

tatal predecessor. The hills had not yet cast off their summer verdure; the sun although shorn of its heat, had lost none of its brightness or glory, and looked down upon the earth as though participating in its gladness; and the clear blue sky was tranquil as the sea sleeping beneath the moon. Many visitors had again assembled at Marchlaw. The sons of Mr. Elliott and the young men of the party were assembled upon a level green near the house, amusing themselves with throwing the hammer and other Border games, while himself and the older guests stood by as spectators, recounting the deeds of their youth. Johnson, the sheep farmer, whom we have already mentioned, now a brawny and gigantic fellow of two and thirty, bore away in every game the palm from all competitors. More than once, as Peter beheld his sons defeated, he felt the spirit of youth glowing in his veins, and, "Oh!" muttered he, in bitterness, "had my Thomas been spared to me, he would have thrown his heart's blood after the hammer, before he would have been beat by ever a Johnson in the country."

While he thus soliloquized, and with difficulty restrained an impulse to compete with the victor himself, a dark, foreign-looking, strong built seaman, unceremoniously approached, and, with his arms folded, cast a look of contempt upon the boasting conqueror. Every eye was turned with a scrutinizing glance upon the stranger. In height he could not exceed five feet nine, but his whole frame was the model of muscular strength; his features were open and manly, but deeply sunburnt and weather-beaten; his long, glossy, black hair, curled into ringlets by the breeze and the billow, fell thickly over his temples and forehead; and whiskers of a similar hue, more conspicuous for size than elegance, gave a character of fierceness to a countenance otherwise possessing the appearance of manly beauty. Without asking permission, he stepped forward, raised the hammer, and, swinging it round his head, hurled it upward of five yards beyond Johnson's most successful throw. "Well done!" shouted the astonished spectators. The heart of Peter Elliott warmed within him, and he was hurrying forward to grasp the stranger by the hand, when the words groaned in his throat, "It was just such a throw as my Thomas would have made;—my own—lost Thomas!" The tears burst into his eyes, and, without speaking, he turned back, and hurried towards the house to hide his emotion.

Successively at every game the stranger had defeated all who ventured to oppose him; when a messenger announced that dinner waited their arrival. Some of the guests were already seated, others entering; and, as heretofore, placed beside Mrs. Elliott, was Elizabeth Bell, still in the noon-tide of her beauty; but sorrow had passed over her features, like a veil before the countenance of an angel. Johnson, crest-fallen and out of humor at his defeat, seated himself by her side. In early life, he had regarded Thomas Elliott as a rival for her affections; and, stimulated by the knowledge that Adam Bell would be able to bestow several thousands upon his daughter for a dowry, he yet prosecuted his attentions with unabated assiduity, in despite of the daughter's aversion and the coldness of her father. Peter had taken his place at the table; and still by his side, unoccupied and sacred, appeared the vacant chair, the chair of his first-born, whereon none had sat since his mysterious death or disappearance.

"Barns," said he, "did nane o' ye ask the sailor to come up and take a bit o' dinner wi' us?"

"We were afraid it might lead to a quarrel with Mr. Johnson," whispered one of the sons.

"He is come without asking," replied the stranger, entering; "and the wind shall blow from a now point if I destroy the mirth or happiness of the company."

"Ye're a stranger, young man," said Peter, "or ye would ken this no' a meeting o' milt-makers. But, I assure ye, ye are welcome, heartily welcome. Haste ye, lassies," he added to the servants; "some o' ye get a chair for the gentleman."

"Gentleman indeed!" muttered Johnson between his teeth.

"Never mind about a chair, my hearties," said the seaman; "this will do!" and, before Peter could speak to withhold him, he had thrown himself carelessly into the hallowed, the venerated, the twelve-years unoccupied chair! The spirit of sacrilege uttering blasphemies from a pulpit could not have smitten a congregation of pious worshippers with deeper horror and consternation, than did this sitting of the vacant chair the inhabitants of Marchlaw.

"Excuse me, Sir! excuse me Sir!" said Peter, the words trembling upon his tongue; "but ye cannot—ye cannot sit there!"

"Oh, man, man!" cried Mrs. Elliott, "got out o' that! get out o' that!—take my chair!—take my chair!—the house!—but dinna, dinna sit there! It has no'er been sit in by mortal being since the death of my dear bairn!—and to see it filled by another is a thing I cannot endure!"

"Sir! Sir!" continued the father, "ye have done it through ignorance, and we excuse ye.—But that was my Thomas's seat! Twelve years this very day—his birthday—he perished, Heaven kens how! He went out from our sight, like the cloud that passes over the hills—never—never to return. And, oh, Sir, spare a father's feelings! for to see it filled wings the blood from my heart!"

