

Stories of the Border Marches eBook

Stories of the Border Marches by John Lang (writer)

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Stories of the Border Marches eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	9
Page 1.....	10
Page 2.....	11
Page 3.....	12
Page 4.....	13
Page 5.....	15
Page 6.....	16
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	19
Page 10.....	20
Page 11.....	22
Page 12.....	24
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	27
Page 15.....	28
Page 16.....	29
Page 17.....	30
Page 18.....	31
Page 19.....	32
Page 20.....	33
Page 21.....	34
Page 22.....	36



[Page 23..... 37](#)

[Page 24..... 38](#)

[Page 25..... 40](#)

[Page 26..... 42](#)

[Page 27..... 43](#)

[Page 28..... 44](#)

[Page 29..... 45](#)

[Page 30..... 46](#)

[Page 31..... 47](#)

[Page 32..... 48](#)

[Page 33..... 49](#)

[Page 34..... 50](#)

[Page 35..... 52](#)

[Page 36..... 54](#)

[Page 37..... 56](#)

[Page 38..... 58](#)

[Page 39..... 60](#)

[Page 40..... 61](#)

[Page 41..... 63](#)

[Page 42..... 64](#)

[Page 43..... 65](#)

[Page 44..... 66](#)

[Page 45..... 67](#)

[Page 46..... 68](#)

[Page 47..... 69](#)

[Page 48..... 70](#)



[Page 49..... 71](#)

[Page 50..... 72](#)

[Page 51..... 74](#)

[Page 52..... 76](#)

[Page 53..... 78](#)

[Page 54..... 80](#)

[Page 55..... 82](#)

[Page 56..... 84](#)

[Page 57..... 85](#)

[Page 58..... 86](#)

[Page 59..... 87](#)

[Page 60..... 88](#)

[Page 61..... 90](#)

[Page 62..... 91](#)

[Page 63..... 92](#)

[Page 64..... 93](#)

[Page 65..... 95](#)

[Page 66..... 97](#)

[Page 67..... 98](#)

[Page 68..... 100](#)

[Page 69..... 101](#)

[Page 70..... 102](#)

[Page 71..... 103](#)

[Page 72..... 105](#)

[Page 73..... 107](#)

[Page 74..... 109](#)



[Page 75..... 110](#)

[Page 76..... 112](#)

[Page 77..... 113](#)

[Page 78..... 114](#)

[Page 79..... 115](#)

[Page 80..... 116](#)

[Page 81..... 117](#)

[Page 82..... 118](#)

[Page 83..... 119](#)

[Page 84..... 120](#)

[Page 85..... 121](#)

[Page 86..... 122](#)

[Page 87..... 124](#)

[Page 88..... 125](#)

[Page 89..... 126](#)

[Page 90..... 128](#)

[Page 91..... 129](#)

[Page 92..... 131](#)

[Page 93..... 132](#)

[Page 94..... 133](#)

[Page 95..... 134](#)

[Page 96..... 135](#)

[Page 97..... 136](#)

[Page 98..... 137](#)

[Page 99..... 138](#)

[Page 100..... 139](#)



[Page 101..... 140](#)

[Page 102..... 142](#)

[Page 103..... 143](#)

[Page 104..... 144](#)

[Page 105..... 145](#)

[Page 106..... 146](#)

[Page 107..... 147](#)

[Page 108..... 149](#)

[Page 109..... 151](#)

[Page 110..... 152](#)

[Page 111..... 153](#)

[Page 112..... 155](#)

[Page 113..... 157](#)

[Page 114..... 159](#)

[Page 115..... 161](#)

[Page 116..... 163](#)

[Page 117..... 165](#)

[Page 118..... 166](#)

[Page 119..... 168](#)

[Page 120..... 169](#)

[Page 121..... 170](#)

[Page 122..... 171](#)

[Page 123..... 172](#)

[Page 124..... 174](#)

[Page 125..... 175](#)

[Page 126..... 176](#)



[Page 127..... 178](#)

[Page 128..... 180](#)

[Page 129..... 182](#)

[Page 130..... 183](#)

[Page 131..... 184](#)

[Page 132..... 185](#)

[Page 133..... 186](#)

[Page 134..... 187](#)

[Page 135..... 188](#)

[Page 136..... 189](#)

[Page 137..... 190](#)

[Page 138..... 191](#)

[Page 139..... 193](#)

[Page 140..... 194](#)

[Page 141..... 196](#)

[Page 142..... 198](#)

[Page 143..... 200](#)

[Page 144..... 201](#)

[Page 145..... 202](#)

[Page 146..... 204](#)

[Page 147..... 205](#)

[Page 148..... 206](#)

[Page 149..... 207](#)

[Page 150..... 208](#)

[Page 151..... 209](#)

[Page 152..... 210](#)



[Page 153..... 212](#)

[Page 154..... 213](#)

[Page 155..... 215](#)

[Page 156..... 216](#)

[Page 157..... 217](#)

[Page 158..... 218](#)

[Page 159..... 219](#)

[Page 160..... 220](#)

[Page 161..... 221](#)

[Page 162..... 222](#)

[Page 163..... 224](#)

[Page 164..... 225](#)

[Page 165..... 226](#)



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
THE WHITE LADY OF BLENKINSOPP		1
DICKY OF KINGSWOOD		8
STORM AND TEMPEST		13
GRISELL HOME, A SEVENTEENTH- CENTURY HEROINE		21
KINMONT WILLIE		31
IN THE DAYS OF THE '15		38
SEWINGSHIELDS CASTLE, AND THE SUNKEN TREASURE OF BROOMLEE LOUGH		50
THE KIDNAPPING OF LORD DURIE		53
THE WRAITH OF PATRICK KERR		61
THE LAIDLEY WORM OF SPINDLESTON-HEUGH		63
A BORDERER IN AMERICA		68
BORDER SNOWSTORMS		75
THE MURDER OF COLONEL STEWART OF HARTRIGGE		86
AULD RINGAN OLIVER		89
A LEGEND OF NORHAM		95
THE GHOST OF PERCIVAL REED		102
DANDY JIM THE PACKMAN		105
THE VAMPIRES OF BERWICK AND MELROSE		108
A BORDER MIDDY		111
SHEEP-STEALING IN TWEEDDALE		116
A PRIVATE OF THE KING'S OWN		123
SCOTTISH BORDERERS		
HIGHWAYMEN IN THE BORDER		128
CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE		134
ILLICIT DISTILLING AND SMUGGLING		138
SALMON AND SALMON- POACHERS IN THE BORDER		146
THE GHOST THAT DANCED AT JETHART		155
A MAN HUNT IN 1813		157
LADY STAIR'S DAUGHTER		160



Page 1

THE WHITE LADY OF BLENKINSOPP

Among the old castles and peel towers of the Border, there are few to which some tale or other of the supernatural does not attach itself. It may be a legend of buried treasure, watched over by a weeping figure, that wrings its hands; folk may tell of the apparition of an ancient dame, whose corpse-like features yet show traces of passions unspent; of solemn, hooded monk, with face concealed by his cowl, who passes down the castle's winding stair, telling his beads; they whisper, it may be, of a lady in white raiment, whose silken gown rustles as she walks. Or the tale, perhaps, is one of pitiful moans that on the still night air echo through some old building; or of the clank of chains, that comes ringing from the damp and noisome dungeons, causing the flesh of the listener to creep.

They are all to be found, or at least they *used* all to be found, somewhere or other in the Border, by those who love such legends. And, perhaps, nowhere are they more common than amongst the crumbling, grass-grown ruins of Northumberland.

Away, far up the South Tyne, and up its tributary the Tipalt Burn, close to the boundary of Cumberland, there stands all that is left of an ancient castle, centuries ago the home of an old and once powerful family. The building dates probably from early in the fourteenth century. In the year 1339 "Thomas de Blencansopp" received licence to fortify his house on the Scottish Border, and it is supposed that he then built this castle.

Truly that was a part of England where a man had need be careful in his building if he desired to sleep securely and with a whole skin, for on all sides of him were wild and turbulent neighbours. From the strenuous day of the old Romans, who built across those hills that long line of wall, which stands yet in parts solid and strong, for centuries the countryside was lawless and unruly, the inhabitants "ill to tame," and every man a freebooter. The Thirlwalls, the Riddleys, the Howards of Naworth, the wild men of Bewcastle; the Armstrongs, Elliots, Scotts, and others across the Border, they were all of them—they and their forebears to the earliest times—of the stuff that prefers action, however stormy, to inglorious peace and quiet, and the man who "kept up his end" in their neighbourhood could be no weakling.

Whether the Blenkinsopps were strong enough permanently to hold their property intact among such neighbours one does not know, but at any rate, in 1488 John de Blenkinsopp and his son Gerrard committed the castle to the custody of Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, Warden of the East and Middle Marches. Percy's care of the building, however, does not seem to have been particularly zealous, or else "the false Scottes" had again, as was their wont, proved themselves to be unpleasant neighbours, for in 1542 the place is described as "decayed in the Roof, and not in good reparation."

