

THE FIRST-FOOT.

Notwithstanding the shortness of their days, the bitterness of their frosts, and the fury of the storms, December and January are merry months. First comes old Christmas, shaking his hoary locks, helike, in the shape of snow-drift, and laughing, well-pleased, beneath his crown of mistletoe, over the smoking surloin and the savoury goose.— There is not a child on the south side of the Borders, who longs not for the coming of merry Christmas—it is their holiday of holidays: their season of play and of presents: and old and young shake hands with Christmas, and with each other. And even on the northern side of “the river,” and “the ideal” by fancy drawn,” which “divide the kingdoms,” there are thousands who come and forget not “blithe Yule day.” It comes the New Year: the bottle, the pint, and the *first-foot*; and, we might say, also, Hansel Monday, and “and Auld Hansel Monanday,” which follow in their train, and keep up the merriment till the end of January is broken. But our business, at present, is with the *first-foot*, and we must hold. It matters not on what side of the Borders it may be: and northward the feeling extends far beyond the Border; there is a mysterious, an ominous importance attached to the individual who first crosses the threshold, after the clock has struck twelve at midnight, on the 31st of December, or who is the *first foot* in a house after the New Year has begun. The *first-foot* stamps the “luck” of the house: the good fortune or the evil fortune of its inmates throughout the year! To begin with our story. There was not a person on all the Borders, nor yet in all Scotland, who attached more importance to First Foot than Nelly Rogers. Nelly was a very worthy, kindhearted, yea, even amiable sort of woman, but a vein of superciliousness ran through her sense; she had imbibed a variety of “and warld notions” in her infancy, and as she grew up, they became a part of her creed. She did not exactly believe that ghosts and apparitions existed in this day, but she was perfectly sure they *had* existed, and *had* been seen; she was sure there was something in dreams, and she was positive there was a great deal in the kindness or unkindness of a First Foot; she remarked it in her own experience thirty years, and she said “it was of nae use attempting to argue her out o’ what she had

observed herself.” Nelly was the wife of one Richard Rogers, a respectable farmer, whose farm-house stood by the side of the postroad between Kelso and Lauder. They had a family of several children, but our business is with the oldest, who was called George, and who had the misfortune to receive both from his parents and their neighbours the character of being a *genius*. This is a very unfortunate character to give to any one who has a fortune to make in the world as will be seen when we come to notice the history of George the genius, for such was the appellation by which he was familiarly mentioned. Now it was the last night of the old year, George was about twelve years of age, and because he was their first born, and moreover because he was a genius he was permitted to sit with his father and his mother, and a few friends who had come to visit them, to see the old year out and the New Year in. The cuckoo clock struck twelve, and the company rose: shook hands: wished each other a happy new year, and, in a bumper, drank, “May the year that’s awa be the worst o’ our lives.”

“I wonder wha will be our first foot,” said Nelly; “I hope it will be a lucky one.” The company began to argue whether there was any thing lucky in a first foot or not, and the young genius sided with his mother; and, while they yet disputed upon the subject, a knocking was heard at the front door.

“There’s somebody,” said Nelly; if its anybody that I think’s no lucky I winna let them in.”

“Nonsense!” said Richard.

“It’s nae nonsense,” replied Nelly; “it may be a *flatsoled* body, for anything I ken; and do ye think I wad risk the like o’ that. Haud awa, see wha it is, George,” added she, addressing the genius; “and dinna let them in unless you’re sure that they dinna come empty-handed.”

“Did ever ye hear the like o’ the woman!” said her husband; “sic havers! Run awa, George, hinny; open the door.”

The boy ran to the door, and inquired; “Who’s there?”

“A stranger,” was the reply.

“What do you want?” inquired the genius, with a degree of caution seldom found in persons honoured with such an epithet.

“I have a letter to Master Rogers, from his own brother,” loudly answered the stranger.

“A letter frae my brother, John!” cried Richard, starting from his seat; “open the door, laddie—open the door.”