

the *true* Highlands, which I had never before seen, save on the distant horizon; and, to a boy who had to walk all the way, even thirty miles, in an age when railways were not, and ere even mail gigs had penetrated so far, represented a journey of no inconsiderable distance. My mother, though rather a delicate-looking woman, walked remarkable well; and early on the evening of the second day, we reached together my aunt's cottage, in the ancient Barony of Gruids. It was a low, long, dingy edifice of turf, four or five rooms in length, but only one in height, that, lying along a gentle acclivity, somewhat resembled at a distance a huge black snail creeping up the bill. As the lower apartment was occupied by my uncle's half-dozen milk-cows, the declination of the floor, consequent on the nature of the site, proved of signal importance, from the free drainage which it secured; the second apartment, reckoning upwards, which was of considerable size, formed the sitting-room of the family, and had, in the old Highland style, its fire full in the middle of the floor, without back or sides; so that, like a bonfire kindled in the open air, all the inmates could sit around it in a wide circle,—the women invariably ranged on the one side, and the men on the other; the apartment beyond was partitioned into small and very dark bed-rooms: while, further on still, there was a closet with a little window in it, which was assigned to my mother and me; and beyond all lay what was emphatically "the room," as it was built of stone, and had both window and chimney, with chairs, and table, and chest of drawers, a large box-bed, and a small but well-filled bookcase. And "the room" was, of course, for the time, my cousin the merchant's apartment, his dormitory at night, and the hospitable refectory in which he entertained his friends by day.

My aunt's family was one of solid worth. Her husband,—a compactly-built, stout-limbed, elderly Highlander, rather below the middle size, of grave and somewhat melancholy aspect, but in reality of a temperament rather cheerful than otherwise,—had been somewhat wild in his young days. He had been a good shot and a skilful angler, and had danced at bridals,