

***WILLIAM HENRY
GILES KINGSTON***



***RONALD
MORTON; OR,
THE FIRE
SHIPS***

William Henry Giles Kingston

Ronald Morton; or, the Fire Ships

A Story of the Last Naval War

EAN 8596547337041

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Chapter One.](#)

[Chapter Two.](#)

[Chapter Three.](#)

[Chapter Four.](#)

[Chapter Five.](#)

[Chapter Six.](#)

[Chapter Seven.](#)

[Chapter Eight.](#)

[Chapter Nine.](#)

[Chapter Ten.](#)

[Chapter Eleven.](#)

[Chapter Twelve.](#)

[Chapter Thirteen.](#)

[Chapter Fourteen.](#)

[Chapter Fifteen.](#)

[Chapter Sixteen.](#)

[Chapter Seventeen.](#)

[Chapter Eighteen.](#)

[Chapter Nineteen.](#)

[Chapter Twenty.](#)

[Chapter Twenty One.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Two.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Three.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Four.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Five.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Six.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Seven.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Eight.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Nine.](#)

[Chapter Thirty.](#)

[Chapter Thirty One.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Two.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Three.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Four.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Five.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Six.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Seven.](#)

[Chapter Thirty Eight.](#)

Chapter One.

[Table of Contents](#)

The Spanish Man-of-war off Shetland —A Calm—The “Saint Cecilia” in Danger—The Pilot—Brassay Sound.

“Land! land on the larboard bow!” The cry was uttered in a foreign tongue from the masthead of a corvette of twenty guns, a beautiful long, low, flush-decked craft with dark hull, taunt raking masts, and square yards, which, under all the sails she could carry with a southerly breeze right aft, was gliding rapidly over the now smooth surface of the northern ocean. The haughty flag of old Spain, and the language spoken on board, showed that she belonged to that nation. The crew sat clustered about on the forecastle with their arms folded in a listless, inactive way—some asleep—others smoking cigarillos or playing games of chance between the guns, while a few were disputing on some trivial points with a vehemence which proved the fiery tempers hidden under those calm exteriors. The officers lolled against the bulwarks, sat on the guns, or paced slowly backwards and forwards; but rather more etiquette was kept up on the quarter deck than appeared to be the case among the men forward. The captain walked backwards and forwards with his first lieutenant on the starboard side; they crossed occasionally, and lifted their hands to their eyes to watch the land just sighted as the ship approached and glided by it at the distance of two or three miles. The captain’s

appearance was in his favour. He was tall and graceful, with the clear olive-complexion, the pointed beard, the thin moustache, and the large pensive eyes, so frequently seen in portraits of high-born Spaniards. Still, though his features were handsome and very intelligent, there was an expression in them not altogether satisfactory. His companion was a short, thick-set man, dark and bearded, with a daring look in his countenance and a firmness in his mouth which might raise a suspicion that in cases of emergency he would be likely to take the command in the place of his superior.

“That land out there should be of some interest to us, Alvarez,” said the captain, pointing to the little conical-shaped islets the ship was passing. “It was there, so history tells us, that one of the grandees of Spain, the great Duke of Medina Sidonia, was wrecked when he sailed in command of that mighty Armada which would have assuredly crushed the power of England had it not been so completely baffled by the wonderful opposition of the elements. Many of his crew after being saved from the fury of the tempest were cruelly murdered by the barbarous inhabitants, and he and a small remnant only escaped to the main island of Shetland, whither we are bound.”

“Ah! I have heard say that the people in those parts are little better than cannibals,” answered the lieutenant; “we may as well, at all events, keep our guns run out and double-shotted while we lie here, that we may be prepared for them should they attempt to play us any tricks.”

“Oh! they are tolerably civilised now, I fancy,” answered the captain. “I myself have some Shetland blood in my

veins, so I have been told, though it must be tolerably diluted by this time.”

“You sir! I thought that in your veins flowed none but the purest of Castilian streams,” answered the lieutenant, with a slight sneer in his tone. It was so slight, however, that his captain did not perceive it. “How came that about, Don Hernan?”

