

"It is the custom of the country—one of the few that's like to be left to us before long."

"*A la santé de la bonne cause!*" said the Count politely, choking upon the fiery liquor, and putting down the glass with an apology.

"I am come from France—from Saint Germain's," he said. "You may have heard of my uncle; I am the Count de Montaignon."

The Baron betrayed a moment's confusion.

"Do you tell me, now?" said he. "Then you are the more welcome. I wish I could say so in your own language—that is, so far as case goes, known to me only in letters. From Saint Germain's—" making a step or two up and down the room, with a shrewd glance upon his visitor in the bygoing—"H'm, I've been there on a short turn myself; there are several of the Highland gentry about the place."

"There is one Bethune—Hugh Bethune of Ballinmeanach, Baron," replied Count Victor meaningly.

"Knowing that I was coming to this part of the world, and that a person of my tongue and politics might be awkwardly circumstanced in the province of Argyll, he took the liberty to give me your direction as one in whose fidelity I might repose myself. I came across the sleeve to Albion and skirted your noisy eastern coast with but one name of a friend, *pardieu*, to make the strange cliffs cheerful."

"You are very good," said the Baron simply, with half a bow. "And Hugh Bethune, now—well, well! I am proud that he should mind of his old friend in the tame Highlands. Good Hugh!"—a strange wistfulness came to the Baron's utterance—"Good Hugh! he'll wear tartan when he has the notion, I'm supposing, though, after all, he was no Gacl, or a very far-out one, for all that he was in the Marischal's tail."

"I have never seen him in the tartan, beyond perhaps a waistcoat of it at a *bal masque*."