Page 2

Before this date, however, there had been at least one of the Blenkinsopp family on whose reputation for daring and strength no man might cast doubt. Far and wide, Bryan de Blenkinsopp was known for his deeds in war; he was counted gallant and brave even amongst the bravest and most gallant, and his place in battle was ever where blows fell thickest. But it is said that he had one failing, which eventually wrecked his life—he was grasping as any Shylock. Love of money was his undoing.

In spite of many chances to do so, in spite of the admiration in which he was universally held, Bryan de Blenkinsopp had never married. He was greatly admired, and yet, for a certain roughness and brutality in him, greatly feared, by many women, and he had been heard many a time scoffingly to say that only would he bring home a wife when he had found a woman possessed of gold sufficient to fill a chest so large that ten of his men might not be able to carry it into his castle. Brides of this calibre did not then grow in profusion on either side of the Border, and had he continued to live uninterruptedly in his own country, no doubt Bryan de Blenkinsopp might have remained to the end unmarried. But: “When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I was married.” In that, Bryan might have anticipated *Benedick*, as well as in the resolution. “Rich she shall be, that’s certain.” He went abroad to the wars. Perhaps he was with Henry V at Agincourt, and thenceforward, till the king’s death in 1422, saw more of France than of England. In any case, to the unbounded wonder of the countryside, when at length he did return, Bryan brought back with him a foreign bride to Blenkinsopp. And what added to the wonder, the bride brought with her a chest of treasure so heavy that twelve of Bryan’s retainers could with difficulty bear it into the castle.

Naturally, all this gave rise to endless talk; what prattling little busybody but would relish so succulent a morsel! Ere long the local gossip-mongers revelled in a perfect feast of petty scandal. Stories in minute detail spread quickly from mouth to mouth. The eccentricities and shortcomings of the foreign bride were a priceless boon to the scanty population of the district; in castle and in peel tower little else for a time was talked of. To begin with, the mere fact that she was a foreigner, and that neither she nor any of her immediate followers could speak English, told heavily against the lady in the estimation of the countryside. Then, hardly anyone ever saw her (which in itself was an offence, and the cause of still further tattle). She was very little, folk said who professed to be well informed, and her face and hands showed strangely brown against the white robes that she habitually wore; her eyes were like stars; her temper quick to blaze up without due cause. Backstairs gossip, no doubt; but there were even pious souls who, in strictest confidence,



Page 3

went so far as to hazard the opinion that the lady was not quite “canny”; she might, they thought, quite possibly turn out to be an imp of the Evil One sent with her gold to wile Bryan’s soul to perdition. The belief was not more fantastic than many another that prevailed at that day, and later; and the fact that she was never known to go to mass, nor had been seen to cross the threshold of a sacred building, lent some weight to it. This was the kind of “clash” that floated about the countryside.

But assuredly there was this much foundation for talk: Bryan and his foreign bride were far from happy together. As time went on, their quarrels, indeed, became notorious. It was whispered that the fount from which flowed all the trouble was nothing more nor less than that chest of gold which the bride had brought for dowry. The lady, folk said, would not surrender it to her husband; no matter how he stormed. *She* was not of the kind that tamely submits, or cringes before a bully; on the contrary, she ever gave back as good as she received. Finally, things came at length to such a pitch, that the lady and her foreign servants, it was said, at dead of night had secretly dug a great hole somewhere in the huge vaulted dungeons of the castle, and had there buried her gold and the rich jewels which now she hated as the cause of her troubles.

Then, a little later, followed the climax—after violent scenes, Bryan himself disappeared, as if to show that, the treasure being somewhere beyond his ken, or out of his reach, he had no further use for the wife. He might, no doubt, have resorted to poison, or to the knife, in order to revenge himself; or he might have so made life a burden to her—as is done sometimes, one is told, even by modern husbands—that she would have been glad to lick his hand like a whipped spaniel, and to have owned up, perhaps, to the place where she had hid the gold. But if he killed her, her secret might die with her, or the servants who were in her confidence might themselves secure the treasure. Again, she had plenty of spirit, and, indeed, rather seemed to enjoy a fight, and it was possible that bullying might not cause her to try to conciliate him by revealing the whereabouts of the hidden treasure. So Bryan took the course that he judged would make things the most unpleasant for his wife, and which would at the same time rid him of her. He simply disappeared.

And now the poor little lady, fierce enough in quarrel, and bitter enough in tongue, was inconsolable. In spite of all—it is one of the most inscrutable of the many inscrutable points in the nature of some women—in spite of all, she had loved her great, strong, brutal, bullying husband, and probably was only jealous of the gold because he had showed too plainly that in his estimation it, and not she, came first. Her days, unhappy enough before, were now spent in fruitless misery, waiting for him who returned never again. A year and a day passed,

Page 4

and still no tidings came to her of Bryan de Blenkinsopp. The deserted wife could bear no longer her life in this alien country, and she, too, with all her servants, went away. Folk, especially those who had always in their hearts suspected her of being an imp of Satan, said that no man saw them go. Probably she went in search of her husband; but whether or not she ever found him, or whether she made her way back to the land from which she had come, none can say, for from that day to this all trace is lost of husband and of wife. Only the tale remained in the country people's minds; and probably it lost nothing in the telling as the years rolled on.

The story of the White Lady of Blenkinsopp became one to which the dwellers by Tyneside loved to listen of a winter's evening round the fire, and it even began to be whispered that she "walked." More than one dweller in the castle claimed to have seen her white-robed figure wandering forlorn through the rooms in which she had spent her short, unhappy wedded life. Perhaps it may have been due to her influence that by 1542 the roof and interior had been neglected and allowed to fall into decay.

Yet though shorn of all its former grandeur, for some centuries the castle continued to be partly occupied, and as late as the first quarter of last century, in spite of the dread in which the White Lady had come to be held, there were families occasionally living in the less ruined parts of the building.

About the year 1820 two of the more habitable rooms were occupied by a labouring man with his wife and their two children, the youngest a boy of eight. They had gone there, the parents at least well knowing the reputation of the place; but weeks had passed, their rest had never in any way been disturbed, and they had ceased to think of what they now considered to be merely a silly old story. All too soon, however, there came a night when shriek upon shriek of ghastly terror rang in the ears of the sleeping husband and wife, and brought them, with sick dread in their hearts, hurrying to the room where their children lay.

"Mither! mither! oh mither! A lady! a lady!" gasped the sobbing youngest boy, clinging convulsively to his mother.

"What is't, my bairn? There's never a lady here, my bonny boy. There's nobody will harm ye."

But the terrified child would not be comforted. He had seen a lady, "a braw lady, a' in white," who had come to his bedside and, sitting down, had bent and kissed him; she "cried sore," the child said, and wrung her hands, and told him that if he would but come with her she would make him a rich man, she would show him where gold was buried in the castle; and when the boy answered that he dare not go with her, she had stooped to

lift and carry him. Then he had cried out, and she had slipped from the room just as his father and mother hurried in.



Page 5

“Ye were dreamin’, my bonny lamb,” cried the mother; and the parents, after a time, succeeded in calming the child and in getting him again to fall asleep. Night after night, however, as long as the boy remained in that room, this scene was re-enacted; the same terror-stricken screams, the same hurried rush of the parents, the same frightened tale from the quivering lips of the child. Dreams, no doubt, induced by some childish malady; a common enough form of nightmare, suggested by previous knowledge of a story likely to impress children. But to the day of his death—and he died an old man, a successful colonist, prosperous and respected, a man in no way prone to superstitious weakness—the dreamer ever maintained that it was something more than a dream that had come to him those nights in Blenkinsopp Castle. He could feel yet, he said, and shuddered to feel, the clasp of her arms and the kiss on his cheek from the cold lips of the White Lady; and the dream, if dream it were, was not due to suggestion, for he was conscious of no previous knowledge of the legend.

The White Lady of Blenkinsopp has fled now, scared from her haunt by the black smoke of tall chimneys and the deep—throated blare of steam hooters; coal dust might well lay a more formidable spectre than that of a Lady in White. But no man has ever yet discovered the whereabouts of her hidden treasure, though many have sought.

Seventy or eighty years ago, there came to the inn of a neighbouring village a lady, who confided to the hostess of the inn that in a dream she had seen herself find, under a certain stone, deep in the dungeon of a ruined castle, a chest of gold; and Blenkinsopp, she said, answered in every detail to the castle of her dream. Assuredly, she thought, to her now was to be revealed the long-sought burial-place of the White Lady’s treasure. But patiently though the dreamer waited on and importuned the castle’s owner, permission to make a systematic search among the ruins was too hard to obtain, and the disheartened seer of visions departed, and returned no more. And so the hidden treasure to this day remains hidden; no prospector has yet lit on that rich “claim,” no “dowser” has poised his magic hazel twig above its bed, nor has clairvoyant revealed its whereabouts.

