

Literature, &c.

THE FALL OF MURRAY.

THE severity of winter had already begun to relax, although the season of its endurance had not yet passed away; for, as it not unfrequently happens, the unwonted rigor, which had characterized the last months of 1568, was succeeded by a scarcely less unusual mildness in the commencement of the following year. The air was mild, and for the most part southerly, and the continuance of soft and misty weather had clothed the meadows with a premature and transitory verdure. The young grass pushed forth its tender blades from the mound, which covered all that earth might claim of the hapless wife of Hamilton, the small birds chirped above her silent home, and in the vales, which she had gladdened by her presence, it seemed as though her gentle virtues were forgotten, almost before her limbs had perished in their untimely sepulchre. One heart, however, there still beat, that never would forget—one heart that would have deemed forgetfulness the deepest curse it could be made to feel, although the gift of memory was but the source of unavailing sorrow and despair! Experience has fully shown, that to no frame of mind is grief more poignantly acute, than to such as, having been fashioned by nature in a stern and rugged mould, averse to sympathy, and hardly susceptible of any tender emotion, have, by some fortuitous circumstance, and in some unguarded hour been surrendered to the dominion of one master passion, which has worked in time an entire revulsion of their feelings, and changed the very aim of their existence. Such had been the fate of Bothwellhaugh; restless, fierce, and ambitious, as he has been pictured in his unbridled youth, accustomed to speak and think of woman with licence and contempt, he had been affected by the sweetness and pure love of his young bride to a degree, which souls like his alone are able to conceive, and when deprived of her, in a manner so fearfully horrible, and with details so aggravating, the effects produced on his demeanor were proportioned only to the event which gave them birth.

No sudden burst of violence, no fierce display of temper, such as, in his days of unrestrained indulgence, he had been wont to shew at the loss of a favorite falcon, or a faithful hound, followed upon this his first true cause for sorrow. Not a tear moistened his burning eyeball, not a sob relieved the choking of his throat, as he followed his first and only love to her eternal home; a heavy stupor was upon him; he moved, spoke, and acted as if by instinct, rather than by volition, and there were those who deemed that his brain had received a shock that would paralyse its faculties forever and that the high souled and sagacious Hamilton was henceforth to be rated as a moody, moping idiot. Not long, however, did this unusual temper continue; for scarcely had he seen the last remains of the only being he had ever loved committed to earth, ere, to the eye of a superficial observer, he appeared solely occupied in the management of his departure from the patrimony of his immemorial ancestors;—few, indeed, and brief were his preparations,—a charger of matchless strength and symmetry, was easily provided on that warlike frontier, to supply the place of that which had borne him on his fatal journey,—his arms were carefully inspected, the rust wiped from his two handed blade, and the powder freshened in his clumsy but effective fire arms; and lastly a dozen of the hardest riders of the border side had preferred the fortunes of their natural chief, although his star was overcast, to the usurped dominion of him, who, by the haughty Regent's favor, possessed the confiscated demesnes of a better and a braver man. Mounted on horses famed for their hardness and speed, and trained to all the varied purposes of war,—their bright and soldier like accoutrements contrasting strangely with the wild expression of their features, their untrimmed beards, and shaggy locks,—the small band, as they leaned on their long lances, or secured their slight equipments, around the solitary tower, in which their leader had passed the melancholy hours of his sojourn, presented a picture of singular romance and beauty. Horses neighed and stamped in the echoing court yard, armor clashed, and spurs jingled, and louder than all were heard the eager and excited voices of the untamed borderers; but every sound was hushed as their stern chief came forth, surveyed the harness of every trooper, and the comparison of every steed in silence, threw himself upon his horse and wheeled his handful of men at a hard trot upon the road towards the Scottish capital. Hardly a mile of their route had been passed, and the troop was diving into the very glen which had witnessed the downfall of Hamilton's sole earthly hope, when the vidette fell hastily back with notice of the approach of horsemen. Hurrying forward, they had already cleared the ravine, when they beheld some half score lancers wading down towards the rugged ford, the followers, it seemed, of a knight who had already passed the river. There needed not a moment's halt to array his fresh steeds and ready warriors for the charge, if such were to be the result of the encounter. At a glance had Hamilton discovered the person of the Regent's minion, the cold blooded, relentless, hater, who had wreaked his coward spite upon his unoffending, helpless wife, nor were his followers slower in recognizing the usurper of their chieftain's patrimony. With a fierce and triumphant yell, they dashed their spurs into their horses' flanks, and with levelled spears and presented match locks, threatened inevitable destruction to the victim, who was thus hopelessly surrendered to their mercy. The nearest of his train was separated from him by the wide