“I will tell you,” answered the captain: “an ancestor of mine—in our family tree he appears quite a modern one—commanded one of the ships of the holy Armada. She, like that of the Admiral, was driven north, and ultimately wrecked and totally lost on the land we shall soon make to the northward, called Shetland. He and his crew were kindly treated by the chief of the little island on which they were driven. The crew built a chapel to show their gratitude, and having nearly produced a famine in the district, were conveyed home with honour; while he, to prove his, married the old Udaller’s daughter, and thinking it likely that his head might be chopped off as a sacrifice to assuage the rage of our pious monarch Philip, settled on the island, and did not return home till towards the end of a long life. His son, who accompanied him, having recovered his ancestral estates, remained in Spain; but he, when advanced in years, in consequence of being implicated in some political plot, fled the country, and naturally took refuge in that of his mother, where he was cordially welcomed. He was afterwards joined by his son, who, curiously enough, married a Shetland lady, and thus, even in the days of my father, who was his grandson, a constant communication was kept up with our Norse connections. I, also, have more

than once heard of them since my father's death, and have determined to become more intimately acquainted with my relatives during this northern voyage of ours. But where are we getting to? What with the strong tide, and the favourable breeze, we positively fly by the land. Send for the chart on deck, Alvarez, and let me have a look at its bearings."

The first lieutenant beckoned to a midshipman, who soon returned with a large sea-chart, which the captain spread out on the capstan head.

"Ah! here we have this small rock—Fate Island, I see the natives call it—away to the south-west; and that lofty bluff headland, north by west, now shining so white, as if formed of marble, is Fitfiel Head, or the *White Mountain*, I see by a note—not an unfit name either; and that high point to the south-east again is Sumburgh Head. What bleak and barren hills appear to the northward again! What a dreadful coast to make during the long nights of winter!" The captain shuddered. "Unless we find the interior more attractive, I shall wonder how my ancestors could have had so much partiality for such a country."

"Summer or winter, in stormy weather it is not a coast a seaman would wish to hug too closely," observed Lieutenant Alvarez; "the crews of the ships of our great Armada found that to their cost. However, there appear to be some good roadsteads, where, should bad weather come on, we may be secure."

"Numbers. See what a curious shape has the mainland," observed the captain, pointing to the chart. "It is fully twenty leagues long, and yet there does not appear to be a point where it is more than a league across from sea to sea.

Those voes run up for a league or more, and make it appear like some huge insect. Then what innumerable islands of all shapes and sizes! The people should be amphibious, who live here, to enable them to visit their neighbours: in a southern clime what a delightful spot it might be! but in this hyperborean region, existence must be a penalty.”

“As to that, my fancy is for a southern clime,” answered the lieutenant, who, by-the-by, did not clearly comprehend all his captain’s remarks; “but I suppose as there are some animals, polar bears and arctic foxes, who delight in snow and frost, so there are human beings who are content to live on in this cheerless region.”

“Not a bad notion, Alvarez,” observed the captain, who continued walking the deck, and talking much in the same strain with his officer. The contrast between the two was very considerable. The captain, Don Hernan Escalante, was a refined, highly-educated man. His knowledge on most matters was extensive, if not profound; he spoke several languages, and among them English, with a fluency few Spaniards attain. Few Spaniards indeed of that day were equally accomplished. His first lieutenant, Pedro Alvarez, was every inch a seaman, and like many seamen despised all who were not so. Again the captain stopped before the chart, and placing his finger on it, observed: “Here I hope we may anchor to-night, opposite the capital, Lerwick. See, there is a long wide sound marked with good anchorage, called Brassay Sound, formed by the mainland and the island of Brassay. I wonder what sort of a city is Lerwick! It of course has theatres, hotels, billiard-rooms, and balls;

these northern people are fond of dancing, I have read. We shall have ample amusement with the fair islanders.”

“The dances will be something like those of the North American Indians, I suspect,” answered the lieutenant, who might have thought that his captain was laughing at him, when he talked of such amusements in a country he believed so barbarous.

The corvette had got close in with Sumburgh Head, when her sails gave several loud flaps against the masts, bulged out, then again collapsed, and she speedily lost all steerage way. The head of the vessel, instead of pointing, as heretofore, towards the north, now began slowly to turn round west, and south, and east, and then, as if some secret power had seized her keel, away she was whirled, now to the westward, and then to the north in the direction of the towering heights of Fitfiel Head.

As the ship lay rocking to and fro under this lofty headland, which they at length arrived at, the sea-birds flew forth in myriads from the ledges and caverns, where, for ages past, in storm and sunshine, in winter and summer, they have roosted undisturbed, wheeling and circling with discordant cries round the stranger, as if to inquire why she had thus come to intrude on their domain. The Spanish seamen, accustomed chiefly to southern climes, gazed with superstitious wonder at the frowning cliff and the screeching birds, and fully believed that those winged denizens of the wild sea-coast were evil spirits sent out by the witches of the country to trick and torment them, and perchance to lead them to destruction.