But rumour had it once that the long-sought hiding-place was found. Orders had been given that the vaults of the castle should be cleared of rubbish, and fitted up as winter quarters for cattle, and as the workmen proceeded with their task they came on a low doorway, hitherto unknown, on a level with the bottom of the keep. This doorway gave on a narrow passage, leading no man knew whither. The report flew abroad that here at last was the Lady’s vault, and people flocked to see what might be seen. None dared venture far along this passage, till one, bolder than the rest, taking his courage in both hands, went gingerly down the way so long untrod by human foot.

Page 6

The passage was narrow and low, too low for a man to walk in erect; after a few yards it descended a short flight of steps, and then again went straight forward to a door so decayed that only a rusted bolt, and one rust-eaten hinge, held it in place. Beyond this door, an abrupt turn in the passage, and then a flight of steps so precipitous that the feeble beam of his lantern could give the explorer no help in fathoming their depth; and when this lantern was lowered as far as it was in his power to do so, the flame burned blue and went out, killed by the noxious gases that stagnant centuries had breathed. Dizzy and frightened, the explorer with difficulty groped his way back to the fresher air of the vault, and no persuasion could induce him, or any of his fellows, to venture again so far as to that long flight of steps. The employer of those labourers was a man entirely devoid of curiosity or of imagination, possessed of no interest whatsoever in archaeology; so it fell out that the passage was closed, without any further effort being made to discover to what mysteries it might lead.

About the year 1845, one who then wrote about the castle visited the place, and found that boys had broken a small hole in the wall where the passage had been built up. Through this hole they were wont to amuse themselves by chucking stones, listening, fascinated, to the strange sounds that went echoing, echoing through the mysterious depths far below. Here, say some, lies the buried treasure of the White Lady of Blenkinsopp. But there are not wanting unsympathetic souls, who pride themselves on being nothing if not practical, who pretend to think that this hidden depth is nothing more mysterious than the old draw-well of the castle.

This story of the White Lady is not the only legend of the supernatural with which the old family of Blenkinsopp is connected.

Where Tipalt Burn falls into Tyne, stand on the opposite bank the ruins of Bellister Castle. There, many hundred years ago, dwelt a branch of the Blenkinsopps. To Bellister there came one night at the gloaming a wandering harper, begging for shelter from the bitter northerly blast that gripped his rheumatic old joints, and sported with his failing strength. He was a man past middle age, with hair thin and grey, and a face worn and lined; his tattered clothes gave scant protection from inclement weather. As was the custom in those times, the minstrel's welcome was hearty. Food and drink, and a seat near the fire, were his, and soon his blood thawed, the bent form of the man seemed to straighten, and his eye kindled as, later in the evening, "high placed in hall, a welcome guest," he touched his harp and sang to the company. You could scarcely now recognise the weary, bent, old scarecrow that but two hours back had trailed, footsore and tired, across the castle drawbridge. The change was astonishing, and many jested with the harper on the subject.



Page 7

But one there was who noticed, and who did not jest. They were increasingly uneasy looks that the lord of the castle from time to time threw towards the minstrel. What, he pondered unquietly, caused this amazing change in the appearance of one who so lately had seemed to be almost on the verge of the grave? Was he in truth the frail old man he had pretended to be, or had he overacted his part, and was he no minstrel, but an enemy in disguise? The lord's looks grew blacker and more black, and ever more uneasy as the evening proceeded; and the more he suspected, the more he drank to drown the disquiet of his mind. At length his unease became so marked that unavoidably it communicated itself to the rest of the company. Even the rough men-at-arms desisted from their boisterous jests, and spoke beneath their breath. The harper glancing around as the silence grew, and finding the lord's black looks ever upon him, trailed off at last in his song and sat mute, with uncertain fingers plucking at the strings of his instrument. The company broke up, glad to escape from the gloom of their lord's glances, and somebody showed the old man to a rude chamber, where a bundle of pease straw was to serve him for bed.

But the lord of Bellister sat on, "gloomingly" morbidly to himself. Bitter feud existed between him and a neighbouring baron. Had he not cause to distrust that baron, and to believe that means neither fair nor honourable might be employed by his enemy to wipe out the feud? What if this self-styled harper should turn out to be no minstrel after all, but a hired assassin, a follower of that base churl, his hated foe! To suspect was to believe. In his excited, drink-clouded brain wrath sprang up, fully armed. He would speedily put an end to that treacherous scheme; his enemies should learn that if one can plot, another may have cunning to bring to naught such treachery. And little mercy should be shown to the base tool of a baser employer.

"Bring hither quickly to me that minstrel," he called. "And it will be the better for some of you that there be no delay," he muttered beneath his breath, with a threatening blow of his fist on the table.

Of old his servants and dependants had learned the lesson that it was well not to linger over the carrying out of their passionate lord's orders. But in this instance, speed was of no avail; they were obliged to return, to report to a wrathful master that the bird had flown; the place was empty, the old man gone. Threatening glances and black looks had scared him; without waiting for rest, he had fled while yet there was time, less afraid of exposure to a wild and stormy night than to find himself in the clutches of a petty tyrant.

That the man had fled was to Blenkinsopp quite convincing proof that his suspicions were justified. Immediate pursuit was ordered. "Lay the sleuth hounds on his trail without an instant's delay. Let *them* deal with him!"



Page 8

* * * * *

Less than a mile away, by some willows that once marked a ford in the river, men hurrying after the baying hounds came up too late. Echoing across the heath, an agonised shriek rang on their ears, drowned by the snarling as of wild beasts. Lying on its back on the river bank, head and shoulders in the shallow stream, the man-hunters found but a frail, mutilated body that had once been the wandering old minstrel.

This was what gave rise to the legend of the Grey Man of Bellister. Ever since that hideous night, at intervals the "Grey Man" has been wont to appear to belated travellers along that road. Near the clump of willows he might first be seen, hurrying, hurrying, his long grey cloak flying in the wind. And woe to him on whom he chanced to turn and look; his wild eye and torn face, his blood-clotted beard, would freeze with horror those who gazed, and disaster or death followed hard on the track of the vision.

It is a hundred years now, and more, since last the "Grey Man" was seen. Perhaps his penance for sins committed on earth is ended; or perhaps it is that against railways, and drainage, and modern scoffings, he and his like cannot stand. He is gone; but even yet, about the scene where once as a man the old minstrel fled for dear life, there hangs at the dead time of night a sense of mystery and awe. As the chilly wind comes wailing across the everlasting hills, blending its voice with the melancholy dirge of the river, one may almost believe that through the gloom there passes swiftly a bent, hurrying figure. Perhaps it is but the swaying of a branch near by, that so startlingly suggests the waving in the wind of a threadbare cloak.

DICKY OF KINGSWOOD

Your Border ruffian of the good old days was not often a humorist. Life to him was a serious business. When he was not reiving other people's kye, other people were probably reiving his; and as a general rule one is driven to conclude that he was not unlike that famous Scotch terrier whose master attributed the dog's persistently staid and even melancholy disposition to the fact that he "jist couldna get enough o' fechtin'."

In olden times, "fechtin'" was the Border man's strong point; but in later, and perhaps less robust, days there were to be found some who took a degenerate pride in getting by craft what their fathers would have taken by force. Of such, in the early days of the eighteenth century, was Dicky of Kingswood. Had he lived a hundred or a hundred and fifty years earlier, Dicky would no doubt have been a first-class reiver, one of the "tail" of some noted Border chieftain, for he lacked neither pluck nor strength. But in his own day he preferred the *suaviter in modo* to the *fortiter in re*; his cunning, indeed, was not unworthy of the hero of that ancient Norse tale, "The Master Thief," and in his misdeeds there was not seldom



Page 9

to be found a spice of humour so disarming that at times his victims were compelled to laugh, and in laughter to forget their just resentment; and with the perishing of resentment, to forego their manifest duty and that satisfaction which virtue should ever feel in the discomfiture of vice. Compounding a felony, we should call it now. And no doubt it was. But in those days, when the King's writ ran with but halting foot through the wild Border hills, perhaps least said was soonest mended.

Kingswood lies just across the river from Staward Peel, but Dicky dwelt generally at the latter place—in former days an almost unassailable stronghold, standing on a bold eminence overlooking Allen Water, some miles to the east of Haltwhistle. Here of old, when beacon-fires blazed on the hill-tops, “each with warlike tidings fraught,” flashing their warning of coming trouble from “the false Scottes,” the people of these regions were wont to hurry for safety, breathlessly bearing with them whatsoever valuables they prized and had time to save. Many a treasure is said to lie here, buried, and never again dug up, because those who alone knew where to look had perished in defence of the Peel. Truly, if the troubled spirits of those slain ones yet wander, brooding over hidden chattels and lost penates, they are not greatly to be pitied, for a spot more beautiful, one less to be shunned if our spirits *must* wander, it would be hard to find in all Northumberland or in all England. Not distant would they be, too, from good company, for away to the north across the Tyne, in a mighty cavern in the rock—below what once was the castle of Sewing Shields—does not local tradition tell that Arthur and his knights lie asleep, waiting the inevitable day when England's dire need shall bring them again to life, to strike a blow for the land they loved. And along that noble line of wall which spanned England from sea to sea, might they not perchance foregather—some dark and stormy night, when snow drives down before a north-east wind—with the dim forms of armoured men, wraiths of the Roman legions, patrolling once more the line that they died to defend?

