lived, brought to his mind more than one case of litigation in which Sir Allan had come off victorious; the other was being addressed as *Mr. Stuart*, a title by which he was never known among his own people. The polite and affable manner of his visitor had tended to diminish his prejudices during the last five minutes, but Sir Allan's blundering observations recalled to the mind of the old *duinhe-wassal* the bitter feelings which he inherited from his father, and his high forehead became flushed and contracted.

"It appears very unaccountable," said he, after the uncomfortable pause which had ensued, "that my son has never, during the past days, mentioned the circumstance of the happy manner in which he drew you from the Corrie-avon."

"To that," replied the other laughing, "a story is appended, a very romantic one indeed, part of which I suppressed in my relation; nothing less, in fact, than a love-affair, to which, as I have conceived a friendship for the brave boy to whom I owe a life, I drink every success," (draining his glass); "but this must be treated of more gravely at a future interview."

"Sir Allan, I understand you not; but if Ronald has formed any attachment

in this neighbourhood, he must learn to forget it, as he will soon leave Lochisla. Some cottage girl, I suppose: these attachments are common enough among the mountains."

"You mistake me: the young lady is one every way his equal, and they have known each other from their childhood. But I will leave the hero to tell his own tale, which will sound better from the lips of a handsome Highland youth, than those of a plain grey-haired old fellow, like myself."

"I like your frankness," said Stuart, softened by the praise bestowed on his son by his old adversary, whose hand he shook, "and will requite it, Sir Allan. When Ronald comes down the glen, I will talk with him over this matter, which I confess troubles me a little at heart, as I never supposed he would have kept an attachment of his secret from me, his only parent now, and one that has loved him so dearly as I have done. But I must be gentle with him, as he is about to leave me soon, poor boy."

"Ah! for the army,—so I have heard: our boys will follow nothing else now-a-days. I fear my own springald, Lewis, is casting wistful thoughts that way. But should you wish it, I may do much in Ronald's favour: I have some little interest with those in power in London, and——"

"I thank you, but it needs not to be so. Huntly has promised me that Ronald shall not be forgotten when a vacancy occurs in the "Gordon Highlanders," a regiment raised among his own people and kindred; and the Marquis, whose interest is great with the Duke of York, will not forget his word—his pledged word to a Highland gentleman."

On Sir Allan's departure, Stuart, from one of the hall windows, watched his retiring figure as he rode rapidly down the glen, and disappeared among the birchen foliage which overhung and shrouded the winding pathway. A sour smile curled his lip; he felt old prejudices rising strongly in his breast, and he turned his eye on the faded portrait of his father, and thought of the time when he had sat as a little child upon his knee, and heard the family of Lisle mentioned with all the bitterness of Highland rancour, and been told a thousand times of the days when Colonel Lisle had carried fire and sword through all Lochisla, besieging the little tower for days, until its inmates were perishing for want. In the tide of feeling which these reflections called forth, the late amiable interview was forgotten; and he only remembered Sir Allan as the foe of his race, and the victor in many a keenly contested case in the Parliament house, the place where the Court of Session sit at Edinburgh.

A bustle in the narrow staircase recalled him to himself: the door was thrown open, and Ronald entered, gun in hand, from the hill, flushed and excited with the nature of the sport. Two tall Highlanders strode behind, bearing on their shoulders a stout pole, from which was suspended by the heels a gi-

gantic deer, whose branching antlers trailed on the floor, which was sprinkled with spots of blood falling from its dilated nostrils and a death-wound in its neck, which had been gashed across by the skene-dhu of a Highlander. A number of red-eyed dogs accompanied them, displaying in their forms the long and muscular limbs, voluminous chest, and rough wiry coat of the old Scottish hound,—a noble animal, once common in the Lowlands, but now to be found only in the north, where the deer wander free over immense stretches of waste moorland or forest, as they did of old.

"A brave beast he is," said Ronald exultingly, as he cast aside his bonnet and gun. "At the head of the loch I fired, and wounded him here in the neck: we traced him by the blood for two miles down the Isla, where he flew through thicket and brake with the speed of an arrow; but the gallant dogs Odin and Carril fastened upon him, and drew him down when about to take the water, near the march-stone of the Lisles. 'Twas luckily done: had he once gained the grounds of Inchavon, our prize would have been lost."

"Ronald," replied his father coldly, "we will hear all this matter afterwards." Then turning to the gillies, "Dugald Stuart, and you Alpin Oig," said he, "carry away this quarry to the housekeeper, and desire her to fill your queghs for you. I have had a visit from Sir Allan Lisle," resumed Stuart, when the Highlanders had obeyed his order and retired. "Hah! you change countenance already: this has been a mysterious matter. He has been here to return thanks for your pulling him out of Isla, where he was nearly drowned, poor man, a day or two since,—a circumstance which you seem to have thought too worthless to mention to me. But there is another matter, on which I might at least have been consulted," he added, watching steadily the changes in the countenance of the young man, whose heart fluttered with excitement. "You have formed an attachment to some girl in the neighbourhood, which has reached the ears of this Allan Lisle although it never came to mine, and the intercourse has continued for years although I have been ignorant of it. Ronald, my boy, who is the girl? As your father, I have at least a right to inquire her name and family."

"Do pray excuse me," faltered the other, playing nervously with his bonnet; "I am too much embarrassed at present to reply,—some other time. Ah! your anger would but increase, I fear, were you to know."

"It does increase! Surely she is not a daughter of that grim churl Corrieoich up the glen yonder? I have seen his tawdry kimmers at the county ball. I can scarcely think this flame of yours is a child of his. You remember the squabble I had with him about firing on his people, who were dragging the loch with nets under the very tower windows. By Heaven! is she a daughter of his?" cried his father in the loud and imperative tone so natural to a Highlander. "Answer me, I command you, Ronald Stuart!"

"She is not, I pledge you my word," replied the young man gently.

"Ronald!" exclaimed the old gentleman, a dark flush gathering on his cheek, "she must be some mean and contemptible object, otherwise you would not shrink from the mention of her name, was it gentle and noble, in this coward way."

"Coward I never was," replied Ronald bitterly. "I may shrink before my own father, when I would scorn to quail before the angry eye of any other man who lives and breathes. Nor do I blush to own the name of—of this lady. She is Alice, the daughter of Sir Allan Lisle, of Inchavon. Ah, sir! I fear I have applied a match to a mine; but I must await the explosion."

Ronald had indeed lighted a mine. A terrible expression flashed in the eyes of the old Highlander, and gathered upon his formidable brow.

"Ronald! Ronald! for this duplicity I was unprepared," he exclaimed in emphatic Gaelic, with a tone of the bitterest reproach. "Have you dared to address yourself to a daughter of that man? Look up, degenerate boy!" he added, grasping Ronald's arm with fierce energy, while he spoke with stern distinctness. "Look upon the portrait of old Ian Mhor, your brave grand sire, and imagine what he would have thought of this. The Lisles of Inchavon! *Dhia gledh sinn*! I have not forgotten their last hostile attempt sixty-five years since, in 1746, when Colonel Lisle, the father of this Sir Allan, besieged our tower with his whole battalion. I was a mere infant then; but I well remember how the muskets of the fusileers flashed daily and nightly from rock and copse-wood, and from the dark loop-holes of the tower, where the brave retainers of Lochisla defended my father's stronghold with the desperate courage of outlawed and ruined men,—ruined and outlawed in a noble cause! These days of death and siege I have not forgotten, nor the pale cheek of the mother at whose breast I hung seeking nourishment, while she was perishing for want of food. Nor have I forgotten the gallows-tree—God be gracious unto me!—raised by the insolent soldiery on the brae-head to hang our people when they surrendered; and, had they ever yielded, they would have swung every man of them, and have been food for the raven and hoodiecraw. And this paternal tower would have been now ruined and roofless, forming a lair for the fox and the owl, but for the friendship of our kinsman Seafield, who wrung a respite and reprieve from the unwilling hand of the merciless German duke.

"Oh, Ronald Stuart! remember these things, and recall some traces of the spirit of Ian Mhor, whose name and blood you inherit. He was a stern old man, and a proud one, possessing the spirit of the days that are gone,—days when the bold son of the hills redressed his wrongs with his own right hand, and held his lands, not by possession of a sheepskin, but by the broad blade of his good claymore."

He paused a moment, passed his hand across his glowing brow, and thus continued in a tone of sterner import, and more high-flown Gaelic.

"Listen to me, O Ronald! Hearken to a father who has loved, and watched, and tended you as never father did a son. Think no more of Inchavon's daughter! Promise me to spurn her from your remembrance, or never more shall you find a home in the dwelling-place of our fathers: you shall be as a stranger to my heart, and your name be known in Lochisla no more. I will cast you off as a withered branch, and leave our ancient patrimony to the hereditary chieftain of our race. Pledge me your word, or, Ronald, I pronounce you for ever lost!"

During this long and energetic harangue, which was delivered in the sonorous voice which Mr. Stuart always assumed with his Gaelic, various had been the contending emotions in the bosom of Ronald. Love and pride, indignation and filial respect, agitated him by turns; and when his father ceased, he took up his bonnet with an air of pride and grief.

"Sir—sir—O my father!" said he, while his pale lip quivered, and a tear glittered in his dark eye, "you will be spared any further trouble on my account. I will go; leave Lochisla to the Stuarts of Appin, or whom you may please. I will seek my fortune elsewhere, and show you truly that 'a brave man makes every soil his country.'"

As he turned to leave the apartment, the stern aspect of his father's features relaxed, and he surveyed him with a wistful look.

"Stay, Ronald," he exclaimed; "I have been hasty. You would not desert me thus in my old age, and leave me with anger on your brow? Let not our pride overcome our natural affection. I will speak of this matter again, and——"

Here he was interrupted by Donald Iverach, who entered respectfully, bonnet in hand, bearing two long official-looking letters, which he handed to Mr. Stuart, who started on perceiving "*On his Majesty's service*" (an unusual notice to him) printed on the upper corner of each.

"Hoigh!" said the piper, "your honour's clory disna get twa sic muckle letters ilka day. The auld doited cailloch tat keeps the post-house down at the clachan of Strathfillan, sent a gilly trotting up the water-side wi' them, as fast as his houghs could pring him."

Their contents became speedily known. The first was a letter from the Horse Guards, informing Mr. Stuart that his son was appointed to an ensigncy in the 92nd regiment, or Gordon Highlanders, commanded by the Marquis of Huntly. The second was to Ronald himself, signed by the adjutant-general, directing him with all speed to join a detachment, which was shortly to leave the depot in the Castle of Edinburgh for the seat of war.

Pride and pleasure at the new and varied prospect before him were the first emotions of Ronald's mind; sorrow and regret at thoughts of parting so suddenly,

perhaps for ever, from all that was dear to him, succeeded them.

"Hoigh! hui-uigh!" cried old Iverach, capering with Highland agility on hearing the letters read. "Hui-uigh!" he exclaimed, making the weapons clatter on the wall with his wild and startling shout, while he tossed his bonnet up to the vaulted roof; "and so braw Maister Ronald is going to the clorious wars, to shoot the French loons like the muircocks o' Strathisla, or the bonnie red roes o' Benmore! Hoigh! Got tam! auld Iverach's son sall gang too, and follow the laird's, as my ain faither and mony a braw shentleman did auld Sir Ian Mhor to the muster o' Glenfinan. And when promotion is in the way, braw Maister Ronald will no forget puir Evan Iverach, the son of his faither's piper, that follows him for love to the far-awa' land. And when the pipers blaw the onset, neither o' them will forget the bonnie banks of Lochisla, and the true hearts they have left behind them there. And when the onset is nigh, let them shout the war-cry of their race: my prave prothers cried it on the ramparts of Ticonderago,[*] where the auld plack watch were mown doon like grass, in a land far peyond the isles, where the sun sets in the west."

[*] In that sanguinary affair the 42nd Highlanders, or old Black-Watch, lost 43 officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, and had 603 privates killed and wounded; and "to many a heart and home in the Highlands did this disastrous though glorious intelligence bring desolation and mourning."

As this enthusiastic retainer left the apartment to communicate the news to the rest of the household, old Mr. Stuart turned to gaze on his son.

The arrival of these letters had caused a vast change in their feelings within the last five minutes; all traces of discord had vanished, and the softest feelings of our nature remained behind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEPARTURE.

"Farewell, farewell, a last adieu!
Adieu, ye hills and dales so sweet;
Adieu, ye gurgling rills, for you

And I again may never meet!
Sweet lovely scene, with charms replete!
Backward my longing eyes I turn,
Leave your stupendous rocks with woe,
To yonder cloud-capped town I go,
Ah! never to return."
Colin Maclaurin.

Sorrow for the sudden departure of Ronald was the prevailing sentiment in the tower of Lochisla, which old Janet the housekeeper caused to re-echo with her ceaseless lamentations, poured forth either in broken broad Scotch, or in her more poetical and descriptive Gaelic, for the going forth of the bold boy whom she had watched over and nursed from childhood with the tenderness of a mother.

His father felt deeply the pang of parting with the only child that death had left him; but he pent his feelings within his own proud bosom, and showed them but little. He said nothing more of Alice Lisle, unwilling to sour the few remaining hours they had to spend together by harsh injunctions or disagreeable topics, deeming that Ronald in the busy scenes which were before him in his military career would be taught to forget the boyish attachment of his early days. It is thus that old men ever reckon, forgetting that the first impressions which the young heart receives are ever the strongest and most lasting.

He directed with cool firmness the arrangements for his son's early departure, and save now and then a quivering of the lip or a deep sigh, no other emotion was visible. He felt keenly, nor would he ever have parted with Ronald, notwithstanding the eagerness of the youth to join the army, but for the entanglement of his private affairs, which rendered it absolutely necessary that his son should be independent of his shattered patrimony, and the proud and martial disposition of both their minds made arms the only profession to be chosen.

It was close upon the time of his departure ere Ronald could make an arrangement to obtain an interview with Alice Lisle. He despatched by Evan, the son of Iverach, a note to Alice, requesting her to meet and bid him adieu, in the lawn in front of Inchavon-house, on the evening of the second day, referring her to the bearer for a recapitulation of the events which had taken place.

The young Highlander, who was to accompany Ronald to the regiment as a servant and follower, was as shrewd and acute as a love-messenger required to be, and succeeded, after considerable trouble and delay, in delivering the billet into the fair hands of the young lady herself, who, although she neither shrieked or fainted, nor expired altogether, like a heroine of romance, was nevertheless overwhelmed with the intelligence, which Evan related to her as gently as he

could; and after promising to attend to the note without fail, she retired to her own chamber, and gave way to the deepest anguish.

At last arrived the important day which was to behold Ronald launched from his peaceful Highland home into the stormy scenes of a life which was new to him. Evan Iverach had been sent off in the morning with the baggage to the hamlet of Strathisla, where the stage-coach for Perth was to take up his young master.

Sorrowful indeed was the parting between the old piper and his son Evan Bean, (*i.e.* fair-haired Evan,) and they were but little comforted by the assurance of the old crone Janet, who desired them to "greet weel, as their weird was read, and they would never meet mair."

Ronald was seated with his father at breakfast in the hall or dining-room of the tower. The table was covered with viands of every kind, exhibiting all the profuseness of a true Scottish breakfast,—tea, coffee, cold venison, cheese, oaten bannocks, &c., &c., &c., and a large silver-mouthed bottle, containing most potent usquebaugh, distilled for the laird's own use by Alpin Oig Stuart in one of the dark and dangerous chasms on the banks of the Isla, a spot unknown to the exciseman, a personage much dreaded and abhorred in all Highland districts.

The old cailloch, Janet, was in attendance, weeping and muttering to herself. Iverach was without the tower, making the yard ring to the spirit-stirring notes of—

"We'll awa to Shirramuir,
An' haud the whigs in order;"

and he strode to and fro, blowing furiously, as if to keep up the failing spirit of his tough old heart.

Mr. Stuart said little, but took his morning meal as usual. Now and then he bit his nether lip, his eye glistened, and his brow was knit, to disguise the painful emotions that filled his heart.

Ronald ate but little and sat totally silent, gazing with swimming eyes, while his heart swelled almost to bursting, on the lofty hills and dark pine woods, which, perchance, he might never more behold; and the sad certainty that slowly passing years would elapse ere he again stood by his paternal hearth, or beheld his father's face,—if, indeed, he was ever to behold it again,—raised within him emotions of the deepest sadness.

"Alas!" thought he, "how many years may roll away before I again look on all I have loved so long; and what dismal changes may not have taken place in that time!"

"Hui-uigh! Ochon—ochanari!" cried the old woman, unable to restrain her-

self longer, as she sunk upon a settle in the recess of the hall window. "He is going forth to the far awa land of the stranger, where the hoodiecraw and fox pyke the banes of the dead brave; but he winna return to us, as the eagle's brood return to their eyrie among the black cliffs o' bonnie Craigonan."

"He shall! old woman. What mean you by these disheartening observations in so sad an hour as this?" said the old gentleman sternly, roused by that prophetic tone which never falls without effect on the ear of a Scottish Highlander.

"Dinna speak sae to me, laird. God sain me! I read that in his bonnie black een which tells me that they shall never again look on mine."

"Hoigh! prutt, trutt," said Iverach, whom her cry had summoned to the spot, "the auld teevil of a cailloch will pe casting doon Maister Ronald's heart when it should pe at the stoutest. Huisht, Janet, and no be bedeviling us with visions and glaumorie just the noo."

"Donald Iverach, I tell you he shall never more behold those whom he looks on this day: I tell you so, and I never spoke in vain," cried the old sybil in Gaelic with a shrill voice. "When the brave sons of my bosom perished with their leader at Corunna, did I not know of their fall the hour it happened? The secret feeling, which a tongue cannot describe, informed me that they were no more. Yes; I heard the wild wind howl their death-song, as it swept down the pass of Craigonan, and I viewed their shapeless spirits floating in the black mist that clung round the tower of Lochisla on the night the field of Corunna was stricken, for many were the men of our race who perished there: the dead-bell sung to me the live-long night, and our caillochs and maidens were sighing and sad,—but I alone knew why."

"Peace! bird of ill omen," replied the piper in the same language, overawed by the force of her words. "*Dhia gledh sinn!* will you break the proud spirit of a *duinhe wassal* of the house of Lochisla, when about to gird the claymore and leave the roof-tree of his fathers?"

"Come, come; we have had enough of this," said Mr. Stuart. "Retire, Janet, and do not by your unseemly grief disturb the last hours that my son and I shall spend together."

"A wreath, and 'tis not for nought, is coming across my auld een," she replied, pressing her withered hands upon her wrinkled brow. "Sorrow and woe are before us all. I have seen it in many a dark dream at midnicht, and heard it in the croak of the nicht-bird, as it screamed from its eyrie in Coirnan-Taischatrin,[*] where the wee men and women dance their rings in the bonnie moonlicht. Greet and be woefu', my braw bairn, for we shall never behold ye mair. Ochon—ochon!" and pressing Ronald to her breast, this faithful old dependant rushed from the hall.

[*] The cave of the seers.

"Grief has distracted the poor old creature," said Mr. Stuart, making a strong effort to control the emotions which swelled his own bosom, while Ronald no longer concealed his, but covering his face with his hands, wept freely, and the piper began to blubber and sob in company.

"Hoigh! oigh! Got tam! it's joost naething but fairies' spells and glaumorie that's ever and aye in auld Janet's mouth. She craiks and croaks like the howlets in the auld chapel-isle, till it's gruesome to hear her. But dinna mind her, Maister Ronald; I'll blaw up the bags, and cheer your heart wi' the 'gathering' on the bonnie *piob mhor*." The piper retired to the yard, where the cotters and many a shepherd from the adjacent hills were assembled to behold Ronald depart, and bid him farewell.

Ronald's father, the good old man, although his heart was wrung and oppressed by the dismal forebodings of his retainer, did all that he possibly could to raise the drooping spirits of his son, by holding out hopes of quick promotion and a speedy return home; but Ronald wept like a youth as he was, and answered only by his tears.

"Oh, Ronald, my boy!" groaned the old man; "it is in an hour such as this that I most feel the loss of her whose fair head has long, long been under the grassy turf which covers her fair-haired little ones in the old church-yard yonder. The sun is now shining through the window of the ruined chapel, and I see the pine which marks their graves tossing its branches in the light." He looked fixedly across the loch at the islet, the grassy surface of which was almost covered with grey tomb-stones, beneath which slept the retainers of his ancestors, who themselves rested among the Gothic ruins of the little edifice, which their piety had endowed and founded to St. John, the patron saint of Perth.

The day sped fast away, and the hour came in which Ronald was compelled to depart, if he would be in time for the Perth stage, which passed through Strathisla. His father accompanied him to the gate of the tower, where he embraced and blessed him. He then turned to depart, after shaking the hard hand of many an honest mountaineer.

"May Got's plessing and all goot attend ye! Maister Ronald," blubbered old Iverach, who was with difficulty prevented from piping before him down the glen; "and dinna forget to befriend puir Evan Bean, that follows ye for love."

A sorrowful farewell in emphatic Gaelic was muttered through the court as Ronald, breaking from among them, rushed down the steep descent, as if anxious to end the painful scene. His father gazed wistfully after, as if his very soul seemed to follow his steps. Ronald looked back but once, and then dashed on as

fast as his strength could carry him; but that look he never, never forgot.

The old man had reverently taken off his hat, allowing his silver hair to stream in the wind, and with eyes upturned to heaven was fervently ejaculating,—"Oh, God! that nearest me, be a father unto my poor boy, and protect him in the hour of danger!"

It was the last time that Ronald beheld the face of his father, and deeply was the memory of its expression impressed upon his heart. Not daring again to turn his head, he hurried along the mountain path, until he came to a turn of the glen which would hide the much-loved spot for ever. Here he turned and looked back: his father was no longer visible, but there stood the well-known tower rising above the rich copse-land, with the grey smoke from its huge kitchen chimney curling over the battlements in the evening wind, which brought to his ear the wail of Iverach's bagpipe. The smooth surface of the loch shone with purple and gold in the light of the setting sun, the rays of which fell obliquely as its flaming orb appeared to rest on the huge dark mountains of the western Highlands.

"Ah! never shall I behold a scene like this in the land to which I go," thought Ronald, as he cast one eager glance over it all; and then, entering the deep rocky gorge, through which the road wound, hurried towards the romantic hamlet of Strathisla, the green mossy roofs and curling smoke of which he saw through the tufts of birch and pine a short distance before him.

It was dusk before he reached the cluster of primitive cottages, at the door of one of which, dignified by the name of "the coach-office," stood Evan with the baggage, impatiently awaiting the appearance of his master, as the time for the arrival of the coach was close at hand. Telling him hastily that he would meet the vehicle on the road near Inchavonpark, he passed forward to keep his promise to Alice. A few minutes' walk brought him to the boundary wall of Sir Allan's property; vaulting lightly over, he found himself among the thickets of shrubs which were planted here and there about the smooth grassy lawn, in the centre of which appeared Inchavon-house, a handsome modern structure; the lofty walls and portico of fine Corinthian columns, surmounted by a small dome, all shone in the light of the summer moon, by which he saw the glimmer of a white dress advancing hastily towards him.

At that instant the sound of the coach, as it came rattling and rumbling down a neighbouring hill, struck his ear, and his heart died within him, as he knew it would be there almost immediately.

"Alice!" he exclaimed, as he threw one arm passionately around her.

"Ronald, O Ronald!" was all the weeping girl could articulate, as she clung to him tremblingly.

"Remember me when I am gone! Love me as you do now when I shall be far, far away from you, Alice!"

"Ah, how could I ever forget you!"

At that moment the unwelcome vehicle drew up on the road.

"Stuart—Ronald, my old comrade," cried the frank though faltering voice of Lewis Lisle, who appeared at that moment; "give me your hand, my boy. You surely would not go without seeing me?"

Ronald pressed the hand of Lewis, who threw over his neck a chain, at which hung a miniature of his sister.

"Alas!" muttered Ronald, "I have nothing to give as a keepsake in return! Ay, this ring,—'tis a very old one, but it was my mother's; wear it for my sake, Alice." To kiss her pale cheek, place her in the arms of Lewis, to cross the park and leap the wall, were to the young Highlander the work of a moment,—and he vanished from their side.

"Come alang, sir! We canna be keepit here the haill nicht," bawled the driver crossly as Ronald appeared upon the road, where the white steam was curling from the four panting horses in the moonlight, which revealed Evan, seated with the goods and chattels of himself and master among the muffled-up passengers who loaded the coach-top.

"Inside, sir?" said the guard from behind the shawl which muffled his weather-beaten face as he held open the door. Ronald, scarcely knowing what he did, stepped in, and the door closed with a bang which made the driver rock on his seat. "A' richt, Jamie; drive on!" cried the guard, vaulting into the dickey; and in a few minutes more the noise of wheels and hoofs had died away from the ears of poor Alice and her brother, who listened with beating hearts to the retiring sound.

CHAPTER V.

EDINBURGH CASTLE.

"But tender thoughts maun now be hushed,
When danger calls I must obey;
The transport waits us on the coast,
And the morn I will be far away."
Tannahill.

The young Highlander, who had never beheld a larger city than Perth, was greatly struck with the splendid and picturesque appearance of Edinburgh. The long lines of densely crowded streets, the antique and lofty houses, the spires, the towers, the enormous bridges spanning deep ravines, the long dark alleys, crooks, nooks, and corners of the old town, with its commanding castle; and then the new, with its innumerable and splendid shops, filled with rich and costly stuffs, the smoke, noise, and confusion of the great thoroughfares and promenades contrasted with the sombre and gloomy grandeur of the Canongate and Holyrood, were all strange sights to one who from infancy had been accustomed to "the eagle and the rock, the mountain and the cataract, the blue-bell, the heather, and the long yellow broom, the Highland pipe, the hill-climbing warrior, and the humbler shepherd in the garb of old Gaul."

From the castle he viewed with surprise and delight the vast amphitheatre which surrounds the city. To the westward Corstorphine, covered to the summit with the richest foliage, Craiglockart, Blackford, the ridges of Braid and Pentland, the Calton, the craigs of Salisbury and Arthur's seat, encircling the city on all sides except the north, where the noble Frith of Forth—the Bodoria of the Romans,—the most beautiful stream in Scotland, perhaps in Britain, wound along the yellow sands.

Far beyond were seen the Lomonds of Fife, the capes of Crail and Elie, the broad bays and indentures of the German Ocean, and the islets of the Forth, the banks of which are studded with villages, castles, churches, and rich woodland. As he entered the fortress he was particularly struck with the gloomy and aged appearance of its embattled buildings and lofty frowning batteries, where the black cannon peeped grimly through antique embrasures. It was a place particularly interesting to Ronald, (as it is to every true Scotsman,) who thought of the prominent part it bore in the annals of his country,—of the many sieges it had sustained, and the many celebrated persons who had lived and died within the walls, which held the crown and insignia of a race whose name and power had passed away from the land they had ruled and loved so long.

Kilted sentinels, wearing the plumed bonnet, tasselled *sporan* or purse, and the dark tartan, striped with yellow, of the Gordon Highlanders, appeared at the different bastions as he passed the drawbridge, entered through many a strong gate studded with iron, and the black old arch where the two portcullises of massive metal hang suspended.

Ronald, for the first time since he left home, found himself confounded and abashed when he was received by the haughty staff-officer in the cold and stiff manner which these gentlemen assume to regimental officers. Here he *reported* himself, as the phrase is, and presented the letters of the adjutant-general. It was in a gloomy apartment of the old palace, and the very place in which the

once beautiful Mary of Guise breathed her last. Its furniture consisted of two chairs and a hardwood table covered with books, army lists, papers and dockets of letters: boards of general orders, a couple of swords, and forage-caps hung upon the wall. A drum stood in one corner, and an unseemly cast-iron coal-box bearing the mystic letters "B.O." stood in another. A decanter of port and a wine-glass, which appeared on the mantel shelf, showed that the occupant of the office knew the secret of making himself comfortable.

Considerably damped in spirit, by the dry and unsoldierlike reception he had experienced, Ronald next sought the quarters of the officer who commanded the detachment of his own regiment. On quitting the citadel, he passed the place where the French prisoners of war were confined. It was a small piece of ground, enclosed by a strong palisado, over which the poor fellows displayed for sale those ornaments and toys which the ingenuity of their nation enabled them to make. Little ships, toothpicks, bodkins, dominoes, boxes, &c. were manufactured by them from the bones of their scanty allowance of ration meat, and offered for sale to the soldiers of the garrison, or visitors from the city who chanced to pass the place of their confinement.

They appeared to be generally very merry, and were dressed in the peculiar uniform of the prison; but here and there might be observed an officer, who, having broken his parole of honour, was now degraded by being placed among the rank and file. Ronald was but a young soldier, and consequently pitied them; he thought of what his own feelings would be were he a prisoner in a foreign land, with the bayonets of guards glittering at every turn; but there seemed to be none there who yearned for home or hearts they had left behind them, save one, and of him we will speak hereafter. The reception Ronald met with from the officers of his own corps, tended much to revive his drooping spirits, which were, for some time, sadly depressed by the remembrance of Lochisla, and the affectionate friends he had left behind him there.

Among the officers were young men who, like himself, had recently left their homes in the distant north, and a unison of feeling existed in their minds; but, generally, they were merry thoughtless fellows, and the vivacity of their conversation, the frolics in which they were ever engaged, and the bustle of the garrison, were capital antidotes against care. But the tear often started to the eye of Stuart as he beheld the far-off peak of Ben Lomond, fifty miles distant from the window of his room,—his rank as a subaltern entitling him only to one, and he thought of the romantic hills of Perthshire, or of the lonely hearth where his grey-haired sire mourned for his absence. But little time was allowed him to muse thus. Parades in the castle, the promenades, theatres, the gay blaze of ball-rooms in the city, crowded with beautiful and fashionable girls and glittering uniforms, left him little time for reflection; and the day of embarkation for the

Peninsula, the seat of war, to which all men's thoughts—and women's too, were turned, insensibly drew nigh.

Evan Iverach had been enlisted in his master's company, and under the hands of a regimental tailor, and the tuition of the drill sergeant, was rapidly becoming a smart soldier, while he still remained an attached servant to his master.

The latter, soon after his arrival in the capital, had visited his father's agent, Mr. Æneas Macquirk, a writer to the signet, who had long transacted the business and fleeced the pocket of the old laird in the most approved legal manner. This worthy, having lately procured the old gentleman's signature to a document which was ultimately to be his ruin, was therefore disposed to treat Ronald drily enough, having made the most of his father; and he would never have been invited to the snug front-door-house, with the carpeted staircase, comfortable dining and airy drawing-room in the new town, but for the vanity of Mrs. and the Misses Macquirk, who thought that the rich uniform of the young officer as a visitor gave their house a gay and fashionable air.

Quite the reverse of the good old "clerks to the signet" who once dwelt in the dark closes of the old city, Macquirk was one of the many contemptible fellows whose only talent is chicanery, and who fatten and thrive on that unfortunate love of litigation which possesses the people of Scotland. Mean and servile to the rich, he was equally purse-proud and overbearing to the poor, to whom he was a savage and remorseless creditor. Many were the unfortunate citizens who cursed the hour in which they first knew this man, who feathered his nest by the law, better than ever his father had done by the honester trade of mending shoes in the West Bow.

Mrs. Macquirk was a vulgar-looking woman, most unbecomingly fat; her money had procured her a husband, and she was as proud as could be expected, considering that she had first seen the light in the low purlieus of the Kraimes, and now found herself mistress of one of the handsomest houses in Edinburgh.

The young ladies were more agreeable, being rather good-looking but very affected, having received all the accomplishments that it was in the power of their slighted and brow-beaten governess, the daughter of a good but unfortunate family, to impart to them. They gave parties that Ronald might show off the uniform of the Gordon Highlanders, and played and sung to him in their best style; while he drew many comparisons between them and the Alice whose miniature he wore in his bosom, by which they lost immensely; and while listening to their confused foreign airs and songs, he thought how much sweeter and more musical were the tones of Alice Lisle, when she sung "The Birks of Invermay," or any other melody of the mountains, making his heart vibrate to her words. But even in the Castle of Edinburgh Ronald had recently made a friend, whose society, in spite of military and Highland gallantry, he preferred to that

of the daughters of Macquirk.

Among the French captives within the stockade, he had frequently observed a young officer who remained apart from the rest, the deep dejection and abstraction of whose air gained him the readily excited sympathy of the young Highlander. He was a tall, handsome, well-shaped young man, with regular features, dark eyes, and a heavy black moustache on his upper lip. He wore the uniform of Napoleon's famous Imperial Guards; but the once gay epaulette and lace were much worn and faded. He wore a long scarlet forage-cap, adorned with a band, a tassel falling over his right shoulder. The gold cross of the Legion of Honour dangling at his breast showed that he had seen service, and distinguished himself.

He had more than once observed the peculiar look with which Ronald Stuart had eyed him; and on one occasion, with the politeness of his nation, he gracefully touched his cap. The Scotsman bowed, and beckoned him to a retired part of the palisado.

"Can you speak our language, sir?" asked he.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur officier," replied the Frenchman; "I have learned it in the prison."

"I regret much to see you, an officer, placed here among the common rank and file. How has such an event come to pass? Can I in any way assist you?"

"Monsieur, I thank you; you are very good, but it is not possible," stammered the Frenchman in confusion, his sun-burned cheek reddening while he spoke. "*Croix Dieu!* yours are the first words of true kindness that I have heard since I left my own home, in our pleasant France. O monsieur, I could almost weep! I am degraded among my fellow-soldiers, my *frères d'armes*. I have broken my parole of honour, and am placed among the private men; confined within this palisado by day, and these dark vaults by night,"—pointing to the ancient dungeons which lie along the south side of the rocks, and are the most antique part of the fortress. These gloomy places were the allotted quarters of the French prisoners in Edinburgh.

"I have been placed here in consequence of a desperate attempt I made to escape from the depot (Greenlaw,[*] I think it is named,) at the foot of these high mountains. I perceive you pity me, monsieur, and indeed I am very miserable."

[*] A village near Edinburgh, where barracks were constructed in 1810 for some thousands of French prisoners. The buildings are now quite deserted, and no trace remains of their former inhabitants, except a monument, with an appropriate inscription, erected by the proprietor of Valley-Field-mill over the remains of 300 French soldiers, interred in the most beautiful part of the grounds.

"I dare swear the penance of captivity is great; but 'tis the fortune of war, and may be my own chance very soon."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the Frenchman despondingly, "to me it is as death. But 'tis not the *mal-du-pays*, the home-sickness, so common among the Switzers and you Scots, that preys upon my heart. Did you know my story, and all that afflicts me, your surprise at the dejection in which I appear sunk, would cease. I endure much misery here: our prison allowance is scant, my uniform is all gone to rags, and I have not wherewith to procure other clothing. We are debarred from many comforts—" The blood rose to the temples of the speaker, who suddenly ceased on perceiving that Ronald had drawn forth his purse. He could ill spare the money, but he pressed it upon the Frenchman, by whom after much hesitation the gift was accepted.

"It was not my intention to have excited your charity," said he; "but I take the purse as a gift from one brother soldier to another, and will share it among my poor comrades. Though our nations be at war, *frères d'armes* we all are, monsieur; and should it ever be in his power, by Heaven and St. Louis! Victor d'Estouville will requite your kindness. If by the fortune, or rather misfortune, of war, you ever become a prisoner in my native country, you will find that the memory of *la Garde Ecossaise* and your brave nation, which our old kings loved so long and well, and the sufferings of the fair Marie, are not yet forgotten in *la belle France*."

"I trust my destiny will never lead me to a captivity in France, or elsewhere. But keep a stout heart: the next cartel that brings an exchange of prisoners, may set you free."

"*Mon Dieu*! I know not what may have happened at home before that comes to pass. Monsieur, you have become my friend, and have therefore a right to my confidence; my story shall be related to you as briefly as possible. My name is d'Estouville. I am descended from one of the best families in France, of which my ancestors were peers, and possessed large estates in the province of Normandy,—a name which finds an echo, methinks, in your sister kingdom. By the late revolution, in which my father lost his life, all our lands were swept from us, with the exception of a small cottage in the neighbourhood of Henriqueville, situated in the fertile valley where the thick woods and beautiful vineyards lie intermingled along the banks of the winding Seine; and to this spot my poor mother with her fatherless children retired. Ah, monsieur! 'twas a charming little place: methinks I see it now, the low-roofed cottage, with the vines and roses growing round its roof and chimneys, and in at the little lattices that glistened in the sunshine,—every green lane and clump of shadowy trees, and every silver rill around it.

"Living by our own industry, we were happy enough; my brother and myself increased in strength and manliness, as my sisters did in beauty; and the sweetness of my noble mother's temper, together with the quiet and unassum-

ing tenour of our lives, rendered us the favourites of all the inhabitants of the valley of Lillebonne.

"Monsieur, I loved a fair girl in our neighbourhood, a near relation of my own,—Diane de Montmichel, a beautiful brunette, with dark hair and sparkling eyes. Oh! could we but see Diane now!