“Shall we anchor, Alvarez?” asked the captain, anxiously looking around seaward, and then at the frowning height above their heads.

“Anchor!” exclaimed the lieutenant, “as well anchor in the middle of the Bay of Biscay as in the Roust of Sumburgh with such a current as this, even if the depth would allow. We might get the boats out and tow, and perchance, by gaining time, obtain a breeze to carry us free.”

“By all means do so,” was the answer. The boats were lowered, and their crews were soon lustily tugging at their oars with the head of the corvette to the westward, while long sweeps were got out and run through the ports to impel her yet more rapidly through the water. Suddenly, however, she seemed to be once more seized upon and carried completely out of their control. Her head was to the westward, but she herself was swept away as fast as before to the southward; while so tumbling and breaking was the sea, that it was not without danger of being swamped that the boats were again hoisted in. The crew cast frowning glances towards the shore.

“What are we to do, Alvarez?” asked the captain, not at all liking the condition of his ship.

“Let her drive backwards and forwards till a breeze springs up, I suppose,” answered the lieutenant. “Should a westerly gale catch us before we again get to the southward of Sumburgh Head, and should we fail to weather some of those ugly-looking points, I doubt much whether Saint Cecilia herself, after whom our pretty craft is called, could prevent every one of us from sharing the fate which has

befallen many a bold seaman before us. However, we'll hope for the best."

"You do not seem to like the prospects of this northern cruise of ours, Alvarez," observed the captain. "You have not been in good humour since we entered the British Channel, and have done nothing but predict disaster."

"Pardon me, captain," answered the lieutenant, "I am not now predicting disaster—though it requires no seer to foretell the fate of the ship, if not of our lives, should certain not unlikely contingencies occur. However, here comes a breeze, I verily believe from the westward too, and if it will but fill our sails for a short half-hour, we may double yon ugly-looking Sumburgh Head, and getting out of the Roust, the tide will carry us along to our anchorage."

The boats being once more lowered, towed the head of the corvette round to the westward, though all the time several hands were bailing to keep them free of the water, which bubbled and tumbled hissing into them over the sides. The breeze which Pedro Alvarez had observed playing on the surface in the distance, at length filled her sails, and stemming the current, she again got into smooth water and the influence of the tide, making to the northward. The wind also drew round to the southward, and all sails being made, the corvette, with her wide spread of canvas, glided on as smoothly and majestically as before, till the island of Mousa, with its Pictie tower, bore west on her larboard beam. A signal was flying for a pilot, and a long, light boat, pulling six oars, was seen coming off from Fladbister, a town—in reality a little fishing village—on the shore. The heads of her crew were visible a long way off, by the bright hues of their long

pendant worsted caps. They wore large sheepskin coats, coming down to the knee over their worsted shirts, and high boots of yellow untanned leather. The corvette was about to shorten sail, but they making signals that that was unnecessary, the boat shot alongside, and two of them sprang on board.

“Those fellows would be unpleasant customers if they came as enemies to attack our ship, from the active way in which they leaped up our sides,” observed the captain. “They would be as difficult to keep out as wild cats.”

One of the two pilots was a man advanced in life, the other was very much younger, and habited in the quaint costume which has been described; his dress, though rough, differed much from the rest, while his easy, unembarrassed manner showed that he was an officer rather than an ordinary seaman. With a brisk step the men came aft, inquiring, as they did so, of the officers if any of them could speak English. They were referred to Don Hernan, who politely returned the salute as they touched their hats to him.

“Well, my men,” said he, “will you take charge of the ship, and bring her to an anchor in Brassay Sound to-night?”

“That will we, captain, right gladly,” answered the younger of the two, glancing aloft with the eye of a seaman. “She is as pretty a craft as any one has ever seen in these waters, and well worth taking care of. What is her name? where are you from? and whither are you bound, captain? Pardon me for asking, but it is my duty so to do. They are the questions we always put in these waters.”

“As to that, of course you are perfectly right,” answered the captain. “Her name is the ‘Saint Cecilia,’ her commander Don Hernan de Escalante, and she carries, as you see, twenty guns. We sailed from Cadiz, and have touched at two or three French ports, and the British port of Plymouth; after visiting Lerwick, we are bound round the north of your island, into the Atlantic again. You see that we have nothing to conceal. The character of this ship is above all suspicion; and you will find, my friend, that you have lost nothing by navigating her in safety wherever we may wish to go.”