Dicky of Kingswood was making for home one day in early spring. He was outside the radius of his usual field of operations, far to the east of Kingswood and Staward, plodding along with the westering sun in his eyes, and thinking ruefully that he had come a long way for nothing. Sometimes it is convenient for gentlemen of Dicky's habits to visit foreign parts, or parts, at least, where their appearance may not attract undue notice—for such as he are often of modest and retiring disposition. On this occasion he had so far done no business of profit, and Dicky was depressed. He would fain turn a more or less honest penny ere he reached home, if it might but be done quietly.



Page 10

Late in the day came his chance. Grazing in a neighbouring lush pasture were two fine fat bullocks. Dicky paused to look, and the more he looked, the more he admired; the more he admired, the more he coveted. They were magnificent beasts, seldom had he seen finer; nothing could better suit his purpose. Such beasts would fetch a high price anywhere—they *must* be his. So, with what patience he could command, till darkness should come to his aid, Dicky discreetly retired to a neighbouring copse, where, himself unseen, he might feast his eyes on the fat cattle, and at the same time make sure that if they did happen to be removed from that particular pasture, at least he would not be ignorant of their whereabouts. But the bullocks fed on undisturbed. No one came to remove them; only their owner stood regarding them for a while. Darkness fell, and the call of an owl that hooted eerily, or the distant wail of a curlew, alone broke the stillness. Then up came Dicky's best friend, a moon but little past the full. Everything was in his favour, not a hitch of any kind occurred; quietly and without any fuss the great fat beasts began to make their slow way west across the hills for Cumberland.

Morning came, bringing with it a great hue and cry on that farm bereft of its fat cattle, and things might chance to have fared ill with Dicky had he not adroitly contrived to lay a false trail, that headed the furious owner in hasty pursuit north, towards Tweed and Scotland. Meanwhile, in due time—not for worlds would Dicky have overdriven them—the bullocks and their driver found themselves in Cumberland, near by Lanercost. There, as they picked their leisurely way along, they encountered an old farmer riding a bay mare, the like of which for quality Dicky had never seen. His mouth watered.

"Where be'st gangin' wi' the nowt?" asked the farmer.

"Oh, to Carlisle," said Dicky.

"Wad ye sell?"

"Oh aye!" answered Dicky. "For a price. But the beasts are good."

"Yes, they were good," admitted the farmer. And Dicky must come in, and have a drink, and they'd talk about the oxen. So in they went to the farmer's house, and long they talked, and the more they talked the more the farmer wanted those bullocks; but the more he wanted them the more he tried to beat Dicky down. But Dicky was in no haste to sell; he could do better at Carlisle, said he; and the upshot, of course, was that he got the price he asked. And then said Dicky, when the money was paid, and they had had another drink or two, and a mighty supper:

"That was a bonnie mare ye were riding."

"Aye," said the farmer. "An' she's as good as she's bonnie. There's no her like in a' Cumberland."



“Wad ye sell?”

“Sell!” cried the farmer. “No for the value o’ the hale countryside. Her like canna be found. Sell! Never i’ this world.”

“Well, well,” said Dicky, “I canna blame ye. She’s a graund mare. But they’re kittle times, thir; I wad keep her close, or it micht happen your stable micht be empty some morning.”



Page 11

“Stable!” roared the fanner boisterously. “Hey! man, ah pit her in no stable. She sleeps wi’ me, man, in my ain room. Ah’m a bachelor, ah am, an’ there’s non’ to interfere wi’ me, and ivvery nicht she’s tied to my ain bed-post. Man, it’s music to my ear to hear her champin’ her corn a’ the nicht. Na, na! Ah trust her in no stable; an’ ah’d like to see the thief could steal her awa’ oot o’ my room withoot wakenin’ me.”

“Well, maybe ye’re right,” said Dicky. “But mind, there’s some cunnin’ anes aboot. Ye’ll hae a good lock on your door, nae doot?”

“Aye, I *have* a good lock, as ye shall see,” cried the farmer, caution swamped in brandy and good fellowship. “What think ye o’ that for a lock?”

“Uhm—m!” murmured Dicky reflectively, carefully scrutinising lock and key—and he was not unskilled in locks. “Aye, a good lock; a very good lock. Yes, yes! Just what you want; the very thing. They’ll no pick that.”

“No! They’ll never pick *that*. Ho! Ho!” laughed the complacent farmer.

Then Dicky said he “maun be steppin’. It was gettin’ late.” And so, after one more drink, and another “to the King, God bless him,” and yet one more to “themselves,” and a fourth, just to see that the others went the right way and behaved themselves, the two parted, the best and dearest of friends.

It might have been the outcome of a good conscience, or perhaps it was the soothing thought that he had made a good bargain, and had got those bullocks at a figure lower than he had been prepared to pay; or, possibly, it may only have been the outcome of that extra last glass or two that he had had with Dicky. But whatever it was, the fact remained that the farmer’s slumbers that night were very profound, his snoring heavier than common. Towards morning, but whilst yet the night was dark, dreaming that he and the mare were swimming a deep and icy river, he woke with a start. Everything was strangely still; even the mare made no sound. And—surely it must be freezing! He was chilled to the bone. And then, on a brain where yet sang the fumes of brandy, it dawned that he had absolutely no covering on him. Sleepily he felt with his hands this way and that, up and down. To no purpose. His blankets must certainly have fallen on the floor, but try as he might, no hand could he lay on them. Slipping out of bed to grope for flint and steel wherewith to strike a light, with soul-rending shock he ran his forehead full butt against the open door of his room.

“De’il tak’ it! What’s this?” he bellowed. It was inconceivable that he had forgotten to close and lock that door before getting into bed, however much brandy he might have drunk overnight. What was the meaning of it? At last a light, got from the smouldering kitchen fire, revealed the hideous truth—his room was empty, the cherished mare gone! The door (as he had found to his cost) stood wide open; along the floor were carefully spread his blankets, and over them no doubt the mare had been led out without making

noise sufficient to awaken even a light sleeper, let alone one whose potations had been deep as the farmer's.

Page 12

Lights now flashed and twinkled from room to room, from house to stable and byre, and back again, as the frenzied, cursing farmer and his servants tumbled over each other in their haste to find the lost animal. It is even said that one servant lass, in her ardour of search, was found looking under the bed in an upstairs room—scarcely a likely grazing ground for any four-footed animal (unless perhaps it might be a night-mare). But whether she expected to find there the lost quadruped, or the man guilty of its abduction, tradition says not. At any rate, all that any of the searchers found—and that not till broad daylight—was the print of the good mare's hoofs in some soft ground over which she had been ridden fast. And no one had heard even so much as the smallest sound.

The day was yet young, and the breeze played gratefully cool on Dicky's brow, as, fearless of pursuit, he rode contentedly along towards home a few hours later. Skirting by Naworth, thence up by Tindale Tarn and down the burn to South Tyne, he had now come to the Fells a little to the south and east of Haltwhistle. To him came a man on foot; and, said he:

“Have ye seen onny stray cattle i' your travels? I've lost a yoke o' fat bullocks.”

“What micht they be like?” asked Dicky innocently; for he had no difficulty in recognising the farmer from whom he had stolen the beasts, though the latter, having never set eyes on Dicky, had no idea of whom he was talking to.

“Oh,” said the man, “they were fine, muckle, fat beasts, red, baith o' them, ane wi' a bally face, an' the tither wi' its near horn sair turned in.” And some other notable peculiarities the farmer mentioned, such as might strike a man skilled in cattle.

“We-el,” answered Dicky thoughtfully, “now that ye mention it, I believe I did see sic a pair, or twa very like them, no later agone than yesterday afternoon. If I'm no mista'en, they're rinnin' on Maister ——'s farm, no far frae Lanercost.”

“Man, ah'm that obleeged to ye. But ah'm that deid tired wi' walkin', seekin' them, ah canna gang that far,” said the farmer. “That's a gey guid mare ye're ridin'. Ye wadna be for sellin' her, likely?”

“Oh aye, I'll sell. But she's a braw mare; there's no her like i' the countryside, or in a' Northumberland. I'll be wantin' a braw price.” Dicky was always ready for a deal, and in this instance of course it suited him very well to get rid of his steed.

So, after some chaffering, Dicky was promised his “braw price,” and he accompanied the farmer home to get the money. A long way it was. The farmer perforce walked, but Dicky, with native caution, rode, for, said he, in excuse to his companion:



“I’m loth to part wi’ my good auld mare, for I’ve never owned her like. Sae I’ll jist tak’ a last bit journey on her.”

In due course Dicky got his money, and food and drink, as much as he could swallow, into the bargain. Then the farmer rode away for Lanercost; and Dicky, of course, remembered that he had business in a different part of the country.



