

"Step your ways in, Monsher de Montaignon," cried the little man with a salute more profound than before. "We're prood to see you, and hoo are they a' in France?"

"Tolerably well, I thank you," said Count Victor, amused at this grotesque combination of military form and familiarity.

Mungo Boyd set down the stool on which he had apparently been standing to look through the spy-hole in the door, and seized the stranger's mails. With three rapid movements of the feet, executed in the mechanical time of a soldier, he turned to the right-about, paused a second, squared his shoulders, and led the way into a most barren and chilly interior.

"This way, your honour," said he. "Ye'll paurdon my discreetion, for it's a pernikity hoose this for a' the auld, bauld, gallant forms and ceremonies. I jalouse ye cam roond in a wherry frae the toon, and it's droll I never saw ye land. There was never mony got into Doom withoot the kennin' o' the garrison. It happened aince in Black Hugh's time wi' a corps o' Campbells frae Ardkinglas, and they found themselves in a wasp's byke."

The Count stumbled in the dusk of the interior, for the door had shut of itself behind them, and the corridor was unlit except by what it borrowed from an open door at the far end, leading into a room. An odour of burning peats filled the place; the sound of the sea-breakers was to be heard in a murmur as one hears far-off and magic seas in a shell that is held to the ear. And Count Victor, finding all his pleasant anticipations of the character of this baronial dwelling utterly erroneous, mentally condemned Bethune to perdition as he stumbled behind the little grotesque aping the souldier's pompous manner.

The door that lent what illumination there was to his entrance was held half open by a man who cast at the visitor a glance wherein were surprise and curiosity.