and stony channel of the Eske, nor was it possible that he could be joined by succor in time to preserve him from the fury of these wild avengers. To the astonishment, however, of both parties, Bothwellhaugh, who had only learned the deadly intentions of his men from the hoarse clamor with which they greeted the appearance of their destined prey, himself reined up his horse with a shock so sudden that it had nearly thrown him on his haunches; "How no!" he shouted, in the short tones of resolution—"vassals! halt, or I cleave the foremost to his teeth! Saint Mary aid us—but we have fair discipline!" His determined words, no less than the readiness, with which he had upon the instant beat down the lances of the fiercest troopers, arrested their wild violence; and before the intended victim had prepared his mind either for resistance or submission, the peril was at an end. Wheeling his party upon the narrow green beside the bridge, the bereaved husband halted, awaiting the approach of his wife's destroyer, with an apathy which, to the veterans who had followed him in many a bloody day, appeared no less incomprehensible than shameful: while one by one the enemy filled through the narrow pass, formed, hesitated for a space, and then, perceiving that no opposition would be offered to their progress, marched onwards with a steady front, and well dissembled resolution. Last of the troop, with downcast eye and varying complexion, as though he scarcely dared to hope for mercy from a man whom he had so irreparably injured, rode the usurper, expecting at every step to hear the border slogan pealing from the lips, and to feel the death blow thundering from the arm of him to whom he had given such ample cause to curse the hour when he was born. Motionless as a statue sate the noble Hamilton on his tall war horse, his broadsword at rest within its scabbard, and his countenance as calm, and almost as dark as midnight;—yet whatever were the feelings that induced the borderer to forego his vengeance, when circumstances thus wooed him to the deed, it was evident that mercy had no place within his soul at that tremendous moment. The heavy gloom that dimmed his eye—the deep scowl upon his brow—the compression of his lip—and the quivering motion of his fingers, as they hovered upon the gripe of his dagger, betokened no slight or transitory struggle; and the deep breath drawn from the bottom of the chest, as the hated minion disappeared, spoke as plainly as words, the relief which he experienced at the removal of so powerful a temptation. "No!" he muttered between his teeth—"It would have been a deed of madness!—To have crushed the jackall would but have roused the lion into caution! Let them deem me coward—slave—fool!—if they will—so I have MY REVENGE!" Again he resumed his route in silence; nor did a word, save my occasional command, fall from him by which the train of his sensations might have been discovered; all day he pursued his march with unwearied diligence, barely allowing such brief intervals of rest as might enable his cattle to proceed with recruited vigor,—and, while toiling through the deep morass, or over the pathless hill, night closed starless and overcast above his houseless head; but little mattered it to such men, as that determined soldier and his rugged comrades, whether night found them on the lonely moor, or in the lighted hall, and if they thought at all upon the subject, it was but to congratulate themselves on the fortunate obscurity which agreed so well with their mysterious enterprise.