“Very likely, captain,” answered the pilot, looking up into the captain’s countenance. “I entertain no doubt about the matter, and if the provost and bailies of Lerwick are satisfied, I am sure that I shall be: keep her as she goes now for the Bard of Brassay. The tide will shoot her into the sound rapidly enough as we draw near it.”

When in a short time the corvette was off the Bard or Beard of Brassay, as the ragged-looking southern end of that island is called, a turn of the helm to starboard sent the vessel into the Sound, and up she flew with smooth green heights on either side, here and there a few white buildings showing, and numerous rocks visible, till the pilot warned the captain that it was time to shorten sail. At a word the sailors were seen swarming aloft; studding-sails came in as if by magic, royals and top-gallant sails were handed, topsails clewed up, and with her taunt tapering masts and square yards alone, surrounded by the intricate tracery of their rigging, the beautiful fabric glided up to an anchorage off the town of Lerwick.

“Friend, you brought the ship to an anchor in true seamanlike style,” said Captain Don Hernan, touching the young pilot on the shoulder. “You have not been a simple pilot all your life.”

“No, indeed, captain,” answered the pilot, “I have been afloat since my earliest days in southern seas, as well as engaged in the Greenland fishery. Lately I have been mate of a whaler, and maybe my next voyage I shall have charge of a ship as master. You have hit the right nail on the head—this is the first summer that I ever spent on shore.”

“Can I trust you, then, to take charge of the ship round the coast?” asked the captain. “Perhaps, however, you are not well acquainted with that?”

The pilot smiled. “There is not a point or headland, a rock, or shoal, or island, which I have not as clearly mapped down in my memory, as are the hues on yonder chart, and more correctly, too, I doubt not.”

“That will do—I will trust you,” said Don Hernan. “What is your name, friend, that I may send for you when you are wanted?”

“Rolf Morton,” was the answer; “but my home is some way to the northward, on the island of Whalsey. There you have it on your chart. Those who live on it boast that it is the finest of the outlying islands; and well I know that such a castle as we have is not to be found in all Shetland.”

“Ah, it is your native place,” observed the captain. “You therefore think so highly of it.”

“Not exactly, though I remember no other spot of earth before I put eyes on Whalsey. I was, so I have been told, picked up, when a child, from a wreck at sea; and the men I

was with called me Rolf Morton, the name which has stuck to me for want of a better. I know nothing more of my history; but I am prating of myself, and shall weary you, captain."

"Far from it, friend; I delight in a little romance," answered the captain. "How comes it, though, that you remained on shore this summer?—but I need not ask—one of your fair islanders, of whom I have heard so much, was your attraction."

"Yes, in truth," said the pilot, laughing; "she has become my wife, though; and as I could not bring myself to quit her, I bethought me I would try to gain my livelihood by turning pilot. Yours is one of the first ships I have taken charge of. There—I have been frank with you, captain, and told you all my history from beginning to end."

"And I thank you for it. I saw at a glance that you were above the ordinary style of a pilot. I wanted to find a man like yourself, who would give me the information I require about the country, the habits and customs of the people. I would wish to win their regard. But you have, I suppose, few good families here?"

Don Hernan well knew that the islander's pride would tempt him to launch out in a full description of all the families of consequence in the group, and that he should thus easily obtain, without apparently seeking for it, all the information of that description which he required.

Morton unsuspectingly answered exactly in the tone for which he was prepared.

"Indeed, captain, you are out of your latitude. We have the Edmonstones of Unst, and the Lord Dundas, and the

Mouats, and the Ogilvys, and Scott of Scalloway, and Braces of Sandwick, and also of Symbister; and Spences, and Duncans, and the Nicolson family; baronets of old date, all honourable men, and of ancient lineage; besides many others I have not named, standing equally well in the estimation of the country; and then there is the Lunnasting family of Lunnasting Castle, of which I spoke to you. The owner is Sir Marcus Wardhill, who succeeded to his property by right of his wife, the Lady Margaret Brindister; one of the most ancient of our Shetland families, descended, so it is said, from one of the former chiefs, the Udallers of old. They are very great and important people, at all events when in their own castle, and of course have little communication with a man of my humble rank. Maybe I hear more of them than do others, because my wife's mother was for long the companion of the Lady Margaret, and the nurse to her children. I believe she loved them as her own. Indeed, although but called a nurse in the family, she is nearly akin to the Lady Margaret. But these are matters about which a stranger can have no interest."

