

THIRD BOOK.

Chapter XXII. Retrospect.

The autumn holiday-time had come to an end; and the tourists had left Scotland to the Scots.

In the dull season, a solitary traveler from the North arrived at the nearest post-town to Mount Morven. A sketchbook and a color-box formed part of his luggage, and declared him to be an artist. Falling into talk over his dinner with the waiter at the hotel, he made inquiries about a picturesque house in the neighborhood, which showed that Mount Morven was well known to him by reputation. When he proposed paying a visit to the old border fortress the next day, the waiter said: "You can't see the house." When the traveler asked Why, this man of few words merely added: "Shut up."

The landlord made his appearance with a bottle of wine and proved to be a more communicative person in his relations with strangers. Presented in an abridged form, and in the English language, these (as he related them) were the circumstances under which Mount Morven had been closed to the public.

A complete dispersion of the family had taken place not long since. For miles round everybody was sorry for it. Rich and poor alike felt the same sympathy with the good lady of the house. She had been most shamefully treated by her husband, and by a good-for-nothing girl employed as governess. To put it plainly, the two had run away together; one report said they had gone abroad, and another declared that they were living in London. Mr. Linley's conduct was perfectly incomprehensible. He had always borne the highest character--a good landlord, a kind father, a devoted husband. And yet, after more than eight years of exemplary married life, he had disgraced himself. The minister of the parish, preaching on the subject, had attributed this extraordinary outbreak of vice on the part of an otherwise virtuous man, to a possession of the devil. Assuming "the devil," in this case, to be only a discreet and clerical way of alluding from the pulpit to a woman, the landlord was inclined to agree with the minister. After what had happened, it was, of course, impossible that Mrs. Linley could remain in her

husband's house. She and her little girl, and her mother, were supposed to be living in retirement. They kept the place of their retreat a secret from everybody but Mrs. Linley's legal adviser, who was instructed to forward letters. But one other member of the family remained to be accounted for. This was Mr. Linley's younger brother, known at present to be traveling on the Continent. Two trustworthy old servants had been left in charge at Mount Morven--and there was the whole story; and that was why the house was shut up.