The second moon was in her wane, from that which had beheld the death of Margaret and her miserable babe; yet the savage executor of her fate lored it securely in the halls, which had so lately been the dwelling of female innocence and peace. For a while men looked for a sure and speedy retribution from the fatal wrath of him, who had never yet been known to fail a friend, or to forgive a foe; yet day succeeded day, and with the impunity of the murderer, the astonishment at first, and ere long the scorn of all, pursued the recreant husband and fugitive chief of a name once so noble. Some gray haired veterans there were, who would ominously shake their heads, and press their fingers to the lip, when topics such as these were broached, or hint that the Lord of Bothwellhaugh would bide his time, and that, if he were unaccountably slow in seeking his revenge, he paused but to **MAK SICKER**;—generally, however, an idea prevailed that the spirit of Hamilton had been so utterly prostrated by the blow, that no gallant deed of vengeance,—which was held in those days of recent barbarism, not only justifiable, but in the highest degree praiseworthy and honorable,—was now to be dreaded by his foes, or hailed by his firm adherents. Little, however, did they know the man whom they presumed to stigmatize as a recreant, or a coward; and still less could they conceive the change, which had been brought about by a single event in his formerly rash and thinking temper. Once, not an instant would have elapsed between the commission of the crime and its punishment;—once, he would have rushed upon a thousand perils to confront the man who wronged him, and would have set his life at naught in avenging his tarnished honor. Now, on the contrary, his bold and open hardihood was exchanged for a keen and subtle cunning; now he hoarded, with a miser's care, that life which he had set upon a cast a thousand times; not that he loved his life, but that he had devoted it to the attainment of one object, which had become the single aim of his existence. It was from the quiver of Murray that the arrow had been selected, which had pierced his love, and he haughtily overlooked

\* The celebrated words of Kirkpatrick, the companion of Robert Bruce, when he returned to complete the slaughter of Comyn, who had been stabbed at the high altar by the patriot.

the wretched villain, who had aimed the dart, in his anxiety to smite the mightier though weaker agent, who had furnished his tool with that power which had destroyed his all.

Successful in his ambitious projects, backed by the almost omnipotent league of the covenanted lords, wielding the truncheon of the regency as firmly as though it were a royal sceptre, feared and honored by Scotland, respected by the lion-queen of England, Murray entertained no doubt, harbored no lurking dread, of a man too insignificant, as he deemed in his overweening confidence, to cope with the occupant of Scotland's throne.