"A stranger might not, but I must not be considered in that light," answered the captain. "Strange as it may appear to you, I am connected with that very family of which you are speaking. An ancestress of mine was a Brindister. I must claim relationship with the occupants of Lunnasting. It will, in truth, be pleasant in this remote region to find friends so nearly related to me."

The reserve which the pilot had hitherto maintained seemed to vanish on hearing the assertion made by Don Hernan.

“I have no doubt, captain, that they would have given you a warm northern welcome,” he answered. “But Sir Marcus Wardhill himself, and his second daughter, are in the south, travelling, I have heard, among French and Germans, and it is said that they purpose remaining some time in the big city of London, a place among all my wanderings I have never seen.”

“The Lady Margaret, of whom you speak, and her elder daughter are there, I hope; or is the castle shut up?” asked Don Hernan.

“The Lady Margaret, as we called her, Lady Wardhill, is dead, but her elder daughter, Miss Hilda Wardhill, lives at Lunnasting, and manages the Shetland estates, they say as well as any man would do.”

“Ho, ho! I should like to become acquainted with this talented cousin of mine,” said Don Hernan. “Is she handsome as well as clever?”

Thus appealed to, Morton replied with even more hesitation than before. “As to an eye for the look of a ship aloft, or for her build or trim, I’ll yield to no man; and maybe I like the faces of some women more than others. This I’ll say, sir; it’s my belief that there are not many in this world like the Lady Hilda.”

“You have probably heard of the Spanish connection of the family.”

“Yes, once or twice, maybe,” answered Morton; “my wife’s mother often speaks of them. In her father’s time they constantly corresponded, and exchanged presents—Shetland shawls and stockings for Spanish silks and

brocades. It was said that, during his travels, Sir Marcus thought of visiting his connections in Spain.”

After some further conversation, the captain observed, “I would pay my respects to the governor or authorities of the town. As you have proved so good a pilot afloat, you shall accompany me as my guide on shore.”

Chapter Two.

[Table of Contents](#)

Lunnasting Castle—The Stranger Ship—Sandy Redland, The Factor—Archy Eagleshay—Miss Wardhill’s Visitors—The Disappearance of the Heir.

Lunnasting Castle stood on a high rocky promontory, washed by the ocean on the south and east, and by a voe which ran up some way inland on the west. It was a somewhat extensive building; but though of a castellated style of architecture it was not really a fortress further than the naturally inaccessible nature of the ground on which it stood made it so. It stood on the site, and was formed partly of such materials as time had left of an old castle of the earls or ancient Udal lords of Shetland, and had been very much increased in size, and ornamented, as well as rendered a more commodious habitation by the present owner, Sir Marcus Wardhill. The dwelling-house consisted but of two stories, and standing, as it did, elevated some way above the sea, looked lower than it really was. It was surrounded on the north, east, and west, by a high

castellated wall, flanked with towers, which, if not capable of keeping out a mortal enemy, served the purpose for which it was built,—to guard the mansion from the assaults of the wintry blasts of the icy ocean. In front, on the south side, that the inhabitants might enjoy the sea view, and that the warm rays of the sun might be admitted, the wall sunk down to the height of a mere ornamental parapet, the round towers at either end giving it some right to claim the title bestowed on it; especially as on the summit of either tower Sir Marcus had mounted a couple of long six-pounders, capable of considerably annoying any hostile vessel of a size at all likely to venture near that part of a coast so full of dangers that no large ship would willingly approach it. The muzzles of some smaller guns appeared through the embrasure of the parapet wall, which was also flanked by a buttress, or rather a circular outwork at either end at the foot of the towers, where pivot guns were placed, so that the one on the west could fire directly up the voe or gulf, and served to flank the western wall. The two principal front towers were connected with the dwelling-house, and had small chambers in them, one above the other, which had been fitted up as sitting-rooms or dormitories.

In a deep window recess, in the highest chamber of the western tower of Lunnasting Castle, sat Miss Wardhill, Sir Marcus Wardhill's eldest child. Although the window matched in appearance the others in that and the opposite tower, which were mere high, narrow, glazed loop-holes, by an ingenious contrivance a huge stone was made to turn on an iron axle, and by pressing a spring, it slid in sufficiently to

allow the inmate of the room to gaze out conveniently on the surrounding scene.

