

CHAPTER XVI.

“Let not this weak, unknowing hand,
Presume thy bolts to throw.”

POPE.

THE great fires of the Parliament Close and the High Street were events of this winter. A countryman, who had left town when the old spire of the Tron Church was blazing like a torch, and the large group of buildings nearly opposite the Cross still enveloped in flame from ground-floor to roof-tree, passed our work-shed, a little after two o'clock, and, telling us what he had seen, remarked that, if the conflagration went on as it was doing, we would have, as our next season's employment, the Old Town of Edinburgh to rebuild. And as the evening closed over our labors, we went in to town in a body, to see the fires that promised to do so much for us. The spire had burnt out, and we could but catch between us and the darkened sky, the square abrupt outline of the masonry atop that had supported the wooden broach, whence, only a few hours before, Fergusson's bell had descended in a molten shower. The flames, too, in the upper group of buildings were restricted to the lower stories, and flared fitfully on the tall forms and bright swords of the dragoons, drawn from the neighboring barracks, as they rode up and down the middle space; or gleamed athwart the street on groupes of wretched-looking women and ruffian men, who seemed scanning with