

CHAPTER VIII.

O, thou, my elder brother in misfortune! —
By far my elder brother in the muses, —
With tears I pity thy unhappy fate!

BURNS.

THE asylum in which my unfortunate friend was confined — at this time the only one in Edinburgh — was situated in an angle of the city wall. It was a dismal-looking mansion, shut in on every side by the neighboring houses from the view of the surrounding country, and so effectually covered up from the nearer street by a large building in front that it seemed possible enough to pass a lifetime in Edinburgh without coming to the knowledge of its existence. I shuddered as I looked up to its blackened walls, thinly sprinkled with miserable-looking windows barred with iron, and thought of it as a sort of burial-place of dead minds. But it was a Golgotha which, with more than the horrors of the grave, had neither its rest nor its silence. I was startled, as I entered the cell of the hapless poet, by a shout of laughter from a neighboring room, which was answered from a dark recess behind me by a fearfully-prolonged shriek and the clanking of chains. The mother and sister of Ferguson were sitting beside his pallet, on a sort of stone settle, which stood out from the wall; and the poet himself — weak and exhausted and worn to a shadow, but apparently in his right mind — lay extended on the straw. He made an attempt to rise as I entered;