Page 13

Sure enough, when the farmer reached Lanercost there were his bullocks contentedly grazing in a field, while contemplatively gazing at them stood an elderly man, with damaged face.

Up rode the farmer on the mare.

“Here!” shouted he angrily, “what the de’il are ye doin’ wi’ my bullocks?”

“Wh-a-at?” bellowed the other with equal fury. “*Your* bullocks! And be d——d to ye! If it comes to that, what the de’il are ye doin’ ridin’ my mare? I’ll hae the law o’ ye for stealin’ her, ye scoondrel! Come *doon* oot o’ my saiddle afore ah pu’ ye doon.” And the two elderly men, each red in the face as a “bubbly jock,” both spluttering and almost speechless with rage, glared at each other, murder in their eyes.

Then came question and answer, and mutual explanation, and gradually the comic side of the affair struck them; each saw how the other had been done, and they burst into roar after roar of such laughter as left them weak and helpless. They had been properly fooled. But the fat bullocks were recovered, and the well-loved mare, even if the money paid for each was gone. And after all, he laughs best who laughs last. But they saw no more of Dicky of Kingswood.

STORM AND TEMPEST

When we think of “the Border,” the picture that rises to mind is usually one of hill and dale, of peat-hag and heathery knoll, of brimming burns that tumble headlong to meet the embrace of rivers hurrying to their rest in the great ocean. One sees in imagination the solemn, round-shouldered hills standing out grim in the thin spring sunshine, their black sides slashed and lined with snow; later, one pictures these hills decked with heartsease and blue-bells a-swing in the summer breeze, or rich with the purple bloom of heather; and, again, one imagines them clothed in November mists, or white and ghost-like, shrouded in swirling clouds of snow.

But there is another part of the Border which the inland dweller is apt to forget—that which, in sweep upon sweep of bay, or unbroken line of cliff, extends up the coasts of Northumberland and Berwickshire. That is a part of the Border which those who are not native to it know only in the months of summer, when the sea is sapphire-blue, when surf creams softly round the feet of limpet-covered rocks, and the little wavelets laugh and sparkle as they slide over the shining sands. It is another matter when Winter with his tempests comes roaring from the North. Where are then the laughing waters and the smiling sunlit sands? Swallowed up by wild seas with storm-tossed crests, that race madly landward to dash themselves in blind fury on shoreless cliffs, or sweep resistless over a shingly beach.



Page 14

It is a cruel coast in the winter time, and its children had need be strong men and fearless, for they who make their living on the face of its waters surely inherit a share greater than is their due of toil and danger; they, verily, more than others “see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.” From earliest times when men first sailed the seas this coast has taken heavy toll of ships and of human lives, and in the race that it has bred, necessarily there has been little room for weaklings; their men are even to this day of the type of the old Vikings—from whom perhaps they descend—fair-bearded and strong, blue-eyed and open of countenance. And their women—well, there are many who might worthily stand alongside their countrywoman, Grace Darling, many who at a pinch would do what she did, and “blush to find it fame.”

Yet one must admit that, as a whole, this community was not always keen to save ship and crew from the breakers, nor prone to warn vessels off from dangerous reef or sunken rock. In days long gone by, if all tales are true, the people of these coasts had no good reputation among sailors, and their habits and customs were wont to give rise to much friction and ill-will betwixt England and Scotland. It is certain that in 1472 they plundered the great foreign-going barge built by Bishop Kennedy of St. Andrews—the greatest ship ever seen in those days—when she drove ashore one stormy night off Bamborough. And of her passengers, one, the Abbot of St. Colomb, was long held to ransom by James Carr, a deed the consequences of which, in those days of an all-powerful Church, might be dreadful to contemplate. Pitscottie says the “Bishop’s Barge” cost her owner something like L10,000 sterling. Perhaps the harvest reaped by Bamborough when she came ashore may have encouraged Northumbrians to adopt this line of business in earnest, for by 1559 we read that “wreckers” were common down all that coast; and their prayer: “Let us pray for a good harvest this winter,” contained no allusion to the fruits of the field.

In 1643 there was a Scottish priest, Gilbert Blakhal, confessor in Paris to the Lady Isabelle Hay, Lord Errol’s daughter, who in the course of a journey to his native land visited Holy Island, and in the account of his travels he makes mention of the ways of the island’s inhabitants, and of their prayer when a vessel was seen to be in danger. “They al sit downe upon their knees and hold up their handes, and say very devoutely, ‘Lord, send her to us. God, send her to us.’ You, seeing them upon their knees, and their handes joyned, do think that they are praying for your sauuetie; but their myndes are far from that. They pray, not God to sauve you, or send you to the porte, but to send you to them by ship-wrack, that they may gette the spoile of her. And to showe that this is their meaning, if the ship come wel to the porte, or eschew naufrage (shipwreck), they gette up in anger, crying: ‘The Devil



Page 15

stick her; she is away from us.” Father Blakhal does not pretend that with his own ears he heard the Holy Islanders so pray. It was told to him by the Governor of the island. But, then, this Governor, Robin Rugg by name, was “a notable good fellow, as his great read nose, full of pimples, did give testimony.” Perhaps he exaggerated, or it was but one of his “merry discourses.” Yet I think he told the truth in this instance. To “wreck” was the habit of the day, and by all coastal peoples the spoil of wrecks was regarded as not less their just due than was the actual food obtained by them from the sea. On our own coasts and in our islands until quite recent times such was undoubtedly the case, just as in savage lands it continues to be the case to this day; and the distinction is a fine-drawn one between doing nothing to prevent a vessel from running into danger which would result in profit to the spectators, and the doing of a something, greater or less—say the showing of a light, or the burning of a beacon—which may make it certain that the same vessel shall go where she may be of “the greatest good to the greatest number”—the “greatest number” in such instances being always, of course, the wreckers. A wrecked vessel was their legitimate prey, and the inhabitants of many coastal parts are known to have deeply resented the building of lighthouses where wrecks were frequent. In his notes to *The Pirate*, Sir Walter Scott mentions that the rent of several of the islands in Shetland had greatly fallen since the Commissioners of Lighthouses ordered lights to be established on the Isle of Sanda and the Pentland Skerries. And he tells of the reflection cast upon Providence by a certain pious island farmer, the sails of whose boat were frail from age and greatly patched: “Had it been *His* will that a light hadna been placed yonder,” said he, with pious fervour, “I wad have had enough of new sails last winter.”

Then as to the saving of life—in those days, and well on into the eighteenth century, it was believed to be a most unlucky thing to save a drowning person; he was sure eventually to do his rescuer some deadly injury. A similar belief, as regards the ill luck, prevails in China to this day; nothing will induce a Chinaman to help a drowning man from the water. In our own case, probably this superstition as to ill luck originated in the obvious fact that if there were no survivor from a wreck, there could be no one to interfere with the claim made by the finders to what they considered their lawful due. If a vessel drove ashore on their coast, that surely was the act and the will of God, and it was not for them to question His decrees or to thwart His intentions.



Page 16

Many, since the days of the wreckers, have been the ships cast away along that rugged coast-line which starts southward from the grim promontory of St. Abb's Head, and runs, cruelly rock-girt or stretched in open bay of yellow sand, away past Berwick and down by Holy Island. Many have been the disasters, pitiful on occasion the loss of life. But never, since history began, has disaster come upon the coast like to that which befell the little town of Eyemouth in the early autumn of 1881, never has loss of life so heartrending overwhelmed a small community. Once the headquarters of smuggling on our eastern coast, and built—as it is well known was also built a certain street of small houses in Spittal—with countless facilities for promoting the operations of “Free Trade,” and with “bolt-holes” innumerable for the smugglers when close pressed by gangers, Eyemouth is still a quaint little town, huddling its strangely squeezed-up houses in narrow lanes and wynds betwixt river and bay. There, too, as at a northern town better known to fame than Eyemouth,

“The grey North Ocean girds it round,
And o'er the rocks, and up the bay,
The long sea-rollers surge and sound,
And still the thin and biting spray
Drives down the melancholy street.”

* * * * *

Truly, in Eyemouth it is not alone spray that drives. So close a neighbour is the protecting sea-wall to some of the houses that turn weather-beaten backs on the bay, that at high tide during a north-easterly gale the giant seas, breaking against the wall, burst also clear over the houses, hurling themselves in torrents of icy water into the street beyond. And up the width of one little street that runs to the bay, and past its barricaded doors, you may see sometimes billows that have overleapt the wall come charging, to ebb with angry swish and long-drawn clatter of shingle as the waves suck back. It is a strange sight, and it causes one to wonder what manner of men they are who dwell here, who draw their living from the bosom of a sea that thus harshly treats its children. Yet it is a sea that can be kindly enough; and in the long, golden summer evenings, when the brown-sailed fishing-boats in endless procession draw out from the “haven under the hill,” to vanish seaward in the deepening twilight, you would scarce believe that a thing so gentle could be guilty of treachery, or ever could arise in sudden mad frenzy to slay those who had trusted it.