Returning from an expedition through the vales of Eske and Clyde, whose romantic waters had been dyed with blood by his remorseless policy, leaving sad traces of his progress in smoking villages, ruined towers, he had reached Linlithgow on his progress towards his capital. Surrounded by a select force of the best warriors from every Lowland plain or Highland glen, he had entered the antique town as the last sun, that was ever to set for him, sank slowly into a bed of threatening clouds; and all night long, the streets of Linlithgow rang with sounds of war and revelry. From leagues around, the population of the country had crowded in, to feast their eyes with the triumphant entry, and pay their homage to the well-nigh royal conqueror; many an eye was sleepless on that memorable night, but few from sorrow or anxiety; yet there was one within the precincts of those antiquated walls whose presence, had it been whispered in the Regent's ear, would have shaken his dauntless heart with an unswayed tremor. Overlooking from its Gothic bartizan, the market place of the old city, stood one of those gloomy dwellings, with its surtured gable to the street, its oaken portal cleft with many a massive spike and bar, and its narrow casements subdivided by stone transoms, which are yet to be seen in several of the Scottish burghs, presenting evident traces of having been erected in that iron time, when every man's house was in truth his castle. Here, in a narrow gallery which commanded the principal thoroughfare, without a light to cheer his solitude, or fire to warm his limbs, watched the avenger. The night was raw and gusty, yet he felt not the penetrating breath of winter; he had fasted the preceding night, yet he knew no hunger; he stood upon the brink of murder, yet he shuddered not. Before the sun had set, he had dispatched his attendant to the castle of his princely kinsman, the Duke, who bore his name, and owned his fealty; he had supplied his charger with the grain which was to serve him for to-morrow's race, in one of the lower halls of the deserted house; he had barricaded every portal with unwonted deliberation, and secured the windows with chain and bar; he had prepared all that was needful for the tragedy he was about to perpetrate, and now he was alone with his conscience and his God!—His mind, wrought to the highest pitch of resolution, dreamed not of compunction, nor did he for an instant doubt his full justification in the eyes of his Creator, although he was lying in wait secretly to mark a fellow being, as though he were a beast of the chase. Nor indeed did he feel so much of hesitation in leveling his rifle at this his brother man, as he had often experienced in striking down the anlered monarch of the waste. Oftentimes, when the beautiful deer had been stretched at his feet, by his unerring aim, with its graceful form unstrung for ever, and its noble crest grovelling in the dust, had he sorrowed in secret over the destruction he had wrought for a momentary pleasure, but no such thoughts were here to melt his resolution, or to damp his anticipated triumph. As he paced on his short beat with firm and measured stride, he reckoned the minutes with anxiety, and as the successive hours changed from the lofty steeple, he cursed the space that yet divided him from his revenge; still, amidst all his eagerness, he had the strength of mind to banish from his thoughts all recollection of the grievance, which he never returned to but he felt his brain reel, and his nerves tremble with fury, which he could neither guide nor moderate. Night, however, though it may be tedious even to disgust, cannot endure for ever; and in due time the misty light of dawn glimmered through the narrow panes, upon the scene of fatal preparation. The wall, facing the window, hung from the ceiling to the floor with black cloth, that no shadow might betray the lurking enemy,—the piles of bedding strewed upon the floor to prevent a single football from awakening suspicion,—and on a table by the casement, the matchlock rifle, with its slow match already kindled, the horn and bullets ready for the hand, no less than the accoutrements and bearing of the man, proclaimed the fixed determination with which he had plotted, and the cold-blooded preparation with which he was prompt to execute his enemy's destruction. As the morning broke, a wild flourish of trumpets sounded the reveille from a distant part of the town, where his victim had passed the hours of sleep in undisturbed tranquillity. The sound fell upon the ear of Hamilton, and, thrilling in his heart's core, stirred him like the horse of Job. Again he applied himself to his task, again he reconnoitred every outlet to the main street, and made assurance doubly sure that for ten minutes, at least, the fastenings could resist any assaults short of ordnance; he equipped his charger with the lightest trappings, tried every buckle, and proved the least important thing;

† The carbine with which the Regent was shot is still preserved at Hamilton palace, it is a brass piece of middling length, very small in the bore; and what is rather extraordinary, appears to have been rifled or indented in the barrel. It had a matchlock, for which a modern firelock has been injudiciously substituted.—Sir Walter Scott.

