

MY AUNT PHOEBE'S COTTAGE.

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

CHAPTER I.

THE INTRODUCTION.

Still linger, in our northern clime,
Some remnants of the good old time;
And still within our valleys here,
We hold the kindred title dear.

MARMION.

ON re-visiting my native country last Summer after several years absence, I called, of course, upon what few of my relatives were left alive, an old maiden Aunt about eighty years of age among the number. She lived in a neat little cottage of her own, by the sea shore. She was a hale healthy woman, with a complexion as ruddy and blooming as that of any rustic maiden in her neighbourhood, attributable no doubt, as she said herself, to her long morning walks on the sand, whenever the weather and the tide would permit. When the latter was the obstacle she turned her steps to the hills. She had an old woman, as old and as healthy as herself, to wait upon her and take care of her cow and tend her little garden in front of the cottage. Her bees and fowls and pigeons, and she had a profusion of each, she attended to herself, and they were a source of no small profit to her, without taking into consideration the inestimable value of the amusement they afforded her. Her other means were small, but quite adequate to her wants, and "she was passing rich with forty pounds a year" the exact amount of an annuity which had been left her by her father out of the family estate.

The cottage had been bought partly with her own little savings, the balance being made up out of Janet's wages which had accumulated for so many years that both servant and mistress had long since ceased to count them. At the time I speak of they had both made their wills, Janet bequeathing all her wages to her mistress while the latter had left to Janet, her cottage and garden with all else she might die possessed of.

All Aunt Phoebe's leisure time, and it could not have been much, was occupied in reading, and

that without the aid of spectacles. The light reading of the present day she viewed in the same light as the novels of her youth, and considered it a sin to read it.

"Oh, if I could but write like you," she said to me, one day when I was busily employed in some work of fiction, in which I was engaged at the time, "if I could but write like you, instead of such stuff as that," pointing to the manuscript before me, "I could give you a story ten times more interesting and true besides."

"What would it be about," I said, in no little surprise at the new trait which I supposed I had discovered in Aunt Phoebe's character.

"About!" she replied rather snappishly, as if under the impression that I was disposed to laugh at her literary pretensions; "About! why it would be about this cottage of mine, and the room you're in, aye, and the very chair you are sitting on. I well remember the night when your poor old Aunt, she was not old then though, was providentially saved from a watery grave, and that poor dear suffering angel—no, that's not what I was going to tell you about just now."

"But, dear Aunt," I said, interrupting her as I saw she was beginning to ramble off into an old story I had heard, but without heeding, a hundred times before, if you want to tell me all, begin at the beginning; and give me time to note it down and we'll make a story of it and have it printed."

"Make a story of it?" she said, repeating my words interrogatively, "Why it is made, all put down in writing. It would want, I dare say," she continued after a moment's pause, "a little polishing up and a few connecting links put in to make it read properly, you would have of course to describe this cottage for instance, a principal scene in the story, I've said nothing about it, nor about the box-wood tree, you must mind and put that in too."

"But tell me, Aunt of mine," I said with no small doubts about their very existence, "where are all these memorandums to be found?"

"Just hand me down that box, if you can reach it," she replied, pointing at the same time to a small tin one on the top of the corner cupboard in the room.