

"The Monsher de Montaignon frae France," announced Mungo, stepping aside, still with the soldier's mechanical precision, and standing by the door to give dignity to the introduction and the entrance.

The Baron may have flushed for the overdone formality of his servant when he saw the style of his visitor, standing with a Kevenhuller cocked hat in one hand and fondling the up-turned moustache with the other; something of annoyance at least was in his tone as he curtly dismissed the man and gave admission to the stranger, on whom he turned a questioning and slightly embarrassed countenance, handing him one of the few chairs in the most sparsely furnished of rooms.

"You are welcome, sir," he said simply in a literal rendering of his native Gaelic phrase; "take your breath. And you will have refreshment?"

Count Victor protested no, but his host paid no heed. "It is the custom of the country," said he, making for a cupboard and fumbling among glasses, giving, as by a good host's design, the stranger an opportunity of settling down to his new surroundings. A room ill-furnished as a monk's cell, lit by narrow windows, two of them looking to the sea and one along the coast, though not directly on it, windows sunk deep in massive walls built for a more bickering age than this—Count Victor took all in at a glance, and found revealed to him in a flash the colossal mendacity of all the Camerons, Macgregors, and Macdonalds, who had implied, if they had not deliberately stated, over many games of piquet or lansquenet at Cammercy, the magnificence of the typical Highland stronghold.

The Baron had been reading; at least beside the chair drawn up to a fire of peat that perfumed the apartment lay a book upon a table, and it was characteristic of the Count, who loved books as he loved sport, and Villon above all, that he should strain his eyes a little and tilt his head slightly to see