

MY AUNT PHOEBE'S COTTAGE.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HALLS OF THE NORTH," AND OTHER BORDER LEGENDS.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLOT.

"Then curse him not; perhaps now he,
Stung with remorse, is blessing thee;
Perhaps at death; for who can tell,
Whether the judge of heaven or hell,
By some proud foe, has struck the blow,
And laid the dear deceiver low?"

LADY ANNE BOTHWELL'S LAMENT.

On the edge of the high point of land I have mentioned, as intervening betwixt the two adverse vessels and hiding them from each other's view, stood a lone cottage, of so humble and simple a structure that it could hardly claim a higher designation than that of a hut—a fisherman's hut, and indeed it was nothing more.

It faced, and consequently commanded a full view of the bay on the Southern side of it, while its Northern side looked out upon the wide waste of sands, which formed the deep inlet for the tide, I have so often already referred to.

The only occupant of this cottage, at the time I speak of, was an old crone, the widow of a fisherman. Her husband had come to his end in a very mysterious manner. He had certainly been murdered, for he was found stone dead one dark and stormy night near his own door, with his throat cut from ear to ear, and his wife, his widow now, was thought to have had a hand in the bloody deed, so at least the rumor ran and helped to make her what her simple neighbors thought she was without its aid—"a fearsome woman." They all indeed believed her to be a witch, and many a goodly gift she got from rich and poor.

These offerings were made on the same principle that led to the far more costly and precious sacrifices to Moloch of old, and to the payment of "black mail" by the Sassenach to the wild Highlander in ages less remote, and that principle was fear. All alike were offered, not so much to conciliate favor as to deprecate wrath—not to effect a benefit, but to prevent a misfortune. Hence old Matty Deadenham, such was her name, derived from her simple and superstitious neighbours, ample means for a comfortable subsistence, lest she should cast an

evil eye upon them or theirs. Not but that she had other sources of income, and of no small importance either; and if a more minute account of her life and conduct belonged to our narrative, we could tell how much she made by telling fortunes, and how much more by secreting smugglers and smuggled goods; but it does not, and therefore suffice it to say, as we have said before, that she was a "fearsome woman."

On the stormy evening in which we were crossing the sands, on our return home from our visit to the Millway's Cottage, and a few minutes before the signal light was seen, the quick eye of our sailor guide perceived, in the fitful glances of the moon, a dark speck upon the troubled waters, and, anon, he saw, or thought he did, as it reached the shore, a moving figure, as of a tall and stalwart man, ascending rapidly towards old Matty's cottage. He was not alone—a shorter and a stouter man was by his side, and the two, as afterwards came out on the Coroner's inquest, were engaged in a conversation deeply interesting to one or both of the parties.

When they had got about half way up the hill on which the cottage stood, the latter turned back and rejoined the party in the boat that had brought them to the shore, but ere he did so, the following colloquy ensued.

But before we give it, it will be necessary to premise, that William Armstrong, the tallest of the two personages referred to, as the ingenious reader will have already guessed, had had recourse, on several occasions, to various schemes founded on the well-known constancy of woman's love, to obtain an interview with Bella Millway, his betrothed, all of which had heretofore proved abortive.

"You'll never get her to stir an inch from the house, I know, unless you tell her, and make her believe it too, that some dreadful and fatal misfortune has befallen me. Say that I have been attacked by some fearful disease—the small pox, for instance, or the scarlet fever, or better still, that I have been mortally wounded by a shot from some infamous scoundrel belonging to the preventive service, and that I want to see her before I die."