Yet that was what happened that terrible Friday, the 14th of October 1881. No summer's morning could have dawned more peaceful and fair. And here we were but in mid-October, when the woods are in their glory and Scotland looks still for the settled weather of her “Indian summer”; there should yet be ample measure of quiet days and nights ere winter gales rumble in the chimneys and wail through the rigging of boats lying weather-bound in harbour.

Page 17

A cloudless day, sea of deepest blue, without even the faintest cat's-paw to wrinkle its shining face; a morning warm, genial, windless, reminiscent of fairest summer, such a day as landsmen rejoice in, feeling that it is good to be alive. But the glass came tumbling down, the sea heaved sullenly in the oily calm, seething around the bared fangs of jagged rocks, drawing back with threatening snarl or snatching irritably at the trailing sea-weed; and high aloft the gulls wheeled, clamouring. Old men amongst the fishers looked askance. Why did they not take warning? Alas! The year had been a lean year; the weather latterly had been bad, and for near on a week the boats had been unable to go out. The fish were there for the taking. Prices now were good. And "men must work" even if "women must weep." So it befell that boat after boat put out from harbour and headed over the windless sea, dragged, galley-like, by the clumsy sweeps, till, clear of the land, the fanning of a light air from the south-west gave her gentle steerage way. Soon not a boat was left in port; even those whose weather-wise "skeely" old skippers had counselled caution, at length, against their will and better judgment, were shamed into starting. After all, it was no great distance they were going; with ordinary luck they might be back before much wind came. And if the worst came to the worst and they were caught out at sea, why, the boats were weatherly craft, manned by the best of seamen, and an hour or two at the most would see them fight their way back to port. It was all in the day's work. Nothing venture, nothing win. If one may take a risk, so may another. It does not do to stand idle in the background whilst one's neighbour by superior daring secures the prize we also sorely need.

So by 9 A.M. the last boat of the five and forty had got to sea. Before midday all had made an offing of eight or ten miles, and had started to shoot their lines. Folk who had watched them creep out of the harbour now gave no further heed, save perhaps that wives may chance to have cast anxious looks seaward now and again. But none dreamt of evil.

Then of a sudden, as the morning passed, some on shore became aware of a strange, death-like stillness that had fallen over all things, a feeling of gloom and oppression in the air. The sun indeed still shone unclouded over the land, but away out at sea to the north-east there was a horrible canker of blackness that was eating up the sky, and that already had hid from sight, as by a wall, those boats that lay farthest from the land, whilst those still visible could be seen hurriedly letting everything go by the run. Then the blackness shut down over all, and men could but guess what was going on behind that terrible veil. Over the town, as people deserted their houses and hurried to cliff or sea wall, or wherever there seemed possibility of gaining sight or knowledge of the fleet, the same horror of darkness came rushing; wind raved



Page 18

and screamed, and already a sea, indescribable in its appalling fury, was raging into the bay, the crests, cut off as with a knife, flying through the air like densest smoke. Rain scourged and blinded, the driving spray lashed beyond bearing the faces of those who, dread in their souls, peered through their sheltering hands, trying vainly to penetrate the smother to windward. A few hundred yards of raging water, a blurred vision of rushing, tumbling seas; tumultuous, deafening roar of surf, the tortured scream of wind; and that was all. It was as if one might try to gaze into the mouth of hell.

Then through this Hades of waters, rolling, tumbling, pitching, buried almost in the breaking seas, into the bay came rushing three yawls, manned by crab-fishers from St. Abb's, past the Hurcar Rock, and round safely into the harbour; then a large Eyemouth fishing-boat, and another, and another, and then a pause of sickening suspense, and two more large boats from St. Abb's fought their way to safety. Men began faintly to pluck up heart. If these had come out of the jaws of death, why not the others? But now again they hoped with ever sinking hearts, for minutes passed and there came no more. Then, even as they strained their eyes despairingly, there came one into the bay that failed to get far enough to windward. Down on the rock behind the breakwater she drove, helpless, and went to pieces. Another took the same road, and smashed to atoms almost at the pierhead, so near, and yet so far from human aid, that the voices of both crews could be heard by the helpless, distracted spectators—white-lipped men, wailing women, who clustered there by the rocks in impotent agony. One struggling drowning man fought hard—it is said that the outermost of a chain of rescuers once even touched his hand. But no help was possible, no human power could have drawn those helpless men from that raging cauldron; against such wind no rocket could fly, near these rocks no lifeboat could live. Even if she could have lived, there was no crew to man her; all were away with the fleet.

It was near low water now, and into the bay came driving a big boat that rushed on the rocks at Fort Point, pounded there a brief second, and was hurled by the following sea on to the beach, so nearly high and dry that her crew, by the aid of lines, were readily saved. And then into view through the welter came staggering a new boat, one whose first trip it was, sore battered, but battling gallantly for life, and making wonderful weather of it. Yet, even as hope told the flattering tale of her certain safety, there came racing up astern a sea, gigantic even in that giant sea, raced her, caught her, and, as it passed ahead, so tilted her bows that the ballast slid aft, and down she sank by the stern, so near to safety that betwixt ship and shore wife might recognise husband and husband wife.

As at Eyemouth, so it was all down the coast. At Burnmouth, at Berwick (though no boat belonging to Berwick that day was out), at Goswick Bay, and elsewhere, boat after boat, driven before the fury of the gale, was forced over by wind and sea, and sunk with all her crew, or was dashed to pieces on the shore.



Page 19

Night fell on Eyemouth; and, God, what a night! “In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”

By little and little, by ones and twos, boats, battered and with sails torn to ribbons, with crews exhausted and distraught, kept arriving during the Saturday and Sunday, bringing men, as it were, back from the dead. One or two, under bare poles, had ridden the gale out at sea, lying up into the wind as near as might be, threshing through those awful seas hour after hour, buried almost, sometimes, in the seething cauldron, or struck by tons of solid water when some huge mountain of a wave, toppling to its fall, rushed at her out of the blackness. From minute to minute the men never knew but that the next roaring billow would engulf them also, as already they had seen it roll over and swallow up their neighbours.

It was the skipper of the *White Star* that told afterwards how, before the tornado burst—as some said, “like a clap of thunder”—the first thing to take his attention from the shooting of his lines was boats on the weather side of him hurriedly shortening sail, or letting all run. To the nor’ard, from horizon almost to zenith, already the sky was black as ink, the sea beneath white with flying spume. Then like magic the sea got up, and the *White Star* turned to run for Eyemouth, with the *Myrtle* in company. But darkness and the fierce turmoil of waters forced them to lay to in order to make certain of their position. As they lay, pitching fearfully and many times almost on their beam ends from the violence of the wind, a foaming mountain of water came thundering down on the *White Star*, so that for a brief moment all thought that she was gone; and almost as she shook herself free, just such another tremendous wave struck the *Myrtle*, and rolled her over like a walnut-shell skiff, a child’s plaything. As the *White Star* rose on successive waves, her crew twice afterwards saw the *Myrtle* heave up her side for a second ere she went to the bottom, but of her seven hands no man was ever seen again. Head-reaching into the wind, the *White Star* gradually made her perilous way, presently passing yet another boat floating bottom up, her rigging trailing in the water around her, but no bodies visible anywhere. Of the rest of the fleet, no sign. Four and forty hours later the *White Star* reached safety at North Shields. Other boats that also headed for the open sea were even longer in coming to port, but all, as they drew farther and farther from land, found weather less terrible, a sea less dangerous, than that from which by the skin of their teeth they had escaped. Some of the smitten craft drove far to the south before the wind, and after escapes many and incredible, reached a haven of safety, with men worn and dazed, but not all with crews complete; too many paid toll to the



Page 20

sea with one or more lives. For as long as a day and a half, there were skippers who sat, unrelieved, at the tiller of their boat, an awful weight of responsibility on their shoulders, human lives depending on their nerve and skill. Some of these men had to be carried ashore, when at length they reached safety; the legs of one were found to be so twisted and wedged in beneath his seat, that it was only with the greatest difficulty and pain that he was got out of the boat.

There was one boat that found refuge at Shields on the Sunday. She arrived too late to permit of a telegram being sent announcing her safety, but in time to allow her crew—or what was left of it—to catch a late train to the north, and the solemn, echoing tramp of their heavy feet at midnight in the silent street of Eyemouth brought the stricken people from their beds with a start, and with vague apprehension of fresh disaster. But their dread was turned to rejoicing, except for the family of that man who came home never again. In all, on that Sunday night it was known that sixty-four of the men of Eyemouth had perished, and seventy-one were still missing. Of these but a handful ever returned. Eyemouth alone lost one hundred and twenty-nine—the men of whole families, almost of clans, swept away. Truly to her that day was as of old had been Flodden Field to Scotland. The total number of men who perished along this coast in that hurricane was one hundred and eighty-nine.

