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## THE HALLS OF THE NORTH.\*

### CHAPTER VII.

\* He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small,  
Who does not put it to the touch  
To gain or lose it all."  
SCOTT.

In that extensive valley between those two gigantic ranges of mountains partially described at the commencement of our little history, is many a lovely little hamlet, dignified with the appellation of village, although consisting frequently of not more than a dozen of houses, with the hall or halls—for some of them have two; and those halls, it must be remembered, are quite a separate and distinct description of strongholds, for such they are, from the ancient castles now almost universally in ruins, and originally intended for a very different purpose.

When to each of the Norman nobles, after the conquest, a large tract of country was allotted, over which they exercised sovereign and despotic sway, disputes would often arise between them, concerning perhaps the limits of their jurisdiction, or from other causes, or without any apparent or pretended cause at all; for in those days might was right, and to the sword those warlike men appealed, as we do now to courts of law, and with the same results; we have but changed the mode: the weakest then, as at the present day, were always worsted. In such a state of things, a strong, impregnable fortification—sufficiently comprehensive to afford a place of refuge not only for all the vassals of the castellan, with their families, but likewise for their flocks and herds, during an incursion from a ferocious and vindictive neighbour—became absolutely necessary, and hence the castles; whereas to captains or inferior officers free demesnes and manors were allotted, chiefly among the Saxon population, whose natural hatred of these intruders, nurtured and kept alive by the overbearing and tyrannical

conduct of such petty rulers, often broke out in open and riotous rebellion, more especially in the particular locality of which we are now speaking, not only from its being more exclusively inhabited by that brave and persecuted race, but owing to its vicinity to the Fells, infested at the period to which we allude by a lawless set of marauders, little better than banditti, who, whenever they made a descent from their wild fastnesses for raid or foray, found these dwellers in the valleys ever ready with heart and hand to plunder and destroy their common enemy. To guard against such sudden and unforeseen incursions of those nocturnal robbers, some defence was necessary; and hence some of those numerous Halls in the North; and if the others cannot lay claim to so remote an origin, they owe their existence to a similar cause—the lawless and turbulent character of the borderers. Though unlike the fortress and the castle in the outward appliances of portcullis, moat, and drawbridge, common to both, they were uniformly surrounded, at least their assailable points were, with a high wall of solid mason work, with a narrow but massy door of oak, studded thick with heavy headed nails, as the only entrance. Whether the hall itself formed one, two or three sides of a square, the courtyard-wall formed the remainder, and in every case there were no doors nor windows, except a small postern below the height of the top of the wall. In some instances indeed this wall would take a wider and a longer range, and comprise within its limits stables, barns and granaries.

Besides the reasons already assigned for the origin of these strongholds, there were others.

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