"*Mon Dieu*! The very day on which I was to have wedded her was fixed, and the future seemed full of every happiness; but the great Emperor wanted men to fight his battles, and by one conscription the whole youth of the valley of Lillebonne were drawn away. My brother and myself were among them. Ah, monsieur! Napoleon thinks not of the agony of French mothers, and the bitter tears that are wept for every conscription. Britain recruits her armies with thousands of free volunteers, who tread by their own free will the path of honour. France—but we will not talk of this. Our poor peasant boys were torn from their cottages and vineyards, from the arms of their parents and friends; we felt our hearts swelling within us, but to resist was to die. O monsieur! what must have been the thoughts of my high-minded mother, when she beheld her sons—the sons of a noble peer of old France—drawn from her roof to carry the musquet as private soldiers—"

"And Diane de Montmichel?—"

"In a few months I found myself fighting the battles of the great Emperor as a soldier of his Imperial Guard, the flower of *la belle France*. In our first engagement with the enemy my brave brother fell—poor Henri! But why should I regret him? He fell gaining fame for France, and died nobly with the eagle on his breast, and the folds of the tricolour waving over him. Since then I have distinguished myself, was promoted, and received from the hand of Napoleon this gold cross, which had once hung on his own proud breast. I received it amidst the dead and the dying, on a field where the hot blood of brave men had been poured forth as water. From that moment I was more than ever his devoted soldier. He had kindled in my breast the fire of martial ambition, which softer love had caused to slumber. I now looked forward joyously to quick promotion, and my return to poor Diane and my mother's vine-covered cot in happy Lillebonne. But my hopes were doomed to be blasted. I was taken prisoner in an unlucky charge, and transmitted with some thousand more to this country.

"O monsieur! not even the pledge of my most sacred honour as a gentleman and soldier could bind me while love and ambition filled my heart. I mourned the monotonous life of a military prisoner, and fled from the depot at Greenlaw; but I was retaken a day after, and sent to this strong fortress, where for three long and weary years I have been confined among the common file. O monsieur!—Diane—my mother—my sisters! what sad changes may not have happened among them in that time?"

He covered his face for a moment with his hand to hide his emotion.

"Adieu, monsieur! Should we ever meet where it is in my power to return your kindness, you will find that I can be grateful, and remember that in his distress you regarded Victor d'Estouville, not as a Frenchman and an enemy, but as a brother *officier* under misfortunes."

He ceased, and bowing low, retired from the palisado to mingle among the prisoners.

Since his arrival in the capital, Ronald had received many letters from home, but none from Alice Lisle; he was deterred from writing to her, fearing that his letters might fall into other hands than her own, and he grew sad as the day of embarkation drew near and he heard not from the fair girl, whose little miniature afforded him a pleasing object for contemplation in his melancholy moods.

On the morning after the arrival of the route, Ronald was awakened from sleep about day-break by the sound of the bagpipe, which in his dreaming ear carried him home: he almost fancied himself at Lochisla, and that old Iverach was piping to the morning sun, when other sounds caused him to start. He sprang up, and looked from the lofty old window into the gloomy court of the castle. Ronald Macdonuil-dhu, the piper, was blowing forth the regimental gathering, the wild notes of which were startling the echoes of the ancient fortress and rousing the soldiers, who were thronging forth in heavy marching order, as the military term is,—completely accoutred.

"Come, Stuart, my boy, turn up!" cried Alister Macdonald, a brother ensign, who entered the room unceremoniously, "you will be late; we march in ten minutes, and then good-by to the crowded ball-rooms and fair girls of Edinburgh."

"I had no idea the morning was so far advanced," replied Ronald, dressing himself as fast as possible. "There goes the roll of the drum now; why—they are falling in."

"The deuce! I must go, or our hot-headed commander, the major, may forget that I am a kinsman from the Isle of the Mist. This morning he is as cross as a bear with a sore head, and expends his ill-humour on the acting adjutant, who in turn expends his on the men. There is the sound of Black Ronald's pipe again; I must be off," and he left the apartment.

"Come, Evan, bustle about, and get me harnessed! Push this belt under my epaulette, bring me my sword and bonnet; be quick, will you?" cried Ronald to his follower, who, accoutred for the march with his heavy knapsack on his back, entered the room. "You will look after the baggage. Where are the trunks, and other *et cætera*?"

"A' on the road to Leith twa hoors syne."

"What, in the dark?"

"Ay, maister, just in the dark. Three muckle carts, piled like towers, wi' kists and wives an' weans on the tap, an' pans and camp-kettles jingling frae ilka neuk and corner,—an' unco like flitten' as ever I saw."

With Evan's assistance his master was garbed and armed. On descending to the castle square, he found the detachment, to the number of three hundred men, formed in line, motionless and silent. Ronald was particularly struck with the martial and service-like appearance of the Highlanders, by the combination which their costume exhibits of the "garb of old Gaul" with the rich uniform of Great Britain. The plumed bonnets, drooping gracefully over the right shoulder, the dark tartan, the hairy purses, the glittering appointments, and long line of muscular bare knees, together with the gloomy and antique buildings of the fortress, formed a scene at once wild and picturesque; but Ronald had little time for surveying it.

There is something peculiarly gallant and warlike in the dashing appearance of our Highland soldiers, which brings to the mind the recollections of those days when the swords of our ancestors swept before them the martial legions of Rome,—imperial Rome, whose arms had laid prostrate the powers of half a world,—of the later deeds of Bannockburn, and many other battles,—the remembrance of our ancient kings and regal independence,—all "the stirring memory of a thousand years," raising a flush of proud and tumultuous feelings in the breast of every Scotsman who beholds in these troops the brave representatives of his country; troops who, in every clime under the sun, have maintained untarnished her ancient glory and her name. So thought Ronald, and he was proud to consider himself one of them, as he drew his sword and took his place in the ranks.

The rattling bayonets were fixed, and flashed in the morning sun, as the muskets were shouldered and "sloped," the line broke into sections, and moving off to the stirring sound of the fife and drum, began to descend the steep and winding way to the gate of the fortress.

The idea of departing for foreign service had something elevating and exciting in it, which pleased the minds of all, but roused to the utmost the romantic spirit of Ronald Stuart, whose ear was pleased with the tread of the marching feet and sharp roll of the drums resounding in the hollow archway; as was his eye, with the waving feathers and glittering weapons of the head of the little column, as they descended the pathway towards the city.

As they passed through the latter towards Leith, the streets were almost empty, none being abroad at that early hour, save here and there, within the ancient royalty, an old city guardsman, armed with his Lochaber axe; but the head of many a drowsy citizen in his nightcap appeared at the windows, from which many an eye gazed with that interest which the embarkation of troops for the seat of war always called forth; for many were marching there who were

doomed to leave their bones in the distant soil of the Frank or Spaniard. Many relatives and friends of the soldiers accompanied their march, and Ronald was witness of many a painful parting between those who might never meet again.

"O my bairn! my puir deluded bairn!" exclaimed an aged woman wildly, as she rushed into the ranks with her grey hairs falling over her face, and with streaming eyes, clasped a son round the neck; "O lang, lang will it be till I see ye again; and oh, when you are far awa frae bonnie Glencorse, wha will tend ye as your auld forsaken mither has dune? she that has toiled, and watched ower, and prayed for ye, since ye first saw the licht. O Archy, my doo, speak; let me hear your voice for the last time!"

"God be wi' ye, mither! O leave me! or my heart will burst in twa," sobbed the poor fellow, while some of his more thoughtless comrades endeavoured by jests and ill-timed merriment to raise his drooping spirits; and many a hearty but sorrowful "Gude by," and "Fareweel," was interchanged on all sides as they passed along. The sun was high in the sky when they halted on the beach at Leith, and above a thick morning mist, which rested on the face of the water, Ronald saw the lofty taper spars and smart rigging of the large transport, which lay out in the stream, with her white canvas hanging loose, and "blue peter" flying at the foremast-head.

As boat after boat, with its freight of armed men, was pulled off towards the vessel, shouts loud and long arose from the sailors and idlers on the pier and quays; and stirring were the cheers in reply which arose from the boats and floated along the surface of the river, as the Highlanders waved their bonnets in farewell to those they left behind. Certainly, like many others, Ronald did not feel at his ease when on board the vessel, and he became confused with the tramp of feet, the bustle, the rattle of arms, the loud chaunt of the sailors weighing anchor, the clash of the windlass pals, the pulling, hauling, ordering and swearing on all sides,—sights and sounds to him alike new and wonderful. The smell of tar, grease, bilge-water, tobacco, and a hundred other disagreeable odours, assailed him, and he felt by anticipation the pleasures of sea-sickness.

As soon as the anchor swung suspended at the bow, the yards were braced sharp up, the canvas filled, and the ripple which arose at the bow announced the vessel under way. She slowly passed the light-house which terminates the old stone pier, and rounding the strong Martello tower, moved down the glassy waters of the broad and noble Forth.

The officers were grouped together on the poop, and their soldiers lined the side of the vessel, gazing on the city towering above the morning mist, which was rolling heavily and slowly along the bases of the hills in huge white volumes. The frowning and precipitous front of the bold craigs of Salisbury,—the still greater elevation of Arthur's lofty cone,—the black and venerable fortress,—

the tall spires and houses of the city,—the romantic hills of Braid,—the wooded summit of Corstorphine, and the undulating line of the gigantic Pentlands, were all objects which riveted their attention; and many a brave man was there whose heart swelled within him, while he gazed, for the last time perhaps, on the green mountains and ancient capital of Caledonia.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREIGN SERVICE.

"Who had followed, stout and stern,
Through the battle's rout and reel,
Storm of shot and hedge of steel,
The gallant grandson of Lochiel,
Valiant *Fassifern*."
Scott.

A month or two more found Ronald with his comrades, after being landed at Lisbon, pursuing their route through Portugal to join their regiment, then campaigning in Estremadura with the division of Sir Rowland Hill.

Every where the ravages of the ruthless French were visible as they marched onwards. At Santarem, Punhete, Abrantes, and many other places, they viewed with surprise and pity the pale features of the starving inhabitants, the fire-blackened walls, the roofless streets or utterly deserted villages, from which every thing had been carried off or given to destruction by the French in their retreat. Ancient churches and stately convents had been turned into stables, where cavalry horses and baggage-mules chewed their wretched forage of chopped straw, and reposed on the lettered stones, beneath which slept the proud cavaliers and brave Hidalgos of old Lusitania.

When they looked on these scenes of desolation, and considered the desecration of every thing whether sacred or profane, their hearts grew sick within them; and they thought of the happy isle which they had left behind, where such horrors are unknown—unknown to the mercantile citizens, who grudge so much the miserable pittance received by the poor soldier.

In their route through these places they were welcomed by no sign of mer-

riment, no joyful cheering, from those whom they had come to free from the iron grasp of Buonaparte; they were greeted with no welcome save the sepulchral tolling of some cathedral or chapel bell,—the waving of white kerchiefs or veils from the grated lattice of some convent which had escaped the ravagers, when their walls rung to the sound of the drum and war pipe,—the muttered benison of some old *Padre*, as he viewed with surprise the bare knees, the wild and martial garb, of the men of Albyn, and the gigantic proportions of the officer who commanded them. Major Campbell was a handsome Highlander, of a most muscular make and herculean form. His dark hair was becoming grizzled, for he was nearly fifty years of age, and his nutbrown cheek had been tanned by the sun and storm in many a varied clime. From the strength of his arm and the length of his sword (a real Andrea Ferrara,[*] with the maker's name on the blade) he was a most uncomfortable antagonist at close quarters, as many of the French and others had found to their cost; but Campbell never drew his Andrea unless when he found himself pressed, but made use of a short oak stick furnished with a heavy knob at the end, which he had cut in one of the wild forests of Argyleshire, and always retained and carried with him, as a relic and memorial of his native mountains.

[*] These swords are often worn by the officers of our Highland corps, the old blades being polished and set in new regimental basket-hilts.

It was towards the end of a chilly day in the spring of 1812, that the major's detachment halted in the ancient city of Albuquerque, where they spent their first night in Spain. This old frontier town is situated in the slope of the Sierra de Montanches, a ridge of mountains in Estremadura. By a miracle, or little short of it, it had escaped better than other places the ravages of the French, who had left the roofs on all the houses, which were, however, gutted of every thing of value. In general the outrages of Napoleon's troops were less flagrant in Spain than in Portugal, from a wish to conciliate the former, and render them, as of old, friends and allies. Owing to the eminence on which the city is situated, its streets are much cleaner than those of Spanish towns generally, where the thoroughfares are cleared of the mud and filth that encumber them by the rain, which in Albuquerque, when it falls heavily, sweeps every thing down the causewayed slopes to the bed of the Guadiana, which flows past the foot of the city. An ancient castle, as old probably as the days of Roderick "the last of the Goths," stands upon the summit of a rock above the town; and around its base are the streets, ill paved, dark, and narrow,—well fitted for Spanish deeds of assassination and robbery. By

an order from the *alcalde*, the Highlanders were billeted upon different houses, and Ronald Stuart and Major Campbell were both quartered in the same mansion, the *patron* of which, Senor Narvaez Cifuentes (as he styled himself), kept a shop for retailing the country wine. Many goodly pigskins filled with it were ranged upon the rickety shelves of his store, from the ruinous rafters of which hung some thousands of tempting bunches of dried grapes, and many of these fell kindly down at Campbell's feet when the old house shook with his heavy tread.

The patron, in appearance, was not quite what one should wish a host to be, especially in a strange country. His stature was low, his face was so swarthy as to resemble that of a negro in darkness; his moustaches were thick, fierce, and black, mingling with the matted hair of his huge bullet-head. He wore a long stiletto (openly) in the yellow worsted sash which encircled his waist, and the haft of a knife appeared within the breast of his doublet, or sort of vest with sleeves, which was, like the rest of his attire, in a very dilapidated condition; and altogether, the Senor Narvaez Cifuentes displayed more of the bravo or bandit, than the saint in his appearance.

He was, nevertheless, a rattling jolly sort of fellow, especially for a Spaniard; he sung songs and staves without number to entertain his guests, who scarcely comprehended a word of them; and to show his loyalty, emptied many a horn to the health of Ferdinand VII., to the freedom of Spain, and to the eternal confusion of the French, compelling, with rough and unceremonious hospitality, Stuart and the major to do so likewise, until they had well nigh each imbibed the contents of a pigskin,—the common vessel for containing wine in Spain, where neither bottles nor flasks are used, but the simple invention of a pigskin, sewn up with the hair inside, which, when full, looks not unlike the bag of the Scottish piper, from its black, bloated, and greasy appearance.

Almost reeling with the effects of their potations, they were shown by the patron to their chamber, where their bedding consisted only of a blanket and mattress.

"What the mischief is the meaning of this, Senor Patron, Mr. Narvaez, or what is your title?" stammered the major, holding the flickering candle over the miserable couch; "'tis all over blood. What does it mean? We *soldados* are not so fond of slaughter as to relish a bed of this sort." This strange exclamation recalled Ronald's wandering senses, and on surveying their humble pallet, he beheld it stained with blood, which, though hard and dry, appeared to have been recently shed, and in no small quantity.

"Campbell, here has been some foul work," said he, instinctively laying his hand on his basket hilt. "Make the fellow explain."

"Holloa, Mr. Cifuentes; tell us all about it, or I'll beat the pipe-clay out of

your tattered doublet, and that without parley," vociferated the inebriated major, flourishing his short cudgel over the head of their host.

"*Dios mio*, senors! Ha! ha! what a noise you make about a few red spots; 'tis French Malaga," replied the other, laughing heartily, as if something tickled his fancy exceedingly. "But I will tell you the tale as it happened, as you appear so anxious about it. The last time the French were in Albuquerque, I had four of their officers billeted upon me by our dog of an alcalde. They were merry and handsome young sparks of the chasseurs, and I plied them well with the contents of half-a-dozen pigskins, until they could scarcely stand, and then led them here for their repose; and they all four slept upon this very pallet. In the night-time I and two other comrades, guerillas of Don Salvador de Zagala's band, stole softly in upon them, and plunged our stilettoes into their hearts:[*] they died easily, being overcome with wine, and the fatigue of a long march, and our strokes were deadly and sure. Carrying off all their chattels, we hid for some days in the forest of Albuquerque until the enemy had retired, when I returned, and was surprised to find my *caza* but little the worse. The carrion, which we had tossed into the street in our flight, had been carried away, and buried by Dombrouski's corps with military honours.

[*] This piece of cruelty is no fiction, but actually happened as related here.

"So now, senors, you see I am a true patriot,—a loyal Spaniard, and that you have nothing to suspect me for. All Albuquerque knows the story of the four chasseurs, and praise me for the deed. I will turn up the mattress to hide the marks, and you will repose in all comfort upon it." As all this was related in Spanish, but little of it was understood by Ronald, who, however, comprehended enough to make him regard with detestation and horror the man who coolly confessed that he had slain four helpless fellow-beings in cold blood, and exulted in the narration of the deed with the feeling of one who had acted a most meritorious part. The satisfaction of the patriotic patron seemed considerably damped by the expression which he saw depicted in the features of his hearers.

"I do not believe you: this cannot be true," said they, at one and the same time.

"*Madre de Dios*! I call the mother of God to witness that it is. Why, senor, the men were only Frenchmen, and you would have taken their lives yourselves."

"In the open field, when equally armed; but we should not have stolen upon them in the night, and butchered them in their sleep, as you say you did. And you shall die for it, you base Spanish dog!" cried Ronald furiously, as he unsheathed

his sword.

"Hold, Stuart, my lad!" cried the major, who was perfectly sobered by this time; "it is beneath a soldier and gentleman to draw on so vile a scoundrel as this: I will deal with him otherwise. Look ye, Senor Narvaez," said Campbell, turning to the Spaniard, who had started back at the sight of Ronald's glittering blade, and eyed them both with a savage scowl, while his hand grasped the hilt of his poniard. "You had better betake yourself again to your friends in the forest of Albuquerque, and get clear of the city by morning, or I may have interest enough with the corregidor or alcalde to have you hanged like a scarecrow by the neck. So retire now, fellow, at once, and leave us."

"*Demonios!*" cried he, grinding his teeth; "am I not master of my own house? *Carajo, senor——*"

The rest was cut short by the summary mode of ejectment put in force by the major. Seizing him by the throat, he dragged him to the door, and in spite of all his struggles,—for the Spaniard, though a stout ruffian, was not a match for the gigantic Highlander,—hurled him to the lower landing-place of the old wooden stair, and tossing the mattress after him, shut and bolted the door.

"I can scarcely believe the tale to be true which this fellow has told us," observed Ronald, as they composed themselves to rest upon the hard boards, with no other covering than their gay regimentals.

"I entertain no doubt of its truth. He called to witness one, whom a Spaniard names only on most solemn occasions. But we must seek some sleep: 'tis two in the morning by my watch, and we march in three hours. The boards are confoundedly hard, and I am too sleepy to prick for a soft place. *Diavolo!* what a time we have wasted with that tattered vagabond! But good night, Stuart; we will talk this matter over on the march to-morrow."

Campbell stretched his bulky form on the boards, with his cudgel and long claymore beside him, and turning his face to the wall was soon in a deep slumber, as a certain noise proceeding from his nostrils indicated. But it was not so with the younger soldier, who courted in vain the influence of the drowsy god whose power had overwhelmed the senses of his comrade.

The fumes of the unusual quantity of wine which he had taken, were mounting into Ronald's head, and he lay watching the pale light of the stars through the latticed windows. Frightful faces, which he traced in the stains on the discoloured wall, seemed to peer through the gloom upon him, and every rumbling sound that echoed through the old mansion caused him to start, grip his sword and look about, for the vivid idea of the poor chasseurs who had been assassinated, in that very chamber, haunted him continually, causing him to shudder. When he thought, also, that he had spent the night in carousal with a murderous bravo, he resolved to be more circumspect in what company he

would trust his person, in future, while in Spain.

From a sleep into which he had sunk, he was soon awakened by the warning pipe for the march, which passed close beneath the window, and then grew fainter in sound as Macdonuil-dhu strode on, arousing his comrades from their billets, and the wild notes died away in the dark and narrow streets of the city. The major sprang up at the well-known sound, and Ronald, although wearied and unrefreshed, prepared to follow him.

"Confound this fashion of Lord Wellington's! this marching always an hour before day-break," muttered Campbell. "The morning is so chilly and cold, that my very teeth chatter, and——the devil! my canteen is empty," he added, shaking the little wooden barrel which went by that name, and one of which every officer and soldier on service carried slung in a shoulder-belt. "If you have nought in yours, Stuart, we must leave the house of the honourable Senor Narvaez Cifuentes without our *doch-an-dhoris*,[*] as we say at home in poor old Scotland, where men may sleep quietly at night, without fear of getting a dirk put into their wame. Shake your canteen, my boy! Is there a shot in the locker?"

[*] Gaelic, meaning stirrup-cup.

Luckily for the thirsty commander, Ronald's last day's allowance of ration rum was untouched, and they now quaffed it between them to the regimental toast,—"Here's to the Highlandmen, shoulder to shoulder!" a sentiment well known among the Scottish mountaineers as a true military toast.

They now proceeded down stairs, where they found their patron seated in his wine-store, surrounded by the well-filled skins; he sat beside a rickety old table, on which he leaned with the clumsy and careless air that so well became his appearance; his chin rested on his hand, and his tangled black hair fell over his face, but from between the locks he eyed them with a gaze of intense ferocity as they entered. Campbell sternly shook his stick over his head, and tossing towards him a few reals for their last night's entertainment, passed with Ronald into the street, where the soldiers were under arms.

On leaving behind the town of Albuquerque, the sound of distant firing in front warned them of their nearer approach to the place of their destination, and the scene of actual hostilities. As they advanced, the sharp but scattered reports of musketry, and now and then the deeper boom of a field-piece, came floating towards them on the breeze which swept along the level places; but an eminence, upon which the ancient castle of Zagala is situated, obstructed their view of the hostile operations, and they pressed eagerly forward to gain the height, full of

excitement and glee.

"Welcome to Spain!" cried an officer of the 13th Light Dragoons, who came galloping up from the rear, and reined in his jaded charger by the side of the marching Highlanders for a few minutes. "There is brave sport going on in front; press forward, my boys, and you may be in at the death, as we used to say at home in old Kent."

"What is going on in advance?" asked the major. "Are ours engaged?"

"I have little doubt that they are: Cameron never lags behind, you know. I was left in the rear at Albuquerque on duty, and am now hurrying forward to join the 13th, who belong to Long's cavalry brigade. They are now driving a party of plundering French out of La Nava: you will have a view of the whole affair when you gain the top of the hill. But I must not delay here: adieu!" and dashing the spurs into his horse, he disappeared behind the ruinous castle.

"Forward, men! double quick. Let us gain the head of the brae," cried Campbell, urging forward with cudgel and spur a miserable Rosinante, which he had procured at Lisbon.

Carrying their muskets at the long trail, the Highlanders advanced with that quick trot so habitual to the Scottish mountaineers, which soon brought them beneath the grass-grown battlements and mouldering towers of Zagala, from the eminence of which they now had an extensive view to the southward.

The horizon extended to about six or eight leagues, and all within that ample circle was waste and barren land, where the plough had been unknown for an age, and where nought seemed to flourish but weeds and little laurel-bushes. There was no trace of habitation around the plain, but far off appeared the deserted village of La Nava, near a leafless cork wood, the bare boughs presenting but a poor back ground to roofless walls and solitary rafters. There was something chilling in so dreary a prospect, but most of the plains in the same province present a similar aspect, because in no part of Spain is agriculture more neglected than in Estremadura. It was early in the spring of the year, and traces of vegetation were becoming visible; the wood near La Nava was, as I have said, bare and leafless, but a few stunted shrubs by the way-side gave signs of budding. The ruddy sun was setting in the west behind the lofty Sierra de Montanches, the dark ridges of which rose behind the high city and castled rock of Albuquerque: the sky in every direction was of a clear cold blue, save around the sun, where large masses of gold and purple clouds seemed resting on the curved outline of the mountains, over which and through every opening the rays fell aslant, and were reflected by the arms of the troops who occupied the level plain, over which shone the long line of its setting splendour. From the height of Zagala they beheld the operations in front.

A party of five hundred French infantry were rapidly retreating towards the

cork wood, exposed to the continual fire of two twelve-pound field-pieces and the charges of the cavalry brigade under General Long, who took every opportunity of breaking among the little band through the gaps formed by the cannon shot, which made complete lanes through their compact mass. The French retired with admirable coolness and bravery, keeping up a hot and rapid fire from four sides on the cavalry, who often charged them at full speed, brandishing their sabres, but were forced to recoil; and no sooner was a gap made in a face of a solid square by the fall of a file, than it was instantly filled by another. And thus leaving behind them a line of killed and wounded, they continued their retreat towards Merida, where their main body lay, disputing every foot of ground with desperate courage until they reached the cork wood, which being unfavourable for the movements of the cavalry, the latter were obliged to retire with considerable loss.

"Hurrah!" cried Campbell, flourishing his stick; "I have not seen this sort of work for this year and more. You see, Stuart, that a solid square of bold infantry may laugh at a charge of horse, who must recoil from their bayonets like water from a rock. There are the 9th and 13th Light Dragoons and the fire of the French seems to have cooled their chivalry a little, and shown them that a sabre is as nothing against brown Bess, with a bayonet on her muzzle. They are retiring towards us, after doing, however, all that brave hearts could do. Poor fellows! many of them are lying rolling about wounded and in agony, or already dead, near the skirts of that confounded copse by which the frog-eaters have escaped. But where are *ours*? I do not see Howard's brigade."

"Yonder they are, major," replied Ronald, "halted on the level place behind the ruined village. I see the bonnets of the Highlanders, and the colours."

"Ay, I see them now. Yonder they are, sure enough; and the old Half-hundred, and the 71st, the light bobs, with the tartan trews and hummel bonnets, all as spruce as ever, bivouacked comfortably on the bare earth as of old. We shall have the pleasure of passing the night without even a tent to keep the dew off us. *Carajo!* as the Spaniard says; you will now taste the delights of soldiering in good earnest, as I did first in Egypt with old Sir Ralph Abercrombie."

"We are seen by them. I hear the sound of the pipes, and they are waving their bonnets in welcome," said Alister Macdonald.

"Blow up your bags, Macdonuil-dhu, and let them hear the bray of the drones," cried Campbell, whacking the sides of his nag to urge her onward. "Push forward, brave lads! we will be with Fassifern and our comrades in a few minutes more."

Skirting the miserable village of La Nava, they soon arrived at the ground over which the advanced picquet of the enemy had retired. Two dead bodies attracted the eye of Ronald as he passed over them, and being the first men he had ever seen slain, and in so revolting a manner, they made an impression on

his mind which was not easily effaced. They were young and good-looking men, and the same cannon-shot had mowed them both down. A complete hole was made in the body of one, and his entrails were scattered about; the legs of the other were carried away, and lay a few yards off, with a ball near them half buried in the turf. Their grenadier caps, each adorned with a brass eagle and red plume, had fallen off, and the frightful distortion of their livid features, with the wild glare of their white and glassy eyes, struck Ronald with a feeling of horror and compassion, which it was long ere he could forget.

"Queer work this!" said the major, coolly looking at them over his horsed flank, "and you don't seem to admire it much, Stuart; but you are a young soldier yet, and will get used to it by and by. Nothing hardens either the heart or the hide so much as a campaign or two. I learned that in Egypt."

"Puir callants! what would their mothers think, were they to see their bairns as they lie here noo?" soliloquized Evan, looking after them ruefully.

"It would be an awfu' sicht for them, or ony o' the peaceable folk at name," replied another soldier. "But what can these twa queer chields wi' the muckle brimmed hats be wanting wi' them?"

"The Spanish dogs! Would to Heaven I might be allowed to shoot them dead," vociferated Campbell, making a motion with his hand towards the bear-skin covering of his holsters. "The scoundrels! they are come to rob and strip the dead."

Two Spanish peasants had approached the bodies, about which they exercised their hands so busily, that they soon plundered them of knapsacks, accoutrements, uniform, and every thing, leaving the mutilated bodies stripped to the skin and exposed on the plain, while they made off towards La Nava with their spoil. A few minutes' more marching brought the major's detachment to the spot where the brigade of General Howard was halted on a piece of waste moorland, where the three corps had piled their arms, and were making such preparations for bivouacking for the night as could be made by men who had neither tent to cover them, nor couch to repose on but the bare and cold earth.

No tents at that time, or for long afterwards, were served out by the British government to our troops in Spain, and their privations and misery were of course greatly increased by the want of proper means of encamping. The men were lying about in all directions, worn out and exhausted with the load they had carried and the fatigue of a long march; and the officers were reposing among them without ceremony. Apart from them all, on the right of the line, Colonel Cameron of Fassifern stood holding his caparisoned horse by the bridle, as was his usual custom, aloof alike from his officers and soldiers. He was a proud and strict commander, who kept the former "at the staff's end," as the military saying is, behaving to them in a manner at once haughty, cold, and distant; and yet

withal he was a good officer, a brave soldier, and beloved by his regiment, which would have stood by him to the last man. He was a well-made figure, above the middle height; his features were handsome, and his hair was fair and curly. There was ever a proud and fiery sort of light in his dark blue eyes, which when he was excited were wont to sparkle and flash with peculiar brilliancy,—an expression which never failed to produce its due effect upon beholders. To him the major reported his arrival, and introduced the officers one by one.

He eyed Ronald Stuart, of whom he had heard previously, with a keen Highland glance, and asked some questions about his family and his father.

"I have often heard of the Stuarts of Lochisla," said he, "but have never had the pleasure of seeing one till now. Sir John Stuart of the Tower saved the life and honour of my grandfather Lochiel, at the risk of his own, on the bloody field of Culloden. I am happy to have the descendant of so brave a man an officer of the Gordon Highlanders."

"Ensign Macdonald, colonel," said the major, presenting Alister.

"Macdonald? Ah!" said Cameron, bowing, "your family is not unknown to me. I have had letters from Glengarry, and all the Macdonalds of the Isles, respecting you;" and thus he went on, as there was scarcely an officer introduced to him whose family was not well known in the North. After some little conversation, Ronald withdrew to where the officers were grouped around the bulky figure of Campbell, asking a hundred questions about the news from home, &c.

There was scarcely an officer or private of the new comers but was met and greeted by some kinsman or old friend, whose canteen of ration rum, or Lisbon wine, was at his service; and loud were the shouts of laughter and merriment that arose on all sides. Eager and earnest were the inquiries about village homes and paternal hearths in "the land of the mountain and the flood," and to many a Jean, Jessy, and Tibby, were the wooden canteens drained to their dregs; but although the fun "grew fast and furious" amongst many, there were some whose hearts grew sad at the intelligence which their comrades brought, of some grey head, which they loved and revered, being laid in the dust in some old and well-remembered kirk-yard; or of a faithless Jenny, who preferred a lover at home to one far away in Spain.

As the shades of night darkened over the plain of La Nava, the sounds died away; and stretching their bare legs on the dewy earth, the hardy Highlanders reposed between the pyramids of firelocks and bayonets that glittered in the red glare of the watch-fires, lighted at certain distances throughout the bivouac, which became quiet for the night, after strong picquets had been posted in the direction of Merida, where fifteen hundred French under the command of General Dombrouski (a Pole in Buonaparte's service) were quartered. Rolled up in a cloak and blanket, Ronald laid himself down like the rest, with the basket-

hilt of his claymore for a pillow and clay for his bed; but to sleep in a situation so new and uncomfortable was almost impossible, and he often raised his head to view the strange scene around him.

The ruddy blaze of the fires was cast upon the worn uniform, faded tartan, and sun-burned knees and faces of the soldiers, giving a strong light and shade, which increased the picturesque and romantic appearance of the bivouac. The arms of the sentries flashed in the light, as they paced slowly to and fro on their posts; and farther off were seen the motionless forms of the cavalry videttes, appearing like black equestrian statues in the distance, standing perfectly still, with their long dark cloaks flowing over their horses' flanks; but as the night grew darker, and the light of the watchfires waned, these distant objects could be no longer discerned.

The bright stars were twinkling in the dark blue sky, and among them a red planet in the west, (the *Ton-thena* of Ossian,) which Ronald used to watch for hours at midnight from the battlements of the tower at Lochisla, while listening to the ancient tales of war or woe related by Donald Iverach.

He thought sadly of his home, and of poor Alice Lisle. He gazed upon her miniature until the flickering light of the fire failed him, and then dropped into an uneasy slumber, from which he was startled more than once by the deep howling of wild dogs, or other animals, from that part of the plain where the dead bodies of the slain lay uninterred.

CHAPTER VII.

MERIDA.

"All was prepared—the fire, the sword, the men
To wield them in their terrible array.
The army, like a lion from his den,
March'd forth with nerve and sinews bent to slay—
A human hydra, issuing from its pen
To breathe destruction on its winding way,
Whose heads were heroes, which, cut off in vain,
Immediately in others grew again."

Don Juan, canto viii.

Towards morning a storm of rain and wind arose, and none but those who have experienced it can imagine the manifold miseries of a tentless bivouac on such an occasion. Howling dismally among the trees of the cork wood, the cold wind swept over the desert plain, and the sleety rain descended in torrents, drenching the unsheltered soldiers to the skin, and extinguishing their fires; as the cold increased towards day-break, they cursed the order which had halted them in so exposed and dreary a spot, to which even the cork wood or ruins of La Nava would have been preferable.

It became fair about day-break, and Ronald, unable to remain longer on the ground, where the water was actually forming in puddles around him, arose; and so wet was the soil, that the impression made by the weight of his body was almost immediately filled with water. His limbs were so benumbed and stiff that he could scarcely move, and his clothing was drenched through the blanket and cloak in which he had been muffled up. The soldiers, worn out with the fatigues of the preceding day, lay still until the last moment for rest, and slept in ranks close together for warmth, with their muskets under their great coats, and their knapsacks beneath their heads for pillows. Here and there, apart from the rest, one might be seen with his miserable wife and two or three little children huddled close beside him, all nestling under the solitary blanket, (provided by government for each man,) from which the steam arose in a column, owing to the heat of their bodies acting on the rain-soaked covering. The distant sentinels and cavalry videttes were standing motionless and silent at intervals along the plain, where banks of white mist were rolling slowly in the yellow lustre of the morning sun, the rising light of which was gilding the summits of the mountains above Albuquerque. All was misery and unutterable discomfort. Ronald wrung the water from the feathers of his bonnet, and kept himself in motion to dry his regimentals and underclothing, which stuck close to his skin. He now perceived that, in addition to his blanket, Evan had during the storm cast over him his own great-coat, standing out the misery of the night in his thin uniform. When he met Ronald's eye, he was shivering with cold, exhaustion, and want of sleep.

"O Evan! my faithful but foolish fellow, what is this you have done? Did you really strip yourself for me, and pass the night thus exposed?" exclaimed Ronald, his heart overflowing with tumultuous feelings at the kindness of his humble follower and old friend.

"I thocht ye would be cauld, sir," replied Evan, his teeth chattering while he spoke, "and my heart bled to see ye lying there like a beast o' the field on the dreary muir, in siccan a miserable and eerie nicht. For me it mattered naething,—for neither my name nor bluid are gentle. I'm the son of your father's vassal, and, Maister Ronald, I did but my duty,—what my puir auld faither would hae wished me to do."

"See that you never again subject yourself to such a privation on my account; and Heaven knows, Evan, I will not forget your kindness," said Ronald, laying his hand familiarly on the tufted wing which adorned Iverach's shoulder. "You appear to be perishing with cold, and my canteen is empty. See if your comrade, Angus Mackie, or any one, will give you a drop of something to warm you. Where is the colonel? I do not see him."

"Lying yonder, on the bieldy side of his horse."

"And Mr. Macdonald—"

"Is sleeping by the bieldy side of the major, and a burn of water rinnin round them. Och, sirs! it's awfu' wark this for gentlemen's sons."

"Rouse, Alister!" said Ronald, stirring him with his sword; "we shall get under arms immediately. I see, through the mist yonder, that Howard is preparing to mount." He shaded the rays of the sun from his eyes with his hand, and perceived at some distance the brigadier, with his tall cocked-hat and large military cloak, examining the girths of his saddle and the holsters, while he despatched the brigade-major to the officers commanding regiments. The long roll of several drums, sounding dull and muffled with the rain, immediately followed, rousing the bivouac; and the troops "stood to their arms," preparatory to moving off, all draggled and wet, and with empty stomachs, in the direction of the enemy, who were to be driven from Merida at the point of the bayonet.

The women and camp-followers were sent off to the rear, where the baggage-mules were halted on the La Nava road; the wet cloaks and blankets were rolled up for the march, the officers slinging theirs in their sashes of crimson silk, while those of the soldiers were strapped to their knapsacks.

"Uncase the colours, gentlemen. Examine your flints," cried Cameron, touching his bonnet to the officers, as he rode along the front of the line.

In a few minutes the troops moved off in close column, with the light cavalry on their flanks; and making a circuit about the plain, advanced upon Merida, skirting the cork wood through which the French had retired on the preceding evening. Ronald scanned the plain with an earnest eye in search of the two dead men, the slaughter of whom had haunted his mind during the whole of the last night; and the reader may conceive the disgust which he and others experienced, when, on the spot where they had fallen, the scattered bones of two skeletons were discovered, red and raw as they had been left by wild animals, which had been busy upon them the live-long night. Yesterday they were active young soldiers, animated probably with spirit, courage, and many a noble sentiment,—today they were bare skeletons, left to bleach unburied on the plain, as the troops had no time to inter them. The old campaigners faced them with comparative indifference; but there was altogether something rather appalling to so young a soldier as Ronald in the lesson of war and mortality before him, and gloomy

feelings, which he endeavoured to shake off, took possession of his mind. But it was not a time to appear depressed when there was a chance of hearing shot whizzing in an hour or so more, and his spirits rose as the six regimental pipers, with their major Macdonuil-dhu in their front, struck up a well-known Scottish quick-step, and all pressed forward in hopes of driving the enemy from their post, and obtaining a meal there.

During a march of several miles they saw but little of the boasted fruitfulness of Spain. The soil appeared rich enough in some parts, but it lay untended and untilled, for the roll of the drum and the glitter of arms had scared away the husbandman and vine-dresser, making the once peaceful peasantry either prowling plunderers, or fierce and savage guerillas, turning the plough-share into a sword, and a fertile country into a neglected wilderness.