Will the terror of that time ever be forgotten, or its horror wiped out from the town of Eyemouth? In the face of disaster such as that, smaller happenings appear for the time almost insignificant. Yet it was but the other year that another great gale on that coast brought disaster most pitiful. A Danish steamer, feeling her way to the Firth of Forth in weather thick with fog and with a great gale blowing, mistaking her position, came creeping in the darkness close in to the little village of St. Abb's. Nearer and nearer to the people, snug in their warm, well-lit houses, came the roar of her fog-horn. And then, from the neighbourhood of a treacherous rock—awash at low water—and little more than a stone's throw from the village houses, there rushed up a rocket, and a flare was seen dimly burning. In the heavy sea, the steamer had brought her bows with a mighty crash on to that sunken rock, and there she lay, the great seas sweeping her from stem to stern. Rockets from the cliff that overlooked the wreck could not reach her in that fierce wind; the life-boat, when it arrived from Berwick, could not live in the broken water near to her. All was done that man could do to rescue the perishing men in that hapless vessel; but that "all" in the end amounted to just nothing. Helpless, the watchers listened with sick hearts to the cries of her doomed crew and to the deep baying of a great hound that was on board the doomed ship; helpless, they gazed in impotent agony at the despairing signals



Page 21

made. In the morning she was still there, but the cries were fainter, the faces seen fewer, the vessel more often buried under breaking seas. Then the cries ceased. And when daylight came a second time, where the hull had been there was now but white, raging water, and seas that spouted high in air from a black rock that showed its cruel head at intervals. And of the crew there was found no sign. Only to and fro on the shore there ran a great white dog, that would let no man approach it, that would take no food from strange hands. Day and night, like a lost spirit, to and fro between Eyemouth and St. Abb's Head trotted the great white hound, never resting. And ever when a sail hove in sight, or a steamship passed near in, he would run hurriedly to the farthest projecting point, and throwing back his head, wail piteously for the drowned sailors, his friends.

GRISELL HOME, A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HEROINE

The Merse has given many a gallant man to the mother-country, oftentimes a fighter, now and again a martyr, but no fairer flower has ever blossomed in that stretch of land that has the North Sea for one of its boundaries, and looks across fertile plains to the long, blue line of Cheviots in the south, than one whose name must ever find a sure place in the hearts of those whom courage and fortitude, sweetness and merry humour, exquisite unselfishness, and gay uncomplainingness in the face of dire emergency are things to be honoured and held dear.

Grisell Home was the eldest of eighteen children, two of whom died in infancy. She was born at Redbraes Castle—now Marchmont—on December 25, 1665. There is a belief that Christmas babies always have an extra large share of the nature of Him who was born on Christmas Day; and truly Grisell Home was one of those who never seemed to know the meaning of Self. Her father, Sir Patrick Home, a man of strong character and large fortune, was known to be a rigid Presbyterian, no friend to the house of Stuart, and he was regarded by the Government of his day as “a factious person.” His great friendship with his neighbour, Robert Baillie of Jerviswoode, in no way increased the favour with which either of those good men was regarded in high places. Jerviswoode and Home were “suspects,” and being known as close allies, where one was supposed to be plotting, the other was always expected to be at his back.

To be the eldest of so large a brood must have been a sobering thing for any little girl, but Grisell shouldered her responsibilities with a happy heart, and united with that happy, child-like heart the wisdom and discretion of a woman. She was only twelve when she was chosen as messenger from her father to his friend Mr. Baillie, who was then in prison in Edinburgh. Over lonely Soutra Hill (where highway robbery and

murder were things not unknown), it was no easy or pleasant ride from Marchmont to the Port of Edinburgh; and here the bleaching skulls of martyred



Page 22

covenanters gave to those who entered the town grim warning of the risks of nonconformity. Doubtless little Grisell had been provided by her parents with a suitable escort, but, even so, her heart must have beat faster as she went up the High Street to where the "Heart of Midlothian" then stood, and asked to see Mr. Robert Baillie, her father's friend. The bright-eyed, slim little maid, with her chestnut hair and exquisite complexion, must have been as unexpected a sight in that gloomy place as a wild rose in a desert. None could suspect her of meddling with affairs of State, or of tampering with the prisoners of his gracious Majesty. Thus Grisell Home was able successfully to carry a letter of advice and information, and to bring back to her father in the Merse tidings of a blameless martyr.

With his father in prison that day was Baillie's son, George, a boy one year older than Grisell. He had been, as were many of the well-born lads of his time, at his studies in Holland, reading law, when his father was put in prison, but hastened home on hearing the news. Boys wore swords, and not Eton jackets, in George Baillie's day. He had, as his daughter afterwards wrote of him, "a rough, manly countenance"; and from that day until the day of her death that face, which she knew first as a boy's, was more beautiful to Grisell Home than any other face on earth. Several times afterwards was Grisell sent as bearer of important letters from her father to him whose son, in days still long to come, was to be her husband, and never once was the douce little messenger suspected.

Not many months later her own father was a prisoner in Dumbarton Castle, and during the fifteen months in which he lay there, Grisell was still the messenger, not only to him, but to his friends in various parts. Her early childhood may have been unharassed, but Grisell Home's girlhood was a careful and anxious one. On the discovery of the Rye House Plot, Baillie of Jerviswoode and Home of Polwarth, innocent men both, were denounced as traitors to their King. Baillie was taken, and after several months of imprisonment in London, so heavily loaded with chains that his health completely broke down, he was brought by sea to Edinburgh in stormy November weather which kept the ship a fortnight on its way. A dying man when he was put in the Tolbooth, he yet had to undergo many exhausting examinations and a farcical trial, with "Bluidy Mackenzie" for chief inquisitor, and on Christmas Eve, 1684, he gallantly and cheerfully met a martyr's death at the Market Cross of Edinburgh.

Sir Patrick Home's denunciation was longer in coming than that of his friend, and not until November 1684 was the warrant for his apprehension issued. He, good man, had no desire for martyrdom; moreover, at that time he already possessed ten children, whose future as orphans was likely to be wretched, and so Sir Patrick sought concealment from the hounds of the law. Foiled in laying hold of him, the law



Page 23

seized his eldest son, Patrick, and cast him into prison. Two days after Jerviswoode's death, the lad petitioned the Privy Council for release. He was but "a poor afflicted young boy," he said, loyal to his principles and with a hatred of plots, and only craved liberty that he might "see to some livelihood for himself" and "be in some condition" to help and serve his disconsolate mother and the rest of his father's ten starving children. Most grudgingly was the boon bestowed, and not until the boy had obtained security for his good behaviour to the extent of two thousand pounds sterling was he allowed to return to the Merse.

Meantime Redbraes Castle was constantly kept under supervision. Scarcely a week passed without a party of redcoats clattering up the drive, interrogating the servants, tramping through all the rooms, hunting round the policies, and doing everything in their power to make things unpleasant for the wife and children of this attainted rebel. To only two people in the house, and to one out of it, was the secret of Sir Patrick Home's hiding-place known. With the help of a faithful friend and retainer, Jamie Winter, the carpenter, Lady Home and her daughter Grisell had one dark night carried bed and bedclothes to the burying-place of the Homes, a vault under Polwarth Church, a mile from Redbraes. A black walnut folding-bed, exactly underneath the pulpit from which the minister of Polwarth preached every Sunday, was the fugitive's resting-place at night, while for a month he saw no more daylight than was able to reach him from a slit at one end of the vault. The ashes of his ancestors were scarcely lively company, but Sir Patrick found "great comfort and constant entertainment" by repeating to himself Buchanan's Latin Version of the Psalms. Each night, too, the prisoner was cheered by a visit from his daughter Grisell. Through an open glen by the Swindon Burn, down what is called The Lady's Walk, Grisell nightly came to the vault with her little store of provisions. She was an imaginative, poetic little maid, and the whisper of the wind in the lime trees that grew on either hand would make her shiver, and yet more loudly would her heart thump when in the darkness she stumbled over the graves in the kirkyard, and remembered all the tales she had ever heard of bogles and of ghosts. That lonely walk in the night must always have been full of terrors, yet Grisell's love for her father was so great that she steadfastly braved them all. One fear only she had—that of the soldiers. The wind moaning through the trees or rustling the long grass, the sound of a rabbit or some other wild thing in the bracken, the sudden bark of a dog,—all these made her sure that some spy had found out her secret, and sent her running as fast as her little legs could carry her to try to save her father from his captors. The first night she went was the worst, for the minister kept dogs, and the manse was near the church, and even her light footfall was sufficient to set every one



Page 24

of them a-barking. But Lady Home sent for the minister next day, and upon the pretence of one of them being mad, persuaded their owner to hang them all. Grisell and her father had the same sunny nature, and both dearly loved a joke, and each amusing little incident of the day was saved up by the former to be told while the prisoner made a meal on the food which she brought with her. Many a hearty laugh they had together in that dark, dismal place, and often Grisell stayed so late that she had to run up the glen, so as to get home before day dawned. The difficulties she encountered in securing food enough for her father without arousing the suspicion of the servants was always a subject for jest, for, more often than not, the only possible means of getting the food was by surreptitiously conveying it, during a meal, from her own plate into her lap. Her amazing appetite was bound to be commented upon, but never did she surprise her brothers and sisters more than on a day when the chief dish at dinner was her father's favourite one—sheep's head. While the younger members of the family were very busy over their broth, Grisell conveyed to her lap the greater part of the head. Her brother Sandy, afterwards Lord Marchmont, dispatched his plateful first, looked up, and gave a shout of amazement.

