

releasing as he did so the small sword from the tanglement of his skirts, and feeling the Mechlin deucedly in his way. As he approached closer to the man barring his path he relapsed into a walk and opened a parley in English that except for the slightest of accents had nothing in it of France, where he had long been the comrade of compatriots to this preposterous savage with the manners of mediæval Provence when footpads lived upon Damoiselle Picoree.

"My good fellow," said he airily, as one might open with a lackey, "I protest I am in a hurry, for my presence makes itself much desired elsewhere. I cannot comprehend why in Heaven's name so large a regiment of you should turn out to one unfortunate traveller."

The fat man fondled the brawn of his sword-arm and seemed to gloat upon the situation.

"Come, come!" said Count Victor, affecting a cheerfulness, "my waistcoat would scarcely adorn a man of your inches, and as for my pantaloons"—he looked at the ragged kilt—"as for my pantaloons, now on one's honour, would you care for them? They are so essentially a matter of custom."

He would have bantered on in this strain up to the very nose of the enemy, but the man in his path was utterly unresponsive to his humour. In truth he did not understand a word of the nobleman's pleasantry. He uttered something like a war-cry, threw his bonnet off a head as bald as an egg, and smote out vigorously with his broadsword.

Count Victor fired the pistol *à bout portant* with deliberation; the flint, in the familiar irony of fate, missed fire, and there was nothing more to do with the treacherous weapon but to throw it in the face of the Highlander. It struck full; the trigger-guard gashed the jaw and the metalled butt spoiled the sight of an eye.

"This accounts for the mace in the De Chenier quartering," thought the Count whimsically. "It is