As the wood of La Nava lessened in the rear, the city of Merida, situated on a high hill, around the base of which the Guadiana wandered amid groves of cork-wood, laurel, and olive, presented itself to view. Merida, one of the most ancient cities in Spain, was once the capital of a province of the same name, and numerous are the remains of Roman and Gothic grandeur which are preserved within the circle of its mouldering fortifications.

Dombrouski, a brave soldier of fortune in the service of France, commanded the enemy, and he had put the town in the best possible state of defence by raising a few redoubts on the granite hill beside the city. He barricadoed the streets with the furniture of the citizens, and all that the soldiers could lay hands on for the purpose; the suburban houses and walls were loop-holed, and the Pole was determined to defend his post, if a force came against it for which he deemed himself a match; but when the waving colours and polished arms of Sir Howland Hill's division, sixteen thousand strong, appeared descending the gentle slope towards the city, he saw the folly of his resolution, and prepared to abandon his position. On the nearer approach of the British, they beheld the corps of Dombrouski formed outside the town, preparatory to moving off by the ancient Roman bridge, the lofty arches of which span the deep waters of the Guadiana. On a front movement being made among our cavalry, the French, not wishing to feel the steel of those who had so lately gained the battle of Arroya-del-Molino, retreated double quick, without firing a shot; and in a short time the glitter of their appointments and the flashing tops of their glazed shakoes disappeared among the olive-groves and broken ground in the direction of the town of Almendralejo, where a strong party lay, commanded by the Count D'Erlon. The division halted, and bivouacked about Merida, to which those inhabitants who had fled during its occupation by Dombrouski returned: the streets were filled with acclamations of welcome to the British, and the bells rang merrily from the steeples of the churches and convents. A small ration was now served out to the half-famished

soldiers, and thousands of fires were lit in every direction; while all the camp-kettles and pans were put in requisition for cooking, and the axes, saws, and bill-hooks of the pioneers made devastation among the underwood and wild groves to procure fuel.

The miserable ration consisted of a few ounces of flour and flesh, given to each man alike, without distinction. The flesh was that of ill-fed, jaded, and wearied bullocks, which had become too old for agricultural labour, driven up rapidly after the army. Those given to each regiment were instantly shot through the head, flayed, and in a twinkling served out in the allotted quantities, which were placed warm in the camp-kettles to boil, almost before the circulation of the blood, or the vibration of the fibres had ceased.

This was the usual way in which the military rations were served out in Spain,—killed and eaten when the animals were in a state of fever from long and hasty journeys, tough and hard as bend leather, in consequence of age, ill-feeding, and want of proper cooking.

More lucky than thousands of their comrades, who pursued their culinary operations in the open air, Ronald and Alister Macdonald obtained possession of a deserted shed or house in the suburbs, where Evan Iverach, casting aside his accoutrements, began to prepare in the best manner he could the poor meal, for which, however, the appetites of all were sufficiently sharpened, for they had not broken their fast since they quitted Albuquerque.

The wretched apartment had neither windows nor shutters to boast of; and the arms of leafless vines straggled in at the apertures, through which, now and then, the swarthy face of a passing Spaniard appeared, looking in with evident curiosity. Strong black rafters crossed by red tiles, the joints of which admitted the daylight, composed the roof; the floor was earth pounded hard by means of a pavier's rammer, or some such instrument. As the room had no fire-place, Evan made one by means of two stones placed in the centre of the floor; between them was kindled a fire with one of the doors, which Ronald had torn down, and hewn in pieces with his sword.

The smoke filled the place, and rolled in volumes out at every aperture. A large stone and Evan's knapsack set on end composed their furniture, and, seated thus, they set about the discussion of their meal, which when cooked was but a sorry mess, being merely the tough flesh boiled with the flour, without the aid of a single vegetable,—tasteless and insipid; but hunger is said to be "the best sauce," and they dispatched it with infinite relish. Each had produced his knife, fork, and spoon from his havresack, a strong bag of coarse linen, in which provisions are carried on service, and their dinner-set was complete.

"Hech me, sirs! I would rather sup sourcrowdy at the ingle neuk o' auld Lochisla, than chow sic fushionless trash as this," said Evan with strong contempt,

as he sat squatted on the floor, taking his share of the provision out of a camp-kettle lid, and scarcely seen amid the smoke. "It micht pass muster wi' a puir chield like me; but I trow it's no for sic as you, Maister Ronald, or you, Maister Macdonald, or ony gentleman o' that ilk."

"It is confounded stuff, certainly," replied Alister, laughing at the young Highlander's quaint mode of expression; "the flesh is as tough as a buff belt, and the old bull it belonged to has seen hard service, no doubt, in his day. But I wish that we had a drop of the purple Lisbon wine to wash it down with, eh, Ronald?"

"We are better off than our Portuguese comrades, however bad our present fare; they, poor fellows, have only received a few ounces of wheat each man."

"And an unco chappin' they are making by the water-side, sir, ilka man pounding his wheat between twa stanes, into something to mak' bannocks wi'. Puir black-avised deevils! I pity them muckle," observed Evan, who, from many circumstances combined, presumed to break the laws of military etiquette, and mingle in the conversation. "It's an unco thing to march far wi' an empty wame and fecht fasting. It makes my very heart loup like a laverock, when I think o' the braw Scots' brochan and kail, that the miserable folk here ken naething aboot. O, it's a puir hole this Spain, I think, either to fecht or forage in."

"If you grumble thus, Evan, I shall be led to suppose you will make but a poor soldier. We have seen little of Spain yet; the best part of the country and the summer are still before us, and let us hope that this is the worst. But there is little pleasure in abiding in this wretched sheiling, where we are almost choked and blinded with smoke. Let us find out some wine-house, where we can get something to gargle our throats with. Come, Macdonald, we shall be smoked like deer's hams, if we sit here longer. There are the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, and other things in this city of Merida, which I would wish to see, and our time is short; we march again in the morning, as you know."

On passing down the principal street, their attention was attracted by the ruins of a noble triumphal arch, (a relic of the Roman power,) under which lay mouldering fragments of the rich cornice and marble statues that had fallen from above. Near the arch stood two tall Corinthian columns upwards of forty feet in height, the last remnants of some magnificent temple.

The houses were lofty, and decorated with heavy entablatures, pilasters, and ornaments of stucco or plaster, some of them richly gilt, and many had broad balconies of stone or iron projecting over the pavement. On some of them appeared dark-haired and dark-eyed Senoritas, wearing the long sweeping veil and graceful black mantilla, of which so much has been said by romancers, surveying with smiles of wonder and pleasure, the strange scene of so many foreign uniforms crowding the streets, and waving their fans and handkerchiefs, crying to the British officers who passed them, "*Viva! la valiante Inglesa! viva!*"

"What beautiful eyes, and splendid figures these girls have!" said Macdonald rapturously, doffing his bonnet to a group of fair ones, whose attention their Highland garb had attracted. "By Heaven! we have no such eyes at home. How they flash under their long lashes! I never beheld such glossy curls as those that stream from under their veils."

"I have, Alister," was Ronald's brief reply.

"Ay, in her whose miniature you wear under the fold of your shoulder-belt: I saw it for an instant the other day at Albuquerque. Nay, nay, man, you need not colour or look so cross; I shall not tell any of our fellows, and we have no mess here to try your fiery temper by jokes and quizzing. But keep it in a more secure place; should it be seen by Grant or Bevan, or any of them, it may become the source of continual jesting."

"Those who dare to jest with me on such a subject, may find it dangerous work," said Ronald coldly and haughtily. "But here is the place we have been looking for,—the *Caza de Vino*."

A bunch of gilded grapes, suspended over the door of a low flat-roofed building, announced it to be the shop of a retailer of wine. The door-way was crowded by British, Portuguese, and German officers, who were pressing their way in and out, intermixed with a few cigar-smoking citizens, wearing broad sombreros and the eternal long Spanish cloak, enveloping their whole form in a manner not ungraceful, but in the style of mysterious gentry on the stage, rendering it impossible to discover their rank in society; in fact, all the Spaniards they beheld were exactly like one another. All smoked cigars with the same air of immovable gravity; all wore the same sombre attire, and strode under the piazzas of the Plaza with the same haughty swagger. To stroll about smoking by day, and to sit listlessly at night muffled in their mantles, with their feet resting on a pan of hot charcoal while they sipped their sour wine, appeared to be their only employment.

Ronald and his friend made their way into a spacious oblong apartment, fitted up in the plainest manner with rough deal seats and tables, at which sat many of the officers of the second division,—the red, or rather purple coats of the British, the blue of the Portuguese, the green of the German Rifles, and the brown of a few Spaniards, being intermingled. Several olive-cheeked young girls, with their long black hair streaming unbound, wearing short petticoats, large bustles, and high-heeled shoes, were continually tripping about, and serving the country wine in all kinds of vessels, from which it was rapidly transferred to the throats of the thirsty carousers; and a strange din of several languages and many sonorous voices, shook the rafters of the place.

"A devil of a den this! Let us quit it as soon as possible," said Macdonald, draining his horn of dark liquor.

"As soon as you please. I am almost stifled with the fumes of garlick from the Portuguese, and tobacco from the Germans. Look at old Blacier of the 60th Rifles, how quietly he sits in that corner, filling the whole place with the smoke of his long pipe."

"Looking as grave as his Serene mightiness of Hesse Humbug. But I do not see any of ours here?"

"There's Campbell, sitting beside Armstrong of the 71st; doubtless he is fighting some battle in Egypt over again. He speaks so earnestly, that he is not aware of our presence,—and yonder is Chisholm."

"Stuart," exclaimed Alister, abruptly, "who can that strange fellow be who seems to scrutinize you so narrowly. See, behind the chair of Blacier, in the dark recess of the doorway."

Ronald looked in the direction pointed out, and beheld the fierce serpent-like eyes of a well-known face fixed on him with a settled stare.

"It is the rascal Narvaez," whispered Ronald, making a stride towards the place; but the worthy, pulling his sombrero over his face, pressed through the crowd, gained the door, and disappeared.

"Pshaw! let him go," said Alister, holding Ronald back by his silk sash. "You surely would not follow him? You are neither an alcalde or an alguazil, and you need not care how many he sends to the shades. He eyes you with a look that bodes you no good, and the revengeful disposition of these swarthy gentlemen is well known. I would advise you to be on your guard; perhaps he is dogging you for your squabble at Albuquerque."

"If ever I meet the vagabond on a hill side," replied Ronald angrily, "I will teach him to model his face differently, when he dares to look at me."

"Ay; but 'tis not decently on the hill side that disputes are settled here. A stab in the dark, or a shot from behind a hedge ends matters, and all is over," answered Macdonald, as they issued into the street, after settling with the *patron*. "And now, before it is quite dark, let us take a view of the amphitheatre. I see its ruins above the flat-roofed houses at the end of the street yonder, and a bold outline it rears against the clear sky of the evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ADVENTURE.

"The troops exulting sat in order round,
And beaming fires illumin'd all the ground:
A thousand piles the dusky horrors gild,
And shoot a shady lustre o'er the field.
Full fifty guards each flaming pile attend,
Whose umber'd arms by fits thick flashes send;
Loud neigh the coursers o'er their heaps of corn,
And ardent warriors wait the rising morn."
Iliad, book viii.

It was almost dusk when they entered the vast and gloomy ruins of the amphitheatre, the appearance of which was rendered doubly impressive by the sombre light in which it was viewed. The broad arena, where once the bold gladiator contended for honour, or the wretched malefactor for his life, straining every desperate energy in battle with the fiercest animals of the wilderness, was now overgrown with grass, as were also the wide circles of seats rising from it; and from the arcades of arches, from the mouldered cornices, the shattered columns, and empty niches, waved weeds and nettles, showing how vain was the pride of the founder and the architect, and telling that time was too powerful for the mightiest work of human hands,—that man's labours, like himself, are perishable.

In some places great masses of masonry had fallen down, where the clamps of iron and brass had mouldered away, and ponderous architraves and fragments of friezes, bearing ornaments and Roman inscriptions, were lying in the centre of the arena, half buried in the soil. All was silence and ruinous desolation now in the place where once the beautiful, the brave, and the noble, had witnessed and applauded soul-stirring deeds of martial prowess, manly strength, and unequalled cruelty and ferocity. Its vast arcades and empty galleries rang no more with the flourish of the trumpet, the clash of cymbals, the shout which greeted the triumphant victor in the lists, the yell or the dying groan of his vanquished opponent.

From the grass-covered arena, around which appeared the dark dens where lions, tigers, and other savage animals had been confined, Ronald and his friend clambered up the stone seats, which rose one above another like a flight of broad steps, until they gained the uppermost corridor or gallery, which ran round the whole fabric on the outside. From this eminence they obtained a view of the scenery below and around them. Night had now set in, and darkness reigned in the streets of Merida. Towering above the low roofs appeared the other remains of Roman greatness,—the noble arch which had rung so often to the tread of their martial legions, and the shattered temple where marble gods had received

the fervent adoration of idolaters.

A thousand watch-fires cast their lurid glare on the silent waters of the Guadiana, on the dark groves of olive overhanging its glassy surface, on the lofty outline of the Roman bridge, and on the black buildings of the adjacent town, from the bivouac of Sir Rowland's division. The piles of burnished arms glittered in the light, which was reflected by the bayonets of the sentries at the river side, and by the sabres of the far-off cavalry videttes, and of the advanced picquets on its opposite side, keeping watch and ward on the road to Almendralejo. A low hum of many mingled voices rose from the place where the soldiers lay, mingled with the occasional neigh of a horse, the sharper sound of the cavalry trumpet turning out the picquets, or the roll of a distant infantry drum recalling stragglers echoing among the granite crags, and dying away in the thickets by the water side; and nearer rang the more discordant noise of laughter and reckless military merriment from the wine-house in the neighbouring street.

"Yonder is the evening star glimmering above the summit of the dark mountain to the southward of us," observed Ronald in a low tone; "it rises twinkling just as I have seen it rising above the noble Benmore in Perthshire; and while I view its well-known appearance my heart fills with strange emotions. I can almost fancy myself at home in the Highlands,—at home in my father's house."

"I am animated by similar feelings," replied Macdonald in the same subdued voice. "Many that love us dearly may at this moment be watching it, and thinking of us. Many a summer gloaming, in my dismal moods, I have watched it rising amid the white breakers, and shining above the ruined spire of Iona, while the empty arches of the cathedral were illumined with the red flush of the setting sun. Ah, Stuart! I know these places well: my father dwells in Inch-kenneth, in the wild and surf-beaten western isles. It is a sweet little place the Inch, with dark foliage hanging from the tall rocks over the boiling ocean. These ruins around us are all very well in their way, but I would not give the Runic cross and the Culdee's cell, which cover the graves of my ancestors, even for all the ruins of Rome! But let us not begin to muse thus: I shall become too melancholy to feel agreeable. We must retrace our steps to the bivouac, for both fighting and hard marching are before us in the morning, over the hills yonder," said he, pointing in the direction of Almendralejo, where a faint crimson streak illumined the dark sky, caused probably by the watch-fires of D'Erlon's troops.

"What! do you think of returning to the den where we cooked our splendid repast?"

"We should be eaten up by rats and the Spanish musquitoes before morning; better the bivouac where our comrades stretch their bare legs on the cold sod. Fassifern would ill like us seeking even the shelter of a kennel, while he sleeps as usual under the heels of his horse, with the pommel of his saddle for a pillow."

"You speak of a kennel; I assure you, Macdonald, that last night I envied the old barrel in which our household dog at Lochisla takes his repose in the barbican. But we shall lose ourselves here, the streets are so dark and strange." As he spoke they had quitted the ruins of the amphitheatre, and entered a dark and silent street leading towards the Plaza. It was empty, and its stillness was broken only by the ripple of the Guadiana, chafing against the stone quay at one end, past which its broad and rapid current flowed unceasingly.

"Have Sir Rowland and his staff quarters in Merida?"

"I have not heard that they have. But hush! we have something here that savours of romance," replied Macdonald, as they heard the notes of a guitar sounding as if struck by a bold and firm hand; and immediately (the prelude being over) a fine, clear, and manly voice sung a song, which being in Spanish, was not understood by his listeners, excepting the burden which he repeated at the end of every verse:—

"Yo acuerdo de te, querida,—
Adios! adios!"

"What cavaliero is this?" whispered Macdonald. "I thought that these days of serenading had passed away, even in Spain."

"I know him: it is Alvaro de Villa Franca, a captain of the Spanish cavalry. I see the tall outline of his figure now, and I well know his helmet with the red horse-hair on its crest."

"Keep under the shadow of the houses, Stuart; perhaps he may sing again. But he surely hears us; he is looking round."

The form of the Spanish officer, the outline of his high helmet, and his large bullion epaulettes were now distinctly visible. When his song ceased, a window above opened, a light flashed through the shutters, and a lady appeared on the iron balcony; she clapped her hands and the dragoon drew near, when a conversation, carried on in low and earnest tones, ensued. The don had placed his hand on the lower part of the balcony, preparatory to swinging himself up, when a noise in the street caused the lady to start away, and close the shutters of the window with the utmost precipitation.

"*Caramba!*" cried the Spaniard, fiercely turning round and endeavouring to pierce the darkness which enveloped the stradi: but nothing could be discovered. After a vain attempt again to obtain a hearing from the lady, he took his guitar under his arm, and proceeded leisurely down the street on the darkest side, as if to elude observation, still humming the burden of his ditty, "Adios, querida,"[*] while his heavy spurs and long steel scabbard clattered in accompaniment. The

two British officers had turned to pursue their way towards the Plaza, when a cry of "*Diavolo! Ah, perros—ladrones! Carajo!*" burst from the Spaniard, followed immediately by a clashing of steel blades, the noise of which drew Ronald and Alister hastily to the spot. Here they found Don Alvaro, with his back to the wall, contending fiercely with his single weapon against six armed men, from whose swords and poniards he made the fire fly at every stroke he dealt, keeping them at bay with admirable courage and skill.

[*] Farewell, love.

"One, two, three—six to one! the rascally cowards! Draw, Alister,—draw and strike in," cried Ronald, unsheathing his sword, an example which his companion was not slow in following, and all three were soon engaged, two to one, against the assailants of Alvaro, who were surprised at this unexpected attack, and fought with double desperation to escape. The whole of Ronald's long-nourished love of tumult, his fiery spirit and inherent fierceness broke forth in this martial fray, and indeed he was put to his mettle. No fewer than three of the ruffians fell upon him pell mell, cutting and thrusting with their long blades, while they watched every opportunity to use the sharper stilettoes which armed their left hands. Ronald's regimental gorget saved him from one deadly thrust at his throat, and the thick folds of his plaid, where they crossed the iron plate of his left epaulette-strap, saved him from more than one downright blow. Sweeping his long claymore round him, with both his hands clenched in its basket hilt, he fought with the utmost energy, but only on the defensive, and was compelled to retire backwards step by step towards the quay of the Guadiana, where he must have been inevitably drowned or slain, but for the timely interference of a fourth sword, which mingling its strokes with theirs, struck the three Spanish blades to shivers. Two of the fellows immediately fled, and plunging into the river swam to the opposite bank; the third would have followed, but Ronald, grasping him by the throat, adroitly struck the poniard from his hand, and pinning him to the earth, placed his foot upon his neck. At the same moment Alister Macdonald passed his long claymore through the body of the fourth, who fell shrieking—"*Santa Maria! O Dios! O Dios!*" and almost instantly expired. The other two, who had been driven far off by the Spanish officer, now fled, and the brawl was ended.

"Hot work this, gentlemen," said Campbell, in his usual jocular tone. It was his sword which had intervened so opportunely between Ronald and destruction. "The fray has been bravely fought and gallantly finished. You have drawn your sword to-night for the first time, Stuart, and proved yourself a lad of the proper

stuff. Keep your foot tight upon that growling scoundrel, and if he dares to stir, pin him to the pavement. This affair beats hollow my brawl at Grand Cairo, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph. By the by, what did the fray begin about?"

"I am sure I cannot say," replied Ronald, panting with his late exertion; "but for your prompt assistance, major, it might have ended otherwise. Alister, I am glad you have disposed of your opponent in so secure a manner,—yet his horrid death-cry rings strangely in my ears." A grim smile curled the handsome features of Macdonald, who wiped his sword in his tartan plaid, and jerked it into the sheath in silence.

"*Senores—officiales*, I thank you for the good service you have rendered me to-night," said the Spanish officer in good English, while he made a low obeisance, "and am happy that you have all escaped unharmed; but we must dispose of this remaining villain. Be pleased to stand aside, senor, that I may run him through the heart. A fair thrust from the blade of a noble cavaliero is too good a death for such a fellow."

"Sir, I should be sorry to thwart you in your pleasure, but have a little patience, pray," replied the major, laughing at the coolness of the don's request, and parrying with his stick a thrust made at the bravo, who lay prostrate under Ronald's foot. "As this fellow's skin is whole, he may be inclined to let you know his employer, or what all this row began about."

"Right, senor; I had forgotten that. Dog!" cried Don Alvaro, fiercely dashing his guitar into a thousand fragments on the head of the bravo, "tell me who employed your rascal hands against my person! You will not answer? Well, we must prove what materials your skin is made of. By Santiago! I will have it flayed off you with a red-hot sabre, if you do not confess! The tortures of the Inquisition will be as nothing to what I will inflict on your miserable body, if you are stubborn. Aid me, noble senors, in taking this wretch to the Convento de San Juan de Merida, in the Plaza: my troop is quartered there. 'Tis but a pistol-shot from here."

It was impossible to refuse. Don Alvaro tied tightly with his silk sash the hands of the captive, who was dragged without ceremony from street to street, to the entrance of a narrow dark alley leading to the convent of Saint John, the front of which looked towards the Plaza.

"*Quien vive?*" challenged the Spanish trooper on sentry with his carbine in the Gothic porch.

"*España*," returned the don, as they passed into the gloomy body of the building, in the vast extent of which their footsteps awoke a thousand echoes.

"*Ho! there, saryentos y soldados!*" cried Alvaro. "Pedro Gomez, a light—a light! Rouse,—do you hear me?"

A strange bustle immediately rose around them, and a sargento appeared

bearing a lamp, the light of which revealed his brown uniform, and browner features. They found themselves in the chapel of the convent, and the red glare of the blazing lamp was cast on its fluted columns, groined arches, and Gothic ornaments, giving a wild and romantic appearance to the scene, which was heightened by the presence of Don Alvaro's troop. About sixty fine Spanish steeds, with flowing tails and manes, stood ranged on each side of the nave of the building, saddled and bridled, bearing the carbines, holsters, and valises of their riders, who, muffled in their long brown cloaks, with their swords and helmets beside them, were sleeping among the horse-litter, or looking up surprised at the interruption. Every man lay beside his horse, and their tall lances were reared against the shafted pillars, from which military accoutrements, curry-combs, horse-brushes, &c. were suspended from the necks of angels and other effigies that adorned them.

"Pedro Gomez, raise the light," said Alvaro, "and let us see the face of this fellow, who to-night raised his hand against the life of your captain."

"*Dios mio!*" cried Pedro, placing the lamp within an inch of the prisoner's nose.

"The villain Narvaez, by heavens!" exclaimed Ronald, recoiling at the expression of indescribable hatred and ferocity legible in the ruffian's countenance, while his eyes shone with the sparkle of a demon's as the sullen glare of the lamp fell on their black balls.

"How d'ye do, Senor Cifuentes? Speak up, man. You are the very prince of rascals!" said the major, giving him a prod in the stomach with his stick.

"What!" exclaimed Macdonald, scrutinizing him with disgust and curiosity, "is this the fellow you told us about? the keeper of the wine-house at Albuquerque?"

"Ay, the same," answered Ronald; "a wretch who slew in cold blood the French officers. But he shall not escape us now."

"If I should, you shall live to repent it,—you shall, by the holy mother of God!" said the bold ruffian with a scornful smile.

A few words made Don Alvaro acquainted with the story of Narvaez.

"Fellow!" said he sternly, "I might almost forgive you the slaughter of the four Frenchmen,—I wish, however, that it had been done less treacherously; but for this attempt on my own life you shall hang, and that instantly, by San Juan of Merida! as a warning to all low-born knaves to beware ere they draw their weapons on a noble hidalgo. Diego de la Zarza, Pedro Gomez! bring hither a horse-halter, some of you," cried he to the astonished troopers who crowded round. "Run this fellow up to the roof. Santos! do you hear?"

He had scarcely spoken before Pedro Gomez cast his horse's halter over the neck of a gigantic stone angel, whose extended wings, carved on a corbelled

stone, supported one of the oak beams of the roof, and prepared with ready hands a noose with a slip-knot to encircle the neck of Narvaez, who beheld these summary preparations with considerable trepidation; and he would soon have swung a corse, but for the interference of the three British officers, who, natives of a clime where the passions are less violent than in Spain, revolted at the idea of so sudden an execution.

"Stay, Don Alvaro, and put off his exit until to-morrow," said Campbell. "I do not admire such quick dispatch, although I have seen a Turk's head fly off like a thistle's top, when I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph."

"It would be losing time in the morning, as we march by day-break," replied the Don; "but worthless as the villain is, I may alter my decree if he gives me the name of his base employer."

"The husband of her whom you serenaded this night in the Calle de San Juan," answered Narvaez in a guttural tone.

"What! the guerilla chief, Don Salvador Xavier de Zagala?" cried Alvaro furiously, his eyes flashing tire. "Base coward! ignoble hidalgo! But my sword shall reach him ere long, if he is to be found on this side of the Pyrenees,—it shall, by the bones of the Cid! Your five rascal comrades were guerillas of his band, thought I knew the scarlet caps of the vagabonds."

"Noble cavalier! do not forget your promise," said Narvaez supplicatingly. "What is now your decree?"

"That you shall be shot in the morning instead of being hanged to-night! Sargento Gomez, see this carried into execution punctually, before the trumpets sound 'to horse,' as you value your life."

With all the indifference that he assumed at first, Cifuentes was a coward at heart, and piteous were the entreaties he made for mercy, and the promises he gave of reformation for the future, if the cavalier would spare his life; but they were unheeded. The dragoons thrust him into a narrow dormitory adjoining the chapel, and a sentinel, with his carbine loaded, was placed at the door.

"Send for the Padre, Alvarez; and let him make his peace with Heaven."

"Noble senor, it will be difficult to find the reverend Padre in his sober senses at this hour," replied Gomez.

"You are right, Pedro; he has no longer the Holy Inquisition, of terrible memory, to scare him from his cups. This fellow may die easily enough, without the help of Latin. Should he make the slightest attempt to escape, remember, Diego de la Zarza, to shoot him dead without fail. And now, senors, let us retire and leave my troopers to repose, as we must be all in our saddles at crow of the cock."

"What will be done with the fellow who lies dead in the street?" asked Ronald, as they stumbled down the dark alley leading from the convent.

"What could we do with him, senor?" replied the don with surprise. "The carcase will be found in the morning, and the finder will bury it for the sake of the clothes, perhaps. To find a man stabbed in the street is no marvellous matter in our Spanish towns. You saw how little notice the clash of our swords attracted: scarcely a window opened, and no person approached. We take these affairs coolly here, senor."

"So it seems, Don Alvaro," said the major. "But there is the clock of the town-house striking the hour of eleven, and we have a weary route before us in the morning; so the sooner we seek some place to roost in the better. I left Colonel Cameron and the rest of ours preparing for repose, under the bieldy side of a granite craig,—but I fear you don't understand me,—at the confounded bivouac yonder; and the sooner we join them, the longer rest we shall have."

"You shall have no bivouacking to-night, senors. One gets quite enough of it in these times; and when a good billet comes in the way, it should be accepted. I reside in Merida; my family mansion is at the corner of the Plaza: you shall pass the night with me there. My sister, Donna Catalina, will be most happy to entertain the preservers of her brother,—three cavaliers who draw their swords for the freedom of Spain."

"Certainly, Don Alvaro, we should be sorry to slight your offer," said the major. "A comfortable quarter is a scarce matter in Spain just now; and if Donna Catalina will not be incommoded by three soldados billeting themselves upon her mansion without notice, we are very much at your service. When I was in Egypt in 1801, I remember an adventure just such as—"

"Take care of the curb, major," cried Ronald as the bulky field-officer tripped against the side of the pavement.

"Just such as this. We were quartered at—"

"Grand Cairo," interrupted Ronald ruthlessly, for he disliked the repetition of long stories, which was a failing of the worthy major's, who lugged in Egypt and Sir Ralph Abercrombie on all occasions. "Ay, I remember the story, and a capital one it is! But here is Don Alvaro's house."

As he spoke, they halted before a large mansion, ornamented with lofty columns and broad balconies, upon which the tall windows opened: through the curtains bright rays of light streamed into the dark street. Alvaro applied his hand to the large knocker hanging on the entrance door, which appeared more like the portal of a prison than that of an hidalgo's residence, being low, arched, and studded with iron nails.

"*Quien es?*" said a voice within.

"*Gente de paz!*" replied Alvaro, while the light from the passage flashed through a little panel which was drawn aside, and through which they were cautiously scrutinized.

The door was immediately opened by an aged and wrinkled female servant, whose bright black eyes contrasted strangely with her skin, which was shrivelled and yellow as an old drum-head. Old Dame Agnes, lamp in hand, led them along a passage, up a broad wooden staircase, and into a noble and spacious apartment, which displayed the usual combination of elegance and discomfort, so common in the houses of Spanish nobles. The ceiling presented beautifully painted panels, and a gorgeous cornice of gilt stucco, supported by pilasters of the Corinthian order; while the floor from which they rose was composed of large square red tiles. Four large casements looked towards the Plaza; they were glazed with glass,—a luxury in Spain, but their shutters were rough deal boards, which were barely concealed by the rich white curtains overhanging them: the furniture was oak,—massive, clumsy, and old as the days of Don Quixote. Upon the panels of the ceiling, the bases of the pillars, and other places, appeared the blazonry of coats armorial, displaying the alliances of the family of Villa Franca.

On the table, beside a guitar, castanets, music books, &c., stood a large silver candelabrum, bearing four tall candles, the flames of which flickered in the currents of air flowing through many a chink and cranny, as if to remind the three British officers that it was at home only that true comfort was to be found. Heat was diffused through the room by means of a pan of glowing charcoal placed in the centre of the floor, and a lady, who sat with her feet resting upon it in the Spanish manner, rose at their entrance.

CHAPTER IX.

DONNA CATALINA.

"Down from her head the long fair tresses flow,
And sport with lovely negligence below.
The waving ribands, which her buskins tie,
Her snowy skin with waving purple dye;
As crimson veils, in palaces displayed,
To the white marble lend a blushing shade."
Ovid's Metamorphoses.

As she stood erect, her velvet mantilla fell from her white shoulders, displaying

a round and exquisitely moulded form, tall and full, yet light and graceful. The noble contour of her head, and the delicate outline of her features, were shown by the removal of her black lace veil, which she threw back, permitting it to hang sweeping down behind, giving her that stately and dignified air so common to the Spanish ladies, but of which our own are so deficient, owing, probably, to the extreme stiffness of their head-dress. Her skin was fair, exceedingly so for a Spaniard; but the glossy curls of the deepest black falling on her neck, rendered it yet more so by contrast. Her crimson lips and the fine form of her nostrils, her white transparent brow and full dark eyes, shining with inexpressible brilliance, struck the three Scots mute with surprise,—almost with awe. So showy a beauty had not met their gaze since their departure from Edinburgh, and even Ronald, while keeping his hand within the breast of his coat upon the miniature of Alice, felt his heart beneath it strangely moved at the sight of the fair Spaniard.

"Don Alvaro, I think you might have spent with me the only night you have been in Merida for this year past," said the young lady, pouting prettily.

"Nay, my dear Catalina, you must not receive us thus," replied her brother in Spanish, her knowledge of English being very slight. "Allow me to introduce three British officers, to whom I am indebted for the preservation of my life, which six bravoes, employed by old Salvador de Zagala put in imminent peril to-night."

"Ah! you have been at your old affair,—you have been visiting the Calle de San Juan. How often have I warned you! Well, and the bravoes?"

"One has been sent to purgatory to-night, and another shall be sent somewhere else by daybreak." On Catalina hearing the story, she thanked, in broken English, but in a voice of thrilling earnestness, the three wearied soldados, who had seated themselves on the large old-fashioned chairs, the crimson leather and gilding of which showed them to be the work of the previous century.

"You must excuse, senors," said Catalina, "the very poor fare I have to present you with. The French ladrones carried off almost every thing with them this morning, and Merida will not soon forget their visit."

"Our fare, thanks to the lazy commissariat department, has been so hard of late, that almost any thing will pass muster with us," replied Ronald; "but here are dishes enough for a whole troop." While he spoke, the oak table was laid in a twinkling with a variety of covers; of which they could scarcely taste any, owing to the garlic and olive oil with which the Spaniards, as well as the Portuguese, always season and cook up their victuals.

"You do not seem to relish the pigeon, senor mio," said Donna Catalina to the major, who was making wry faces at every mouthful he took. "Try the piece of cold roasted meat on the cover near you."

"I thank you," answered Campbell, helping himself largely. "It would be

excellent to my taste, was it not for the olive oil and spices, not used in our country, with which it is seasoned."

A hash and ragout were likewise attempted, but in vain; the garlic with which they were dressed rendered it impossible for the three strangers to taste them, but it was equally impossible to be displeased: the polite apologies and regrets of the cavalier, and the condescending sweetness of his beautiful sister, made ample amends. But the three hungry Scots were very well pleased to see the first course replaced by the second, which consisted of white Spanish bread of the purest flour, dried grapes, and several large crystal jugs of the purple country wine, sherry, and Malaga.

"You British are rather more fastidious than our Portuguese friends and allies," said Alvaro laughing. "The last time the 6th Caçadores lay quartered here, they left not a single cat uneaten,—a loss still remembered with peculiar animosity by the housewives of Merida. The Portuguese are not over nice in any thing, certainly, and we have a proverb among us, 'that a bad Spaniard makes a good Portuguese.'"

"Sir, when I am sharp-set, I am not very apt to be particular myself," replied Campbell. "When I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph, on one occasion I ate a very juicy steak cut from a horse's flank, and fried in a camp-kettle lid. We were starving for want of rations, senor; and, I dare say, even the holy camel on its way to Mecca, had it passed our route, would have been gobbled up, hump and all."

Ronald, who had hitherto sat almost silent, began to dread a long Egyptian story from the major; but this fear was removed by Don Alvaro's filling up his horn, and drinking to the health of Lord Wellington and the British forces,—the deliverers of Spain and Ferdinand the Seventh.

After this complimentary toast had been duly honoured, "A bumper, gentlemen!" exclaimed the major; "fill up your glasses—regular brimmers, and they must be drunk off with true Highland honours. *A la libertad de España!* hurrah!" and, springing up erect with native agility, the three Scots, placing their left feet on their seats and their right on the table, (a movement which considerably surprised the grave don and his sister, who trembled for her crimson chairs), they flourished their glasses aloft, and drank to the toast with what are called *Highland honours.*

"*Viva! viva!*" cried the cavalier, in applause of the sentiment, though rather puzzled at the mode of proclaiming it.

They drank to their fair hostess, and to all sorts of gallant and martial toasts; and, as the wine-horns were filled and emptied again and again, they grew more merry, the national gravity of the don disappearing gradually as their conviviality increased. He laughed and sung with the frankness of a soldier, and trolled forth more than once the "Song of five hundred Horse," a Spanish military carol. At

Ronald's request, Catalina took her guitar from the back of her chair where it hung, and, without requiring the entreaties necessary to obtain the same favour from a British lady, the frank girl sung with a coquettish air, which peculiarly became her, "My Mother wants no Soldiers here," a song well known in Spain at the time our troops were campaigning there.

"She seems bent on making a conquest of you, Alister," whispered Ronald.

"Of yourself, rather," retorted the other coldly. Indeed Macdonald had said but little all night; his mind was continually wandering to the recent fray, and the remembrance that he had for the first time slain a fellow-being,—a reflection which troubled him very little, truly, a few weeks afterwards, when he had become used to that sort of work. "Of yourself rather, Stuart. Her eyes are ever on you, and—"

"Hush! she hears us," replied the other hurriedly, his cheek reddening, yet more with mental shame than anger. "O Alice Lisle!" thought he, "this Spaniard, beautiful as she is, cannot surely be teaching me to forget you so soon. Her eyes are blacker than those of Alice, certainly, but they are less soft and feminine,—less gentle in expression; yet—" Here he was interrupted by the loud and sonorous voice of Campbell, who, at the request of Catalina, was commencing a song.

Ronald was rapidly becoming so confused with the effects of the wine he had taken, that he knew not whether it was Alice Lisle or Donna Catalina who sat beside him; but having a vague idea that it was some beautiful female, before the major's song was ended he was making downright love, which the lady took in very good humour.

Campbell's song, the

"Piobracht au Donuil-dhu,"

although it roused the hearts of his countrymen by its martial and forcible language, was listened to with a grave and pleasant smile by Don Alvaro, who of course comprehended not one word of the ditty, which in his ears sounded as a most barbarous jargon, and might have been a Moorish battle song for aught that he knew to the contrary.

The retiring of Donna Catalina did not put an end to the carousal; and, as they had to leave Merida an hour before day-break, they betook themselves to rest, (after every jug of wine had been discussed,) on the chairs, as it was useless to go to bed for an hour or two only. The short time they passed in slumber flew quickly, and they were soon roused by the din of the flying-artillery guns, as they swept over the causewayed streets, driven at a hard trot towards the bridge of Merida.