Few scenes, to a romantic temperament, could have been more attractive. The subdued twilight of that northern clime reigned over the face of nature, softening and mellowing all objects, but in no way obscuring them. The light was not so bright as that of the day, and yet it partook in no way of the characteristics of night. It was more like the warm light of the dawn of a summer day in the south, just before the sun rises up from below the horizon in refulgent glory. The water near the land was perfectly smooth, though a breeze could be seen rippling the surface in the offing, the ripple being increased probably by the strong current which nearly at all times sets one way or the other round the islands.

Before the castle, on the right, rose the rocky heights and green swelling undulations of the mainland—the Noup of Nesting Kirkbuster, Brough and Moul of Eswick, while the highlands above Lerwick, and the heights of Brassy and Noss, appeared blue and indistinct in the far distance.

To the east, several green islands, or rather islets, known as Grief Skerries, Rumble, Eastling, and other equally euphonious names, ran out of the dark-blue ocean. The last-named being a mile and a half in length, formed with the main island, along the shore of which it ran parallel, and from which it was little more than a quarter of a mile distant, a sound of some extent, where vessels in all but north-easterly winds could ride safely at anchor. Even in these winds the force of the sea was considerably broken by

the small island or holm of Isbuster, which lay in the very centre of the northern entrance.

Looking eastward, and north from the towers of Lunnasting, the view extended nearly up the Sound, and commanded the whole island of Eastling, which perhaps obtained its name from lying east of the chief habitation of the lords of the domain, Eastling being a corruption of Eastlying. Such was the view on which Hilda Wardhill was occasionally turning her gaze, though her eyes were more frequently fixed on the pages of a large volume lying open on a dark oak reading desk fixed in the recess, and so placed that the last rays of that precious sunlight which so soon departs in the long winter season of the North, might fall full upon it. The room was of an octagon shape, with dark oak wainscoting and ceiling; the chairs were of a suitable character, mostly with high upright backs, rudely carved, as were some book-shelves, which occupied two of the sides, while a massive table, supported by sea monsters, or at all events by creatures of fish-like form, stood in the centre; another table of similar character stood against the side of the room with writing materials on it, and there was a sofa of antique form, and two large chests of some dark wood, with brass clasps and plates on the lids and sides, so tarnished however by the sea air, as scarcely to be discerned as brass. A second high narrow window, with a lattice, faced towards the west and north, so that persons standing at it could, by leaning forward, look completely up the voe. Thus, from this turret chamber, a view could be obtained on every side, except on that looking inland, or rather over the island.

On one of the eight sides there was, however, a small door in the panelling, which opened on a spiral staircase leading to the very summit of the tower, where, as has been said, a gun was placed, and whence a complete view was obtained over every portion of the island, extending far away over the sea beyond, to the Out Skerries, a rocky group so called; and the distant shores of the large island of Yell. As the roof could only be reached by passing through the chamber below, it was completely private to the fair occupant as long as she chose to close the ingress to her own room.

Seldom has a more beautiful picture been portrayed to the mind's eye of the most imaginative of painters, than that which Hilda Wardhill presented as she sat at the window of her turret chamber, either leaning over the volume which occupied her attention, or gazing out on the calm ocean, her thoughts evidently still engaged in the subject of her studies.

At length she rose, and was about to close the window, when her eye fell on a vast towering mass of white, gliding slowly from the northward down Eastling Sound. She looked more than once, mistrusting her senses, and inclined to believe that it was some phantom of the deep, described in wild romances, often her study, which she beheld, till another glance assured her, as the object drew nearer that it was a large ship far larger than had ever been known during her recollection to anchor in the Sound. With speed which seemed like magic, the white canvas disappeared, and the tall masts and the yards and the light tracery of the rigging could only dimly be traced against the clear sky.

Whence the stranger had come, or for what object, Hilda could not tell, but still she had a feeling—how communicated she did not inquire—that the event portended some great change in her own fate. Painful forebodings of evil came crowding like mocking phantoms around her. She tried with the exercise of her own strong will to banish them. In vain she strove—the more they seemed to mock her power. She felt as if she could almost have shrieked out in the agony of her mortal struggle, till her proud spirit quailed and trembled with unwonted fears. Again the clock tolled forth a solitary sound, which vibrated strangely on her overwrought nerves, and seemed more sonorous than usual. She pressed her hand upon her brow, then by an effort she seemed by a single gasp to recover herself, and, closing the window, retired to her sleeping chamber in that part of the house in the immediate neighbourhood of her favourite tower.

