

A HIGHLAND ANECDOTE.—BY SIR W. SCOTT, BART.

From the Keepsake, for 1832

THE same course of reflection which led me to transmit to you the account of the death of an ancient borderer, induces me to add the particulars of a single incident, affording a point which seems highly qualified to be illustrated by the pencil. It was suggested by the spirited engraving of the Gored Huntsman, which adorned the first number of your work, and perhaps bears too close a resemblance to the character of that print to admit of your choosing it as a subject for another. Of this you are the only competent judge.

The story is an old, but not an ancient one ; the actor and sufferer was not a very aged man, when I heard the anecdote in my early youth. Duncan, for so I shall call him, had been engaged in the affair of 1746, with others of his class, and was supposed by many to have been an accomplice, if not the principle actor in a certain tragic affair, which made much noise a good many years after the rebellion. I am content with indicating this, in order to give some idea of the man's character, which was bold, fierce, and enterprising. Traces of this natural disposition still remained on Duncan's very good features, and in his keen grey eye. But the limbs, like those of the aged borderer in my former tale, had become unable to serve the purposes and obey the dictates of his inclination. On the one side of his body he retained the proportions and firmness of an active mountaineer ; on the other he was a disabled cripple, scarcely able to limp along the streets. The cause which reduced him to this state of infirmity was singular.

Twenty years or more before I knew Duncan, he assisted his brothers in forming a large grazing in the Highlands, comprehending an extensive range of mountain, and forest land, morass, lake and precipice. It chanced that a sheep or goat was missed from the flocks, and Duncan, not satisfied with dispatching his shepherds in one direction, went himself in quest of the fugitive in another.

In the course of his researches, he was induced to ascend a small and narrow path, leading to the top of a high precipice. Dangerous as it was at first, the road became doubly so as he advanced. It was not much more than two feet broad, so rugged and difficult, and at the same time so terrible, that it would have been impracticable to any but the light step and steady brain of a Highlander. The precipice on the right rose like a wall, and on the left sunk to a depth which it was giddy to look down upon : but Duncan passed cheerfully on, now whistling the Gathering of his Clan, now taking heed to his footsteps, when the difficulties of the path required caution.

In this manner he had more than half ascended the precipice, when in midway, and it might almost be said, in middle air, he encountered a buck of the red-deer species, running down the cliff