"*Caramba*! Rouse, senors," cried Alvaro, who was the first to awake.

"*Carajo*! Ay, there go the field-pieces: old Rowland's in his saddle already," muttered the major, scrambling up from the floor on which he had rolled in the night time, and placing his large bonnet on the wrong way, permitting the long feathers to stream down his back. "Rouse, gentlemen! Up and be doing, sirs, or we shall be missed from our posts. Old Mahoud take the rule for marching before day-break! Sir Ralph never made us do so in Egypt, and we gained laurels there, gentlemen—I say we did. This infernal bonnet! 'tis always falling off."

"I wish to Heaven I could sleep an hour longer!" said Ronald. "I have scarcely had three hours' sleep this week past."

"Our brigade never sleep, gentlemen," cried Campbell, who was still a little inebriated, "never! We march all night, and fight all day: we used to reverse the matter in Egypt. But what have we here? Peter Forbes—or what is your name, what's the matter? Are Dombrouski's dragoons among ye?"

"*Ave Maria! O Dios mio! O Senor Don Alvaro!*" cried Sargento Pedro Gomez, appearing at the entrance of the room with a lamp in his hand; "we have had the devil among us last night!"

"How so, fellow? What has happened?"

"The bravo has escaped—"

"How! Diavolo, escaped?"

"Ay, noble senor, and carried off the carbine of poor Diego de la Zarza, whom we found lying within the chamber with his throat cut from ear to ear."

The cavalier ground his teeth with absolute fury, while his olive cheek grew black with rising passion.

"*Santos! Santissimus!*" cried he; "would to San Juan, and all the calendar, I had hanged him last night! My brave Diego—but he must have slept; if so, he deserves his fate. Well, there is no help for this matter; we will give Narvaez Cifuentes a short prayer and a long stab the next time we meet, and that without delay. But we must be off; the cavalry advance-guard, and part of the artillery, have already passed. Let the *trompetero* sound 'to horse;' and hasten, Pedro, and get the troop into their saddles. Though we belong to the division of Murillo, we will cross the bridge with you to-day, senors, and strike a blow for honour. *Viva Eapaña y buena Esperanza*! 'Tis a better war-shout than the *Vive l'Empereur* of the followers of the perfidious Buonaparte."

"There are the drums of our brigade," said Ronald Stuart; "and should we be missed by Fassifern, the excellency of Don Alvaro's purple Malaga and sherry, or even the smiles of Donna Catalina herself, would form but a poor excuse for lingering. Hark! the *generale*."

"You improve in the art of gallantry," observed Macdonald; "you could not have turned such fine speeches the morning we halted in the Black Horse-square, at Lisbon. But I regret that we must march without bidding adieu to our fair

patrona."

"Forward, cavaliers; Catalina will excuse our departing without bidding her farewell. Down the stair-case to the left, senors," cried Alvaro. "Pedro Gomez, knave,—light the way!" and they pressed forward into the street, feeling the chill air of the morning blow strangely on their faces, while their heads swam with the fumes of the wine taken so lately.

"It will be long ere I forget the night we spent in Merida," said Macdonald.

"And long ere I do so, truly," replied Stuart, casting his eyes vacantly over the dark windows of the mansion of Villa Franca.

"Ah!—Donna Catalina; are you looking for her?"

"Such strange scenes of fray and other matters! Had such a row occurred at home, all Britain would have rung with it, from Dover to Cape Wrath; but here it is as nothing."

"Hark! what is that, Stuart?"

"A cry,—by Heaven, a most appalling one!" A loud shriek arose from amid the darkness in which the Plaza was involved. They hastened to that part of the square from whence it appeared to issue, and found that the conflict in which they had borne so conspicuous a part was not the only outrage committed that night in Merida. They discovered a young Portuguese lad, the private servant of Lieutenant-colonel Macdonald of the Gordon Highlanders, lying dead under the piazzas, stabbed to the heart with a long stiletto or knife, and the assassin was never discovered.

For some hours the dark streets of the city rang to the measured tramp of marching soldiers, the clatter of accoutrements, the clang of hoofs, and the rumble of heavy wheels, as artillery, cavalry, and infantry moved rapidly forward; but by sunrise the whole division had crossed the bridge, and on the opposite side of the river pursued their route towards Almendralejo.

"Colonel Cameron!" cried old W——, the brigade-major, cantering up to the head of the column; "Major-general Howard requests that you will increase your front. It is Sir Rowland's order."

"Form sub-divisions!" cried Fassifern, in the loud and manly tone of authority which so well became him. "Rear sections, left oblique—double quick!" The order was obeyed along the whole column by each regiment in succession. Their fine brass bands filled the air with martial music, causing every heart to vibrate to the sharp sound of the soul-stirring trumpet, the cymbals, and trombone. The horses shook their manes,—their riders sat more erect; the waving colours were flung forward on the breeze above the steel ridges of glittering bayonets, and the brave hearts of those who marched beneath them grew light and animated at the prospect of a brush with the enemy. Their starving condition, their faded uniform, the discomfort of the last night's bivouac, were forgotten,—all was mil-

itary, gay and exciting to the utmost, filling every bosom with the pride of the profession and the fervent "glow of chivalry." Sir Rowland Hill, with his staff, viewed from a little eminence the whole length of the column of that division of the army under his command, as they passed, and a pleasing smile animated the benevolent features of the bluff old general, when he beheld the willingness with which the foot-sore and almost shoe-less soldiers pressed forward, although they had endured all that could render troops, less persevering and disciplined, less hardy and less brave, mutinous.

Toilsome forced marches—shelterless bivouacs, starvation, receiving no provisions sometimes for three consecutive days,—no clothing, and almost ever in arrears of pay—on one occasion for six months,—nothing but the hope of a change, and the redoubtable spirit which animated them, could have supported the British soldiers under the accumulation of miseries suffered by them in the Peninsula,—miseries which were lessened to the French troops, by their living at free quarters wherever they went.

These things, however, were forgotten for the present time, and with others Ronald Stuart felt all the ardour which the display before him and the fineness of the morning were calculated to inspire. The bright sun shone from an unclouded sky, filling the clear blue vault with warmth; the birds were chirping and hopping merrily among the dewy branches of the olive thickets and dark laurel bushes overhanging the broad path, the deep dingles on each side of which echoed to the notes of the sounding music.

Ronald looked back to the flat-roofed mansions and Roman ruins of Merida, on the grey walls of which, casting bold shadows, streamed the full splendour of the morning sun. The cavalry rearguard were slowly crossing the ancient bridge, and with the red coats came the brown uniform of Spain: it was the troop of Don Alvaro advancing, with their polished helmets and tall lances flashing in the sun, and finding a sparkling reflection in the deep blue current of the Guadiana below.

Ronald carried for the first time the regimental colour, which bore evident marks of service, being pierced in many places by musket-shot. It was a laborious affair to sustain, especially during a breeze, being large, and of rich yellow silk, fringed round with bullion. The sphinx,—the badge of Egypt, (the pride of the major's heart,) surrounded by a wreath of the brave old thistle, and the honourable mottoes '*Egmont-op-Zee*,' '*Mandora*,' and '*Bergen-op-Zoom*,'[*] all sewn, as usual, by fair hands, and done in massive gold embroidery, appeared in the centre of the standard, which the Duchess of Gordon had presented to the clan-regiment of her son.

[*] Such, with many additions, are still the badges of the Gordon Highlanders. For the information

of unmilitary readers I may state, that every corps has two colours,—a king's and regimental; the first carried by the senior, and the latter by the junior ensign.

"Stuart, I see you are casting longing looks back to Merida," said Alister in his usual jesting manner, as he marched by Ronald's side with the gaudy king's colour sloped on his shoulder. "There is some attraction in our rear, I perceive; you are ever looking that way."

"Ay, yonder comes Don Alvaro and his troop of lances; how gallant they appear! But they are almost hidden in the dust raised by the rear of the column."

"Look above the colours of the 71st, and you will see the roof which contains the fair Catalina; it was for that you were searching so narrowly. I can read your thoughts, you see, without being a conjuror. Stuart, my boy, you are very green in these matters, otherwise you would not blush as scarlet as your coat, which, by the by, is rapidly becoming purple."

"What stuff you talk, Macdonald! What is Catalina to me?"

"Pshaw! now you need not bristle up so fiercely. Were you not making downright love to her last night? And the don himself would have seen it, but had drunk too much Malaga."

"Impossible, Alister! You must dream, or this is some of your usual nonsense. I have no recollection of speaking to Donna Catalina otherwise than I would have done to any lady,—and Campbell heard me."

"The major had over much sherry under his belt, and made too much noise about Egypt,—the pyramids,—Pompey's pillar,—the battle of Alexandria, and Heaven knows all what, to hear any one speaking but himself. We spent the night in glorious style, however; but the taste of that horrible garlic——Heavens above! what is this?"

Alister's sudden exclamation was not given without sufficient reason.

A carbine flashed from among the dark evergreens which overhung the road, and Ronald Stuart, staggering backwards, fell prostrate and bleeding at the feet of his comrades, from whom burst a wild shout of rage and surprise; but the strictness of British discipline prevented any man from moving in search of the assassin.

"Hell's fury!" cried Colonel Cameron, spurring his horse to the spot, while his eyes shot fire. "Search the bushes; forward, men! Do not fire, in case of alarming the rear of the column; but fix bayonets,—slay, hew, and cut to pieces whoever you find."

With mingled curses and shouts a hundred Highlanders dashed through the thicket; but their heavy knapsacks and the tall plumes of their bonnets impeded their movements in piercing the twisted and tangled branches of the thickly-

leaved laurels. They searched the grove through and through, beating the bushes in every direction; but no trace of the assassin was found, save a broad-brimmed *sombrero* bearing the figure of the Virgin stamped in pewter, fastened to the band encircling it, which Alister Macdonald found near a gigantic laurel bush, in the midst of the umbrageous branches of which its owner lurked unseen.

"It is the hat of Cifuentes,—the vagabond of our last night's adventure," said Alister, hewing a passage through the bushes with his sword, and regaining the regiment.

"I would you had brought his head rather. O that it was within the reach of my trusty stick! I would scorn to wet Andrea with his base blood." A frown of rage contracted the broad brow of Campbell while he spoke, holding in one hand a steel Highland pistol, which he had drawn from his holsters for the purpose of executing dire vengeance had opportunity offered.

"By all the powers above!" cried Alister, with fierce and stern energy, "if ever this accursed Spaniard crosses my path, I will make his head fly from his shoulders as I would a thistle from its stalk! nor shall all the corregidors and alcaldes in Spain prevent me. But how is Stuart? Poor fellow! he looks very pale. Has he lost much blood?"

Ronald, supported on the arm of Evan Iverach, stood erect within a circle formed by the officers who crowded round, while one of the regimental surgeons examined his left arm, which had been wounded by the shot.

"O gude sake! be gentle wi' him, doctor!" said honest Evan in great anguish, as he observed Ronald to wince under the hands of the medical officer; "be as gentle wi' him as possible. You doctor folk are unco rough ever and aye: dinna forget that he is your namesake, and kinsman forbye, though ye canna find out the exact degree."

"I hope, Doctor Stuart, the wound is not a very bad one?" said Cameron, dismounting from his horse and approaching the circle. "I augur ill from the expression of concern which your countenance wears."

"The shot has passed completely through, colonel, breaking the bone in its passage; but as the fracture is not compound, it will soon join after setting. I hope that none of the red coat, or any other foreign body, is lodged in the wound."

"Oh, if it should be a poisoned ball!" groaned poor Evan in great misery at the idea, while Doctor Stuart removed the sleeve of the coat, and Ronald endeavoured to conceal the miniature of Alice Lisle, which was nearly revealed by the disarrangement of his uniform. "Oh, if it should be a poisoned ball!" he repeated.

"Some of our very best chields have been slain wi' them before now,—especially at the battle of Arroya-del-Molino," observed his comrade Angus Mackie, with a solemn shake of his head.

"Oh, that I had only been at his side! It micht have hit me in his stead!"

"Silence, men! You chatter nonsense," said Cameron sternly. "And what think you now, doctor?"

"That as Mr. Stuart is young, and of a full habit, I must bleed him immediately."

"Stuff! My good fellow, he has lost blood enough already."

"*I* am the best judge of that, Colonel Cameron," replied Esculapius haughtily; "delay is fraught with danger. Holloa, there! where's the hospital attendant? Serjeant Maconush, undo the service-case and bring me the pasteboard splints, the twelve-tailed bandage, and other et cæteras: I will set the bone."

"It is impossible, Doctor Stuart," interposed Cameron. "Your intentions are all very good; but your clansman must return to Merida, where I sincerely hope he will be properly attended to. We have no time to await your operations just now, for which I am truly sorry, as Ensign Stuart will be well aware."

"Do not mind me, colonel," replied Ronald, whose teeth were clenched with the agony he endured. "I will return, as you say, and shall doubtless find a medical attendant. I hear the rear regiments are clamorous at this stoppage in their front, and yonder is Sir Rowland himself, advancing to discover the cause." He spoke with difficulty, and at intervals; the new and painful sensation of a broken limb, together with rage swelling his heart at the manner in which he had received it, made his utterance low and indistinct. Among the group around him he recognised Don Alvaro, who had galloped from the rear to discover the meaning of the confusion.

"*Senor coronel*," said he to Cameron, raising his hand to the peak of his helmet, "let him be taken to my house in Merida, where he will be properly attended to. Pedro Gomez,"—turning to his orderly serjeant,—"dismount. Give this cavalier your horse, and attend him yourself to my residence in the Calle de Guadiana, and desire Donna Catalina to have his wound looked after. You will remain with him until it is healed."

Pedro sprung lightly from his saddle, into which Ronald was with some difficulty installed.

"I thank you, senor," said Cameron, touching his bonnet, "and am glad this disagreeable matter is so satisfactorily arranged; the alcalde might have ordered him but an indifferent billet. Good bye, my dear fellow, Stuart; I trust we shall see you soon again, and with a whole skin. Mr. Grant, take the colours. Gentlemen, fall in; get into your places, men—into your ranks. Forward!" He delivered his orders with firm rapidity, and being a strict martinet who was not to be trifled with, they were instantly obeyed, and the commotion was hushed. The troops were too much accustomed to wounds and slaughter to care about the hurt received by Ronald, but it was the sudden and concealed shot which had raised their surprise and indignation.

Evan Iverach alone delayed executing the orders of Cameron, and entreated that he might be permitted to attend his wounded master to the rear.

"My good fellow, it cannot be," replied the colonel, pleased with the genuine concern manifested by Ronald's honest follower; "the enemy are before us, and I cannot spare a man. Nay, now, you need not entreat; fall into your place at once, sir."

"Oh! if you please, sir, dinna speak sae sternly. Did ye but ken—"

"Into your place this instant, sir! or I will have you stripped of your accoutrements, and sent prisoner to the quarter-guard," exclaimed Cameron sternly, his eyes beginning to sparkle. To say more was useless, and shouldering his musquet with a heavy heart, Evan took his place in the ranks, and moved forward with the rest; but he cast many an anxious look to the rear, watching the retiring figure of Ronald as he sat on the troop-horse, which was led by Pedro Gomez towards the bridge of Merida.

CHAPTER X.

FLIRTATION.

"Oh! the sunny peaches glow,
And the grapes in clusters blush;
And the cooling silver streams
From their sylvan fountains rush.
There is music in the grove,
And there's fragrance on the gale;
But there's nought so dear to me,
As my own Highland vale."
Vedder's Poems.

Ronald experienced most intense pain, together with a cold, benumbed feeling in the fractured limb; but it was as nothing in comparison to the mental torture which he endured, or the indignant and fierce thoughts that animated his heart. He entertained a deep and concentrated hatred of the wretch who, aiming thus maliciously and savagely at his life, had in so daring a manner inflicted a wound by which he might ultimately lose his arm, and which, for the present,

disabled him from accompanying his comrades, who were rapidly following up the retreating foe, and eager to engage.

As his regiment belonged to the first brigade of the division, it consequently marched in front, or near the head of the column, and in his return to Merida he had to pass nearly 16,000 men; and the bitterness of his feelings was increased at the idea that every man there would probably share the honour of an engagement, of which his mutilated state forbade him to be a participator. Solemn and deep were the inward vows he took, to seek dire vengeance for this morning's work on Narvaez Cifuentes, if ever he again confronted him; and his only fear was, that he might never meet with him more.

From the bridge of Merida he cast a farewell look after his comrades, but nought could he see, save a long and dense cloud of dust, through which the glitter of polished steel and the waving fold of a standard appeared at times, as the extended length of the marching column wound its way up the gentle eminence, above which appeared the top of the spire of Almendralejo, several leagues distant.

By Pedro Gomez he was conducted to the stately mansion of Don Alvaro, and delivered over to the tender care of Donna Catalina, whose softest sympathies were awakened when the young officer was brought back to her scarcely able to speak, and his gay uniform covered with blood, for he had lost a great quantity, owing to the hasty manner in which his namesake the surgeon had bound up the wound. Add to this, that he was a handsome youth,—a soldier who had come to fight for Spain, and had but yesternight rescued her brother from death: the young lady's interest, gratitude, and pity were all enlisted in his favour. Her large dark eyes sparkled with mingled sorrow and pleasure when she beheld him,—sorrow at the pain he suffered, and pleasure at the happiness of being his nurse and enjoying his society in a mansion of which she was absolute mistress, and where there was no old maiden aunt or duenna to be a spy upon her, or overruler of her movements; and as for the scandal of Merida, or quizzing of her female companions, she was resolved not to care a straw,—she was above the reach of either. Her uncle, the Prior of San Juan, resided in the mansion, but the worthy old padre was so enlarged in circumference by ease and good living, and so crippled by the gout, that he never moved further than from his bed to the well-bolstered chair in which he sat all day, and from the chair back to bed again, and no one ever entered his room save old Dame Agnes, (already mentioned,) who alone seemed to possess the power of pleasing him; consequently he was never seen by the other inhabitants of the house, any more than if he did not exist.

We will pass over the account of the bone-setting by the Padre Mendizabal, the famous medical practitioner in Merida, who nearly drove Ronald mad by an

oration on different sorts of fractures, simple and compound, and the different treatment requisite for the cure of various gun-shot wounds, before his arm was splinted and bandaged up. Weak and exhausted from the loss of blood, and his head buzzing with Mendizabal's discourse, right glad was Ronald when he found himself in a comfortable and splendid couch,—Catalina's own, which she had resigned for his use as the best in the house,—with its curtains drawn round for the night; and he forgot, in a dreamy and uneasy slumber, the exciting passages of the last few days, the danger of his wound, and the sunny eyes of the donna.

The tolling bells of a neighbouring steeple awakened him early next morning, and brought his mind back to the world, and a long chain of disagreeable thoughts.

There is scarcely any thing which makes one feel so much from home, as the sound of a strange church bell; and the deep and hollow ding-dong which rung from the gothic steeple of San Juan, was very different from the merry rattle of the well-known kirk bell at Lochisla. Ronald thought of that village bell, and the noble peasantry whom it was wont to call to prayer, and the association brought a gush of fond, and sad recollections into his mind. He felt himself, as it were, deserted in a strange country,—among a people of whose language he knew almost nothing; he looked round him, and his apartment appeared strange and foreign,—every object it presented was new and peculiar to his eye. He thought of Scotland—of HOME,—home with all its ten thousand dear and deeply impressed associations, until he wept like a child, and his mind became a prey to most profound and intense dejection,—suffering from the home-sickness, an acuteness and agony of feeling, which only those can know who have been so unhappy as to experience this amiable feeling; one which exists all-powerfully in the hearts of the Scots, who, although great travellers and wanderers from home, ever turn their thoughts, fondly and sadly, to the lofty mountains, the green forests, and the rushing rivers which they first beheld when young, and to the grassy sod that covers the dust of their warrior ancestors, and which they wish to cover their own, when they follow them "to the land of the leal."

The feverish state of his body had communicated itself to his mind, and for several days and nights, in the solitude of his chamber, he brooded over the memory of his native place, enduring the acuteness of the nostalgia in no small degree; and even the fair Catalina, with her songs, her guitar, and her castanets, failed to enliven him, at least for a time; his whole pleasure—and a gloomy pleasure it was—being to brood over the memory of his far-off home. The dreams that haunted the broken slumbers which the pain of his wound permitted him to snatch, served but to increase the disorder; and often, from a pleasing vision of his paternal tower with its mountain loch and pathless pine forests, of his white-haired sire as he last beheld him, or of Alice Lisle smiling and beautiful,

with her bright eyes and curling tresses, twining her arms endearingly round him, and laying her soft cheek to his, he was awakened by some confounded circumstance, which again brought on him the painful and soul-absorbing lethargy which weighed down every faculty, rendering him careless of every present object save the miniature of Alice. The paleness of his complexion, and the intense sadness of his eye, puzzled his medical attendant, Doctor Mendizabal, but neither to him nor to Donna Catalina, who used the most bewitching entreaties, would the forlorn young soldier confess the cause of his dejection,—concealment of the mental feelings from others beins; a concomitant of the disease. So each formed their own opinions. Mendizabal concluded it to be loss of blood; and the lady, after consulting her cousin and companion, Inesella de Truxillo, supposed that he must unquestionably be in love,—what else could render so handsome an *officiale* so very sad?

This conclusion gave him additional interest with her; and certes, Alice Lisle would little have admired the attendance upon Ronald's sick couch of a rival, and one so dangerously beautiful; but her fears might have decreased, had she seen how incessantly, during the days he was confined to his bed, he gazed upon the little miniature which Louis Lisle had given as a parting gift. Concealing it from the view of others, he watched it with untiring eyes, until, in the fervency of his fancy, the features seemed to become animated and expanded,—the sparkling eyes to fill with light and tenderness,—the pale cheek to flush, and the dark curls which fell around it to wave,—the coral lips to smile; while he almost imagined that he heard the soft murmurs of her voice mingling with the gurgle of the Isla and the rustle of the foliage on the banks, where they were wont to play and gambol in infancy.

In a few days, however, his mental and bodily languor disappeared, and when, by the surgeon's advice, he left his sick chamber, his usual lightness of heart returned rapidly, and he was soon able to promenade under the piazzas of the Plaza with Catalina during the fine sunny evenings; and although the miniature was not less admired than formerly, the fair original would have trembled could she have witnessed all the nursing which Ronald received from his beautiful patrona, and heard all the soft things which were uttered.

As his strength increased their strolls were extended, and the young ladies of Merida smiled at each other, and shook their heads significantly, as the graceful donna, attired in her veil and mantilla, swept through the great stradi, flirting her little fan, with the foreign *officiale* in the plumed bonnet and rich scarlet uniform. His fair patrona showed him all the remains of Roman magnificence in Merida, and Ronald, who, like most of his countrymen, was an enthusiastic admirer of the gloomy and antique, explored every cranny and nook of the immense ruins of the once-important castle; surveying with a sad feeling the pillared halls which

once had rung to the sound of the trumpet and the clashing harness of Spanish chivalry, but where now the ivy hung down from the roofless wall, and the long grass grew between the squares of the tessellated pavement. Time had reduced it to little more than a heap of shattered stones, but it was as ancient, probably, as the days of the Goths, during whose dominion a strong garrison lay at Merida.

The large amphitheatre, of which the citizens are so proud, formed another attraction, and its circular galleries were the scene of many an evening; walk with Catalina and her cousin Inesella of Truxillo, a very gay and very beautiful girl, with whom a great deal of laughing and flirting ensued in clambering up the steep stone seats, and rambling through its maze of arcades, arched passages, projecting galleries, and the long dark dens opening on the arena.

The Roman baths of Diana, a subterranean edifice of an oval form, containing ranges of dressing chambers, and a large stone bathing-basin filled with pure water, formed another object of interest; and many were the pleasant strolls they enjoyed along the grassy banks of the Guadiana and by the summit of a high hill, (the name of which I have forgotten,) in the shade of the broad trellis where the vines were bursting into leaf, and in every green lane and embowered walk about Merida, even to the hermitage of San Bartolomi,[*] where a white-bearded anchorite showed them the boiling-hot spring of Alange.

[*] A place three leagues eastward of Merida.

During this intercourse, Ronald rapidly improved in his Spanish; and who would not have done so under the tuition of such fair instructresses? He found it

> "—pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue
> By female lips and eyes—that is, I mean
> When both the teacher and the taught are young,
> As was the case, at least, where I have been;
> They smile so when one's right, and when one's wrong
> They smile still more; and then there intervene
> Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss:—
> I learn'd the little that I know by this."

More than one week had slipped away, and Ronald had nearly recovered from his wound, though still obliged to keep his arm slung in a scarf. In the garden at the back of the mansion, he was seated by Catalina's side one evening on the

steps of a splendid fountain, where four brazen deities spouted the crystal liquid from their capacious throats into a broad basin of black marble, from which, by some subterraneous passage, it was carried to the Guadiana. The spring was now advanced, and the delightful climate of Spain was fast arraying nature, and bringing her forth in all her glory. From the fountain, broad gravelled walks, thickly edged with myrtle, branched off in every direction, and between them were beds where the crimson geranium, the gigantic rose bushes, the pale lilac blossom, and a thousand other garden flowers, which it would be useless to mention, were budding in the heat of the vernal sun by day, and in the soft moist dews by night. Around and above them the graceful willow, the tufted accacia, the stately palm, the orange-tree with its singularly beautiful leaves, and numerous other shrubs, were spreading into foliage, which appeared to increase daily in richness of tint and variety; and beautiful vistas, winding walks, and umbrageous bowers were formed among them with all the art and nicety of Spanish landscape gardening.

The young Highlander and Catalina were seated on the margin of the fountain, as I have already said. They conversed but little. The donna busied herself with the strings of her guitar, and Ronald watched in silence the nimble motions of her white hands as she tied and untied, screwed and unscrewed the strings and pegs, and struck the chords to ascertain the true tone. Strange and conflicting thoughts flitted through his mind while he gazed upon his beautiful companion. He was aware how dangerous to his peace her presence was, and he almost longed for, yet dreaded the coming time, when he should be obliged to return to his regiment. To Alice Lisle he felt that he was bound by every tie that early intimacy, love, and honour could twine around him,—honour! how could he think of so cold a word? and while he did so, he blushed that he could find room in his heart for the image of another.

"Catalina is very beautiful—decidedly so," thought he, while he viewed the curve of her white neck, and the outline of her superb bust. "Her face is one of surpassing loveliness, and her eyes—but Alice is equally bewitching, although perhaps a less showy beauty. Alice is very gentle and winning, so lady-like, and we have known each other so long,—it is impossible I can forget her. Why, then, have I been trifling with one whose presence is so dangerous to my peace? Yes! if I would preserve a whole heart and my allegiance to Alice, I must fly from you, Catalina."

While he reasoned thus with himself, Catalina raised her dark and laughing eyes to his, while she struck the chords of her instrument, and sang a few words of a very beautiful Spanish air. So melodious was her tone, so graceful her manner, so winning the expression of eye, who can wonder that Ronald's resolution melted like snow in the sunshine, and that he felt himself vanquished? Poor Alice! With an air of tenderness and embarrassment he took the little hand of the

donna within his own. She read in his eye the thoughts which passed through his mind; she cast down her long jetty lashes, while a rich bloom suffused her soft cheek. Ronald was about to murmur forth something—in fact he knew not what, when a loud knocking at the outer gate of the mansion, and the sound of a well-known voice, aroused him.

"Unbar the yett—this instant! ye auld doited gomeral! I will see my maister in spite o' ye," cried Evan impatiently, while Agnes delayed unbarring the door to so boisterous a visitor.

"*Caramba, senor! Quien es?*" she repeated.

"Gude wife, I speak nae language but my ain; so ye needna waste your wind by speirin' questions that I canna answer."

At Ronald's desire the old housekeeper undid the door, which was well secured by many a bar and lock, and he immediately saw the waving plumes of Evan's bonnet dancing above the shrubbery, as he came hastily towards the fountain, with his musquet at the long trail, and his uniform and accoutrements covered with the dust of a long day's march. His joy was unbounded on seeing his master, and rapid and quick were the earnest inquiries he made, without waiting for answers, concerning his wound, and how he had been treated "by the unco folk he had been left to bide amang,—begging the bonnie leddy's pardon."

Catalina bowed,—although she knew not a word that he said; but by the natural politeness and expression of the soldier's look, she knew that he referred to her.

"Now then, Evan, that I have answered all your inquiries, be pleased to stand steady, and moderate yourself so far as to reply to mine," said Ronald kindly, far from feeling annoyed at his appearance at a juncture so peculiarly awkward and tender. "How come you here just now? and how alone?"

"I got leave frae the colonel, after an unco dunning, to come here and attend you, for I thocht you would feel yersel unco queer, left alane among the black-avised folk, that canna speak a decent tongue. But here, sir, is a letter and a newspaper, sent you by Maister Macdonald." Evan, after fumbling among the ration biscuits, shoe-brushes, and other matters which crammed his havresack, produced them. "Just as I cam awa' frae the place whar' the regiment lay, in dreary strath—a place like Corrie-oich for a' the world—seventy miles frae this, I heard that the order had come to retire to the rear—"

"Upon Merida?"

"I canna say, sir, because the very moment that Cameron gied me leave, and Maister Macdonald gied me his letter, I set off, and have travelled nicht and day, without stopping, except may be just for an hour, to sleep by the road side or to get a mouthfu o' meat,—trash sic as ane wadna gie to puir auld Hector the watch-dog at hame, at auld Lochisla. O it was a far and a weary gait; but I was

sae anxious to see ye, sir, that I have trod it out in twa days, in heavy marching order as ye see me, and I am like to dee wi' sheer fatigue."

"You are a faithful fellow, Evan; but I fear, by your love for me, you may work mischief to yourself. Here comes Dame Agnes,—to her care I must consign you. She was a kind attendant to me when I much wanted one."

"God bless ye for that, gude wife!" cried Iverach, catching her in his arms and kissing her withered cheek; a piece of gallantry which she owed more to Evan's native drollery and his present state of excitement, than any admiration of her person.

"I believe there is some gaucy kimmer at home, who would not like this distribution of favour, Evan," said Ronald; while Catalina clapped her hands and laughed heartily at the old dame, who, although very well pleased at the compliment, affected great indignation, and arranged her velvet hood with a mighty air.

"It's just quiet friendship for the auld body,—naething else, sir. Even puir wee Jessie Cavers wadna hae been angry, had she been present and seen me."

"Cavers—Jessie Cavers! I heard that name before, surely?"

"It's very like ye may, sir," replied the young Highlander, a flush crossing his cheek. "She is Miss Alice Lisle's maid,—a servant lassie at the Inch-house."

"O—a girl at Inchavon? I thought the name was familiar to me," faltered Ronald, reddening in turn. "But you had better retire, and tell the military news to Pedro Gomez, whom I see waiting you impatiently yonder."

Reserving the newspaper for another time, Ronald, with the donna's permission, opened Macdonald's letter.

"This billet is from the army," said she, familiarly placing her arm through the young officer's and drawing close to his side, while she caused his heart to thrill at her touch. "Ah! tell me if there is any news of my brother Alvaro in it?"

"I will read it aloud, translating those parts you do not understand. It is dated from Villa Franca:—[*]

[*] The date of poor Macdonald's letter is now obliterated, and I have forgotten what it was,—about the month of March (1812), I think.

"DEAR STUART,

"Fassifern and the rest of ours are anxious to know how you are, after that wound you received so villanously, and from which I hope you are almost recovered by this time. Send us word by the first messenger from Merida to the front. Re-

member me particularly to the fair Catalina, and I assure you that your quarters at present in her splendid mansion, are very different from mine here,—in a wretched hut, where the rain comes in at the roof, and the wind at a thousand crannies. You may congratulate us, my old comrade, on the easy victories we obtain over Messieurs the French, who have been driven from Almendralejo, and all the places adjacent, with little loss on our part. I now write you from a village, out of which our brigade drove them a few days ago. How much you would have admired the gallantry of our Spanish friend Don Alvaro, who accompanied us in this affair. On our approaching the enemy, they retired without firing a shot at first, and his troop of lancers, who were halted on the road leading to Los Santos, charged them at full gallop, shouting *Viva Ferdinand! España! España y buena Esperanza!*"

"Noble Alvaro! my brave brother!" interrupted Catalina, her eyes sparkling with delight. "I will always love this *officiale* for what he says. Oh! that Inesella was here! She is betrothed to Alvaro, senor, and would have been wedded long since, but for a quarrel they had about Donna Ermina, the wife of old Salvador, the guerilla chief."

"It was a noble sight," continued the letter, "to see the tall lances levelled to the rest, the steel helmets flashing in the sun, and to hear the clang of the rapid hoofs, as the Spaniards rushed down the brae and broke upon the enemy with the force of a whirlwind, a thunderbolt, or any thing else you may suppose. Campbell protested it equalled the charge of the Mamelukes, when *he* 'was in Egypt with Sir Ralph.' Alvaro has now gone off to join Murillo, where he hopes to meet Don Salvador de Zagala, whom he vows to impale alive. He left me but an hour ago, and desires me in my letter to send a kiss to his sister. This, I dare swear, you will be most happy to deliver."

Ronald faltered, and turned his eye on Catalina, who blushed deeply. It was impossible to resist the temptation; her face was very close to his, and he pressed his lips upon her burning cheek.

"Read on, *senor mio*," she said, disengaging herself with exquisite grace; "perhaps there may be more about Alvaro?"

Ronald glanced his eye over the next paragraph, and passed it over in silence and confusion.

"A little flirtation en passant, you know, will not injure your allegiance to the fair ladye whose miniature—but you may burn my letter without reading further, should I write much on that subject. Angus Mackie, a private of your company, was the other night engaged in a regular brawl with the natives of Almendralejo,—some love affair with the daughter of an old *abogado* (lawyer). I refer you for the particulars to the bearer, who was engaged in it. We had another row at Almendralejo the day we entered it. Some Spaniard, by way of insult, ran

his dagger into the bag of Ranald Dhu's pipe, and so great was the wrath of the 'Son of the Mist,' that he dirked him on the spot; and although the fellow is not dead, he is declared by Doctor Stuart to be 'in a doubtful state.'

"I have sent you an Edinburgh paper, (a month or two old,) wherein you will see by the 'Gazette' that a Louis Lisle has been appointed to us, *vice* poor Oliphant Cassilis, killed in the battle of Arroya. There are people of the name in Perthshire; perhaps you may know something of this Lisle."

The blood rushed into Ronald's face, and a mixed feeling of pleasure and shame to meet the brother of Alice filled his mind. He read on—

"I was just about to conclude this long letter, when some strange news arrived. Ciudad Rodrigo has been invested, and it is supposed must capitulate soon. Our division has been ordered by Lord Wellington to retire into Portugal forthwith; the 'gathering' is at this moment ringing through the streets of Villa Franca, and the corps is getting under arms.—Adieu, &c.

ALISTER MACDONALD."

"P.S.—L. Lisle is at Lisbon, bringing up a detachment for ours,—a hundred rank and file. I do not know what route we take for Portugal; but you had better endeavour to join us on the way."

CHAPTER XI.

ALICE LISLE.—NEWS FROM HOME.

"As you are beauteous, were you half so true,
Here could I live, and love, and die for only you.
Now I to fighting fields am sent afar,
And strive in winter camps with toils of war;
While you, alas, that I should find it so!—"
Virgil, Pastoral x.

Within the chamber which he occupied Ronald sat late that night, musing on what was to be done, and what course was now to be steered. He saw that it was absolutely necessary that he should proceed instantly to rejoin,—a measure

which the healed state of his wound rendered imperative. "The division is retreating," thought he, "and the Count D'Erlon will without doubt push forward immediately and regain possession of Merida, and I must inevitably be taken prisoner. I will join Sir Rowland as he passes through; the troops must pass here *en route* for Portugal. How dangerous to my own quiet is my acquaintance with Catalina, and how foolishly have I been tampering with her affections and with my own heart! Good heavens! I have acted very wrong in awakening in her a sentiment towards me, which my plighted troth to Alice and my own natural sense of honour forbid me to cherish or return. And Catalina loves me; her blushes, her downcast eyes, and her sweet confusion have betrayed it more than once. 'Tis very agreeable to feel one's self beloved, and by so fair a girl, for Catalina is very beautiful; but I must fly from her, and break those magic spells which are linking our hearts together. To-morrow—no, the day after, I will leave Merida, and join the division as soon as I hear by what route it is retiring."

Louis Lisle, too, the brother of Alice, was now an officer in the same corps, and his bold spirit would instantly lead him to seek vengeance for any false or dishonourable part acted towards his sister. "Poor Louis! he is the first friend I ever had; and how will so delicate a boy, one so tenderly nurtured, endure the many miseries of campaigning here? A single night such as that we spent in the bivouac of La Nava, would unquestionably be his death."

Here his cogitations were interrupted by the voice of Evan, who was carousing in the room below with Gomez, (having spent the night together over their cups, although neither understood a word of the other's language), singing loud and boisterously,—

"Keek into the draw-well,
My Jo Janet;
And there ye'll see yer bonnie sell,
My Jo Janet."

a performance which drew many 'vivas!' from his brother-soldier. Roused from the reverie into which he had fallen, Ronald's eye fell on the newspaper sent him by Macdonald, and he now took it up, thinking to find something in it to direct the current of his thoughts; and somewhat he found with a vengeance! Better would it have been if he had never thought of it at all. It was an *Edinburgh Journal*, dated several weeks back, and appeared to have passed through the hands of the whole division, it was so worn and frittered. After scanning over the 'Gazette,' to which he had turned first "with true military instinct," his eye next fell upon one of those pieces of trash styled 'fashionable news,' It was headed—

"MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.—We understand that the gallant Earl of Hynd-

ford is about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Sir Allan Lisle, Bart., M. P. for ——. The happy event is to take place in a few weeks at Inchavon-house, (Perthshire,) the family seat of the venerable and much respected baronet."

