

there, and give you his description, according to which, the brides were "bravely beautiful, and terrible fine."

The merry dance was done. The last scene of that happy drama was enacted—no, not the very last; but the curtain falls, and—now for another chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

"I leave my home and haste to roam  
In yonder bark of pride,  
To lands far o'er the salt sea foam,  
Where foreign nations bide."

—  
RHYMES OF THE GIBBIES.

THE reader will probably remember, although I have but casually adverted to the circumstance, that the Stricklands were not so wealthy as they had been. Yet none knew, nor did they indeed themselves, to what extent they were embarrassed. Their pecuniary difficulties originated in some failure of a mining speculation, in which they were deeply involved. So much so that they began to turn their eyes with hope renewed on Hellbeck Hall, now that things had taken such a turn in Alice Musgrave's favour. To save the family mansion, they resolved to try to raise a sum of money upon the strength of the substitution in their favour, to meet some pressing demand arising out of this ruinous transaction. To this end, the elder Strickland, with his son, a few weeks after the important event recorded in the last chapter, rode over to Appleby, calling at Newby Hall on their way, and taking Charles Moreland with them, to consult their lawyer, Mr. Grassenthwaite, as to the feasibility of the scheme, and the means of accomplishing it.

But before I can possibly enter into a detail of the particulars of this interview, it will be necessary to advert to another.

I will not weary the reader with any minute description of the great sheep-shearing at Forest Hall: nor of the feasting and jubilee to celebrate the restoration of poor Alice Musgrave to her rights, which succeeded, as all, with whom our story is concerned, were not sorry when the last lingering reveller had left the domain. Neither will we tell how the next succeeding night was spent; nor how, in the morning after, Alice could greet her uncle, with her wonted cheerfulness, we must not say, but with a calm and placid smile of resignation to a fate, she knew—she saw, she must submit to. None indeed could tell, for none could ever know, at what a costly sacrifice this seeming triumph o'er her feelings was achieved. It was not, after all, it was *not* real. That smile could not have said: "I did not, unbidden, come to adorn the face, where I was wont in hap-

pier days, to lurk, and hide, and peep, and sparkle forth, when'er I chose." And though her uncle was somewhat pleased to observe this change in her demeanor, he was not satisfied, but still resolved upon his ride; nay he had all but started on the day before, to ascertain the real nature of that accursed will. This was the real object of his ride to Appleby; from a certain delicacy in his peculiar position, on which I need not dwell, to enquire after the prisoner Hudson was his ostensible one.

"Poor Hudson's gone!" were Grassenthwaite's first words, as Mr. Winterton entered his office. "He died last night," he continued; "not, however, until, by a frank and voluntary confession, he had fully exculpated his principal, Mr. Netherby, from all participation and blame in this horrid tragedy. Here it is fairly written out and signed and sealed by himself, before two respectable witnesses."

The document was then put into Mr. Winterton's hands. He carefully read it, and observed when he had done.

"Here is a strange allusion to a codicil to the late Mr. Netherby's will, in which he seems to express remorse for some advice which he had given concerning it. Perhaps I'm trenching on others' privacy, in asking what it means?"

"No, not at all," Mr. Grassenthwaite replied; "far from it; for it concerns yourself, or I am much mistaken, in the paternal interest you evinced the other day, in your fair niece's welfare."

"But what has she to do with it?" the other eagerly enquired.

"You shall see, for here's the instrument ready for your inspection. I knew that you'd be here today, and would have come yesterday, if circumstances had permitted. Nay, save your exclamations of surprise;" Mr. Grassenthwaite continued, in answer to his friend's astonished look; "and know, that I've a strange messenger at command to do my bidding, and indeed far more, sometimes, whose ways are quite inexplicable. He brings me, without my interference in his wayward movements, many little items of more important information, glad as I am to see you, than your visit here today. Doubtless you have heard of him. He's known to all the country round, as Billy Stone, the dast lad, or the fisherman. Free is he as the wind, to come and go when'er he lists; and Hellbeck Hall he generally makes his home—a home no longer now, and the poor creature seems to feel it much—much more than you would think him capable of feeling anything. He knows, however, on which side his bread is buttered, as well as wiser people."

"Why, what has he done?" asked Mr. Win-