"Give me your hand, my worthy soul!" exclaimed the seaman; "I revere, nay, hang it! I would die for your feelings! But Tom Elliott was my friend, and I cast anchor in this chair by special commission. I know that a sudden broadside of joy is a bad thing; but, as I don't know how to preach a sermon before telling you, all I have to say is—that Tom ain't dead."

"Not dead!" said Peter, grasping the hand of the stranger, and speaking with an eagerness that almost choked his utterance; "Oh, Sir! Sir! tell me how!—how!—Did ye say living?—Is my ain Thomas livin'?"

"Not dead, do ye say?" cried Mrs. Elliott, hurrying towards him and grasping his other hand—"not dead! And shall I see my bairn again? Oh, may the blessing o' Heaven and the blessing o' a broken-hearted mother, be upon the bearer o' the gracious tidings! But tell me—tell me, how is it possible! As ye would expect happiness here, or hereafter, dinna, dinna deceive me!"

"Deceive you!" returned the stranger, grasping, with impassioned earnestness, their hands in his—"Never!—never! and all I can say is—Tom Elliott is alive and hearty."

"No, no!" said Elizabeth, rising from her seat, "he does not deceive us; there is that in his countenance which bespeaks a falsehood impossible," and she also endeavored to move towards him, when Johnson threw his arm around her to withhold her.

"Hands off, you land-lubber!" exclaimed the seaman, springing towards them, or shiver me!

I'll show daylight through your timbers in the turning of a handspike!" and, clasping the lovely girl in his arms, "Betty! Betty, my love!" he cried, "don't you know your own Tom?—Father, mother, don't you know me? Have you really forgot your own son? If twelve years have made some change on his face, his heart is sound as ever."

His father, his mother, and his brothers, clung around him, weeping, smiling, and mingling a hundred questions together. He threw his arms around the neck of each, and, in answer to their inquiries replied, "Well! well! there is time enough to answer questions, but not to-day—not to-day!"

"No, my bairn," said his mother, "we'll ask you no questions—nobody shall ask ye any! But how—how were ye torn away from us, my love? And, oh, hunny! where—where ha'e ye been?"

"It is a long story, mother," said he, "and would take a week to tell it. But, howsoever, to make a long story short, you remember when the smugglers were pursued, and wished to conceal their braudly in our house, my father prevented them; they left muttering revenge, and they have been revenged. This day twelve years, I went out with the intention of meeting Elizabeth and her father, when I came upon a party of the gang concealed in Hell's Hole. In a moment half a dozen pistols were held to my breast, and tying my hands to my sides, they dragged me into the cavern. Here I had not been long their prisoner, when the snow, rolling down the mountains, almost totally blocked up its mouth. On the second night, they cut through the snow and, hurrying me along with them, I was bound to a horse, between two, and, before daylight found myself stowed, like a piece of old junk, in the hold of a smuggling lugger. Within a week I was shipped aboard a Dutch man-of-war; and for six years was kept dogging about on different stations, till our old yawning hulk received orders to join the fleet which was to fight against the gallant Duncan at Camperdown. To think of fighting against my own countrymen, my own flesh and blood, was worse than to be cut to pieces by a cat-o'-nine tails; and, under cover of the first broadside, I sprang upon the gunwale, plunged into the sea, and swam for the English fleet. Never, never shall I forget the moment that my feet first trod upon the deck of a British frigate! My nerves felt as firm as her oak, and my heart free as the pennant that waved defiance from her mast-head. I was active as any one during the battle; and when it was over, and I found myself again among my own countrymen, and all speaking my own language, I fancied,—nay, hang it! I almost believed—I should meet my father, my mother, or my dear Bess on board the British frigate. I expected to see you all again in a few weeks at farthest; but instead of returning to Old England, before I was aware I found it was holm about with us. As to writing, I never had an opportunity but once. We were anchored before a French fort; a packet was lying along side, ready to sail; I had half a side written, and was scratching my head to think how I could come over writing about you, Bess, my love, when, as bad luck would have it, our lieutenant comes to me, and says he to me, 'Elliott,' says he, 'I know you like a little smart service, come, my lad, take the head oar, while we board some of these French bum-boats under the batteries!' I could'n't say no. We pulled ashore made a bonfire of one of their craft, and were setting fire to a second, when a deadly shower of small shot from the garrison, scuttled our boat, killed our commanding officer with half the crew, and the few who were left of