The room swam around him, and the light faded for a moment from his eye, while the hot blood gushed back tumultuously through the pulses of his heart; but clinching his teeth firmly, and mustering all his scattered energies, he read it over once more, while mingled sorrow and fury contracted and convulsed the muscles of his handsome features. There was no doubting the purport of the torturing intelligence, and Catalina was forgotten in the fierce excitement of the moment. "O Alice! Alice!" he said, bitterly and aloud, "could I ever have expected this of you? 'Tis but a few months since we parted, and she is false already. I am, indeed, soon forgotten!"

He crushed the paper up, and thrusting it into the charcoal pan on the hearth, it was consumed in an instant. "Hyndford—Carmichael, Earl of Hyndford! Ay; the glitter of the coronet has more charms for her eye than a subaltern's epaulet; but I would not be my father's son, should I think more of her after this. I will learn to forget her, as she has forgotten me,—and this too shall perish!" He took the miniature from his neck, and was about to crush it beneath his heel; but when the well-known features met his eye, his fierce resolution melted away: he averted his head, and replaced it in his bosom, while a sad and subdued feeling took possession of his heart.

"I cannot destroy," thought he, "what has been so long a solace, and an object almost of worship to me. Even were she the bride of another, as perhaps she is at this very hour, I would yet wear and bear it for her sake, in memory of the days that are passed away and the thoughts I had nourished for years—ay, for years,—since the days we gathered the wild rose and the heather-bell on the bonnie braes I now almost wish never to behold again."

For the first hour or two, he felt as if every cord that bound him to happiness and existence was severed and broken, and an acute feeling of mental agony swelled his breast almost to bursting. His Highland pride came, however, to his aid, and roused within him feelings equally bitter, though perhaps less distressing; and starting up, he strode hastily about the apartment, and emptied more than once a large horn of Malaga, from a pig-skin which lay on a side-table near him, drinking deeply to drown care, and allay the wild tumult of his thoughts. But the wine was as water, and he quaffed it without effect.

The baseness of her desertion grew every moment more vivid; and how openly must she have renounced him, when even the public journals had become aware of her intended alliance, which must have been a measure of her own free will, as her father Sir Allan would never control her affections, and the age of

forced marriages was passed away, or existed only in the pages of romance. Love and jealousy, sorrow, pride, and a feeling of helplessness at the great distance which separated him from Britain, passed rapidly through his mind; and during the mental agony and tumult of the first few hours, he forgot Catalina and the honourable struggles he had made with himself to withstand the witchery of her beauty, until the recollection of it rushed fully upon him, raising him in his own estimation, and lessening the fickle Alice in an equal degree.

He hastily threw open his baggage-trunk, and producing writing materials, commenced a letter, in which he meant to upbraid her bitterly, and take a haughty and sad farewell of her for ever. But so great was his agitation, so fast did his ideas crowd upon each other, and so much were they mingled together and confused, that he wrote only rhapsodies in incoherent sentences, and sheet after sheet was filled, torn up, and committed to the flames; until at last it flashed upon his mind that there were no means at present of transmitting a letter, and he abandoned the attempt altogether. Whenever he thought of Catalina, he felt more consoled for the loss of Alice; but yet the deep-rooted affection, the cherished sentiment of years which he felt for her, was a very different feeling from the temporary admiration with which the Spanish lady had impressed him; but ideas of a prouder, and perhaps more healing kind, came to his aid.

"I tread the path which leads to the greatest of all earthly honours,—even the passage to the throne lies through the tented field; and although I look not for that, the ambitious Alice may yet repent having slighted the love of Ronald Stuart of Lochisla. We know not what fate may have in store, or what the great lottery of life may cast up for me. Alice! oh, how false, how fickle, and how heartless! Like twin tendrils of the same tree, like little birds in the same nest, we grew unto each other,—our love increasing with our size and years; and yet, after all the tender sentiments we have exchanged and the happiness we have enjoyed, she has thus cruelly abandoned me, preferring the glitter of a title to the love of a brave and honest heart! But let her go; she will hear of me yet," he said almost aloud, while his sparkling eye fell on his claymore, which lay upon the table, "for this is the land where honour and fame are within the grasp of a reckless and daring soldier, for reckless of life and limb will I be from this hour. But I may fall unhonoured and unknown, as thousands have already done, as thousands more shall do; yet Alice, though perhaps she may drop a tear for me, will never be upbraided with the sight of my tomb!"

Long and silently he continued brooding over the cursed intelligence, which every moment grew, in his fancy, more like some vision of a disturbed slumber, or some horrible enigma; and the hour of twelve tolled from the belfry of San Juan, yet he thought not of rest. He had grown careless of all external objects, and sat with his brow leaning on his hand, absorbed in his own heart-

corroding fancies. His lamp sunk down in the socket and expired,—the stars and the pale moon, sailing apparently through clouds of gauze, glimmered through the tall casement into the gloomy chamber, and poor Ronald still sat there, revolving and re-revolving the matter in his mind, which became a prey, by turns, to the very opposite sentiments of love and sorrow, pride, revenge, indignation, and ambition.

* * * * *

He awoke suddenly, and found that he had been asleep in his chair. The bright light of the morning sun was streaming between the dark hangings of the lofty windows, and the tolling bells of the neighbouring churches reminded him that it was Sunday. The instant he awoke, the aching memories of the past night rushed upon his mind; but he thought of the matter with a little more composure, and the presence of Donna Catalina, all blushes, smiles, and beauty, when the morning was further advanced, contributed very considerably to the re-establishment of his serenity, but her keen eye observed that he was ill at ease. His usual vivacity was gone; he appeared much abstracted, seldom speaking except of his departure, and in a tone of more than usual regret. They had previously arranged to visit the church of San Juan on that day, that Ronald might see high Mass performed, and hear the sub-prior, whom the citizens considered a miracle of learning and piety, preach.

Catalina retired to don her walking attire, while Ronald, from the balcony, gazed listlessly into the street, scarcely observing what was passing there. Peasantry from the neighbourhood were crowding in, attired in dresses at once graceful and picturesque; the men wearing, some the close vest, the broad sombrero, knee-breeches, and large mantle, while others were without it in a loose jacket, with a sash of ample size and gaudy colours tied round their waists, and having on their heads long slouched caps. Many—almost all—wore knives displayed somewhere about their person, and all had a peculiar swagger in their walk, which seemed not ungraceful. Bright-eyed women in their black hoods or mantillas,—priests in their dark robes of sack-cloth, their waists encircled with a knotted cord,—graceful peasant girls, their short bunchy petticoats displaying the most splendid ankles in the world,—sturdy muleteers with their long whips,—and market-women from the south bearing loads of butter, milk, and fruit on their heads, were crowding the street and thronging about the dark piazzas in every direction, and a loud gabble of tongues in Spanish was heard on all sides. Clouds of smoke arose from cigars, as every man had one in his mouth; and here and there, under some of the piazzas, might be seen a few muleteers and olive-cheeked girls, dancing a fandango or bolero about the door of a wine-house to the sound of the

guitar, the tambarine, and the castanets.

"How very different is all this from the sober gravity which marks our Scottish sabbath-day!" thought Ronald, as he glanced languidly around the Plaza. Notwithstanding the mental excitement under which he laboured, the chain of ideas recalled to his memory a few lines of a poem he had once read, and which he now repeated to himself,—

> "O Scotland! much I love thy tranquil dales;
> But most on Sabbath eve, when low the sun
> Slants through the upland copse, 'tis my delight,
> Wandering and stopping oft to hear the song
> Of kindred praise arise from humble roofs;
> Or when the simple service ends, to hear
> The lifted latch, and mark the grey-haired man,
> The father and the priest, walk forth alone
> Into his garden plat or little field,
> To commune with his God in secret prayer."[*]

[*] "The Sabbath: a Poem.". Second Edition. Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1805.

This was one of the many passages in it, which were impressed upon his memory, and he remembered, with peculiar bitterness of feeling, that it was with Alice Lisle he had first perused the pages of that now forgotten poem, seated by her side in one of the green birchen glades through which the Isla flowed towards the Tay.

The heavy clang of a charger's hoofs broke in upon his reverie, and raising his eyes, he saw an officer of the light cavalry ride furiously into the Plaza, with his uniform covered with dust, and his horse and accoutrements dripping with white foam. Casting a rapid glance around him, he spurred at once beneath the balcony over which Ronald leaned, knowing him to be a British officer from his uniform.

He checked his horse by the curb-stone of the pavement.

"Evelyn—Lieutenant Evelyn, 13th Light Dragoons," said he, introducing himself. "Mr. Stuart, I presume?"

"Yes,—Stuart, of the 92nd Regiment," replied Ronald bowing. "I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing you before?"

"Ay, near La Nava, the evening we drove in Dombrouski's advanced picquet."

"I now remember. But what word from the front?"

"Oh! the old story,—a countermarch. Campaigning is like a game at chess: we have been ordered to retire into Portugal, and the second division will be in full retreat by this time. I suppose they will come down the other bank of the Guadiana."

"This movement, likely, has some relation to the recent investment of Ciudad Rodrigo. You will, of course, have heard of that?"

"Our works are carried within a very short distance of theirs. It is said that Marshal Marmont imagines it will hold out for several weeks yet; before which time he will give Lord Wellington battle, and attempt its relief. His lordship appears to be preparing, as troops from all quarters are concentrating under his command; so that, should Ciudad Rodrigo not soon capitulate, we may expect a battle with Marmont in a few days."

"Of course it must fall; Marmont will never attempt its relief. But will you not dismount and refresh yourself? You appear to have ridden far."

"I regret that it is impossible to dismount; I have tarried too long already. I am carrying despatches from Sir Rowland Hill to the rear, and I must be far beyond Albuquerque before night. My orders were to ride without drawing bridle; but my nag is failing already. Just before I left Fuente del Maistre, an orderly dragoon brought up the mail-bags from Lisbon; and a Major Campbell of yours, an immensely big man, but a soldier-like fellow, who insisted that he had seen me in Egypt, although I never was there, gave me a letter for you, that I might deliver it, on my route, at Merida."

"I thank you," replied Ronald in a scarcely articulate voice, while his fluttering; heart became a prey to alternate hopes and fears.

"I trust it will contain good news for you," said the horseman, unbuckling his sabre-tache. "Our letters here are like angels' visits, 'few and far between,' the post delivery being less regular than within sight of St. Paul's. By the by, how is that wound you received the morning we marched from this? I heard something of the story, and would be glad to hear it all, had I time; but there are so many hard knocks going now, that one cares little about them. Your arm is still in the sling, I see."

"I mean to discard it to-day. I am quite recovered now, and am about to rejoin immediately. But the letter?"

"Ay, here it is," replied Evelyn, raising himself in his stirrups, and handing the letter to Ronald, who received it by stooping over the balcony, and knew at once the large round family seal, and the hand-writing of his father.

"Alice, Alice! Evelyn, is there not another?" he groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit.

"Another?" laughed the cavalry officer, who heard him but imperfectly.

"No, by Jupiter! and I am sorry the one you have received does not seem to be in the small running-hand of a fair lady; but it may contain what makes ample amends, you know,—a remittance from the old gentleman through Gordon, your paymaster, who is as jolly a fellow as ever broached a pipe or a pig-skin of wine. Ah! 'tis well when the old boy bleeds liberally. But now, so ho! for the road again! I would advise you to look out sharply while here. D'Erlon, the moment he becomes aware of our temporary retreat, will throw forward some of his cavalry, and regain the places he has lost. The low grounds by the river-side afford great advantages for a concealed movement, and you run a risk of being taken prisoner: the idea struck me as I entered the town a few minutes ago."

"How far is the division from this?" asked Ronald, impatiently awaiting the other's departure, that he might peruse the letter; "a day's march, think you?"

"Three, perhaps; Fuente del Maistre is a long way off. Remember that you must be careful what kind of guide you employ, should you require one in rejoining. And now, adieu."

"Adieu!" echoed Ronald. The other gave his horse the spur, let his reins drop, and was round the corner of the Plaza, out of sight in an instant.

Feeling all that trembling eagerness and indescribable delight which the arrival of a first letter from home, after a long absence, infuses into the heart, Ronald tore it open, but for some minutes was baffled in his attempts to read by an envious mist or film, which seemed to intercept his sight and prevented him from proceeding further than the date, which was upwards of a month back. The letter ran thus, and the ideas and style of the good old gentleman were observable in every line of it:

Lochisla, February 28*th*, 1812.

"MY DEAR BOY,

"I received your letters dated from Lisbon and Portalagre in due course, and cannot find words to express how overjoyed I was to understand by them that you were well, and did not feel the fatigue of long marches. Ronald, my son, may God protect you! You are very dear to me indeed,—dearer even than the little ones that sleep in the old kirk-yard. I can scarce get on further, for the salt and hot tears are filling my eyes, and it is no common emotion which makes a stern old man, like me, weep. We are living much in the old way here at the tower, with the exception that your absence has made a sad blank in the little establishment. My dear boy, I am very lonely now, and it is grievous when a man feels himself so in his old age. Your gentle mother, and her four little boys, are with the angels in

heaven; the green grass covers their sunny ringlets, and you alone were spared me, but only to be exposed to the dangers of a soldier's life,—dangers which make my heart shrink within me for your safety.

* * * * *

"How very quiet is all around me at the moment I am writing! The bright evening sun is streaming through the mullions of the old hall window on the hearth, where you used to play when a little child, and your two old companions, Carril and Odin, are stretched upon the rug; they often whine, and look sadly in my face, or at your bonnet and gun in the corner, as if they still missed you. The noble hounds! I believe that although six months have elapsed since you were here, they have not forgotten you. The wind scarcely stirs the thickets about the tower, and all is very calm and still,—all save the beating of my own anxious heart, and its pulsations are audible.

All our friends and dependants here desire to be remembered to you and to Evan Iverach; and I am assured danger will never visit you, if the prayers of brave and honest hearts can avert it; for the people at the clachan, and in all the glen, pray for you nightly and daily, particularly old Donald. He does not pipe about so much as he used to do, but pays more attention than ever he did to the whisky kegs in Janet's pantry. Poor man! I forgive his melancholy; like me, he mourns the absence of an only son.

"Corrie-oich and I have quarrelled again, about a fight which took place at the last fair, between his herdsman and Alpin Oig. I would fain harry the lair of the old fox, and give his turreted house to the flames, as my father did in 1746. I would teach his fellows to beware how they spoke to a servant or follower of mine.

"I am likely to have a row with Inchavon also. He has trespassed more than once on our marches in his shooting excursions, in which he is always accompanied now by the Earl of Hyndford, who, it is said, is to be married to Miss Lisle, an old flame of yours, whom I trust you have forgotten by this time, as she has undoubtedly done you.

"Inchavon's son has received a pair of colours in your regiment, and has left Perthshire to join; you will, of course, keep him at a due distance, and as you value my paternal love, make neither a friend nor companion of him. Forget not the words your gallant old grandfather used, after cutting down Colonel Lisle at Falkirk: 'Never trust a Lisle of Inchavon, until your blade is through his body.'

"Sir Allan has revived his old claim to the lands and vacant peerage of Lysle, and Hyndford, who is one of our representative peers, is using all his interest for him in the upper house. Let him fish for any rank he pleases; our blood, my boy,

is nobler than his own. We have been Stuarts of Lochisla since the days of our royal ancestor Robert the Second, and I seek no other title.

"By the by, that scoundrel Æneas Macquirk, the W.S. in Edinburgh, some time ago procured my name, as cautioner for a very large sum, to a deed connected with some cursed insurance business, of which I knew nothing. I fear the fellow is tottering in his circumstances; and should he fail, I will be utterly ruined, and the old tower, which has often defied an armed host, will, perhaps, be surrendered to some despicable Lowland creditor. To a Highlander, who knows nothing of legal chicanery, what a curse those harpies of the law are! Remember me to John Cameron of Fassifern, your colonel; he is a brave and good officer, and a true Highland gentleman. Be attentive to your duties, and never shrink from—— But I need not say that; I know that you will do what man dare do, and will never disgrace the house you spring from, or the gallant regiment to which you belong. Good by to you, my boy! let me hear from you soon and often; and that He, whose presence is everywhere, may ever bless and protect you, will be always the earnest prayer of your desolate old father,

"IAN STUART."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONDÉ.

"The anthem rang; for on the heavenward air
'*Gloria in excelsis*' swept along,
From voices soft and forms divinely fair,
While the lone echoes did the notes prolong,
Swelling the numbers of the sweet angelic song."
Scenes among the Mountains, canto i.

So much was Ronald engrossed in the perusal of this letter, which so fully displays the eccentric manners of his father, that it was not until he had withdrawn his eyes from its pages that he became aware of the presence of Catalina, who stood by his side, veiled and robed in her velvet mantilla for church.

"You have received a letter from your home? I trust—I hope—there is noth-

ing in it to cause you sorrow. Why do you sigh so very sadly?" said she, in a tone of thrilling tenderness.

"Indeed I cannot say that its contents are calculated to instil any other sentiments than sorrow," replied Ronald, depositing it in his breast; "and I fear, Catalina, that the last day I shall pass with—with you, will be a very unhappy one."

"The last day!" she repeated sorrowfully. "And are you still resolved on going so soon?"

"My arm, you perceive, is perfectly well now," replied the officer, tossing away the sling in which it hung; "and it is indispensable, if I would save my honour from disagreeable surmises, that I rejoin my regiment. Dearest Catalina! a hundred other circumstances, of which you are ignorant, compel me to leave you,—to leave you perchance for ever." While he spoke, a passionate flush gathered on his cheek, and passing his arm around the waist of the yielding girl, he drew her gently towards him; yet even the feeling of delight which he experienced at that moment, mingled with a sensation of anger at the faithlessness of Alice Lisle. To revenge himself, he pressed his lips a second time to the soft and burning cheek of the beautiful Spaniard, and felt his blood fly like lightning through his veins, while he watched the long lashes which modestly shaded the brilliance of her eyes, and read the smile of pleasure and inexpressible sweetness that played around her finely formed mouth.

A step was heard on the staircase.

"*Santa Maria! Senor mio, el senor Gobernador*; my uncle the prior!" she whispered, starting from Ronald's encircling arm. "Oh, 'tis only my gossiping cousin," she added with a smile, as Inesella de Truxillo swept into the apartment, with a long lace veil reaching from her stately head nearly to her feet, enveloping her tall and dashing figure.

"Pho! I fear I have interrupted some very gallant and tender scene. How very unlucky! Catalina, *mi queredo*, how you blush! Your veil and long glossy ringlets are all sadly disordered. Indeed, senor, you have quite turned the poor girl's head, and I fear we shall have some unhappy brawl, should my brother the Condé de Truxillo hear of it. He is one of Catalina's most passionate admirers, and we expect him here shortly."

"Inesella, I thought you were my uncle the prior," faltered Catalina, blushing with confusion.

"Our uncle, the padre?" cried the gay girl with a loud laugh. "*O madre de Dios!* do my little feet, which our citizens of Merida admire so much, make so great a noise as your old gobernador's? besides, he never leaves his room. *Mi queredo*, you compliment me! But you must remember that I am considered the best waltzer in Madrid, and the cavaliers there pretend to be very excellent

judges. My poor cousin, you are very much abashed; allow me to arrange your curls. But you should not be flirting here with a young *officiale* instead of being at mass, and *el Gobernador* should give you a sermon for doing so. But the bells have ceased to toll, and we shall be late; 'tis fully five minutes' walk from here to the porch of San Juan's church. So let us begone at once, and use our joint endeavours to make you, senor, a convert to the true faith."

Ronald replied only by an unmeaning smile; and taking his sword and bonnet, prepared to accompany the young ladies. They were followed by Evan Iverach and Pedro Gomez, carrying camp-stools for their accommodation, the church (as usual in Spain) not being fitted up with pews; so that all who do not provide themselves with seats, are obliged to remain either on their feet or on their knees.

An indescribable emotion of deep religious veneration, inspiration almost of holy awe, filled the agitated mind of the young Highlander with sensations which he had never before experienced, when, for the first time in his life, he found himself beneath the groined roof and gigantic arches of the Roman Catholic cathedral, while all its thousand hollow echoes were replying to the notes of the sublime organ, the bold trumpet-tones of which shook the very pavement and grave stones beneath his feet. The appearance of the church, being so very different from what he had ever beheld before, made also a deep impression on his mind: the tall traceried windows, filled with gorgeously stained glass,—the strong variations of light and shadow which they caused,—the long lines of shafted columns, and the domed roof which sprung from their foliaged capitals,—the perfumes of the lavender flowers which, arising from smoking censers, filled the air,—the dark and gloomy altar-piece, with the altar itself bearing a gigantic crucifix of gilt work and enormous candlesticks of silver, the pale lights twinkling around it,—the floating drapery of the officiating priests,—the sonorous prayers uttered in an unknown language, and the fervent responses of the swarthy congregation, together with "the pealing organ" and the melodious song of the young choristers,—all these combined, entranced and elevated the enthusiastic soul of the young Highlander, raising it from the grossness and bitterness of earth almost, as it were, to heaven, so grand and impressive, in form and ceremony, is the religious service of the Church of Rome, as it exists on the continent in all its ancient glory.

Poor Evan, who had never heard any other religious music than the humble Presbyterian psalm in Lochisla kirk, was for some time struck with a feeling of such awe, that he scarcely dared to lift his eyes, lest he should encounter the formidable gaze of some spirit or divinity standing on the altar; and the wonderful sound of the music caused his bold heart to shrink, although he could have heard, without his courage failing, the roar of a thousand pieces of cannon. However, when the music ceased, and he had recovered his usual self-possession, the native

prejudices and inherent sourness of the true Presbyterian assumed its ascendency in his mind.

"O sir, is this no an unco kirk?" he whispered from behind. "Gude guide us! never will I trust myself within the yett o' ane mair. Just look, sir, at that puir papist Pedro, how he yammers, and counts his string o' yellow beads ower and ower again. O'd, sir, this ding's a'! And look at the pictures, the images, and a' that: it's just a temptin' o' Providence to trust oursels inside o' this nest o' papistry, idolatry, and deevildom. Hech me, sir, what would the auld men and caillochs in the clachan o' Lochisla think or say if they kenned we were here? And what would our decent body o' a minister, auld maister Mucklewhame, think o' that chield's awfu' blatter o' lang nebbit words?"

Ronald had often motioned him to be silent, and he now ceased as the sub-prior, a black-browed priest of the order of St. Francis of Assisi, ascended bare-footed, the marble steps which led to the lofty pulpit. He was attired in the garb of his order, a grey gown and cowl of woollen stuff, girt about his middle with a knotted cord of discipline. His chaplet hung at his girdle, and his cowl, falling over his neck, displayed his swarthy features, coal-black hair, and shaven scalp. At the same time, Ronald encountered the smiling glances which the keen bright eyes of the ladies bestowed on him, as they watched from time to time the impression made upon him by the solemnity of their church service. The sermon of the Franciscan was filled more with politics and invectives against the French and their emperor, than religious matters, dwelling emphatically on the singular addition made by the priests to the Spanish Catechism at that time,—"to love all mankind, excepting Frenchmen, of whom it was their duty to kill as many as possible."[*]

[*] See "Memoirs of the War in Spain, from 1808 to 1814; by Marshal Suchet, Duke d'Albufera."

"Well, Evan, what think you of the discourse?" said Ronald, in the low voice in which the groups clustered round the columns generally conversed. "I dare say the Spanish sounds very singular to your ear."

"Ay, sir; it puts me in mind o' an auld saying o' my faither the piper. 'A soo may whussle, but its mouth is no made for't.' O'd, sir, I wadna gie the bonnie wee kirk at Lochisla, wi' its grassy grave-yard, whar we used to play on the sabbath mornings, for a' the kirks in Spain, forbye—"

"Hush!" At that moment the priest had raised his voice while denouncing a curse upon all heretics; and his keen expressive eye fell, perhaps unconsciously, on Ronald, whose cheek reddened with momentary anger.

Evan's reply, and his native Scottish accent, caused Ronald to indulge in the same train of ideas. He acknowledged in his own heart, that notwithstanding the gorgeous display before him, he would prefer the humble and earnest, the simple and unassuming service in the old village kirk at home,—the quiet sermon of the white-haired minister, and the slowly sung psalm, raised with all the true fervour, the holy and sober feeling which animate a Scottish congregation, and recall the soul-stirring emotions which inspired those who bled at Bothwell, at Pentland, and Drumclog. He thought of Alice, too; and eagerly did he long for the arrival of her brother Louis, that the cause of her heartless desertion might be explained.

The cry of "*Viva la Religion y España! Muera Buonaparte!*" from the preacher, echoed by the deep tone of a thousand Spanish tongues, awoke him from his reverie, and he took prisoner within his own the white hand of Catalina, who was playing with the silk tassels of his sash, unconscious of what she was doing.

"Senor," said she blushing, and withdrawing it, "you seem very melancholy."

"I have, indeed, much reason to be so. How can I appear otherwise, when the hours we shall spend together are so few?" But she may forget me as soon as Alice has done, thought he, and his heart swelled at the idea. The donna made no immediate reply, and Ronald was surprised to perceive her colour change from white to the deepest crimson, and then become deadly pale again, while her dark eyes flashed with peculiar brilliancy and light.

"Senor, the original of this is probably the cause of your sadness," she said, in a tremulous voice, while she held up her rival's miniature, which had fallen from the lapelle of Ronald's uniform, and hung at the full extent of the chain. "She is very beautiful. If this is her miniature, she must be a queen among women; and you love her very much, doubtless," she added in a cold and sorrowful tone which sunk deeply into the heart of Ronald as he hastily concealed the object of her emotion.

"May I ask who she is, senor?"

"A very dear friend, or rather one who was such."

"She is dead, then,—or perhaps it is a portrait of a sister."

"I never had one," replied the young man colouring with confusion, while he taxed his imagination to find a reply in vain. Happily for him he was relieved from his dilemma by an exclamation from Donna Inesella, who had hitherto sat silent, and had, or affected to have, been gazing intently at the preacher.

"Holy Virgin!" she earnestly whispered. "See, Catalina, yonder is my brother the condé, leaning against the third column from Pizarro's monument."

"Here at church—the Condé de Truxillo here?" replied her cousin, becoming pale and agitated.

"Would to Heaven and San Juan that Balthazzar was any where else than

here at this moment! Somewhat disagreeable will certainly come of it. Oh, senor! I tremble for you."

"For me, Donna Inesella! Sure you mean not what you say. I have a hand to protect myself with, and care not a straw for any condé or cavalier in Spain."

"True, senor. I meant not to offend, but my brother Balthazzar is so fiery——Ah! he sees us now."

Ronald looked in the direction pointed out, and saw a handsome Spanish officer in a dashing staff-uniform, wearing massive epaulets and aigulets of silver, and a score of military orders of knighthood, stars, badges, ribands, medals, and crosses on his breast, leaning listlessly against a pillar of the church, holding in one hand his cocked-hat, which was adorned with a large plume of red and yellow feathers, while the other rested on the hilt of a very long and straight Toledo. With a careless sort of glance he cast his eye along the aisle, as if he had been watching them ever since their first entrance; but on perceiving himself observed, he came hastily towards them. A frown for a moment crossed his fine forehead; but the next a soft smile replaced it, and he stroked the coal-black moustache which curled on his upper lip, forming a contrast in hue with his remarkably white teeth below.

To his sister and cousin he paid his compliments in a graceful and polite, yet distant manner,

"Balthazzar, this is the British officer of whom I told you in my last letter," whispered Inesella, introducing Ronald; "the same who saved Alvaro de Villa Franca's life when——"

"I have heard all the story; so spare me a repetition of it," replied he, waving his hand and coldly bowing to Ronald, at whose presence he felt a displeasure which, certes, he took very little pains to conceal.

"But tell me, Balthazzar, what has brought you here so unexpectedly? and why do you frown in so unbecoming a manner?"

"Faith, Inesella! you are exceedingly impolite; but to be angry with you is useless. I am carrying despatches from my colonel, the Condé Penne Villamur, to Don Carlos d'España, and I must leave Merida in a few hours, or less. But how is it that my fair cousin Catalina has not one smile of welcome to bestow on me, though six months have elapsed since I was last at Merida?"

"Indeed, Balthazzar, I am most happy to see you; but *el senor padre* would little like my laughing in church, you know."

"*El senor padre?* pho! But where is that most prudent of brothers Don Alvaro now? I heard that he had run his captain through the body, and so got command of his troop."

"'Twas a base falsehood circulated by old Don Salvador, whose guerillas were supposed to have done the deed; but Alvaro has joined the Spanish army

under Murillo, cousin condé."

"He is a thoughtless brother, truly," replied the condé, glancing at Ronald, "to go off thus, leaving you under the care of my uncle the prior, who is nearly as useless now as a piece of spiked ordnance. A young lady without guidance——But you look as if about to speak, senor."

"Don Salvador de Zagala," observed Ronald, whom the condé had never addressed until now, "is also with Murillo; and there may be some dangerous brawl between Alvaro and him, should they meet."

"*O Dios mio*! Santa Maria forbid," exclaimed the young ladies together.

"It would be more prudent in Alvaro, senor, to allow the guerilla chief to go in peace, and without molestation. He suffered the wrong, and was in the right to resent it. My cousin Alvaro, although an accomplished soldier, is no match for old Salvador, who in the use of the sword and pistol has scarcely his equal in Spain; besides, Murillo is a fine old fellow, and he takes most summary vengeance upon any noble cavalier who seeks the free privilege of the duello in the camp. I presume, senor, you are at Merida on some duty? I believe you will find it very agreeable,—much more so than hard fighting and long marches."

"No, condé; I have been here for the recovery of a wound, received from a Spanish hand in a manner at once base and dishonourable," replied Ronald, his brows contracting at the sarcastic tone used by the Spanish officer; "a wound in the arm which is barely healed, and it is scarcely an hour since I relinquished the scarf in which it hung."

"Then, senor, I think that the sooner you rejoin your brave regiment, the better for your fair fame. A gallant soldado who values his honour, would scarcely permit a scratch to detain him from the field."

"A scratch! How now, condé! what am I to understand by this premeditated rudeness?" said Ronald furiously and aloud, his cheek flushing, and his eye sparkling with anger. "What mean you, senor?"

"Merely what I have said, *senor officiale*," replied Don Balthazzar in the same provoking tone of sarcastic coldness, "But be pleased to moderate your transports for another and more fitting time. It would ill become a noble cavalier, like me, to brawl at church or in the presence of ladies. But you shall hear from me again, senor;" and bestowing a vindictive glance at Ronald, and a cold bow on his cousin and sister, he pressed through the crowd, and left the church.

"Holy Virgin! Inesella, O Dios! I dreaded that this would come to pass the moment I saw Balthazzar here," whispered Catalina in great agitation. "He is so fierce and untractable, that he never visits Merida without fighting a duel with some one. But you, *senor mio*, surely you will not lay to heart what he has said to you?"

"Calm yourself, Catalina. I know not what to think; but certainly his be-

haviour to me is very unaccountable. Have no apprehension on my account; as I said before, I care not for any cavalier in Spain, and Heaven knows there are plenty of them."

"Pho! Catalina," said her thoughtless cousin; "heed not Balthazzar's angry looks, though, indeed, he can be fierce enough when he pleases. He will probably depart immediately with his despatches: he said he had but a short time to tarry."

"Pray Heaven that may be so!"

"And then Don Ronald and he will perhaps never meet again."

"Let us leave the church. O Inesella! how my heart flutters."

"Indeed, my sweet cousin, your eyes have been the cause of more than one duel already, as the notches on Balthazzar's sword can testify; and you have great reason to feel sorrow and disquiet."

"I hear the hoofs of a horse; 'tis galloping through the Plaza."

"It must be his, Catalina: thanks to our Lady of the Rock, he is gone! They may meet no more."

The ladies were, however, both mistaken. Scarcely had Ronald escorted them home, before Evan placed in his hand a note, addressed to "El Noble Caballero, Don Ronaldo Stuart, 92nd Regimiento, Calle de Guadiana."

In spite of the many vexations which annoyed him, Ronald well nigh laughed on seeing this strange and imperfect address. "This is some trick of Alister's," thought he, as he tore open the billet, the contents of which undeceived him.

"SENOR,

"When the clock of the Casa del Ayuntamiento strikes the hour of two, I shall be awaiting you in the thicket behind the ruins of the castle of Merida. You will not fail to come well armed. BALTHAZZAR DE TRUXILLO."

Anger and surprise were Ronald's first emotions on perusing this unlooked-for challenge, which he considered an additional aggression; and having already been grossly insulted, he deeply regretted that he had not "stolen a march" on the condé, by sending him the hostile message first.

"The devil!" muttered he; "this will be a pretty winding-up of matters, to be shot by this vindictive Spaniard! But, every thing considered, my life is scarcely worth having: certes, a challenge could not have come at a better time, when my heart is filled with misanthropy, gall, and bitterness, and my feelings deadened by the news I have received within these twenty-four hours. Perhaps Alice may

weep when she reads of my death in the 'Gazette,'—so and so to be ensign, *vice* Stuart, deceased. Sorrow or death—come what may, my heart is strung for it all." A sour smile crossed his features, and he glanced at the clock of the corporation-house: it wanted but a quarter of two.

"I shall be late," said he, buckling on his sword. "What shall I do in this cursed dilemma? I have neither a friend to accompany me, nor pistols to use; and the condé may object to so formidable a weapon as the broad-sword. Would to God Macdonald, Chisholm, or any of ours, were here! Evan," said he, turning to his servant, who had watched his excitement, and heard his half-muttered speeches with considerable concern and surprise. "Evan!"

"O'd, sir, ye needna speak sae loud: I'm just behint ye. What's yer wull, sir?"

"I have received a challenge to fight that Spanish officer you saw at church, and you must accompany me as second. It will be prudent to come armed, as some of these Spaniards are treacherous hounds, and the condé may be no better than his neighbours. Get your musquet and accoutrements, and follow me to the ruinous castle at the end of the town; but do not alarm the young ladies, who I see are walking in the garden below."

"A duel! to fecht a duel? Gude guide us, sir, that's unco sudden," replied Evan, turning pale with concern. "And are ye really gaun?"

"Going, Iverach! can you ask me such a question?"

"And your sair arm scarcely weel yet!—it will never do. O'd, sir, let me gang in your place, and my name's no Evan Iverach if I dinna gie that saucy-looking chield his kail through the reek."

"Obey me instantly,—the time is nearly up; follow me at once, without further trifling. I should regret to speak harshly, Iverach, as this, perhaps, is the last day we may ever spend together. I have a great regard for you, Evan; we have been friends since we were little children, and I always forget the distance which birth and the rules of the service place between us in consequence."

"O sir! O'd, sir—"

"Should I fall," said Ronald, speaking in a rapid though faltering tone; "should I fall, you will find some papers and other matters in my baggage, which I wish transmitted home to Lochisla; and these I desire you will deliver either to Major Campbell or Mr. Macdonald."

"Sir, sir—O Maister Ronald! my very heart is bursting to hear ye rin on in that gait," replied Evan, beginning to shed tears, which he strove in vain to conceal. "I would—I would wi' pleasure gang in your place, face this chield mysel, and gie him what he deserves. Dinna think the waur o' me, sir, because I greet like a bairn. I would face hand to hand ony mortal man without quailing; but my spirit flees clean awa', when danger draws nigh you."

”Stay, Evan, my dear old play-fellow; hold, for Heaven’s sake! You will quite unman me. I am indeed deeply sensible of the regard you bear me, and have not forgotten the kind act you performed in our wretched bivouac at La Nava. But dry your tears: your fathers did not weep when they followed mine to battle.”

”Ye are richt, sir,” replied Evan, recovering his self-possession as his pride was roused; ”but my faither wadna be ashamed to yammer himsel, if he kenned that danger was nigh you. May be at this hour they ken it at Lochisla: auld Janet sees things farther off than ither folk. Ye’ll no forget she has the gift o’ the second-sicht.”

”Listen! If any thing should happen to me, you will find attached to this chain a miniature of Miss Lisle,—Miss Lisle of Inchavon,” continued his master in a tremulous voice. ”Tell Mr. Macdonald it is my particular desire that it be restored to her, or her brother Louis, who will shortly be with the regiment. I trust in Heaven you will see this done. And for my father—my poor father! you will find in my largest trunk——But I will tell you the rest by the way: it is useless addressing you while you are in this agitated state. Keep up your heart, Evan, like a man and a Highlander!”

”Sir, if ye should fa’,” replied Evan, in a tone of assumed firmness, ”a’ that ye tell me most religiously will I obey,—ay, obey as I would the commands o’ a voice frae Heaven itself,—that is, if I can survive you, which I dinna think possible. O hoo could I ever face the puir auld laird at hame, and tell o’ what had come ower ye in this unco place?” The honest fellow pressed his master’s hands between his own, while he endeavoured to subdue his sorrow and dread.

”But for what do I greet, sir?” said he, placing his regimental bonnet jauntily on one side of his head. ”A Scotchman is as gude as a Spaniard, and better, may be. Ye were aye a deadly shot on the muirs, and may settle this chield, as ye have dune mony a bonnie fallow-deer, by an ounce o’ lead in the wame.”

At that moment the bell of the Casa del Ayuntamiento tolled the hour of two.

”Time is up, by heavens!” exclaimed Ronald passionately; ”and this cursed count has obtained a triumph over me: he will be first on the ground!” He cast a hasty glance at the graceful figure of Catalina, as she leant on the margin of the fountain conversing with Donna Inesella. Evan hastily examined the lock of his

musquet, and they sallied forth in silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL.