then as the time drew nigh, led him forth silently to the rear of the building, whence a gloomy and neglected garden conducted to an unfrequented lane, by which he might gain access to the open country. Still, when all this was finished, when the preparations were concluded, and his escape provided, to the utmost that human foresight could effect; a tedious hour had yet to creep away before the success of his machinations should be ascertained. Cautiously he retraced his steps, and entering once more upon the scene of action, prepared his weapon for the deed with scrupulous attention; the first smile that had lightened his gloomy brow, now flashed across it, as he drew the leaden messenger down the tube, from which it was soon to be launched on its course of blood, and raising the well proved instrument to his unerring eye, examined with a marksman's skill its range and balance. Then coolly, as though he were about to provide himself against the inconvenience of a protracted chase, drawing from a recess food and wine, he broke bread and drank, not without satisfaction. Hardly had he finished his slender meal, before the distant chiming of the matins bells, proclaiming the earliest service of the church, tinkled upon the breeze. Reverently, devoutly, did the future murderer sink upon his knees, and fervently did he implore the aid of that Being, who, if it be not impious to imagine the ideas of Divinity—must have looked down with abhorrence on the supplications of one, who was even then plotting a deed of blood,—unless the ignorance and barbarism of the age might pass for some alleviation of individual error, in the sight of him who is no less a God of mercy, than of justice and truth. Strengthened in his awful purpose, and confident both of the goodness and the approaching triumph of his cause, Hamilton rose up from his ill-judged devotions. Suddenly the roar of artillery shook the casements, and the din of martial music, trumpet, horn, and kettledrum, mingling in wild discordance with the pibrocks of the Highland clans, announced that the Regent had commenced his progress. At once every symptom of anxiety or eagerness disappeared from the lowering countenance of Hamilton; while there had been uncertainty, the slightest possible shade of trepidation had appeared in his demeanor; but now, as in the warlike symphony, and the acclamations of the populace, he foresaw the success of all his desperate machinations, he was calm and self-possessed—now, when a meaner spirit would have shrunk from the completion of the deed, which it had dared to plan, but lacked the resolution to perform, the full extent of his determination was most manifest. There was a quiet composure in his eye, a serene complacency in the repose of every feature, which, as considered in connexion with his dreadful purpose, was more appalling than the fiercest burst of passion. Firm as a statue he stood in the dark embrasure, the ready weapon in his hand, and his keen glance watching the approach of his doomed victim. Louder and louder swelled the notes of triumph; and now the very words of the applauding concourse distinctly audible—"God save the Regent!"—"Life to the noble Murray!"—Then a score of lancers lightly equipped, and nobly mounted, clattered along the echoing street to clear a path for the procession,—but their efforts were exerted no purpose, the populace, which thronged the area of the place, closed in behind the soldiers, as waves uniting in the wake of some swift sailor, and in their eagerness to prove the extent of their good wishes, frustrated their own intent, and rendered their favorite's doom more certain. Banner after banner, troop after troop, swept onwards!—Glittering in all the gorgeousness of steel and scarlet, marshalled by men, whose fame for warlike science, and undaunted bravery, might have challenged the glory of earth's most widely-brewed heroes, elated with recent victory, and proud of the unconquered leader, whom they guarded, they "trampled on, defying earth, and confident of heaven." Morton was there, with his sneering smile, and downcast eye, as when he struck his point into the heart of Rizzio, and Lindsay of the Byres, sordid in his antiquated garb, and rusty armor, with the hardest heart beneath his iron corselet that ever beat in a human breast,—and Kirkcaldy of the Grange, the best and bravest soldier of the age,—and the celebrated Knox, rising in his clerical garb amidst the spears,—Knox! of whom it was spoken after his decease, that he had never feared the face of man!—and the chief of the Macfarlaes with his shadowy tartans, and the eagle feather in his bonnet, and a thousand kilted caterns at his heels! But proudly as the marshalled ranks proceeded on their march, and haughty as was the bearing of the crest warriors, there was not a man in all the train that could compare in thwies or sinews with him who watched in thwies or sinews with him who watched within; his closely-fitting dress of chamois leather displaying the faultless proportions of his limbs—the elasticity of his tread—the majestic melancholy of his expression, gained by the contrast, when viewed beside the pomp and splendor of his haughty foemen. Another and another of his haughty foemen, a troop of lancers striving in vain to remove the crowded spectators from the route!—and then, preceded by heralds in their quartered tabards, amidst the clang of instruments, and a gray, doubled clang of the multitude, on a gray, which had been cheaply purchased at the price of an Earl's ransom, sheathed from head to foot in the tempered steel of Milan, Murray came forth, in all but name a king. So closely did the crowd press forward, that the chargers of the knights could barely move at a foot's pace. Glencairn was at his right, and on his left, the trust of his followers, Douglas of Parkhead. The pomp had passed unnoticed,—the well known figures had gleamed before the eyes of Hamilton, like phantoms in a troubled dream; but no sooner had his victim met his eye than the ready rifle was at his shoulder.