

THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER.*

BY MISS M. HUNGERFORD.

CHAPTER XVI.

The day was far spent ere they gained the mountain top that looked down on the little romantic dell, the abode of the lady Isabella. Their fears of deception were lulled to rest as the little cottage arose before them, and with the blissful certainty that their sufferings were about to reap a rich reward, they began to descend the mountain. This was no easy task, but it was at last accomplished, and they stood on level ground once more. Some precaution was necessary, lest the attendants of Isabella should be too numerous for them to overcome, and they determined to appear in their assumed characters of minstrels, who had wandered from their accustomed way, and by asking for a shelter for the coming night, make use of any circumstance which might occur to forward their design. They therefore slowly approached the house, but a deep silence reigned around. No moving thing appeared in token that it was now the abode of man, no sound broke the ear; but all around was fearful silence. And yet the little garden bloomed in all its simple luxuriance as if the hand of industry had recently been there; and the two young men, as they slowly and cautiously approached, felt a strange dread of some device to lure them on to destruction.

As they drew near the door, they came upon the dead body of a dog whose mangled carcass pierced by many wounds, seemed to foretell that the hand of violence had there been busy, and that the trusty animal had fallen in defence of its master's home. Signs of violence became more apparent, and as they raised the latch and pushed open the humble door, fearful was the sight that presented itself. Fast bound, and utterly incapable of moving from her position, in one corner sat the mistress of the little mansion, with deep despairing anguish written on every feature of her face. In the opposite corner lay the body of her son, also bound, bloody, and apparently lifeless. A broad red stream of blood had coursed its way from beneath the body, across the clean white floor almost to the feet of the wretched mother. Malcolm looked around

on the fearful scene, while Francis drew back as if he dared not enter a spot so horrid, and as the eye of the young Scotsman rested on the apparently lifeless body of the ill-fated Peter, and from thence turned to his unhappy mother, he advanced to the side of the latter and cut in sunder the cords that bound her. With one wild, convulsive effort she sprang to her feet, and flew to the side of her son: she threw her arms around him, and raised him from the floor, and then still clasping him in that fond embrace, sank down overcome by her strong emotion. Francis had entered, and the two young men approached, and lifting the form of Peter from the floor, bore him to the inner apartment and laid him upon his own couch. A slight tremulous motion, and the almost imperceptible beating of the heart, convinced them that life was not yet extinct, but that he had fainted from loss of blood, and hastily binding up his wounds which proved not very serious, they held to his lips a cordial draught, prepared by his mother, and in a short time were rewarded for their care by seeing him show signs of life. As their anxiety for the wounded youth somewhat subsided, Malcolm fixed his eyes sternly on the face of the mother, and asked.

"Whose hand, Madam, has done this? And where is the lady entrusted to your care by Gustavus de Lindendorf?"

"Oh, the good lord Gustavus will be so angry with us, because his beautiful lady is borne away by those fearful men!" cried the woman, "but indeed we are not to blame; to save her from them, we strove full hard, but they bound me as you saw, and having murdered my Peter before my very face, they dragged away, more dead than alive, the beautiful lady of my lord! Oh, woe is me, it was a fearful sight, and her cries for succour were all in vain!"

"But who, I ask, were the perpetrators of this foul deed?" cried Francis, "and whither have they borne the lady? Speak woman! tell me all! I command thee!"

"Lord bless us! And how should the like of you know aught of my beautiful lady? You, but a wandering minstrel, and she, from the most distant country of all the earth!" cried the woman,