"It has a strange, quick jar upon the ear,
That cocking of a pistol, when you know
A moment more will bring the sight to bear
Upon your person,—twelve yards off, or so;
A gentlemanly distance, not too near,
If you have got a former friend for foe.
But after being fired at once or twice,
The ear becomes more Irish, and less nice."
Don Juan, canto iv.

Passing rapidly through the Plaza, and down the great street which leads towards the Guadiana, they ascended the eminence on the outside of the city, where the remains of the mouldering fortress stand. It was a solitary spot, surrounded by thickets of bushes and tall weeping willows. There was little chance of an interruption in such a place, especially at an hour when the streets were almost deserted, while the lazy Spaniards were enjoying their siesta. Within one of the square courts, round which rose the mossy fragments of shattered towers, they found the Condé de Truxillo holding his charger by the bridle, and conversing with the Spanish doctor, Mendizabal, whose case of instruments was displayed on a large mass of fallen masonry near.

The condé seemed to be impatiently awaiting Ronald's appearance.

"Senor!" said he haughtily, "you have been in no hurry to attend my summons. I believe I mentioned in the church of San Juan that I was hastening with despatches to Don Carlos d'España, and consequently had no time to lose in Merida."

"I am but a few minutes beyond the appointed time, condé; and you must be aware that the notice I received was very sudden."

"As sudden as unwelcome, perhaps."

"Senor! your observations are contemptible, and your blood alone can wipe

out your repeated insolence," was Ronald's fierce reply. "Condé, your life only can atone for such conduct; and by the heavens above, we part not this day until the sword is dyed with the blood of one or both of us."

"This is mighty gay! Your language promises bold deeds, senor," replied the other ironically.

"For what have I received this hostile message from you, condé? from you, whom I have never wronged?"

"When I acquaint you, senor," replied the Spaniard, his olive cheek glowing for an instant; "when I acquaint you that Catalina de Villa Franca is my betrothed wife, I have, perhaps, sufficiently answered that question."

"Donna Catalina is no more to me than any other lady in Spain," said Ronald, colouring in turn, for he knew the assertion to be false.

"Enough!" replied the condé fiercely. "I did not come here to chatter, senor,—my time is too short for that. You have brought pistols, of course?"

"I have no weapon but my sword; and I am perfect master of it."

"We will prove that in good time. I, however, am better provided." He took from his holsters a very handsome pair of long horse-pistols. "Choose one, senor; and here are ball-cartridges enough to last us till sunset, which you are scarcely like to see, if my hand is as steady as it usually is."

Ronald replied only by a scornful smile, and they proceeded each to load.

"Now, then," said Truxillo, "we are all ready, I suppose. I will retire to the ruinous wall, and you will please to stand where you are. 'Tis a very convenient distance. But what mean you by bringing an armed soldier with you here?" he exclaimed, his attention being attracted to Evan by the latter, in the excitement of the moment, loosening his bayonet in the sheath.

"He is a private soldier of my own regiment. I had no other friend in Merida to accompany me."

"Friend? A brave soldier requires none to assist him in defence of his honour. You must know, senor, that a Spanish cavalier, in an affair of this sort, seeks no other ally than a sharp blade and sure eye: however, desire your fellow to retire, that there may be no treachery. We draw lots for the first shot, I presume?"

"Agreed, condé," answered Ronald, whose Highland blood was all on fire, and whose anger had been gradually increasing at the cavalier's insolent demeanour and assumed tone of superiority, until he longed with a fierce eagerness to chastise him by the infliction of some severe bodily injury,—if not totally to deprive him of life. Lots were drawn by Doctor Mendizabal, and the *first* shot fell to the condé. An expression of triumphant malice glittered in his large dark eyes; he smiled sourly, showing his white teeth, and retreated close to the ruinous wall, where he planted himself about sixteen paces off, and examined with the most scrupulous accuracy the flint, priming, and muzzle of his pistol.

With the other in his right hand, Ronald stood erect, awaiting the condé's fire.

I must own, that when he heard the click of the lock, his heart for a moment failed him at the prospect of so sudden a death, and the fear of falling unrevenged: it was the feeling of a moment only,—the next he was all stern eagerness to be fired at, and to fire in his turn, should he survive. With clasped hands and starting eyes Evan watched the heart-stirring affair, stoutly resolving, should his master fall, to avenge him by driving his bayonet through the heart of Don Balthazzar.

"*Cuidado; senor officiale*," cried the condé triumphantly; "Don Alvaro's imprudence is likely to cost you dear. By our Lady of the Rock your life is forfeited. I am the most deadly shot in all Castile; but yet I would spare you on one condition,—that you swear by a soldier's sacred word of honour, never again to come into the presence of Donna Catalina."

"What right have you to dictate terms so degrading? Never, proud Spaniard! while I live, will I make such a promise."

"Then die!" cried the other furiously. He raised his pistol: his eye glanced over the sight for a second,—he fired, and the surrounding ruins rang with the sharp report. Ronald's pulses beat more freely as the hissing shot whistled through his Highland bonnet, sending one of the long black feathers which adorned it floating away on the evening breeze.

"Praise be to the Lord in Heaven! ye have escaped," said Evan, fervently. "But it's your turn now, sir: level low, and if the muzzle rises ye'll be sure to wing him like ony muir-cock; and mony a gude thousand we've bagged thegither in Strathonan, and mony mair we'll bag gin we get ower this awfu' adventure."

"*Dios y Demonios!* some demon of hell has turned aside my hand. I have shot at a score, and never yet swerved in my aim," cried the condé in a hoarse tone of anger and surprise, when as the smoke cleared off he beheld his antagonist still standing erect before him. "No! by Santiago, I never missed before. You have stood my discharge bravely, senor cavalier; but my courage is not less than your own. Fire!" he cried, laying his hand upon his heart.

"Noo, Maister Ronald,—noo, sir! O be calm; may be ye'll never hae sic anither chance. This chield look's unco saucy; but mind ye the auld proverb, "Ilka cock craws crouse on its ain middenstead." Its most awfu' wark this for a Sabbath evening; but oh, sir! level low; mark the buckle o' his waist-belt, and if the piece throws high, like the ither, the braw dies at his button-holes stand a bad chance." Evan spoke in an anxious and hurried tone, while he eyed the condé with no slight feeling of hatred and animosity. Ronald levelled his pistol at the tall and finely formed figure of his brave opponent, who surveyed him steadily, without a muscle of his noble features changing.

"I can never thus coldly shoot so fine a fellow," thought the generous High-

lander, and fired his weapon in the air. An exclamation of sorrow from Evan, and another of angry surprise from the Spaniard, followed the report.

"Santos Santissimos! what mean you by this? Am I unworthy of being fired at? You have most grossly insulted me by this action, senor; and you ought to have considered the very great honour I did you, in becoming personally your antagonist."

"How! Don Balthazzar; honour?—"

"Certainly. Save myself, perhaps, no cavalier of noble lineage, or a long transmitted name, would have condescended to contend thus openly in arms with a stranger, whose birth and blood are both obscure. No, senor! a dagger-thrust from a dark corner would have put an end to our rivalry. But think not to escape; for, by our Lady of the Rock in Leon,[*] we part not this day, until the sod smokes with the blood of one or other of us,—so defend yourself!" He unsheathed his long cavalry sword, and rushed so suddenly upon Ronald, that the latter had barely time to draw and parry his impetuous onset. So fierce was his stroke, that the arm of the Highlander tingled to the very shoulder when their keen blades clashed together; and so much was he infuriated at this unlooked-for assault, that for some moments he struck blindly and at random, whirling his heavy claymore round his head like a willow wand, and having many narrow escapes from the sharp-pointed blade of the Spaniard, who retained his temper and presence of mind admirably. Ronald soon found the necessity of being cool likewise, and using art as well as courage. In the fashion of the Highland swordsman, he placed forward his right foot with a long stride, presenting it as a tempting object for a blow, while he narrowly watched the eye of his adversary, who instantly dealt a sweeping stroke at the defenceless limb, which the young Gael withdrew with the rapidity of light, bestowing at the same time a blow on the condé, which broke the shell of his Toledo and wounded his right hand severely.

[*] A much-frequented image of the Virgin Mary, on a mountain called the rock of France, between the city of Salamanca and Rodrigo, in Leon. It stood there, or still stands in a building, which is, I believe, a monastery of Dominican friars.

He dropped his shattered weapon.

"Claymore for ever!" shouted Evan, triumphantly capering about, snapping his fingers, whooping and hallooing in a truly Highland style, so overjoyed was he to see his master victorious. "Claymore for ever and aye! bonnily dune,—bravely dune. Sir, Wallace himsel couldna hae matched him better. It was my puir auld faither learned ye that trick, Maister Ronald; and God be thanked it's

a' ower noo, and that your skin is a haill ane."

The discomfited cavalier bestowed on him a proud look, at once withering and disdainful.

"Noble senor," said he, turning to Ronald, "you have this day vanquished one of the most accomplished of King Ferdinand's cavalry officers,—in fact, senor, I am one of the best swordsmen in all the ten provinces of Spain; and to disarm me thus, is no small feat for so young a soldier, and I honour you for it. Catalina de Villa Franca must be—but strike! Fortune has placed my life a second time at your absolute disposal; take it, for I swear, by every saint on our monkish muster-rolls, I will have no ignominious terms dictated to me, even though disarmed and at your mercy. So strike the blow that will free you from me for ever."

"Never! gallant condé. This quarrel was your own seeking, and I forgive you for it freely, and for the many insults you have offered me."

"*Senor officiale*, you are too generous: no cavalier or rival in Spain would lose the chance you cast away so carelessly."

"Evan, hand this gentleman his sword? And now, condé, we must look to your wound: I trust it is not a severe one?"

"Pho! 'tis a mere scratch."

"Yet it bleeds much."

"*Carajo!* it does,—more than I wish it to do. But, senor, I have received so many wounds in different ways, and have bled so much, that I marvel I have any blood left in me at all."

"I regret that the cut is so severe," said Ronald, as the condé held up his hand, from which the blood streamed freely.

"Pho! senor; to express regret, though it may appear very generous, is folly. A few minutes since we would with pleasure have passed our blades through each other's hearts,—but that feeling is past now. Ho! Mendizabal. Rogue! why do you tarry? Bind up this quickly, and let me be gone. I have lost much time already, and Carlos d'España will scarcely get the despatches within the appointed time." The wound was tied up hastily, so impatient was Don Balthazzar to be gone; and a strange excitement and irritability possessed him now, instead of his former coolness and self-possession.

The moment it was over, he sharply scrutinized his saddle-girths and harness-buckles; after which he vaulted with the grace of a true horseman upon the back of his noble Spanish charger, which had stood by unmoved during the conflict between its rider and Ronald Stuart.

"Senor," said the condé to the latter in a low but emphatic voice, "our quarrel is ended amicably for the present; but perhaps we may meet again. Do not think that a cavalier of old Castile will thus easily resign to another so fair a prize as Catalina de Villa Franca. No, senor; I must live for her, or learn to die for Spain."

He dashed the sharp rowels into his horse's flanks, tearing the very skin; and forcing the animal to leap a ruined wall, fully six feet high, he vanished from their sight, and rode madly and recklessly towards the centre street of the city. A few minutes more, and they beheld his glittering accoutrements flashing in the evening sun, as he plunged forward at the same furious speed beyond the walls of the city, and disappeared over the eminences in the direction of Albuquerque.

"He is a gallant fellow," thought Ronald, who watched him until he disappeared; "and a noble example he has given me. To him I have almost unwittingly acted that part, which now Hyndford acts to me. But for Truxillo,—I have nothing to regret; I have acted honourably towards him, and in my own heart I thank God that this quarrel is ended amicably, and with so little damage."

An interruption now occurred to Evan's expressions of joy for the safety of his master, who, although most interested in the fortunate issue of the duel, cared indeed least about it. For his attendance, Doctor Mendizabal had received from Ronald a *doblon*, or *onza*, a coin worth about £3. 10s. English; and as it was the first time in his life that he had ever received so great a fee, his thanks, his protestations, and the sweeps he made with his sombrero were innumerable; and he had just taken his departure, when Sargento Gomez scrambled hurriedly over the ruinous walls, and leaping into the sort of court where they stood, advanced towards Ronald with a Spanish military salute.

"Noble senor," said he breathlessly, "I have been in search of you over the whole of Merida—"

"My life on't, anither fechtin' job!" ejaculated Evan, who saw Pedro was highly excited, although he knew not a word he uttered. "Got wi 't, Gomez, in some decent tongue a body can comprehend."

"A muleteer has within this hour arrived from Fuente del Maistre, and says he saw a party of French cavalry advancing down this side of the Guadiana. Donna Catalina wishes to see you immediately. You must fly, senor, if you would escape being made prisoner."

"French cavalry! How can it be possible? Yet Evelyn of the 13th said something about it, which I have forgotten. Can the veracity of your informant be relied on?"

"He is true to death, senor! He is my own brother, Lazaro Gomez of Merida, and an honester muleteer will not be found on the road between Madrid and Alcantara,—and that is one of many leagues in length. He has had the honour to be employed more than once by my Lord Wellington, as a spy upon Marshals Soult and Marmont."

"A recommendation, truly! Are the enemy in force?"

"He said two or three troops, senor,—Dombrouski's lancers."

"Sir Rowland Hill is retiring on Merida. Did your brother Lazaro see any

sign of his troops?"

"No, senor."

"'Tis very unaccountable how they have outflanked our division in this manner."

"Senor, they must have advanced by some secret way pointed out by some of those traitorous banditti which infest every sierra and wood just now. These fellows would hang their mother for a maravedi; so 'tis no wonder they are often false to Spain."

"These lancers must inevitably be captured by Sir Rowland's advanced guard, which cannot be far off now."

"True, senor; but you may either be killed or taken captive before the British come up,—and so may I, as a Spanish soldier. We must retire westwards to Albuquerque. But come, senor; Donna Catalina—"

"Yonder they come, by heavens!" cried Ronald, as a cloud of dust and the glitter of accoutrements appeared about two or three miles off, advancing rapidly towards Merida by the river side. "We shall have to retire without delay; but I must first bid the ladies adieu. Get your harness, Pedro; and though there are but three of us, we will not surrender, even to them, without firing a shot."

"Viva!" cried the Spaniard, tossing his red forage-cap into the air, and leaping up to catch it again. "Viva, noble senor! I will follow you to death, even as I would the noble cavalier who commands my troop, or King Ferdinand the Seventh himself."

Descending from the ruins of the fortress, they entered the city, where all was terror, confusion, and dismay at the unexpected appearance of the enemy, whose numbers were exaggerated, and declared to be the whole of Marshal Ney's division, and which, according to report, had utterly annihilated the British under Sir Rowland Hill. Most of the inhabitants were taking to flight, laden with their bedding and clothing,—matters which a Spaniard ranks among his most valuable goods and chattels. Hundreds of men, bearing burdens of every sort, were pressing towards the western gate, followed by women, whose lamentations were mingled with many a bitter "*carajo*" against the invaders of their soil. Among others appeared Doctor Mendizabal, carrying a carbine in one hand, while with the other he led by the bridle a stout mule, on which were seated his wife and two children. Others led mules and donkeys laden with all kinds of household stuff, and a dense press ensued among the crowd about the city gate, and loud curses of anger and impatience were uttered on all sides at the delay in front, the intense pressure from the continually increasing mass behind permitting but few to get out at a time.

At length a passage was made through the dense column by the arrival of an important personage,—the corregidor, or chief magistrate of the city, surrounded

by several alguazils in broad-leaved sombreros, wearing the livery of the city, and armed with long halberts, or Spanish blunderbusses with brass bell-mouths. The corregidor was a grave old hidalgo, wearing a large military cocked-hat and long moustaches twisted up to his ears; he was muffled in a large brown cloak, and smoked his cigar, while he surveyed with an unmoved eye the crowd, where almost every face wore the expression of terror, rage, impatience, and dismay. However, all fell back on the right and left, as his old-fashioned coach, with its emblazoned coats armorial, and drawn by a single mule, advanced towards the gate. Mounted on another mule rode a livery servant, wearing a red feather in his sombrero, a stiletto in his sash, and armed with an enormous whip, which was never a moment idle, being continually at work either among the people to make them give way, or on his cattle to make them increase their speed, and place as great a distance as possible between himself and the dreaded legions of France. This servant rode alongside of the mule which drew the vehicle, leading it by the bridle, the usual custom in Spain, and one which is truly very awkward and unsightly.

At the gate of the garden Ronald was met by the young ladies, who both advanced hastily towards him, exclaiming, "O Don Ronald! have you heard—"

"They are in sight—"

"*O Madre de Dios!* you will be either killed, or taken a prisoner over the Pyrenees to France."

"To escape either of these fates, I must bid you instantly adieu, senoritas,—unless you will consent to retire with me from Merida, which will scarcely be a safe place for you while the French are in it. The advancing party are some of Dombrouski's Polish lancers, who are not famous for their sentiments either of chivalry or gentle courtesy. They are rough dogs, I understand; and in gallantry, are far inferior to the brave cavalry of France."

"Oh, they are sad fellows, these lancers, and wear frightful whiskers; but we do not fear them, senor," replied Inesella in her usual laughing tone. "You must know that the Condé d'Erlon, who is one of my many most humble and devoted admirers, gave me a written protection the last time he was here, and all soldiers who march under the tri-colour of France, must respect and obey it; therefore we do not fear them—quite the reverse. Some of the French are very gay cavaliers, and I knew a very handsome chasseur—— But, pho! poor fellow! he was assassinated with some others at Albuquerque."

"Then, Donna Inesella, you fear not to remain. And will your letter protect your cousin?"

"O yes, senor, it protects all who are with me; but of course you—"

"Must depart at once."

"Exactly, senor; old D'Erlon's letter will not protect you, who are his en-

emy."

"Then, senoritas, now for flight," replied Ronald, tightening his sash and belt. "I must abandon my baggage to your charge. The citizens are nearly all off *en route* for the north and west, and all the church bells are tolling dismally. But I trust Sir Rowland Hill's advanced guard will be here by to-morrow, and if so, our cavalry under General Long will soon capture this handful of lancers."

"They appear, however, to have scared away my fiery brother, the condé; he galloped furiously down the street a few minutes since, nearly riding over a poor old padre, (protect, us Heaven!) and left the town, without even bidding us adieu, although Catalina called to him from the street balcony."

"Alas! Inesella," said Catalina, "your prattle will detain him here too long, and every moment is fraught with danger."

"Holy Virgin, I hope not! Do not compromise your safety by tarrying longer here, senor. Take the road for the forest of La Nava, and Pedro Gomez will direct you. The Mother of God keep her holy hand over you, brave cavalier! for we may never meet again."

"Farewell! *senor mio.* We have been very happy in Merida," said Catalina, in a voice of assumed firmness, and presenting her white hand, while her lip quivered and her cheek turned very pale. At that moment the distant sound of a cavalry trumpet was borne towards them on the passing breeze.

"Come awa, sir; we maunna bide a minute mair,—it's just a temptin' o' Providence," urged Evan, examining his flint as he stood at the garden gate with Pedro Gomez, who was armed with his carbine, and had donned his helmet and accoutrements.

"Gude by to ye, leddies," added the Highlander, touching his bonnet; "and mony thoosand thanks to ye for your kindness to my maister in this unco hole o' a place."

"Keep this for my sake, fair Catalina, and think of me sometimes, when I am far away from you," said Ronald, casting his tartan plaid over her white shoulders as a parting gift; and kissing her pale brow, and her cousin's hand, he retired hastily from the garden, followed by the soldiers.

CHAPTER XIV.

MULETEERS.

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more, is none."
Macbeth.

The red sun was setting amidst a sea of light floating clouds, which displayed a thousand blending shades of purple, saffron, and gold, shedding the same warm hues on the scenery around Merida, tinging every object of the beautiful landscape, through which, meandering between dark green groves of the orange and olive, wound the slowly rolling and broad-bosomed Guadiana, seeming like a flood of lucid gold, in which the objects on its sides were reflected downwards, the changing sky above and the black round arches of the noble bridge all appearing inverted in the bosom of the stream, as on the surface of a polished mirror.

The dark shadows of the neighbouring mountain were falling across the plain and the city, rendering yet darker the gloomy and antique streets, where all was still confusion and dismay, and from which the chant of the ecclesiastics, and the deep ding-dong of the tolling bells were borne on the wind towards them, mingled with the shouts of the advancing cavalry, who came on in a clamorous style truly French. Suddenly the dark mass emerged from among the trees which had concealed their approach, and galloped across the bridge some hundred in number, with accoutrements glittering, plumes waving, and their tri-coloured penons fluttering from the heads of their lofty lances.

"Now, then," exclaimed Ronald, as the last file disappeared from the bridge, "we must strain every nerve to gain the wood of La Nava. A party of these lancers may be sent forward to scour the roads, and we are very far from safe yet."

"Courage, senor: 'tis but a couple of leagues or so from hence, and I am well assured that no patrol will they send out while there is a single wine-house unsacked in Merida."

"Cast away your knapsack, Evan: you will get another when we rejoin. It is an encumbrance to you, so toss it away. Let us but gain the shelter of the wood, and we will there await, in safety, the arrival of our own troops, as they pass *en route* for Portugal."

Evan took his knapsack by the straps, and cast it into a deep pool by the way side, saying it was better "A' should gang that gate, than fa' into the hands o' uncanny folk."

About eight miles from Merida they met Lazaro Gomez, the brother of Pedro, and a party of muleteers of Catalonia, halted at a fountain which babbled through an iron pipe fixed into the rock, from which the water gushed, and fell into a little pebbled basin. Near it stood an ancient stone cross, marking the tomb of one of Don Alvaro's ancestors, who reposed here in unconsecrated ground. In

the course of centuries it had sunk deep into the earth; but on the upper part yet appeared the time-worn and half-obliterated inscription:—

AQUI YACE.
EL NOBLE CABELLERO D. JUAN DE VILLA FRANCA,
.... MUERTOS .... BATALLA ANO D. 1128.
RUEGUEN A DIOS FOR EL!

This fountain and ancient tomb had been the object of many an evening ride with Catalina, who related the history of Don Juan, a romance which I may give to the public at some future time. Ronald paid but little attention, to either the cross or brook, but advanced towards the jovial muleteers, who were smoking paper cigars of their own manufacture,—laughing, singing, and drinking aguardiente to wash down their repast of bread, onions, and bacallao—oil and lettuce, which was spread on the sward by the side of the fountain; around which, cropping the herbage, wandered their mules, from whose harness jingled a thousand little tinkling bells. On the approach of the British officer, the frank fellows sprung to their feet with one accord, and held their brimming horns towards him, while he was greeted with many 'vivas' and sweeps of their sombreros.

"Senor cavalier, I am glad you have escaped our enemies by means of the intelligence I brought to Merida," said Lazaro Gomez, the master-muleteer; a short thick-set fellow, with a round bullet-head and good-humoured face, containing that roguish sort of expression which is always given by artists to the features of Sancho Panza. He was tanned to the colour of mahogany by continual exposure to the sun, and his chin displayed a short stunted black beard, and slovenly ill-trimmed moustache.

"I am much obliged to you indeed, Master Lazaro; and I would that it was in my power to reward you."

"Mention not reward, I beg of you, senor cavalier," replied Lazaro, making another sweep with his sombrero. Ronald answered by a grave bow. He had become too much accustomed to the appellation of 'cavalier' and the pompous politeness of the Spaniards even to smile when he was addressed in a style that would pass better with the renowned Cid,—Rodrigo of Bivar, than Ronald Stuart of the Gordon Highlanders.

"But you must condescend to drink with us, senor," said a muleteer. "My horn is filled with the best aquardiente."

"Viva el Rey!" said Ronald, in a complimentary tone, as he emptied the cup.

"Viva el Rey!" cried the others, draining their liquor to the dregs.

"Evan," observed Ronald, "you will relish this beverage; 'tis somewhat like

our own mountain dew at home."

"It smells o' the peat reek, sir," said Evan, snuffing with his nose over the horn which Lazaro had given him. "Sour water, I declare! perfect fushionless water," said the young Highlandman, after he had drunk it all off, however. "Meeserable trash! O'd, sir, I wadna gie a gill stoup fu' o' what Alpin Gig used to brew wi' the sma' still in the hole at Coir-nan Taischatrin, for a loch fu' o' this agyerdent, as ye ca' it."

"How is this, Lazaro?" asked Pedro, observing that Evan disliked the liquor. "Have you nothing else but muddy aquardiente to offer to honest soldiers? Come, my jovial brother, broach us one of those bloated pig-skins, which are piled on the backs of your mules there?"

"Our Lady del Pilar! a modest request," replied Lazaro. "Why, brother Pedro, bethink you. I cannot touch the burdens of my cattle,—they are the property of others. Could I broach a skin, our best would be at the service of the noble cavalier. And as for our aquardiente, I avouch, by the head of his Holiness! that better never came out of Catalonia."

"I may pretend to be a judge," said the soldier, "as I have drunk some thousand flasks of it; and avouch, in return, 'tis muddy as the Tajo in a shower, and only fit for a Portuguese or a dog to drink!"

"Never mind, Lazaro; your aquardiente is most excellent," observed Ronald, seating himself by the gushing fountain, and partaking of the bread and bacallao, or dried cod-fish, which composed their simple fare. "Your mules seem heavily laden: how far do you mean to travel to-night?"

"As far as the first posada on the road to Majorga."

"What do your cattle carry in these large packages?"

"Oh! senor, many things; principally flour, rice, corn, pulse, and wine and oil in skins. These commodities we have brought from the centre of Catalonia and Arragon, and are carrying to the frontiers of Portugal to sell among the British troops. We hope to find a good market at the camp before Ciudad Rodrigo, in the kingdom of Leon."

"Catalonia and Arragon, did you say? How! These provinces are in possession of the French troops!"

"True, senor; but we muleteers have ways of our own, by which we evade the out-picquets and foraging parties of the enemy."

"Such as——"

"Travelling fast all night, and concealing ourselves closely all day,—and a hundred other modes. Senor, we would evade Satan himself, did he lay snares for us. We muleteers are cunning fellows!"

"You speak truly," observed Pedro. "A Spanish muleteer is a strange being, and one that is as wily and active as a serpent; but they are happy fellows, I assure

you, senor, and like no other men that I know of. A muleteer makes his home every where, because he is for ever wandering over all wide Spain. Cracking his whip and his joke, he travels with a light heart over our long dusty plains, and through the deep passes of the lofty hills and sierras, singing merrily to the jingle of his mules' bells, stopping only to smack his wine-horn or the lips of the peasant girls, whom he loves almost as well as his mules,—only almost, senor, because he loves his mules better than himself. He gives them fine names; he scolds, talks, kisses, and sings to them, to cheer them by the way; and at the posada or the bivouac he provides for their wants before he looks after his own. Caramba! were I not a soldier, I would certainly become a jolly muleteer. He is a droll fellow indeed,—soft-hearted and hard-headed, but alway honest, and true as the sun, senor."

"You have made a most excellent panegyric upon them, Pedro," remarked Ronald, when the soldier had stopped to take breath, and the shout of laughter which his observations called forth from the muleteers had subsided.

"Our Lady del Pilar! good, good! Well said, Pedro; you deserve another horn for that," cried the master-muleteer. "But if it please you, draw some distinction between us and the muleteers of Valencia, who are none of the best,—in fact the veriest rogues in all Spain. They would cheat the holy Virgin herself, were she to traffic with them. But talking of rogues, senor, if you would travel with us to Majorga, we should be proud of the honour of your company, and in truth you may find some advantage in ours."

"Why so, Master Lazaro?"

"The ruinous chapel of Santa Lucia, in the cork forest yonder, has become the haunt of some deperadoes for this week past,—fellows who are very unscrupulous whom they attack or encounter, and with us, who are all stout and honest men, and well armed to boot,"—every man had a trabuco or blunderbuss with a brass bell-muzzle slung across his back,—"you will be in greater safety. Our escort is not to be despised in these perilous times."

"I thank you for your offer and advice; but as I mean to await in this neighbourhood the arrival of our troops, it would not suit me to travel so far westward as Majorga, and so I care not to take my chance of encountering the thieves in the wood yonder. My Highland follower will, of course, stand by me; and Pedro will, I suppose, likewise."

"May I be blasted by a curse if I do not, senor!" The muleteers clapped their hands in applause.

"Are the rogues numerous?" asked Ronald.

"Three or four, senor; but stoutly armed desperadoes, and led by a regular demon, long well known as a frontier guerilla, whose only delight was slaughter and war to the knife! A fellow that could eat fire, as the proverb says, and upon

whom lead and steel were alike ineffectual."

"We will put him to the test, if he crosses our path. I never heard of a hide yet, unless covered by steel, that was proof against the point of a claymore. Three or four, did you say? We are but three; but then we are soldiers, you know, and are alone worth a dozen such as these fellows you speak of. But what has caused a gallant guerilla to turn robber?"

"Why, senor, 'tis a long story; and we had it yesterday from a poor muleteer of Codeciera, whom the villains rifled of his mules and every maravedi in his pouch,—the devil confound them for it!"

"Well, and this guerilla——"

"Kept a wine-house in Albuquerque; but for some attempt to assassinate the famous cavalier Don Alvaro de Villa Franca, his goods were confiscated to King Ferdinand by the corregidor's order. On finding himself a penniless outlaw, he took his musket and dagger, and turned bandit—keeping himself in the desert places of the forest of Albuquerque and the Sierra de Montanches for some weeks past. Now he has begun to collect followers, and has stationed himself in the wood of La Nava, rendering its neighbourhood any thing but a safe one."

"Go on, Lazaro," said Ronald eagerly; "his name is—"

"Narvaez Cifuentes,—a fellow I never much liked, although I have emptied some thousand horns at his casa. But what is the matter, noble senor; surely I have not offended you?"

Ronald's eyes sparkled with stern delight, and true Highland fury swelled within his breast at the intelligence that Cifuentes was so near; and his wild reckless spirit and love of adventure made him instantly resolve to search the wood and confront his hated enemy, at all risks and hazards.

"Evan—Evan! the daring wretch who attempted to assassinate me is lurking among the dingles of the wood yonder. I will seek him out and take vengeance on him, or perish. He has but three armed villains with him: you will, of course, follow me?"

"Sir! I wadna be my faither's son, if I didna follow whare'er ye led the way," replied Evan testily. "The venture's no' what I would just like; folk shouldna tempt danger or Providence, but follow ye I will as long as I can draw breath; and, troth, I would amaist gie up my hope o' salvation, to hae but a chance at the infernal riever wi' my firelock!"

To Pedro and the muleteer, who were surprised at his sudden excitement, Ronald related all he knew of Cifuentes; and during the narrative he was interrupted by many an indignant "*carajo*" and malediction on the wine-seller. When he had finished, the muleteers declared, with one voice, that if they had not their mules to attend to they would have followed into the wood and assisted him to attack the haunt of the robbers among the ruins, and to kill or capture his en-

emy; but Pedro, animated by the natural daring of a Spaniard, and as a soldier of Spain considering it his duty to follow Ronald as an officer of the allies, he at once volunteered frankly to attend him in his rash undertaking.

The evening had begun to deepen into the darker shadows of night, and the pale evening star, twinkling amidst the blushing blaze of the western sky, had risen above the wood of La Nava, when the sturdy muleteers, collecting their beasts of burden, moved off with much noise, jollity, and cracking of whips in the direction of the place where they meant to pass the night,—an inn on the road to Majorga. Ronald Stuart bade them farewell, and receiving many honest wishes for success, parted from them; and, followed by his two soldiers, left the fountain, making straight for the cork forest, the dark foliage of which lay involved in "a brown horror" before them.

It was a clear and beautiful moonlight night when they reached the skirts of the wood, whence, on looking back, they beheld a red light, which spread over the sky, rising in the direction of Merida, telling that the French were at their old work,—pillage and ruthless devastation. Stuart trembled for the safety of the fair friends he had left behind, and earnestly trusted that the Count d'Erlon's letter would protect them from insult or outrage.

"Braw wark at Merida this bonnie nicht, sir," observed Evan, giving a last look to the rear ere they plunged into the recesses of the forest. "My certie! the very lift seems a' in a low, the clouds are red wi' streaks o' fire,—and here's Pedro, puir gomeril! he is like to gang clean daft at the sicht o't."

"You would not be in a very pleasant humour yourself, Evan, were you to see the clachan of Strathfillan, or the 'fair city' of Perth, blazing by the hands of invaders; and Jessie Cavers, perhaps—ay, even your Jessie, carried off like a stricken deer across the saddle-bow of a French dragoon."

"Sic waefu' things will never happen at hame in auld Scotland, God be praised for't! never, sir, while oor men are made o' the stuff they are; the broad-sword has bent, but it has not yet broken! But it's unco droll to hear how Pedro, puir chield, havers to himsel."

Unaware of how he was listened to, Pedro Gomez ground his teeth with ill-concealed rage, while he invoked the curses of San Juan, San Geronimo, and a hundred others, not forgetting our Holy Lady of Majorga, on the enemy. This vituperation appeared to give him a deal of comfort; and thus consoling himself, he led them on towards the ruins of Santa Lucia by a pathway, with which he was well acquainted. It was so narrow that only one could pass at a time, and so much intersected, crossed, and barred by brambles, bushes, and foliage, that they had infinite trouble in proceeding at all. It led them into a deeper and denser part of the forest, the dewy branches of which were now in full foliage; the waving leaves were glittering in a thousand hues and shades of green as the pale moonbeams fell

on them, streaming in a gush of silver light on the glistening grass or down the dark dingles as they pushed aside the heavy branches in their progress, tearing the nets of silvery gauze which many a busy spider was weaving from tree to tree in the merry moonlight.

"For ony sake, Pedro, haud your wheesht, man!" exclaimed the Scottish soldier impatiently; "it's enough to mak' a body eerie to hear ye growling and yammering that gate, in siccan a dismal place as this. O'd, sir, I never heard ony ane blatter sic words, exceptin' the auld lawyer body at Almendrelauchy, when Angus Mackie and mysel had a fecht wi' him. Would ye like to hear that story, sir?" he added, turning to his master.

"No, not at present," was the reply; "we must move in silence, else 'tis useless to move at all. Look well to your flint and priming, and keep your lock clear of bushes. Should a musquet be discharged it would alarm the thieves, on whom I wish to steal unperceived, if possible." Ronald repeated these injunctions in the Spanish language, as indeed he had to do most of his observations, and they now advanced in perfect silence, following the intricate windings of the narrow track, which in former days had been a well-beaten road to the sequestered chapel of the forest, the fame of whose *relicario* drew, in ancient times, scores of devout pilgrims at certain seasons. As the pathway was now more open, Ronald took the lead.

It was certainly a rash and daring attempt to enter thus a wood, every pass of which was unknown to them, and at night, on such an errand, to search for so formidable a desperado as Narvaez Cifuentes,—a name which is yet a bugbear to the children of Estremadura, and used by their mothers to *frighten* them to sleep; more especially as the number of his followers was doubtful, and it was only certain that they would all be equally desperate and ferocious as himself. But Ronald's bold blood was up, and his eagerness to take vengeance upon him for the recent wound that his hand had inflicted, and the pain and suffering which that wound had caused, rendered him blind to what might be the probable consequences.

Alice's desertion of him for a higher born and more wealthy lover had rendered him careless of life, prompt to encounter and utterly regardless of any danger, which was proved by the cold insensibility with which he conducted himself during his duel with the condé. That native spirit of daring which exists in the bosom of every mountaineer, and which he possessed in no slight degree, likewise spurred him on; and thinking not of the rash manner in which he was perilling his own life and the lives of his friends, he continued to penetrate resolutely into the most gloomy part of the wood.

"Eh! gude guide us! what is that, sir?" exclaimed Iverach, charging his musquet breast high, while he started back in dismay as some huge animal arose

from its lair, upon which they had encroached, and dashing furiously past them, swept through the forest glade like a tempest.

"What an awfu' like beast to meet in siccan erne a place!"

"Many such have we shot at home on the green braes of Strathonan and side of Benmore. Is it possible that you knew not what it was?"

Evan was abashed, and trod on without replying, while he was sadly incommoded by the rough brambles and stunted bushes, which tore his bare legs, where left uncovered by the tartan kilt and gartered hose.

"Senor," said Pedro, "what a noble deer it was that rushed past us just now!":

"Ay, faith! and a splendid mark for a single ball at a range of forty yards or so; but I am surprised to find it here in a cork forest."

"It must have come down from the Sierra de Montanches, for there, and among the high mountains of Guadalupe, many thousands of gallant deer and the dark brown roe-buck rove about in freedom."

Their attention was now attracted by a strange noise, which seemed to approach them in front: it was a series of sounds, in tone something between the snorting growl of some wild animal and the squeaking of young swine. Ronald, who had never heard such noises before, was very much surprised, and kept his hand on the hilt of his sword; but poor Evan's nerves were sadly discomposed, and he felt every hair on his scalp bristling under his bonnet, as the dismal remembrance of the many awful beings who peopled the Coirnan Taischatrin, and every thicket and corrie about Lochisla, rushed upon his mind. All the stories he had heard of the dreadful water-horse that dwelt in the castle loch, (and which his father the piper beheld one clear moonlight night floating on the surface of the placid water, as he was returning from a *dredgie*), of the little fairies who lived under the green holms of Corrie-avon, and the yet more terrible white woman who haunted the black muir of Strathonan and howled to the wind the live-long night, all crowded horribly upon his memory, and the perspiration burst forth from every pore, as something like a legion of flying devils swept tumultuously past them, and plunging into the underwood disappeared, squeaking, growling, and tearing the bushes to fragments in their wild career.

