

round the scented blossoms of the purple clover in the valley; even the broad bare moorlands appeared to smile in the blythe morning, as the great clouds would sweep across them, wrapping their round heads with grand blue shadows, and leaving them, after a moment, bathed in clear sunlight. How beautiful—how peaceful—how far removed from aught of sin or strife or sorrow showed those fair solitudes that summer morning—for although cultivated and inhabited, those moorland glens are, even to this day, indeed solitudes. It is true, certainly, that every mountain valley had its sparse farms and scattered granges, that every broader strath had its small hamlet and its kirk; but so far distant were the hamlets, so wide the tracks of heathclad moorland and deep green morass which intervened between the hill-farms, that there was little intercourse between the lonely cultivators of the soil, except when they assembled on the Sabbath in happy quiet congregations within the precincts of God's house. But peaceful though it showed—there was, in that day, through that groaning land, "no peace but a sword." The fiercest and most blood-thirsty of earthly warfares was devastating those lone valleys—a warfare, as it was called, of religion!—a barbarous sectarian persecution! The kirks were closed, the altars all forsaken, the ministers dispersed and houseless exiles, the faithful congregations driven to worship God, if they did worship Him after the fashion of their fathers, in the untrodden fastnesses of the old hills, and even there to worship in doubt and fear and trembling. Such were the times—dark, stern and bloody—when on the lovely morning, I have assayed to paint, a little household was assembled before the door of a small neat farm-house, in one of the loneliest of those lone valleys, offering their morning sacrifice to Him who has declared His most esteemed offering to be the praise that flows to him from pure and humble hearts. Humble indeed was the dwelling, in front of which that group of worshippers was gathered, and small the farmer's household. A low stone cottage of a single story, with a thatched roof all overran with moss and stone crop, and an old-fashioned porch fronting due southward—a narrow plot of garden, well-stocked with pot-herbs, and a few common flowers, fenced from the sandy road by a low wall of unhewn free-stone, and overshadowed by three gnarled and moss-grown apple-trees—a rich broad meadow opposite across the road, with heavy swathes still steeped in the night-dews lying where

they had fallen yestereven beneath the mower's scythe—two or three stripes of oats and barley—a little garth behind the house, where in two cows and a pet lamb were pasturing—a tract of wild hill-pasture, with its small flocks of ragged, black-faced sheep!—such was the dwelling and demesne which constituted all the earthly wealth for which the moorland farmer was sending up sincerer prayers to the giver of all good, than many a rich man offered for his abundance and blessings!—an old, grey-headed woman, wrinkled, and bowed by age, but active still, and cheerful, clad in a suit of plain deep mourning, with a close cap of snow-white muslin, beneath which, neatly braided, appeared her venerable locks, white as the lawn that shadowed them—a tall and slightly-formed young man, light-haired and comely, although too delicate in his appearance for his rude calling, dressed in the ordinary garb of a Scottish peasant, his broad blue lowland bonnet, doffed reverently on the high occasion—a beautiful bare-footed girl, of scarcely thirteen years—the orphan child of a dead sister—these made the whole of the literal "two or three," who were gathered there together in presence of their King and Maker! And now the brief extemporaneous prayer was ended!—the chapter had been read from the well-thumbed and greasy Bible—it was one of those splendid outbursts of rapt Isaiah's unrivalled eloquence and poetry, full of denunciations dark and mysterious of God's coming wrath and vengeance, with dazzling glimpses interspersed of his beatic promise—in which the Scottish covenanters, as had their puritan forefathers, especially delighted to apply to their own times, and their own persecutions!—and the accustomed hymn was rising on the calm morning air—the self-same hymn that pealed from the steep hills of the enthusiasts who shed their blood like water at Marston and Dunbar and Worcester! The deep, harmonious tones of the young farmer's voice, blent with the shrill sweet girlish treble of his fair niece, and the weak quavering thrill of his old parent swelled up with a strange effect in that wild solitude and, through the sounds, the thrilling psalm-tune were soon mixed with stranger and more unaccustomed noises; so fully had the thoughts of all been occupied by their sincere devotions that 'till the hymn was ended, no one of the three worshippers was in the least aware that their poor melody had found any listening ears save those of that all-hearing one whom they all hoped, with an undoubting confidence was bending from on high to catch each as