At an early hour the lady of the castle was on foot. She at once ascended to the summit of her tower, and gazed eagerly up the Sound, half expecting to find that she had been deceived by her imagination on the previous night, and that the ship she had seen was but a creation of the brain. There, however, floated the beautiful fabric, but there was not the slightest movement or sign of life on board. At all events, it seemed improbable that she would soon move from her present position. At length she descended to her boudoir below, where, as usual, her light and frugal meal was brought to her by her own attendant, Nanny Clousta.

Her meal, at which Nanny stood ready to help her to anything she required, being quickly concluded, Miss

Wardhill descended to the large hall on the ground-floor, in the centre of the castle. It was a handsome room, with an arched ceiling of dark oak, supported by pillars round the wall. A long table ran down the centre, at one end of which, on a raised platform or daïs, she took her seat. Several tenants of the Lunnasting estate came in to make complaints, to beg for the redress of grievances, to report on the state of the farms, or fisheries, or kelp-collecting; to all of which the lady listened with the most perfect attention, making notes in a book placed before her. Two or three were told to wait till she had seen the factor, that she might hear his reports before deciding on their claims. She looked round as if the audience was over; and inquired why Alexander, or Sandy Redland, as he was called, the factor, did not make his appearance, when an old man, leaning on a stick, hobbled into the hall.

“I come for justice, my lady. Oh, hear me, hear me!” he exclaimed; as if before entering the hall he had worked himself up to address her; “I am just auld Archy Eagleshay, and as ye ken weel, my leddie, my only son has long gane been awa to sea, and I’ve been left to struggle on fra ane year to another, till now that I am grown too weak to toil, and the factor, Sandy Redland, comes down upon me, and makes awfu’ threats to distrain and turn me out of my sma’ holding if I dinna pay; and pay I canna’, that is truth, my leddie. Have mercy, have pity, my leddie. Ye love justice whatever else ye love.”

“Justice might induce me to expel you from your holding, if you cannot pay your rent, old man,” said Miss Wardhill, in a cold severe tone. “However I will listen to what Sandy

Redland, the factor, has to say. Ha! here he comes. You are late Mr Redland, in your attendance. What has kept you?"

The man who entered was a tall, thin person, habited in the grey shepherd's plaid of the north. His features were coarse. He possessed a sharp nose, high cheek bones, and small and grey unpleasantly twinkling eyes. He bowed low, and in a voice which was intended to be soft and insinuating, replied—

"It is no fault o' mine when your orders are na implicitly obeyed, Miss Wardhill; but circumstances militate against the best intentions, as may be clear to you oftentimes, I doubt not. I was delayed by having to make inquiries respecting a strange ship, which anchored, it appears, a few hours back, in the Sound of Eastling, and which, as I opine, is within your leddyship's jurisdiction, I deemed it incumbent on me to ascertain the object of her coming, and the time it might be proposed for her to stay. As she is a foreigner, it struck me that charge might be made for harbour and light dues, and the chances are that it would not be disputed. Ye see, Miss Wardhill, that I have always your honoured father's interests at heart."

The lady gave a glance towards the factor, which bespoke the most perfect contempt—too cold and confirmed to cause much change in her features.

"And what have you learned respecting this stranger ship?" she asked.

"Nathing, my leddie, nathing," answered Sandy, shuddering. "What could I tell but that she might be a pirate or an enemy in disguise, or some ill-doer, and that if I, the factor of Lunnasting, was entrapped on board, I might be

retained as a hostage in durance vile, till sic times as a heavy sum might be collected for my ransom.”

A gleam flitted across Miss Wardhill’s countenance, as she replied: “You estimate yourself somewhat highly, factor. Then, in truth, you know nothing of the ship which has anchored in the Sound?”

“Nathing whatever, my leddie,” was the answer. “But I await the return of Jock Busta’s boat which I despatched as soon as I reached Whalsey this morning from the mainland.”

“Bring me the information as soon as you obtain it,” said Miss Wardhill. “In the meantime let me hear what answer you have to make to a complaint old Archy Eagleshay brings against you.”

The factor gave a variety of reasons for his conduct, to which she listened without replying, and then called up the old man to her end of the table.

“Go home Archy Eagleshay,” she said, in a voice totally different to that in which she had spoken to the factor. “Best quiet in your hut. The old and infirm must be sheltered and fed; of that there is no doubt; but let the evil-doer and idle beware. On them I shall have no mercy. Sandy Redland, mark me: I will have no cruelty or oppression—remember that. The instant you receive information respecting the strange ship, let me know through Nanny Clousta.”