"Pedro! What are all these, in the devil's name!" cried Ronald, starting back and half unsheathing his weapon.

"Only a herd of wild swine, senor," replied Pedro with a laugh. "*Demonios!* one fellow has given a stroke with his tusk in passing, which I little like."

"'Twas only a drove of wild pigs," said Ronald. "Cheer up, Evan; surely you were not frightened? Yet you seem very pale in the moonlight."

"Frightened, said ye, sir?" replied, or rather asked, Evan indignantly, but feeling considerably re-assured the while; "frightened! the deil a bit, sir. But I never got sic a start in a' my born days syne the nicht the howlet gied me a flaff

wi' its wing, when we took Maister Macquirk ower to the ruins on the Kirk-inch. Ye'll mind o'd, sir: he was living wi' the auld laird for a day or twa at the tower, and we rowed him ower the loch in the boat, to gie a look o' the bonnie ruins in the moonlicht."

"Macquirk!" reiterated Ronald, the name recalling a disagreeable passage in his father's letter.

"Ay, sir, Maister Macquirk,—a pleasant smooth-spoken gentleman, as a' Edinburgh writer-folk are. Eh! God be wi' us, sir! what's this noo? Mair wild pigs, I declare!" cried he in considerable trepidation.

"Pshaw! Evan. Your father, old Donald, has made a complete old wife of you, by his horrible legends and stories."

"It's no for me, sir, to—— But it's just a temptin' o' Providence to be—"

"Hush! 'tis only the barking of dogs. Tread softly, and keep close under the darkest shadows of the foliage."

"There is a man yonder, senor,—evidently a sentinel," whispered Pedro in a low voice.

"Where?" asked Ronald, as they halted.

"About thirty paces off."

"Under the dark tree?"

"Ay, senor,—the moon shines full upon him."

"Keep close in the gloom: he sees us now, I think."

The figure of a man armed with a long musquet appeared clearly, as the bright radiance of the moon streamed down the narrow path, glittering on the butts of his pistols and hilt of the poniard stuck in the worsted sash which was twisted round his waist. He wore a long slouched cap, which hung down his back, and various tassels, ribbons, and gewgaws of gold lace that adorned his short velvet jacket glimmered in the moonlight.

"*Quien vive?*" challenged he, like a Spanish sentinel, while he stooped his ear towards the ground, listening intensely for a few seconds. He appeared to have heard something. It was Evan's feet rustling among the last year's leaves. The robber stood erect, and cocked his musquet while he looked forward into the gloom, a passing cloud having obscured the face of the moon.

"*Carajo! Quien vive? Amigos ó enemigos?*" he repeated, the sonorous tones of his voice reechoing in the dingles of the wood, and arousing the fierce growling of some dogs near at hand.

"This is one of the villains, senor, bedecked in all his ill-gotten finery."

"We must dispatch him," answered Ronald in a fierce whisper, his natural impetuosity becoming roused; "we must rid ourselves of him, but how?"

"Quietly, senor,—leave him to me. Every man lost to the enemy is one gained to us,—so says Murillo, and he—"

"Pshaw! never mind Murillo. This fellow must be settled warily, if we would steal upon the rest. What would you advise? He certainly hears us, and should he fire in this direction, one of us may be knocked on the head. I will rush on him, and disarm or cut him down in a twinkling."

"Nay, noble senor; his outcry would be as mischievous as the discharge of his musquet: the ruins of the chapel are close at hand, remember. Leave him to me," was Pedro's answer, while he coolly displayed the blade of a long Spanish knife, which flashed as he drew it, and, gliding from Ronald's side, advanced softly towards the brigand under the shadow of the trees.

The challenge of the bandit again sounded through the lonely wood.

"*Cuidado, amigos mios; cuidado?*" he added in a voice of taunt and warning, but evidently while he was uncertain whether or not any one had approached his post. He drew his thumbnail cautiously across the sharp edge of his flint, he raised his musquet to his shoulder, and was about to fire in the direction of the place where Ronald and Evan stood concealed. Another second would perhaps have sealed the fate of one of them, when the stiletto of the dragoon glittered near him in the pale moonlight,—a heavy blow was given, and a deep groan succeeded: the robber fell dying upon the sward, while his musquet only flashed in the pan, and fell rattling from his grasp without doing damage. Ronald rushed towards the spot, and found the bloodthirsty sargento wiping his deadly weapon with scrupulous accuracy, while he kept his foot upon the yet warm, though breathless corpse of the man he had destroyed. The light of the moon fell with a cold and ghastly lustre on the pale and rigid, yet very fine features of the dead man, becoming contracted and fierce with the recent death-struggle. His white and up-turned eyes shone with a terrible glare, as the moon-beams fell on them, and altogether there was something sad and appalling in the sudden manner in which this desperado had been hurled into eternity, with all his unrepented and manifold sins upon his head.

"Awfu' work this, sir!" said Evan with a shudder, while he surveyed the stark and bold features of the slain, around whom a black pool formed by his blood lay increasing. "A dour-looking chield he is, wi' a gloom on his brow that would suit Rob Roy himsel."

"I would to Heaven, Gomez," observed the equally excited Stuart, "you had found some other mode of silencing him than this; there is somewhat in it at which I revolt."

The Spaniard laughed grimly.

"Senor," said he, "the man was only a robber; and when old Murillo gets hold of such, he hangs them by scores at a time, and I have seen a stout beech bending under a load of such devil's fruit. Pho! senor, it matters not. We are now close upon the ruins of the chapel, and the villains who harbour there have some

formidable allies,—mastiff dogs. I hear them growling, and I assure you, senor, that a demon may be as easily dealt with as a Spanish hound. You will require all your resolution and energy to—"

"I do not mean to relinquish the search, after having proceeded so far," replied Ronald, interrupting the Spaniard, at whose tone he felt a little piqued. "I assure you, Sargento Gomez, 'tis not the sight of a little blood that will make the heart of a Scottish Highlander fail."

"I meant not to offend, senor; but let us proceed. The ruins of Santa Lucia are some twenty yards from this."

"Forward, then,—lead on!"

Ronald in passing possessed himself of the dead man's loaded musquet and well-filled pouch of ball cartridges, an acquisition on which he had soon reason to congratulate himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BANDITTI.

"'Tis na' for nought, bauld Duncan cried,
Sic shoutings on the wind:
Then up he started frae his seat,
A thrang of spears behind.

Haste, haste, my valiant hearts, he said,
Anes mair to follow me:
"We'll meet these shouters by the burn,—
I guess wha they may be."
Duncan: a Fragment.

Treading softly and warily, they came to an opening in the wood, and found themselves close upon the ruins of the ancient structure. It occupied the summit of a grassy mound, which sloped down on all sides, and where the mouldered remains of some ancient crosses and tomb-stones lay half sunk and buried among the long rank grass. The chapel had almost disappeared; little remained save the crypt; and at intervals, amid a heap of shattered stones, arose tall ornamented

buttresses (surviving the intermediate walls), their summits glimmering in the moonlight, which streamed through loop-holes and yawning rents in the massive masonry, showing the weeds and grass which waved in every nook and corner, flourishing around the prostrate effigies of departed warriors, whose monumental busts lay stretched like rigid corses under their ruined canopies.

"The auld kirk o' Inchisla just ower again!" exclaimed Evan, as he surveyed the heaps of prostrate pillars and crumbled arches with feelings of awe and veneration.

"Santos! will you be silent?" asked Pedro, in a fierce whisper in Spanish.

"I dinna ken what ye say, mon; ye are waur than an Aberdonian."

"Keep silence, Evan!" said Ronald; "we are close upon their lair now."

A ray of light, streaming through a cross-formed loop-hole, drew them towards it; and on looking in, they beheld the assembled conclave of the worthies they were in search of, but found them more numerous than Lazaro Gomez had given them to believe. In the crypt, or lower vaults of the chapel, stood upwards of twenty—perhaps thirty, black-browed and swarthy desperadoes, clustered around the marble pedestal of a tomb, upon which were displayed a great quantity of coin, jewelry, and various articles of value, all glittering in the streaming blaze of a huge oil lamp placed amid them. Most of the fellows were attired in embroidered jackets, adorned with rich military lace torn from the uniforms of the dead, laced hose, and high-crowned sombreros adorned with feathers, or long cloth head-dresses resembling a night-cap. Some, however, were in absolute rags; none appeared to have been shaven for a month at least, and had their ferocious faces covered with masses of black glossy hair,—probably as a disguise, to be removed as occasion required. All carried pistols and poniards in their sashes or waist-belts, and most of them were armed with military carbines, musquets, and accoutrements, French and English, thousands of which were in these days to be found on every battle-field, and to be had for the trouble of taking them away. Trunks, portmanteaus, mails, and innumerable articles of plunder lay piled in various corners.

Fastened by strong cords to the pillars which supported the groined roof of the crypt, appeared five or six fierce Spanish mastiff dogs, animals of a reddish colour generally, larger and stronger than British greyhounds. They seemed aware of the approach of strangers: every moment they made the hollow vaults ring with their hoarse yells, while they rolled about their fierce red eyes, and shook the snow-white foam from their jet-black muzzles as they strained and strove, almost strangling themselves in the attempt, to snap the cords which bound them to the stone columns.

"Senor, we must retire, if it please you," whispered Pedro; "it would be worse than Moorish rashness if three of us were to encounter thirty such devils. And

then the dogs—"

"I fear we must abandon the attempt," replied the officer in a voice of stern regret. "Discretion is the better part of valour, and Narvaez and I may meet again; but now—"

"It is just a temptin' o' Providence, sir," said Evan, "to bide here, wi' sic a nest o' born deils below us. What an awfu' looking gallows rogue the chield is that counts oot the siller!"

The light fell fully upon the robber's face as Evan spoke.

"It is,—it is the very villain who fired at me near Merida," muttered Ronald almost aloud, in a tone of uncontrollable passion, and feeling scarcely able to restrain himself from shooting Cifuentes dead upon the spot; but he repressed the fierce sentiments of intense hatred, indignation, and horror which he entertained for him, and paused even when his hand was on the lock of the musquet which he carried.

"Whelp!" exclaimed one furiously to Narvaez, "think you I will thus tamely submit to be defrauded of my share in this matter? Remember, you are not at your old work of dealing out sour wine at Albuquerque! The rings I took from the image of our Lady at Majorga were alone worth two hundred *duros*."

"*Pesetas*, you mean, Julian Diaz,—*pesetas*; they were copper trash."

"I say *duros*; they were pure and beaten gold, embossed richly. Methinks I should best know: I have prayed at that shrine some hundred times ere—" He paused and grew pale.

"Bethink you, Julian, of my last night's work, and—"

"Bah! The stabbing of an old *abogado*."

"Old? Perdition seize him! he fought fiercely for his ill-gotten gold. I broke the blade of a choice knife on the bones that cover his hard heart. But silence, Diaz, my pet! Though we may eat flesh in Lent, and rifle our Lady of Majorga, we would scorn to cheat each other. Honour among—among—"

"Thieves! End the adage at once, driveller," cried he whom they named Julian Diaz, a wild-looking fellow, with a broken nose and a frightful squint. "Honour," he added impatiently, "sounds strangely indeed in such a rogue's mouth as thine, Narvaez,—the broken keeper of a wine casa."

"Why not?" cried a third. "Every man, from the king and the soldier down to the lowest *abogado*, swears now by his word of honour; and why may not we?"

"Agreed, agreed. Go on, *diavolo!* go on with the distribution," cried the others impatiently.

"Fiend take these dogs! what do they growl at? Some one surely approaches."

"Impossible," answered Diaz. "Lazarillo is watching the only approach, and all is right; so count on, Narvaez."

"Where was I? Ay—three hundred and ninety-eight, three hundred and ninety-nine, four hundred *reals*," continued Narvaez, counting the money, "are one hundred *pesetas*; now, we are thirty in number, including Lazarillo—"

"But the necklace and rings which I took from the old lawyer's daughter?" interrupted the avaricious Julian.

"San Jago of Compostella wither your accursed tongue!" exclaimed Cifuentes, grasping fiercely the hilt of his poniard; "how often am I to lose count by your interruptions? Allow me to deal to each man his share, and then preach, as of old, until you are weary. When you left your cloister at San Juan, you should have left there your monkish greed with your beads and cowl. One hundred pesetas, then, is—is—twenty duros," &c. &c.; and so on he continued to reckon and count, while his brother desperadoes watched round in silence, with louring looks of eagerness, ferocity, and avarice, their hard-featured countenances appearing like those of demons, as the yellow lustre of the lamp fell on their harsh outlines.

"Let us retire now, while we may do so in safety," whispered Ronald. "But how now, Pedro! what is the matter with you?" he asked, on observing that the face of the Spaniard was pale, fierce, and betrayed symptoms of deep excitement.

"Ah! *senor officiale*," he replied in a scarcely audible voice, "Julian Diaz, the wretch who was this moment disputing with the master rogue, has done me more wrong than even his life can atone for."

"How—how so? Speak low and quickly."

"Two years ago I was about to be wedded to a girl of Merida, Isobel Zuares,—a fair creature, senor, and of good birth, for her grandfather had been an alcalde. The very evening before our marriage, this fiend Julian Diaz, who was then a monk in the Convento de San Juan, sacrilegiously conceived a passion for her at the confessional, and bore her that night by force to the forest of Albuquerque. *Dios! O Dios!* senor, I never again beheld her,—never again in life at least: poor Isobel!" He paused a moment, and the quivering muscles of his face, which appeared pale as that of a spectre in the moonlight, showed the inward agony of his soul.

"Well, Pedro, and this Diaz—"

"Since that day has been a robber and outlaw: as such he has eluded my search. But now—" He cocked and raised his carbine.

"For Heaven's sake—for our own sakes, beware what you do, Gomez! We must retreat rather than attack. Our lives would pay for our rashness in encountering so many."

"God be wi' us! Would ye be temptin' Providence by firing on sic a nest o' caterans?" said Evan angrily, as he dragged Pedro from the wall towards the gloomy dingle. "Come awa, ye desperate loon. If ye haud your life at a bawbee

only, I haud mine dearer than a' the goud in the hill o' Keir; and there lies the ransom o' seven crowned kings."

"*Diavolo*! I will not be restrained," cried the dragoon fiercely, disengaging himself from the grasp of the Highlander. "I will revenge Isobel Zuares, or die!" He rushed to the loop-hole, and fired at the group of bandits. Julian Diaz, shot through the heart, fell dead among his terrified comrades.

"Follow me, senors! I know every pass and thicket of the wood, and will easily elude their pursuit," exclaimed Pedro, dashing into the bushes, and threading his way at random through the maze of dark thickets and entangled underwood. The two mountaineers, acting on the first impulse of the moment, also sought safety by retiring, and followed Pedro with ease and rapidity through every obstacle, having been accustomed from their boyhood to thread the dense pine forests of the Scottish highlands.

Onward they hurried at random, pressing aside the heavy bushes and branches, getting themselves bruised and torn by sharp brambles and hard stumps; but wounds and contusions were unfelt or unheeded in the excitement of the moment, as they pressed forward regardless of immediate consequences. Ronald was boiling with inward rage and vexation to find himself retiring thus from wretches whom he so heartily hated and despised, and more than once he almost resolved to stand and fight against them to the death; but his discretion overruled his desperate resolution, pointing out that flight and deferring his revenge till another time would be the most prudent course to pursue; but that a future time would ever be, seemed at present very doubtful. Fiercely in pursuit, following their path with scrupulous precision, came the outlaws, eager for plunder and revenge. These savage desperadoes had, however, been distanced by some hundred yards; but their shouts, outcries, and the tread of their feet were distinctly heard as they pursued with the speed and accuracy of men accustomed to the ground, and to the irregular warfare of guerillas.

Now and then the gloom of the dark wood was illumined by a lurid flash, as a random shot was fired in the direction of the fugitives, who more than once had narrow escapes from being killed or wounded; the latter was to be dreaded, as it would have ensured, perhaps, a death of torture from the poniards of the bandits. A part of the forest was now gained where the trees grew thinner and the ground was more open; but their path was embarrassed by piled masses of rocks, roots and stumps of decayed trees, entwined bushes, fallen cork-trees, deep gorges and holes, and here and there the stony bed of some bubbling brook. Nevertheless they still kept their pursuers at the same distance, and trod on quickly and in silence.

The moon, which had been obscured for some time, now broke forth and lighted the wild scenery with the pale splendour of its silvery light.

"These wretches are undoubtedly gaining upon us," said Ronald, pausing a moment to listen and draw breath. "Your ill-timed rashness, Pedro, will certainly cost us our lives."

"For my own I care not; but I regret that yours, noble senor, or that of my gallant comrade, should be placed in such deadly peril by me."

"It was a temptin' o' Providence to attack sic a gang," observed Evan, who had begun to comprehend Spanish a little. "O'd, sir! gin we had but ten o' our ain braw fellows here, we would soon gar them ca' a halt."

"Yes; oh! had we but so many of the Gordon Highlanders here, I would soon give these vagabonds fight,—thirty of them though there be."

"Twenty-eight, senor; my hand has struck two from the muster-roll," said Pedro, ducking his head to avoid a shot which whistled past.

"There they are now. How it stings me to the heart's core to fly thus before such a despicable crew!"

As the moon shone forth again, their pursuers were distinctly seen behind, bounding over rocks and leaping through bushes, clearing every impediment with the activity of roes, while the wild yells, maledictions, and blasphemy with which they startled the far echoes of the lonely forest, imparted to the scene a singular and exciting, but certainly terrible effect. Some becoming weary, or missing the track, their numbers were now diminished to about a score, and shot upon shot they sent after the three fugitives, the glitter of whose polished appointments they could plainly discern in the moonlight.

"Fire on them! take a cool and deliberate aim, that every shot may take down its man!" cried Ronald, in a voice which had become hoarse with passion and fatigue; while, by way of example, he levelled the musquet of the dead robber over a fragment of rock, and let fly its contents at the nearest pursuer, who fell with a shriek that started the wild birds in the farthest recesses of the wood, and gave a temporary check to the ardour of the banditti, who still followed them closely but more warily,—firing at them from behind rocks and bushes, maintaining a running skirmish which, notwithstanding the danger, had something very exciting in it, and pleased Ronald's bold and fiery disposition better than the unresisting manner of their previous flight.

"Our Lady of Majorga, assist us!" cried Pedro in a voice of dismay. "We are lost now, senor: the fiends have brought up the dogs to their assistance."

"Pause not a second, but fire and reload; we have steel and lead for the dogs, as well as for their less noble masters. Excellent! that shot told well, Evan."

"Ay, sir, the fallow is kicking up his shoon like a red-rae. I see his legs in the moonlicht dangling ower the cairn o' stanes," replied the other, coolly trailing his piece, and ramming another charge hard home. "But o'd, sir, look at thae awfu' black tykes, louping ower scaur and bush, bank and brae like fairies, or sic-like

awsome things. Sleuth-dugs, I declare! the born deevils!"

"*Demonios! senors.* I tell you we are lost," said Pedro, in a tone of anger and impatience. "You know not the unmatched ferocity of our Spanish mastiffs. They are yet far off; but should they reach us, all the rotten bones in the relicario of San Juan would not save us, if we had them here."

"Take courage, sargento! I place more reliance upon a strong hand and a bold heart, than all the relicarios in Spain: but, certes, these are most devilish antagonists."

Leaping over every intervening obstacle with incredible speed, onward came the six mastiff dogs, yelling and growling as if Pandemonium had broken loose. Clearing rock and bush at a bound, on they came, their glossy skins and starting eyes shining and gleaming in the light, which showed distinctly one that had outstripped its comrades. Its growls were deep and hoarse; the snow-white foam was dropping on the grass and leaves from its red open mouth, as it came careering forward with the fearlessness, ferocity, and determination of some diabolical spirit.

"For this one I will reserve my fire," said Stuart, knowing himself to be a deadly shot; "meanwhile blaze away, and aim steadily, brave hearts!"

"A minute more and it will be upon us; one must certainly become its victim," replied Pedro: "that victim must be me, if my poniard fails to dispatch it. My rashness brought this about, and I am ready to pay the penalty."

"Pshaw! never despond. Mark that fellow with the red cap."

"He is down, senor," replied the other coolly, as he shot the man dead. "I can die content. I have gained vengeance on Julian Diaz, and I should have been no true Spaniard had I not revenged myself."

"I will hold you but *medio Español*, if you talk thus. Courage, good Pedro! I will rid us of this pursuer,—my aim is deadly."

"Could we but escape this one, our safety would be secured. On the other side of this stream is a cavern, the mouth of which is concealed and overgrown with wild vines; but I know it well, as I do every foot of ground hereabout. Let us but gain it, and we can remain there in safety until some assistance arrives. We are now close on the road that leads from La Nava to Albuquerque."

They found themselves on the brink of a rushing torrent, which, hurrying down from the summits of the Sierra de Montanches, swept over its rugged channel towards the Guadiana, seeking the most unfrequented and solitary gorges and defiles to wander through.

"Let us jump into the burn, sir," cried Evan eagerly. "Let us jump in, and gang up the water a wee bit, and the sleuth hounds will sune tyne the scent. My faither, the piper, aye telled that was the only way to get rid o' evil speerits and sic-like, to put a rinnin water between them and yoursel."

"Right, Evan! we are almost safe. Plunge in: follow me!" cried Ronald, springing into the stream, which rose to his waist: the others followed. Keeping close under some weeping willows, that thickly overhung the water, they eluded the search of the ferocious dog, which at that instant gave a yell of disappointment as it shook the foam from its chaps, and stood panting and growling on the bank above them. It next ran fiercely to and fro, snorting and snuffing the air, and tearing up huge pieces of turf with its sharp fangs, as if to discover the lost prey.

"We must cross and gain the cavern now, senor, while the rogues are so far in our rear," said Pedro Gomez, after they had advanced up the bed of the current a little way, treading with difficulty on the slippery pebbles. "I know the path, *senor officiale*; follow me promptly, if you please,—now is the critical time to elude them altogether." Pedro sprang with agility up the steep bank; Ronald followed, but poor Evan, encumbered by his wet tartan kilt, which in the hurry he had neglected to lift in the Highland manner, stumbled in the centre of the rushing torrent, and at the moment he fell backwards the fierce quadruped sprung upon him from the bank above with a wild yell, and seizing him by the thick folds of his filledh-beg, drew him under water. He was so much disconcerted at finding himself grasped by the terrible foe, that he was only able to utter a faint cry when the stream closed over him; but yet he struggled fiercely with his growling antagonist.

"God, he is lost!" exclaimed Ronald, when on looking back he beheld the danger of his faithful follower. Half swimming, he hurried to the spot, with his broad-sword shortened in his hand, and grasping the dog by the throat, plunged the sharp weapon twice through its body. Its teeth relaxed the hold of Evan's tartan, and the quivering carcase floated bleeding down the stream; while the rescued Highlander, propping himself with his musquet, (which luckily he had never relinquished,) sprang up the bank, where he shook himself like a water-dog, the wet streaming from his bonnet and every part of his dress.

"*Viva!* noble cavalier; gallantly done! Follow me, this is the cavern," exclaimed Pedro; and rushing up a steep ascent, they followed his example in plunging at once through a thicket of dark green bushes, and found themselves in a gloomy hole, the extent or height of which it was impossible to discover, being involved in utter darkness. The densely thick foliage around the entrance formed a complete exclusion to the light of the moon, which now revealed a dozen or more of their pursuers on the opposite bank of the stream, about which they hunted in every direction for some trace of those they had pursued, and urged on their dogs, which, now completely at fault, ran up and down scenting among the willow trees and shelving rocks, mingling their hoarse baying with the loud

and bitter curses of the banditti.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SIEGE.

"Fore-doomed is every felon Scot,
Who stains our native land.
* * * *
In ambush, near this darksome stream,
Five hundred rifles lay;
The water-kelpie stroaked his beard,
And nichered for his prey."
Daniel Vedder.

"They must be somewhere hereabout," cried Cifuentes with a horrible oath, speaking at intervals, while he panted with exhaustion and fatigue. "But where in the name of Beelzebub can they have concealed themselves?"

"They crossed the stream, I can swear," replied one fellow while he loaded his musquet. "I saw them descend the bank with my own eyes."

"You could scarcely see them well with another man's, Puerco Vadija; but there is no trace of them on the opposite bank. One of the dogs is missing, too."

"There it lies, floating among the rocks and foam yonder," replied a third ruffian.

"Dead?"

"Ay, dead as Judas."

"*Demonios*! How can these cursed fiends have escaped us?"

"Fiends they appear to be, certainly. They were but three in number, and a hundred shots have missed them, while they have slain some of our best men."

"By all the might of hell!" exclaimed Narvaez, in a voice of bitter rage, "they shall not escape us, if we once more gain sight of them. To the gay bravo with the large black feathers I bear a hatred, that every drop of blood in his coward heart only can quench. To think that they should escape us scathless, after having slain so many!"

"Poor Julian Diaz!" said Vadija. "A more jolly monk was not in Es-

tremadura, where there are well nigh six thousand of the cord and cowl."

"*Dios!* it maddens me!"

"And then the brave Lazarillo de Xeres de los Cavalleros—"

"How, Vadija! what of him?"

"I found him lying dead in the pathway, stabbed twice in the heart."

"*Hombres*! Close round me, comrades; we must fall on some plan to seek vengeance. It is evident they have not crossed the stream,—we must have seen them had they done so; therefore they must be close at hand, and—" The rest was lost in the clamour of the others, who clustered round Cifuentes, each delivering his opinion, and holding forth obstinately against those of his brother rogues, many more of whom were coming straggling up from the rear, panting and almost breathless with exertion. Meanwhile the three fugitives had thrown themselves, wet as they were, upon the damp floor of the cavern, happy to find rest and time to breathe with some regularity and composure.

From behind their screen of thick foliage Ronald heard all that passed, and watched with increasing interest the picturesque appearance of the bandits, whom he could plainly discern in the radiant moonlight, that shed its clear cold lustre through the dark blue vault, where myriads of stars were twinkling. Meanwhile Iverach, who had quite recovered from the dismay caused by his recent immersion, was busily employed drying his wetted musquet, and preparing for action by fixing a new flint and reloading, rejoicing to find that his thick leather pouch had kept his ball cartridges perfectly dry.

"Thanks to Santa Maria, we are safe, senors," said Pedro; "they can never discover this cavern, which is so admirably adapted for concealment. It was in ancient days the retreat of a holy hermit, who was drowned one dark night in the river below,—but that came of eating flesh upon a Friday, they say."

"I wish we had gone to Majorga with your brother Lazaro; this cursed adventure would then have been avoided. This hole is very damp, and cold as the grave."

"But then it is so secure, senor; and we can defend it to the last, and sell our lives dearly, should they attack us." Before Ronald could reply,

"Bah! Lope Ordonez," cried Narvaez, "how should they know of this concealed cavern which you say is up yonder? Are they not British? and two of them belong to those savages that go with their limbs bare."

"The same guide that led them to the ruins of Santa Lucia, might show them the cavern."

"Right, Ordonez. I thought not that there was so much wit in that empty calabash of thine."

"They have a Spaniard with them," said he whom they named Vadija; "I saw the moon reflected on his steel helmet."

"A dragoon! Had he a plume of red horsehair?"

"He had; but I think he has left the half or whole of it among the bushes in his flight."

"*Caramba!* then 'tis either Don Alvaro, or one of his rascally troop! I shall have revenge for the night they made me spend in the Convento de San Juan at Merida. We will search this cavern, and take a true Spanish vengeance on whoever we find there. Look well to your knives and flints, comrades."

"I perceive," said Ordonez, "some alteration has taken place among the vines which conceal the entrance. They are all broken and trodden down; I can swear they were not so this morning."

"Then there it is they are concealed. Tie up the dogs; bind them to the trees; cross the stream. Let whoever thirsts for vengeance, follow me! let whoever is concealed there tremble, for their hour is come!" said Narvaez, concluding with one of those frightful Spanish maledictions with which their conversation was so freely interspersed. The reader may suppose with what feelings of excitement and desperation the three weary fugitives beheld their remorseless pursuers boldly cross the stream to storm their hiding-place. But perhaps Cifuentes and his followers would have advanced less courageously, had they been perfectly assured that those of whom they were in search were really so close at hand.

"Thank Heaven, and our own caution, the ammunition is dry," said Ronald; "and the sixty rounds we have among us will last until to-morrow, if we are sparing and aim well. Let us fire on them as they cross the stream; 'tis neck or nothing with us now. See that you make sure of your men: I will aim at Cifuentes,—the scoundrel with the long feather and high-crowned hat."

The three musquets at once flashed from the dark cavern, the distant recesses of which echoed to the loud report, while the sudden light filled its windings and craggy nooks, illuminating them for an instant as a flash of lightning would have done. Three of the banditti fell splashing in the middle of the stream, which bore them off from the reach of their comrades, whom this unlooked-for volley had stricken with dismay. Ronald missed Narvaez, owing to a sudden motion of the latter; but severely wounded Puerco Vadija, who was behind him. Evan and Pedro had both killed their men.

The wild shrieks and outcries of the drowning robber, re-echoing among the windings of the stream, so greatly appalled and terrified his brother rogues, that, instead of advancing to the assault, they re-crossed the stream, fled up the bank, and ensconced themselves behind the rocks and trees, seeking shelter from the deadly aim of their concealed enemies, and abandoning Vadija to his fate; but his last drowning cry, as it came sweeping towards them on the night-wind, found an echo in the heart of his slayer. From behind the covers where they had posted themselves, a sharp fire was maintained on both sides for some hours,

without any damage being done. However, the three soldados had the best of it in this bush-fighting sort of warfare, as they could aim steadily at a head, or a leg, or an arm, the moment it appeared in view, without exposing themselves in the slightest degree; while their opponents took for their object of attack the large dark cluster of vines which concealed the cavern's mouth, and leaden bullets innumerable came whistling through the intertwined foliage, and were flattened against the rocks, or sunk with a loud bang into the soft green turf near its entrance. But Ronald and his friends escaped most miraculously, while the shot hissed often within an inch of their ears, causing a peculiarly unpleasant and tingling sensation within them, which must be experienced to be comprehended properly.

"*Dios mio*, senors! my cartridges are nearly expended. I have but six left," cried the dragoon, shaking the little cartridge-box which hung at his shoulder-belt.

"Heavens! I have fired my last shot," exclaimed Stuart in reply, when, on putting his hand into Lazarillo's canvas pouch, he found it empty. "We can never hold out till some relief comes. Evan, how stands your pouch?"

"Four charges, sir; deil a ane mair. We maun defend this hole by the cauld airn when a' are gane."

"Stay,—cease firing. Reserve the ten rounds, to be used only in case of some pressing extremity," said Ronald, first in English, and then in Spanish.

"Exactly, senor; ten rounds are the lives of ten men. Should the ladrones advance again, we will not fire until we are well assured our fire will prove effective."

"They are more numerous now than before," observed the officer, pushing aside the vines to view their foes. "There are a dozen more high-crowned sombreros among them; I see them plainly above the rocks."

"*Santos*! O senor, allow me to fire," asked Pedro, slapping impatiently the butt of his carbine. "See yonder fellow behind the chesnut; his whole body is visible. Do allow me, noble senor; 'tis a fair chance."

"Hold, my fiery sargento! we must be sparing of what is left us—— The devil! Draw back, man, or you will certainly be shot."

At that moment six musquets flashed from concealed places, and some of the balls grazed the cone of Pedro's steel helmet, which the waning light of the moon had revealed to them.

It soon became apparent to the bandits that the ammunition of their antagonists was expended; and their courage and insolence rose accordingly. They showed their whole figures at times, and fired with greater rapidity than before, shouting,—

"*Mueran los heregos! Muera, borrachos! perros! ladrones!*" and many a loud

and deep *carajo*, together with innumerable other Spanish epithets and maledictions.

"Thank Heaven, day begins to break!" observed Pedro Gomez, as a pale light in the east began to replace that of the faded moon.

"We shall then get rid of these bawling rascals; they will scarcely dare to besiege us in open daylight."

"I have my doubts as to what course they may pursue, senor."

"How, Pedro?"

"Indeed, senor, in the present disorganized state of the country, our Spanish robbers are bold enough to do any thing. Throughout the whole land they are numerous as the leaves of the forest, and keep up lines of regular communication between one place and another. We may thank the French invasion for such a state of things."

"Why are such bands permitted to exist?"

"Exist, senor! Can shaven monks or lazy alcaldes subdue them?"'

"No; but armed soldiers may."

"Lord Wellington does not meddle with them, as they never assault his troops; and old Murillo's soldiers have always work enough on hand, without making war on the banditti."

"But how do these fellows come to be so numerous? Ah, curse that ball! a narrow escape!"

"Senor, war compels our peasantry to become fierce and roving guerillas: from the guerilla to the bandit is an easy transition."

"I may rejoice that at home, in my own country, we have nothing of that kind to experience. 'Tis perfect day-light now: the thieves are still on the watch. I would they had retired, as I feel very much exhausted by fatigue and want of sleep."

The two soldiers felt in the same predicament, and the reader may imagine the comfort of being drenched by fording the deep stream, and then being obliged to pass the night in a damp cavern without sleep or rest, after the stirring events, exhaustion, and fatigue of the day, and the exposure to the bullets of some twenty desperadoes for an entire night. Evan was seized with a cold shivering, like a fit of the ague, and began to drop asleep in spite of his strenuous efforts to keep himself awake.

Pedro produced his crucifix, and began to mutter his morning orisons, mingling with them sundry invectives against the ladrones, and wishes for a cup of aquardiente to stimulate him to fresh exertion. The fire of the besiegers had now ceased, and they contented themselves with watching the spot as they sat among the rocks smoking paper cigars, and fixing new flints to their pieces; while coarse jokes were mingled with the growls and curses of three or four that lay bleeding

under the shelter of a large block of granite rock, but untended and uncared for by their comrades, who had half-stripped three others of their dead, now tossed under the willow trees to be out of view,—the features of the slain being too unpleasant an object for them to contemplate.

"The sun has risen," said Ronald, as its bright beams darted through openings in the vines. "I will reconnoitre round about, and perhaps I may discover some sign of our troops, if I can see the road which leads to Merida." He received no answer. The mumble-jumble of Pedro's paternoster, and a prolonged snore from Iverach, informed him that his companions in peril were not inclined for conversation. Laying aside his bonnet, he crept close to the mouth of the cave, and putting back the foliage softly, cast a careful and keen glance around him. Their besiegers on the opposite bank of the stream were still stationed as I have described them, and appeared evidently determined to revenge the fall of their comrades by starving their slayers into a capitulation. Behind them, and to the right rose the umbrageous foliage of the cork wood, intermingled with lofty chesnuts, stretching away in long vistas until lost in gloom and obscurity. On the left the trees were more scattered, and between the trunks he beheld the wide plain extending away in the direction of Merida, its broad and level extent bounded by a blue undulating ridge of far-off mountains, the line of which lay low down in the distance, and formed the boundary of the horizon. The warm lustre of the morning sun was shed joyously on the wide expanse, calling into life a thousand birds and insects, and causing the wild flowers to raise their dewy heads, and shake the moisture from their opening petals.

But throughout all the wide prospect which the lofty situation of their retreat enabled him to command, not one human being appeared,—no succour was in sight. O how he longed to behold the glitter of arms, the flash of burnished steel, through the dusty cloud which announces afar off the march of armed men! And his heart beat with redoubled velocity while he gazed upon the band of contemptible yet dreaded ruffians, whom they had kept at bay the live-long night.

The report of a musquet, the whiz and crack of a ball, as it was flattened against the hard granite walls of the cavern, made him suddenly withdraw his head; and the loud shout of savage derision and laughter which arose from those below caused his blood to boil tumultuously, and his heart to swell with anger and impatience. He soon found himself becoming a prey to weariness and exhaustion, owing to the fatigue, excitement, and want of sleep which he had endured during the last twenty-four hours, and it was with the utmost difficulty he refrained from following Evan's example, and falling into slumber. Often did Pedro Gomez recommend him earnestly to do so, reminding him how much might yet have to be endured, and promising to keep faithful watch and ward; but Ronald dared not trust him, fearing that he too might be overcome with drowsiness, and leave them

at the mercy of the bandits. Towards noon, to their inexpressible satisfaction, the besiegers began to draw off by degrees, as if wearied of the affair, and retired into the wood, leaving the ford of the river free.

"*Hio!* our Lady del Pilar!" cried Pedro, exultingly. "*Viva!* senor; they have abandoned their post. Should we get off scathless, I vow most solemnly to visit the shrine of our Lady of Majorga, and present her with three days' pay, and a new hat of the best kind that Badajoz or Zafra can produce."[*]

[*] Great manufactories of hats are carried on in these towns.

"And should we not get off scathless, Pedro?" said Ronald merrily, as he rose from the ground and stretched his limbs.

"Then not a maravedi shall she get from Sargento Gomez,—no, *diavolo*!"

Ronald laughed aloud at the Spaniard's ideas of religious gratitude, and aroused his servant, who started up with agility, grasping his musquet, all alive in an instant to the recollection of their situation.

"Gracious me, sir! I daur say I have slept. On sic an occasion as this to tempt Providence wi'—"

"Never mind, Evan, my honest man; all is right now."

"But the reiving loons—"

"Have abandoned their post and fled. We have nothing to do now but to march off, and make the best of our way to some safe place. Had we accepted the offer of the honest muleteer, we should have escaped a most disagreeable night; but as the play says, 'All is well that ends well.'"

"But dinna be ower rash, sir," said Evan cautiously, as he looked through the screen of vines, and surveyed the ground with a sharp glance. "Be weel assured that the caterans are gane for gude and a'," he added, grasping his master's belt as he was about to descend.

