

PART XII.
LETTER
III.

*Absence of
human
interest.*

*Soror et
amula
Roma.*

And yet, wonderful as it was, that noble and passionately beloved Highland scenery was wanting in one great element that a writer imperatively needs. In all that natural magnificence humanity held no place. Hidden behind a fir-clad promontory to the north, there still remained, it is true, the grey ruin of old Kilchurn, and far to the south-west, in another reach of the lake, the island-fortress of Ardhonnel. But there was not a visible city with spires and towers, there were only the fir-trees on the little islands and a few gravestones on the largest. Beyond, were the depopulated deserts of Breadalbane.

Here, where I write to you now, it seems as if mankind were nearer, and the legends of the ages written out for me on the surface of the world. Under the shadow of Jove's hill rises before me one of the most ancient of European cities, *soror et amula Roma*. She bears on her walls and edifices the record of sixty generations. Temple, and arch, and pyramid—these bear witness still, and so do her ancient bulwarks, and many a stately tower. High above all, the cathedral spire is drawn dark in the morning mist, and often in the clear summer evenings it comes brightly in slanting sunshine against the steep woods behind. Then the old city arrays herself in the warmest and mellowest tones, and glows as the shadows fall. She reigns over the whole width of her valley to the folds of the far blue hills. Even so ought our life to be surrounded by the loveliness of nature—surrounded, but not subdued.