There was a cowed look on the countenance of Sandy Redland as he bowed, while his young mistress rose to retire.

Old Archy lifted up his hands, as if about to address her once more, then he turned slowly round. “Ha, ha!” he muttered; “if she had yielded to you, cruel factor, I’d have

told her all I know, and made e'en her proud spirit tremble; but she's been good and kind to an auld man, and I'll say nothing."

On leaving the hall, Hilda Wardhill went at once to the turret chamber, and from thence mounted to the platform on the summit of the tower. Her first glance was up the Sound, where lay the stranger ship. The sails were still closely furled; the boats were hoisted up; not a movement of any sort appeared to be taking place. The only object stirring was a small boat, which just then was gliding rapidly close under the headland on which the castle stood. A single rower sat in it, who managed his oars with the skill which long practice gives. He looked up, and seeing Miss Wardhill, flourished his oar as a salute, which she returned with the slightest possible inclination of her head, and then continued pacing up and down, while he pursued his course till he entered the voe, and reached the castle landing-place, where he was hid from view. Miss Wardhill continued her circumscribed walk backwards and forwards across the top of the tower, now stopping to look up the Sound at the ship, now casting her glance round the horizon, speaking frequently to herself, and more than once sighing deeply, as if there was some weight at her heart of which she longed to be relieved.

She had again stopped, and was looking at the beautiful ship in the distance, when she started on hearing herself addressed—

"Good morrow, cousin Hilda," said the intruder, who had that instant come up from the room below. "Engaged, as I expected, or you would not be a woman, gazing with

curiosity at the strange ship in the Sound, wondering whence she came, and all about her.”

She turned as he spoke, when he lifted a little gold-laced, three-cornered hat from his head, and saluted her with a profound bow, which might have appeared respectful in the extreme, had he not at the same time indulged in a low chuckling laugh, the usual conclusion, it seemed, of most of his sentences. His manner and appearance were peculiar in the extreme: he was broad and large boned, but thin; and a suit of brown cloth, with huge silver buttons, hung loosely about his body; a wide shirt-frill stuck out in front, and his shirt collars reached up to his ears. His gait was shuffling and shambling; he wore knee-breeches and grey homespun stockings, and his shoes, which were ornamented with silver buckles, were far too large for him, and of course, even had he not had the propensity to do so, would have made him shuffle his feet over the ground, his eyes were unusually large, grey, and staring; and his hair, which was already so grey that its original colour could scarcely be perceived, was cut short, and stood up on end, all over his head like the quills of the porcupine; his forehead was somewhat narrow, but his features were neither plain nor coarse; there was, however, a startled, frightened look about them, and an otherwise painful and indescribable expression, which told too plainly that the ruling power of the intellect had been overthrown, and that the living machine could no longer be altogether held responsible for its acts. Such, in appearance, was Lawrence Brindister: had he been of sane mind, he would have been the lord of Lunnasting and the broad acres of several estates, both on the mainland of Shetland and in

the north of Scotland; but as he had, long before coming of age, given undoubted signs of being totally incapable of managing his affairs, his claims had been set aside in favour of his cousin, Margaret Brindister, the next heir, married to Sir Marcus Wardhill. There had been, when Sir Marcus married, three other heirs besides Lawrence, before Margaret Brindister could succeed to the property: the same fever within a few days carried off two of them; and then, and perhaps not till then, a longing desire seized Sir Marcus to obtain the estates. The possessor was an old man—a bachelor. Sir Marcus was not a man—that was well known—who allowed obstacles to stand in his way; in the most unaccountable manner, the next heir, a boy, disappeared: he was supposed, with his nurse, to have fallen over a cliff, or to have been on the beach when a sea came in and swept them both away—either occurrences too likely to happen to allow suspicion justly to rest on any one. A handkerchief of the nurse's, and a plaything of the child's, were found dropped on the road they had taken. Their bodies were searched for in every direction in vain; the old man mourned for the child, of whom he was very fond, and died shortly after. Sir Marcus, too, mourned for the loss of his young kinsman, but instantly commenced a suit which terminated by making poor Lawrence Brindister his ward. There were certain conditions attached, that Lunnasting should be his abode, and that he should be kindly treated and well looked after, and supplied with anything he might in reason require for his amusement: Lawrence himself, so far from opposing, seemed perfectly contented with the arrangement; and while Lady Wardhill, to whom he was