"Gone? I tell you they are so undoubtedly," replied Ronald, testily. "You see there is no trace of them now, and we had better depart from our uncomfortable billet without further delay."

"I beg your pardon, sir; but just bide a wee—bide a wee. What ca' ye that?"

While he spoke the head of a man rose slowly above one of the masses of granite overhanging the forest river, evidently watching their place of concealment. The instant it appeared, Evan levelled and fired his musquet, and the black scowling visage of Narvaez Cifuentes withdrew immediately.

"The scoundrels are only in ambush," said Ronald, in a fierce tone of disappointment. "They are watching us still!"

"I do not believe, senor," replied Pedro, "that they would dare to hem us in thus, if the French were not in Merida. The corregidor and alguazils of the city would have been upon them long ere this time."

"I do not think so. Few pass this deserted place; and unless some of our troops, when crossing the plain, are attracted towards us by the sound of our arms, we have no other chance of friendly succour."

"And if not, senor?"

"Then nothing is left us but to make one bold dash for our liberty, or sell our lives as dearly as possible. Their design is evidently to starve us out, the revengeful dogs!"

"The whole band are rising from their cover. Santos! had we left this cavern, what a fate would have been ours! *Cuidado, senor! Carojo!* keep back."

Scarcely had Pedro spoken, when the report of twenty musquets awoke the echoes of the place, and enveloped the bank, the stream, and the wood in white volumes of curling smoke; and many of the shot whistled into the cave, but luckily fell on the rocks, against which they were flattened as broad as crown pieces, leaving, wherever they struck, a white round star marked upon the stone. Shot after shot was fired at the place, but without better success. A sort of natural breast-work of turf, running across the mouth of the den, completely shielded the three fugitives from the dangerous and well-directed fire of the outlaws, who continued this system of distant warfare for several hours, until towards evening they again ceased entirely, but continued to watch, although they did not dare to come to closer combat with their opponents, the deadly accuracy of whose aim was a sufficient cause to deter them from attempting to carry the cavern by storm.

"The rogues are indeed very determined, senor," said Pedro. "I hope we shall not have to spend another night in this dismal place, cowering and shivering like rats concealed in a drain."

"I trust not; but when it grows darker, we must make one desperate attempt to cut away through them, or perish. I trust to a running fight for setting us free of them."

"Our Lady of Succour! would that the hour was come! The holy father that dwelt here must have liked a damp couch better than I do, *demonio*!"

"Doubtless he cheered himself with many a long horn of aquardiente, if they had it in those days."

"Ay, senor, and the place was often enlivened by the presence of the peasant girls of La Nava, who came hither for confession. They are droll dogs, these solitary monks. Many a strange story is current of the white-bearded Padre of San Bartolomi."

"What he who shows the sulphurous spring of Alange?"

"Ay; he is as arrant a knave as we have on this side the pass of Roncesvalles. But the sun is setting now, senor caballero: I see the trees are casting long shadows across the plain towards the eastward."

"Haud ye awee, Pedro. As sure as I live, I hear—I hear the skirlin o' a bagpipe?"

"A pipe, Evan?" exclaimed Stuart, "a pipe? I trust it is not imagination! By all that's sacred I hear it too!" he added, stooping his ear anxiously to listen. "'Tis playing—what is the air?"

"The 'Haughs o' Cromdale.' O, sir! I ken it weel," replied the Highlander in a thick voice, while his eyes began to glisten.

"*Senor officiale*," said Pedro, who had been reconnoitring through the vine bushes, "there are British troops moving on the plain,—red uniforms at least."

"Highlanders! Highlanders!" replied Ronald exultingly, as he beheld a long way off a party of kilted soldiers marching across the dusty plain. The setting sun was shining on the polished barrels of their sloped arms, which flashed and gleamed between the trunks of the trees at every step; even the ribbons fluttering from the drones on the piper's shoulders could be discerned, and the heart-stirring strain he was blowing came floating towards them on the fitful wind.

"What troops are these? and where can they have come from? They march towards Merida, and the French are there."

"What regiment they belang to, sir, I dinna care: let that flea stick to the wa'. But they are some o' oor ain folk, that's certain. I see the braw feathered bonnet, the filledh-beg, and the gartered hose. O Maister Stuart! can we no fa' on some plan to win their attention? They are fast leaving us behind; and it's an awfu' thocht to be here, hunted in a hole like a yirded tod lowrie, and yet to see the tartan waving in the sun, and hear the wild skirl of the piob mhor. O'd, sir! my birse is getting up; I feel myself turning wild."

"Stay, Evan. Unless you want a bullet to make a button-hole in your skin, keep back! A man on horseback has met them;—they have halted."

"'Tis a pity the knaves cannot see them, senor. By the elevation of this place, we command a farther view than the post which these rascals occupy by the river-side."

"They must have heard the sound of the pipe to which they marched."

"I do not think so; they would have fled had they heard it. Sound is said to ascend, senor."

"True—"

"O'd, sir," interrupted Evan, who continued to look through the vines in spite of one or two shots which were fired at him, "I would fain ken if thae chields are Gordon Highlanders or no. I think they belang to the auld forty-twa: they have some red feathers in their bonnets."

"Red feathers? Not one; they are all black and white,—I see them distinctly; but whether they are the Ross-shire Buffs or any of ours, I know not. They are certainly not 42nd men; their long feathers are all white."

"The gloaming's sae mirk and sae far advanced, that I canna see very weel; and my een are sair wi' being in the gloom o' this dismal den sae lang."

"They are British troops; to what corps they belong we need not care, as all are friends alike. They have piled their arms. Surely they mean to bivouac there for the night. I pray to Heaven they may!"

"O sir! let us do something to let them ken o' their friends that are here in tribulation and jeopardy. Fire twa or three shots, just to draw them towards us."

"Not one. We have but nine rounds left,—three each; and as our lives depend upon them, they must be reserved for a grand attempt as soon as it is dark. Besides, from the way the wind blows, they would never hear the reports at such a distance. The clouds are fast gathering, and I see with pleasure we shall have a very black night. We shall certainly escape them, if we are courageous and discreet. What think you, Pedro Gomez?" he asked in Spanish.

"Of course, senor caballero. And as you will scarcely know the way after it is dark, if I have the honour to be again your guide I will get you off securely. Should I be shot,—a fate which our Lady of Succour avert!—you will find an easy ford some hundred yards down the stream. You may cross it fearlessly, and gain safely the place where our friends are bivouacked so quietly on the plain."

"We shall scarcely find the spot in the dark, even with your aid, Pedro. What marks the ford?"

"A stone cross, erected by the monks of San Juan to guide travellers. During a storm, one of the brotherhood perished when crossing the stream just below us here, and they marked the shallow part by a stone, to avoid such accidents in future."

"But think o' the sleuth-hounds, Maister Ronald," said Evan, who had been listening attentively to Pedro, and endeavouring to comprehend his Spanish. "I scunner at the very thocht o' them, after the douking that ane gied me in the burn below."

"We must take our chance of these infernals. But be cool and firm: the time is coming when we must have all our wits about us."

Their conversation had often been interrupted by a stray bullet from the besiegers, who lounged lazily on the opposite bank, smoking their cigars, tearing hard American *bacallao* with their teeth, and sucking the purple wine from a huge pig-skin, which they had pierced in several places with their knives, allowing it to stream on the green sward with a heedless prodigality, which showed how easily it had been come by. This employment they varied by venting curses at each other, and at their obstinate opponents, at whom they now and then sent

a random shot; and on one occasion a complete volley at Evan's bonnet, which, by way of bravado, he had elevated to their view on the point of his bayonet. A storm of balls whistled about it, and the young Gael laughed heartily at the joke.

"Your bonnet is riddled," said Ronald, on seeing the feathers nearly all shot away.

"Deil may care, sir! the king has mair bonnets than this ane; and there's plenty ostrich feathers whar thae cam frae," replied he, hoisting it again through the vines; but the Spaniards did not waste their ammunition upon it a second time.

The bivouac of their comrades, which they watched with untiring eyes, and other distant objects, faded gradually from their view as the increasing darkness of night deepened around them. The sky grew black, as masses of dense and heavy clouds drifted slowly across it; and the cold Spanish dews began to descend noiselessly (yet heavy and wetting as a shower of rain) on the grass and leaves, which, as the wind died away, hung motionless and still; and, save the muttering voices of the outlaws, not a sound broke the stillness of the lonely place but the hoarse brawl of the mountain-torrent as it rushed over its stony bed, from which the white foam glimmered through the darkness. Now and then, afar off, a red streak shot through the parted clouds, or a broad lurid flash of sheet-lightning lit the edge of the horizon, showing distinctly the curved outline of the distant hills and the tall black trunks of the neighbouring trees: but no sound of thunder followed these appearances.

"Senor," whispered Pedro, "the night is perfectly dark,—just such as one would wish for on such an occasion."

"Then now is our time to sally," was Ronald's reply, as he grasped his musquet, and slung his claymore on the brass hook of his shoulder-belt that it might not impede him. "Now or never: follow me!"

He pushed softly aside the foliage, and issued from the cavern. They were enabled to see objects with greater distinctness, owing to the pitchy darkness they had endured in their retreat, where it was so dense, that one could not discern the face of the other. Enabled thus to see his way with greater accuracy, Ronald descended the bank of the river in the direction of the stone cross. The others followed with hasty and stealthy footsteps, and in a few minutes they gained the rude column which marked the ford.

"We are safe, senor caballero!" exclaimed Pedro, when they stood on the opposite side. "Our Lady of Majorga shall get the three days' pay, a hat of the best Zafra felt, and a pound of wax candles to boot."

"You are liberal to her ladyship. When are your presents to be given?"

"The first time I pass her shrine," laughed the other, "which may not be during the term of my natural life."

"Yonder is the bivouac," said Ronald, as they scrambled hurriedly up the embankment; "they have lit a fire. How very close upon us it appears."

"The plain is so level, that distance deceives; but they are fully a quarter of a mile from us yet."

"Hurrah!" cried Evan, overjoyed to find himself safe. "Tak' that, ye ill-faured loons!" firing his musquet in the direction of their foes.

"Fool!" exclaimed Ronald angrily; "how have you dared to fire without my desiring you?"

Evan's deprecating reply was cut short by a shout from their baffled enemies, who, firing their pieces at random, rushed hurriedly towards the ford, mingling their outcries with the yells of their dogs. But the unexpected appearance of the large watch-fire blazing on the plain, and the dusky forms of the soldiery crowding around it, served completely to check their pursuit; and with many a hoarse malediction and threat, after firing a volley in the direction where they supposed the fugitives to be, they retired with precipitation into the fastnesses of the cork-wood.

"What a cursed adventure we have had!" exclaimed the officer, throwing away the pouch and musquet of Lazarillo de Xeres de los Cavalleros, when they halted to draw breath for a few seconds. "Evan Iverach, you are a rash fellow: by firing that useless shot we might all have lost our lives. It may also have alarmed the troops yonder, and caused them to get under arms."

"O'd, sir, never mind; there's nae folk like our ain folk," replied his follower, capering gaily when the figures of their countrymen, clad in the martial Scottish garb, became more distinct. "O how my heart loups at sicht o' the belted plaid, the braw filledh-beg, and the bare legs o' our ain douce chields."

"Wha gangs there?" shouted close by the voice of an advanced sentry, the black outline of whose bonnet and grey great-coat they saw looming through the gloom. "Wha gangs there?"

"Friend!" replied Ronald.

"Friends, friends,—hurrah!" cried his follower, rushing upon the astonished sentry, and grasping him by the hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING.

"Our fathers contended in war; but we meet together at the feast. Our swords are turned on the foe of our land: he melts before us on the field. Let the days of our fathers be forgot, hero of Mossy Strumon."—*Ossian.*

Around the ample fire, on which a succession of billets and crackling branches were continually heaped, were grouped some seventy or eighty soldiers—Gordon Highlanders, as was evident from their yellow facings, and the stripes of their tartan. The fairness of their complexions and the bright colour of their untarnished uniform served likewise to show that they had but recently arrived from Great Britain. Some lay fast asleep between the piles or bells of arms, while others crowded round the fire conversing in that low voice, and behaving in that restrained manner, which the presence of an officer always imposes on British soldiers.

The officer himself sat close by the watch-fire, which shone brightly on his new epaulets and other gay appointments. His plumed bonnet lay beside him on the turf, and his fair curly hair glistened in the flame, which revealed the handsome and delicate but rosy features of a very young man—one perhaps not much above seventeen years of age. He was laughing and conversing with the soldiers near him in that easy manner which at once shows the frankness of the gentleman and soldier, and which is duly appreciated by those in the ranks, although it tends in no way to lessen the respect due to the epaulet. A black pig-skin lay near him, from which he was regaling himself, allowing also some of the soldiers to squeeze the liquor into their wooden canteens.

On Ronald Stuart's approach, the sudden apparition of an officer in the uniform of their own regiment, coming they knew not whence, created no small surprise in the little bivouac; and the sudden murmur and commotion which arose among them, caused the young officer to turn his head and look around him.

"Ronald—Ronald Stuart!" he exclaimed in well-known accents, as he sprang lightly from the green turf, his eyes sparkling with surprise and joy; "how have you come so unexpectedly upon us?"

"Ah, Louis, my old friend! and you have really joined us, to follow the pipe and the drum?" replied Stuart, grasping his hand, and longing to embrace him as he would have done a brother; but the presence of so many restrained him, and he contented himself with gazing fondly on the face of his early friend, and tracing in his fine features the resemblance he bore to his sister. The expression was the same, but the eyes and hair of Alice Lisle were dark; the eyes of Louis were light blue, and his hair was fair,—of that soft tint between yellow and auburn. His features, of course, possessed not that exquisite feminine delicacy which appeared

in the fair face of Alice, but yet the family likeness was striking, and pleasing for Ronald Stuart to contemplate and recognise.

"He has her very accent and voice," thought he. "Well, Louis! and how are all at home among the mountains? Does old Benmore keep his head in the mist as usual?"

"All were well when I left in January last, and I dare say the red deer and muirfowl keep jubilee in our absence, for sad havock we used to make among them."

The soldiers, to allow them the freedom of conversation, respectfully fell back, and clustered round Evan Iverach, who, after he had paid his rustic compliments "to his auld friend Maister Lisle, frae the Inch-house," began to regale his gaping countrymen with an exaggerated narrative of his late adventures in Spain, and many a "Hoigh! Oich! Eigh!" and other Scottish interjections of wonder, he called forth as he proceeded.

After a hearty draught from the borachio-skin, many were the questions asked and answers given about home and absent friends; and Ronald's account of his rencontres and adventures with Cifuentes, certainly did not impress Louis Lisle with a very high opinion of the state of society and civilization generally in Spain.

"This must be a strange country," observed he, "when fellows can rove about plundering and rieving, as Rob Roy and the Serjeant Mhor used to do in our grandfathers' days. And the villains from whom you have suffered so much are still lurking in that dark forest of cork trees?"

"Yes; their fastness is in the heart of it. If the rules of the service sanctioned such a proceeding, I would with this party of ours surround the wood, hunt out the rascals from their lair, and put every one of them to death."

"But Lord Wellington—"

"Would make it a general court-martial affair. But there is a time for every thing, and this Spanish robber and I may meet again."

"Spain appears a wretched country to campaign in?"

"Truly it is so."

"I liked Lisbon pretty well; and found much amusement in frequenting the assembly-room, the Italian opera-house, the theatre, and circus for the bull-fights."

"Faith! I saw none of these things, Louis; my purse is scarcely so deep as yours. And the public promenades, you visited them doubtless?"

"The trees and shrubbery are beautifully arranged; but I cannot admire the ladies of Lisbon, they are so little, so meagre and tawny."

"You will like Spain better. Hand me the pigskin, if you please."

"I have not been very favourably impressed by what I have seen of it. The

roads on our route are all but impassable,—mere sheep-tracks in some places; and the posadas are the most wretched to be imagined."

"Rather different from the snug 'Old George' at Perth, with its portly landlord, bowing waiters, and smiling hostess."

"Rather so; and tiresome indeed I found the march thus far,—the towns in ruins, and between them immense desert tracts, where neither a house, a human being, nor a vestige of cultivation was to be seen."

"But it was a useless order to march your detachment thus far to the westward, when the division is retreating. You could have joined at Portalagre."

"I am aware of it; but to march and join the regiment without delay were the orders given me by the commandant at Portalagre. By my route, this day's march should have ended at Merida; but a muleteer, to my no small surprise, informed us of its being in possession of the French; and having no one to consult, I felt at a loss how to act, and halted here."

"'Twas rash of the surly old commandant to send so young and inexperienced an officer in charge of a detachment through a foreign country; but those fellows on the staff, who skulk in the rear, have never the true interest of the service at heart."

"And Sir Rowland Hill is retiring on the Portuguese frontier?"

"*En route*, I believe, for Ciudad Rodrigo, where Lord Wellington means to give battle to Marmont. The troops are marching from all points to join him, and we may soon have the glory of being actors in a general engagement."

"Well; and this place Merida—"

"Is possessed by three or four troops of French lancers: I saw them enter last night. You have acted most prudently in halting here, as a skirmish with so numerous a party was well avoided. But we shall probably have the pleasure of seeing them prisoners of war, when our people come up in the course of tomorrow. I shall make a tour round the sentries in a few minutes, and see that they are on the alert, and then retire to roost under that laurel bush: I feel quite worn out with my last night's affair."

"You must act for yourself now, Stuart. Should any thing occur, you of course take command of the party," replied Louis drily, and in a tone totally different from that of his late observations.

"Ay, Louis; I am a senior sub, you know," said Ronald, colouring at the other's tone.

"What sort of man is Cameron of Fassifern?" asked Louis abruptly, after a long pause.

"A true soldier every inch; and a prouder Highlander never drew a sword."

"Fierce and haughty, is he not?"

"Yes, but a perfect gentleman withal. You will find the most of ours very

fine fellows,—young men of birth and blood, fire and animation; and you will be charmed with the appearance of the regiment. 'Tis indeed a splendid corps."

Another long and perplexing pause ensued, while an expression of doubt and perturbation began to cloud the faces of both. Need I say that Alice,—Alice Lisle, of whom neither had yet spoken, was the cause? Although until now he had disguised it, Lisle's indignation was bitterly aroused to find that Ronald conversed on a variety of topics with an air of lightness, and asked a thousand questions about friends at home in Perthshire, yet that never once had the name of Alice passed his lips. His pride was roused, and consequently he determined not to be the first to speak of his sister, and the anger which was swelling in his heart caused him to assume a distant and haughty behaviour towards his friend, who considered it but a confirmation of the report which he had seen in the *Edinburgh Journal*; and *his* mountain pride and indignant feelings were likewise roused, making him, in turn, display a cold distance of manner to one whom he had ever regarded as his earliest and dearest, almost only friend and companion,—as his very brother.

And this was the happy meeting to which both had so ardently looked forward as a source of pleasure for some time past!

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"Truly," thought Ronald, "my father's old-fashioned prejudices were not without a cause; these Lisles of Inchavon are not endued with either the sentiments of affection or honour."

"Poor Alice!" thought Lisle, at the same moment; "how have her fond and misplaced affections been trifled with! Scarcely has this heartless Highlander (full of his mountain pride and bombast) parted with her, before she is forgotten as utterly as if she did not exist."

However, they kept these thoughts to themselves, and continued to nurse their minds into a state of hot indignation against each other, indignation mingled with feelings of disappointment and sorrow, especially on the part of Louis Lisle.

He had produced from his havresack the remains of his last day's rations,—a few hard biscuits and some cold meat, on which Ronald, although he had fasted so long, merely made a show of regaling himself: he felt little inclination to eat, but often applied himself to the wine-skin. After a long and confusing sort of pause, during which both had severely taxed their imaginations for somewhat to converse about,

"I have heard," observed Ronald, "that your father is again suing for the long dormant peerage,—the title of Lord Lysle."

"Yes, it is the case. How heard you of it?"

"By a letter from Lochisla. I drink to Sir Allan's health! I have not seen him since the day I pulled him out of the deep linn at Corrieavon. I wish him every chance of success!"

"There is little doubt but we shall carry our point during this session of Parliament: my father's descent in a direct line from the last lord is now clear beyond a doubt or quibble. He is certain to gain the day."

"I am sure I shall be most happy—"

"The Earl of Hyndford," continued Louis, in the same cold manner, "is my father's most particular friend, and has some interest with the law lords. He is on the ministerial side, and—— But what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing. Is there any more wine in the skin? I feel very faint after my late fatigue, surely," muttered Stuart, making a tremendous mental effort to appear calm. But the name of Hyndford had caused his heart to leap as it were to his very lips, which quivered as a nervous spasm twitched them, while his forehead grew livid and pale.

"Ronald, what on earth is the matter?" asked Louis kindly, perceiving the changes of his countenance. "Are you turning faint, or ill?"

"Ill,—sick at heart," replied Stuart, scarcely knowing what he said, while he eagerly longed to ask a question—a single question, which he dreaded to hear answered; but the fierce native pride of his race came to his aid, and the inclination was repressed.

"For what shall I condescend to mention her name?" thought he. "To ask in a trembling tone after one who has forsaken me thus, becomes me not. Faithless Alice! neither farewell word, token, or letter has she sent me; but—but I will be calm!" and he placed his hand upon the little miniature, which at that moment he imagined was pressing like a load upon his heart.

"Good Heaven, Stuart! you are certainly very unwell," said Louis anxiously, his indignant feelings giving way to concern. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh! 'tis nothing. It is past—a spasm—the wound I received at Merida."

"Are you still troubled by it?"

"No; that is—I mean—"

He was relieved from his embarrassment by an exclamation of surprise and intense disgust from Lisle, who suddenly leaped up from the green turf on which they were seated.

"It is a skull!" he exclaimed, turning something round and white out of the sod with his foot.

"A skull?"

"Yes; I knew not what it was. I felt something round and smooth lying half sunk in the earth, and my hand rested on it for some time. How does it come to lie here?"

"No uncommon affair in Spain. It is the head of one of those poor fellows I told you of. I saw him killed here the day Long's brigade of horse drove the French advanced picquet into the cork wood."

"What! did you not bury them?"'

"No, we had no time. The wolves came at night, and saved us the trouble."

"And this is dying in the bed of glory!"

"So romancers tell us."

"Ay, Stuart, 'tis all very fine to read of honour and glory. The charge, the encounter, and the victory in a novel—"

"When seated in a well-curtained and softly carpeted room, with your feet encased in morocco slippers, and a huge fire roaring up the chimney; but here it is a very different matter."

"Nevertheless, 'tis a gay thing to be a soldier," said Louis, eyeing his shining epaulet askance.

"It is indeed! I have felt some delicious moments of gratified pride since I first donned the red coat,—moments in which I would scarcely have exchanged my claymore for a crown. But this ghastly death's head had better be removed. Probably the poor boy it belonged to, for he was scarcely any thing else, had his own bright dreams of glory and military renown, and left his sunny vineyards, with hopes that one day he should exchange the goat-skin pack for the baton of a marshal of France. If he had such visions, where are they all now? But let it be taken away. Evan, dig a hole with your bayonet, and bury it deep under the turf."

This temporary excitement over, the two friends again relapsed into their dry and unfriendly distance of manner.

"Give me another cup from the borachio-skin; I will drink to Sir Allan's health before I compose myself to rest for the night," said Ronald, anxious to put an end to it by retiring.

"Drink and replenish again,—you are most welcome; but you will excuse me, Stuart, if I reply somewhat coldly to your many expressions of regard for my family," replied Louis, assuming a haughtiness of manner which it was impossible to pass over.

"How so? What mean you?" asked Ronald hurriedly, his blood mounting to his very temples while he tossed the wine-horn from him.

"To me it appears very singular," began the other in a determined tone, "indeed most unaccountable, that you have never yet inquired for or mentioned one, whom I had every reason, until to-night, to believe to be very dear to you, and ever uppermost in your thoughts."

"You mean," faltered Ronald—

"My sister, Alice,—Miss Lisle," said Louis, giving vent to his long-concealed passion and spleen. "What am I to understand by this singularity of conduct, at

once so cruel, so dishonourable, and—"

"Halt, sir! Stay—beware what you utter!" replied Ronald fiercely, in turn.

"As her brother, I demand an immediate explanation!" cried the other, starting from the ground, while he grew pale with anger.

"By heavens! you shall have none."

"None! Do you then—"

"Speak lower, sir. I am not accustomed to be addressed in this imperious way. Fassifern himself would not dare to speak to me thus. Restrain your manner, or the soldiers will observe it."

"By the gods!" said the other, in a tone of fierce irony, "I little thought to find that one of the Stuarts of Lochisla,—a family, a house, that have ever prided themselves on their notions of honour and noble feeling,—would behave thus to a gentle and too confiding girl. But I will arrange this matter at another time."

"And Lord Hyndford?"

Louis changed colour evidently.

"How, Mr. Lisle,—how can you thus get into heroics with me," said Ronald, observing it, "and in so bad a cause?"

"Cause, sir! Your conduct is at once unbecoming either a soldier or a gentleman," exclaimed the bold boy stoutly, "and a stern reckoning must be rendered at another time!"

Ronald smiled scornfully, while his eyes flashed, and his trembling fingers involuntarily sought the basket-hilt of his sword; but he passed his hand over his hot throbbing forehead, and subduing his emotions, turned haughtily upon his heel and withdrew.

And thus ended his first interview with the brother of Alice, after their long separation.

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Seeking a solitary part of the bivouac, he laid himself under the shelter of a bush, and yielding to the excessive fatigue that oppressed him, fell into a deep sleep, which was destined to be of very short duration. Meanwhile Louis Lisle, unable to enjoy the slumber which sealed the eyelids of the surrounding soldiers, sat listlessly by the flaring fire, watching its red crackling embers for hours, while his young heart was so filled with sorrow, indignation, and disappointment at what he considered the altered behaviour of Ronald Stuart, that he could have wept like a child but for very shame. At last, overcome by the wine, of which he had drunk deeply to drown thought, and by the heat of the blazing faggots, he stretched himself upon the turf and dropped asleep, to dream of his happy home and the fair sister he loved so dearly.

About an hour before day-break, a time when the chill feeling of the atmosphere increases in Spain, Ronald was roused from his heavy slumber by some one shaking his arm.

"Another shot! Keep up your fire, Pedro!" he muttered, not knowing where he was. "Hollo! what is the matter?" he cried, as the glare of the fire, flashing on the epaulets of Lewis, recalled his wandering ideas.

"Mr. Stuart, troops are in motion on the plain to the eastward. I considered it my duty to acquaint you," replied the other, and withdrew.

"They are either our own people, or some French party thrown forward from Merida. Stand to your arms, there. Men! rouse, rouse! Piper, blow the gathering. Mr. Lisle, get the men under arms,—let them fix bayonets and load: I will be with you immediately."

Moving in the direction of the advanced sentry who had given the alarm, he distinctly heard the rapid tramp of horse approaching towards them along the beaten track,—it deserved not the name of road, from Merida.

"Cavalry!" thought he, drawing his sword. "Now then for a solid square: I will not surrender to Dombrouski, without a show of fight, even should he come with all his lancers at his back, in their panoply of brass and steel." At that instant the cavalry halted; but the darkness was so great, that he could not discern any trace of them save their sabres, which glittered in the light of the watch-fire.

"Teevils and glaumories!" shouted the advanced sentinel, a bluff Gael from the forest of Athole, as he 'ported,' his musquet. "Wha's tat,—wha gaes there?"

"What the devil does he say? The challenge was German, Wyndham," said a distant voice.

"Low Dutch, decidedly," replied another with a reckless laugh. "Perhaps they are some of the *chasseurs Britanniques*."

"What would bring them here? Some of the cacadores, probably."

"Who goes there? What troops are these?" cried Ronald.

"Holloa! all right. A reconnoitring party thrown out from the advanced guard of the second division. What are you?"

"A detachment for the first brigade."

"Scots?"

"Gordon Highlanders."

"Captain Wyndham took you for the drowsy Germans," said the officer, riding forward. "All is right, then; we belong to the 9th Light Dragoons, and General Long sent us forward to discover what the fire on the plain meant. We took you for some of the enemy, a party of whom we captured at Merida a few hours ago. Lord knows how they came there! I am sure old Sir Rowland does not."

"Then it seems the division is on a forced march?"

"Ay, the devil take it! It knocks up our cattle confoundedly," answered Wyndham. "The whole column will be here in an hour; but I must retire, and report to Long. Adieu. Party! threes about; forward,—trot!" and away they went.

Scarcely had five minutes elapsed, when the advanced guard, consisting of part of the 9th and 13th Light Dragoons, with the 2nd Hussars of the King's German Legion, came up at an easy trot. Fierce-looking fellows were these last,—wearing blue uniforms, large, heavy cocked-hats, leather jack-boots, and enormous moustaches. The appearance of the brigade of horse, as they passed, was at once striking, martial, and picturesque. The red glow of the blazing fire glittered on the polished harness of man and horse, and the bright blades of the crooked sabres.

They certainly had not the showy and ballroom appearance of cavalry on home service, yet they were the more military and soldier-like. Continual exposure to all weathers had bronzed their cheeks, and turned the once gay scarlet coat from its original hue to purple or black, and the bright epaulets to little more than dusky wire. The canvas havresack and round wooden canteen hung at their backs, and the coarse yellow blanket, strapped behind the saddle of officer and private, did not diminish the effect of the scene. When the morning was further advanced, and the banks of rolling vapour, which for some time rested on the face of the plain, rose into the air, Ronald found the baggage of the division close upon the spot occupied by the detachment which he now commanded. A strange medley the train presented. Horses, mules, and asses laden with trunks, portmanteaus, bags, soldiers' wives and children, tents and tent-poles, bedding and camp utensils; and here and there rode a few officers' wives on horseback, attired in close warm riding-habits. The whole of the long straggling array was surrounded by a guard with fixed bayonets, under the command of a field-officer, who spurred his horse at a gallop towards the party of Highlanders.

Stuart advanced to meet him. It was impossible to mistake the gigantic figure which bestrode the panting horse, the forest of ostrich plumes waving in his bonnet, or the stout oak staff which he flourished about.

"Egypt for ever!" cried the major, reining in his horse, which shook the sod beneath its hoofs. "Holloa, Stuart my boy, is it really you? Glad to see you sound wind and limb again. We thought the French had carried you off. Who are these with you?"

"The draft just come up from Lisbon. Allow me to introduce Mr. Lisle of ours. Major Campbell," said Ronald, presenting Louis, with a stiff formality which stung the younger ensign to the heart.

"Lisle? Ah! glad to see you. Welcome to this diabolical country! We had a capital fellow of your name with us in Egypt. Many strange adventures he and I had at Grand Cairo. He left us after our return home; some relation of yours,

perhaps?"

"My uncle; he is a younger brother of my father's," answered Louis, colouring slightly with pleasure.

"Ah, indeed! a devilish fine fellow he was; but perhaps he is changed by matrimony, which always spoils a true soldier, and cuts up the *esprit de corps* which we Highland troops have imbibed so strongly. I heard that he had married an English heiress, and now commands some foreign battalion in our service up the Mediterranean."

"The Greek Light Infantry."

"A splendid climate, their station. Little drill and duty,—wine to be had like water; and then the white-bosomed Grecian girls, with their bare ankles and black eyes! Ah! it beats Egypt, which is a very good place to live in, if one is a sheikh or pacha. And so you are really a nephew of my old crony and bottle-companion, Lodowick Lisle? I remember his first joining us at Aberdeen, when we were embodied in 1794. A handsome fellow he was! standing six feet three in his shoes; but I over-topped him by four inches."

"I have often heard him mention your name—Colin Campbell, at Inchavon, with terms of singular affection and respect."

"Have you, really? Honest Lodowick," replied the major, his eyes glistening. "Would that I had something in my canteen to drink his health with! Did he ever tell you of our march to Grand Cairo, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph?"

"I do not remember."

"'Twas a most harassing affair, I assure you."

"Now for an Egyptian story," thought Ronald, observing the major composing his vast bulk more easily in his saddle.

"It was sad work, Mr. Lisle, marching over dusty plains of burning sand; the scorching sun glaring fiercely above us in a cloudless sky, blistering and stripping the skin from our bare legs and faces; while our parched throats were dry and cracked, but not a drop of water could be found to moisten them with in the accursed desert through which we marched. Our shoes were worn out completely, and the hot rough sand burned our feet to the bone; and I assure you we were in a most miserable state when we halted among the mosques and spires, the gaudy kiosks and flowery gardens of Grand Cairo,—a place which at a distance appears like a city of candlesticks and inverted punch-bowls. Old Wallace, the quarter-master, (a queer old carle he was,) was sent about to provide shoes for the corps, who, by his exertions, were in a short time all supplied with elegant pairs of Turkish slippers, embroidered and laced, and turned up at the toes. Droll-looking brogues they were, certainly, for the Gordon Highlanders, in their gartered hose and filleadh-begs; yet, certes, they were better than nothing. But I was not so lucky as the rest. In all Grand Cairo there was not a pair of their

canoe-looking slippers to be found which would suit me,—my foot, you see, is a size above a young lady's. And so I might have marched the next day in my tartan hose, had not Osmin Djihoun, a shoemaker, (whose shop occupied the very site of the great temple of Serapis, which was destroyed by Theophilus the patriarch,—as you, having just come from school, will remember,—) undertaken to produce me a pair of shoes by next morning under terror of the bastinado and bow-string, which the Sheik-el-Beled, or governor of the city, threatened duly to administer if he failed to do."

"Well, major; and your next day's march passed over in comfort?" asked Ronald, who had listened with impatience to this story.

"Comparatively so. Another affair I could tell you of, in which Ludowick Lisle bore a part. It happened at the Diamond Isle. The Diamond Isle, you must know, is a place at the mouth of the new port of Iskandrieh, as the Arabs call the city of Alexander the Great. Old Ludowick and I——"

"The baggage has all passed, major. You will scarcely overtake your command by sunset, if you wait to tell us *that* story; it is very long, but nevertheless, very interesting. I have heard it some dozen times."

"A good story," replied Campbell composedly, "cannot be told too often. Therefore, the Diamond Isle—" But I will not insert here the worthy major's story, which he obstinately related, and with, all the tedious prolixity and feeling of entire self-satisfaction that every old soldier displays in the narration of some personal adventure.

"By the by, Stuart," said he, as he concluded, "have you any thing in the pig-skin I see lying near the fire yonder?"

"Not a drop; otherwise it should have been offered long ago. I am sorry 'tis empty; but not expecting visitors, the last drain was squeezed out last night."

"*Carajo*! Well, Lisle, and how are all the depot? How's old Inverugie, and Rosse of Beinderig,—the *Barba-Roxo*, as the dons used to call him?"

"All well when I left."

"Glad to hear so,—jovial old Egyptians they are; many a cask of Islay and true Ferintosh we have drunk together, and, through God's help, many more I hope to drink with them. The very idea of the smoking toddy—the lemons and nutmeg, makes me confoundedly thirsty."

"Doubtless, major, you had a morning draught at Merida?"

"The devil the drop, Stuart; but very nearly a wame full of cold pewter,—and ounce balls are hard to digest."

"How! What occurred?"

"It was unluckily my turn to be field-officer of the guard over this infernal baggage, which, as we are retreating, moves of course in front of the column. We advanced as fast as possible to get into Merida, hoping to halt there and refresh.

As we approached the bridge, I was drawing pleasant visions of the dark purple wine in the borachio skins at the wine-sellers in the Plaza, and was thinking of the long-gulping draught of the cool Malmsey liquor I would enjoy there; when bang—whizz, came a bullet from the carbine of a French vidette, who appeared suddenly before us at the bridge-end. My belt-plate turned the shot, or else there would be a majority vacant at this hour in the Gordon Highlanders. The same thing happened to me once in Egypt, when I was there with Sir Ralph. I will tell you how it was."

"I would rather hear it at the halt, major, if it be all the same to you," said Ronald, interrupting the prosy field-officer without ceremony. "Well, and this vidette? His shot—"

"Caused a devil of a commotion among my motley command. The ladies shrieked and galloped off, the children cried in concert, the donkeys and mules kicked and plunged, the drivers lashed, and swore, and prayed, while the guard began to fire. I knew not what to do, when up came the 9th and Germans, sword in hand, sweeping on like wildfire; and entering the city, after a little fighting and a great deal of shouting and swearing, captured a hundred and fifty French lancers, all in their shirts. Their quarter-guard alone escaped by swimming the Guadiana; but their *chef d'escadre*, a French colonel, the Baron Clappourknuis, was taken in his saddle. You will see him when Sir Rowland comes up. But I must ride hard now, and regain my straggling command, which has left me far in the rear. Adieu, lads, adieu!" and away he went at a hand-gallop.

In a short time, the long line of dust which appeared in sight announced the approach of the division; and the bright steel points of standard-poles, of pikes[*] and bayonets, glanced "momentarily to the sun" as they advanced across the level plain. About a quarter of a mile off, moving forward on the right and left, appeared two dark masses of armed horse—Colonel Campbell's brigade of Portuguese cavalry, covering the flanks of the infantry. Eagerly did Stuart watch the dark forest of waving feathers which distinguished his own regiment, while he awaited their arrival standing apart from Louis Lisle, who eyed him with an expression of anger and disquiet. Since the departure of Campbell, neither had addressed a word to the other, and both felt how exceedingly irksome and disagreeable was this assumed indifference, this appearance of hauteur and coldness.

[*] Carried by Serjeants at that time, instead of the fusee and bayonet now in use.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
Maurice and Co., Howford buildings, Fenchurch-street.

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