

fantastically crossed and re-crossed in every direction by scalloped fringes, and fretted into a species of open work, at least intended to represent alternate rows of roses and tulips. A plate containing a little salt was placed over the breast of the corpse. As we entered one of the women rose, and, filling two glasses with spirits, presented them to us on a salver. We tasted the liquor, and sat down on chairs placed for us beside the fire. The conversation, which had been interrupted by our entrance, began to flow apace; and an elderly female, who had lived under the same roof with the deceased, began to relate, in answer to the queries of one of the others, some of the particulars of her last illness and death.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF ELSPAT M'CULLOCH.

“ELSPAT was aye,” she said, “a retired body, wi’ a cast o’ decent pride aboot her; an’, though bare and puirly aff sometimes in her auld days, she had never been chargeable to onybody. She had come o’ decent, ’sponsible people, though they were a’ low enough the day; ay, an’ they were God-fearing people too, wha had gien plenty in their time, an’ had aye plenty to gie. An’ though they had been a’ langsyne laid in the kirkyard, — a’ except hersel’, puir body, — she wouldna disgrace their gude name, she said, by takin’ an alms frae ony ane. Her sma means fell oot o’ her hands afore her last illness. Little had aye dune her turn, but the little failed at last; an’ sair thocht