“Mother!” he cried, “will ye look at Grisell! while we have been eating our broth, she has eaten up the whole sheep's heid!”

“Sandy must have an extra share of the next sheep's heid,” said the laughing father when he heard the tale.

During the month that Sir Patrick Home lay hid in the vault, it was not only by collecting food for him by day, and by taking it to him by night, that his young daughter gave proof of her devotion. In a room of which Grisell kept the key, on the ground floor at Redbraes Castle, she and Jamie Winter worked in the small hours, making a hiding-place for the fugitive. Underneath a bed which drew out they lifted up the boards, and with their hands, scraped and burrowed in the earth to make a hole large enough for a man to lie in. To prevent making a noise they used no tools, and as they dug out the earth it was packed in a sheet, put on Jamie's back, and carried, Grisell helping, out at the window into the garden. Not a nail was left upon her fingers when the task was completed, and a sorely unslept little maid she must have looked at the end of a month's foraging by day and hard work by night, with that nerve-tearing walk as a beginning to her nightly labours. The hole being ready, Jamie Winter conveyed to it a large deep wooden box which he had made at home, with air-holes in the lid, and furnished with mattress and bedding, and this was fitted into the place made for it. It was then Grisell's duty to examine it daily, and to keep the air-holes clean picked, and when it had for some weeks stood trial of no water coming into it from its being sunk so low in the ground, Sir Patrick one night came home. For a couple of weeks only was Redbraes his sanctuary, for, on Christmas Day, upon Grisell lifting the boards as usual to see that all was well with the lair that her father was to retire to in case of a sudden

surprise, the mattress bounced to the top, the box being full of water. The poor child nearly fainted from horror, but Sir Patrick remained quite calm.



Page 25

“Obviously,” he said to his wife and daughter, “we must tempt Providence no longer. It is now fit and necessary for me to go off and leave you.” Later in the day, news brought by the carrier confirmed him in his resolution. Baillie of Jerviswoode had been hanged in Edinburgh on the previous day, and his head now adorned a spike on the Nether Bow. The death of his best friend was a great shock to Sir Patrick, perhaps an even greater one to Lady Home, and to little Grisell, for could not their imagination readily paint a picture of *their* dear “traitor” hanging where his friend had hung. No time was to be lost, and Grisell at once began work on her father’s wardrobe, and in the coming days and nights, with anxious fingers, made such alterations in his clothing as seemed necessary for a disguise.

Meantime a friend and neighbour of Sir Patrick’s, John Home of Halyburton, had “jaloused” that his namesake was not hidden so far afield as some imagined, and when, one cold January afternoon, he heard the clatter of hoofs on the high-road and saw the red coats of the dragoons, he had a stab at his heart at the thought of another good son of the Merse going to martyrdom.

“Where do you ride to-day?” he asked, when the party came up.

“To take Polwarth at Redbraes,” they said.

“Is it so?” said Home. “Then I’ll go with you myself and be your guide. But come your ways into the house and rest you a little, till I get ready for the road.”

Nothing loth, the troopers followed him, and were still contentedly testing the quality of the contents of his big case-bottles when a groom galloped off to Redbraes. Halyburton’s message to Lady Home of Polwarth was a brief one, for when she opened his envelope there was nothing there to read—only a little feather fluttered out, giving as plainly the advice to instant flight as pages of words might have done.

There was nothing for it but to take another into their secret. John Allen, the grieve, was sent for, and fainted dead away when he heard that his master was in the house instead of being in safety in foreign lands, and that the dragoons were even then on his tracks. He, too, had visions of a figure dangling from a gibbet, and of a head on the Nether Bow—and small blame to him, worthy man.

It was then the darkening, and Allen’s instructions were at once to tell his fellow-servants that he had received orders to sell three horses at Morpeth Fair, and to be off on the road without further delay.

Sir Patrick took farewell of his wife and of Grisell, climbed out of a window, met the grieve near the stables, and was off in the darkness, with as little noise as might be. It was a sorrowful parting, but when, not long after he was gone, the dragoons rode up to Redbraes, Lady Home and her daughter were glad indeed that he was away.



Somewhat regretting their prolonged enjoyment of the hospitality of Home of Halyburton, the search-party thoroughly ransacked every hole and corner of Redbraes Castle. Inside they could find no trace nor pick up one crumb of information, but from an outside servant they heard of John Allen's departure, Morpeth way, with three horses.



Page 26

"Horses, indeed! for Morpeth Fair?" the dragoon officer hooted at the thought. "Boot and saddle, lads!" he called to his men; "we'll run the traitorous fox to earth long before he gets to Berwick!" At a canter they were off down the drive, the contents of Halyburton's case-bottles still warming their hearts and giving extra zest to their enterprise. It was a dark night, and they were thick black woods that they rode between, but they had not ridden very many miles when they were able to make out, some way in front of them, the outlines of two horses.

"We've got him, lads!" cried the officer; "run him down at last. Worry, worry, worry!"

But instead of the horses in front breaking into a gallop at the sound of pursuit, they were pulled up short by the roadside, and instead of there being two riders there was only one, leading an unsaddled horse. More exasperating than all to the ardour of the hunters was the fact that in place of the thin, clever face of Sir Patrick Home being the one to confront them, the round, scared face of a Berwickshire peasant stared at them in dismay. In vain did the officer question, bully, cross-examine. John Allen was unshakeable. He was gaun tae Morpeth Fair tae sell the horse. Na, he didnae ken where the maister was. Sure's daith he didnae ken. Aye, he left Redbraes mebbes twa hour sin', in the darkening. No amount of hectoring, no quantity of loudly—shouted oaths could move the grieve from his tale. "A wuss a *did* ken whaur he is," he said, "but a dinnae ken." Finally he had to be given up as hopeless, and the dragoons rode back, a little shamefacedly and cursing their luck. John Allen, his honest face still full of scared amazement, rode slowly on. Every now and again he would check his horse, look round and listen, mutter to himself bewilderedly, shake his head, and go on once more. The clatter of the dragoons had not long died away when, coming towards him from the other direction, he heard the regular beat of a horse's hoofs. It was no strange horse, he soon realised, nor was the rider a stranger. The gay smile that his face so often wore irradiated Home of Polwarth's when he heard his servant's greeting.

"Eh, losh me, Polwarth!" he said, "a never had sic a gliff in a' *ma* days! Here a' em, thinking aye that ye was riding no far ahint us, and when a hears a gallopin' an' turns roond, ye've santed, an' here's a pack o' thae bluidy dragoons that wad blast ye black in the face an' speir the inside oot o' a wheelbarra. Man, where were ye? It's naething short o' a meericle?"

Page 27

Nor was it much short of a miracle, as Sir Patrick acknowledged. He had followed Allen at first as the grieve had thought, but his mind was full of the parting he had just gone through and of the misty future before him, and when his thoughts came back with a jerk to the actualities of the present, he heard the rush of a winter river and found that he was close by the side of the Tweed. It was some time before he could exactly find his bearings, but he did so at last, and, after some reconnoitring, found a place that could be safely forded. Once across the river, he rode quickly back towards Redbraes, hoping that by good fortune he might yet meet with Allen, and so neatly escaped the soldiers who pursued him. The high-road after this was no longer deemed safe, and the rest of his ride to London was done on bye-ways and across the moors. In two days honest John returned to Redbraes and brought to the sad hearts of Lady Home and Grisell the joyful news that Sir Patrick had not fallen into the hands of the dragoons, as they had greatly feared, but was now safely on his way to England. As a travelling surgeon, calling himself Dr. Wallace, Sir Patrick Home worked his way south, bleeding patients when need be, prescribing homely remedies when called upon to do so. None ever penetrated his disguise, and he was able to cross from London to France and journey, on foot from France to Holland with complete success.

Years afterwards, when Sir Patrick was Earl of Marchmont, Chancellor of Scotland, and President of the Privy Council, it was his lot to have to try for his life a certain Captain Burd. And during the trial there came back to him like a flash the old days when, in company with another wayfarer, he tramped the long French roads, unwinding themselves like white ribbons before him, between the avenues of stiff, tall, silvery poplars on to the flat, windmill-dotted Dutch country, with the brown-sailed boats that seemed to sail along the fields. And here, in Captain Burd, he recognised the companion of those often weary, often hungry days, when pockets were empty, fortunes at dead-low tide, and Scotland and wife and children very far away. In public the Chancellor treated his old friend with severity, but arranged with his son, Sir Andrew Home, then a young lawyer, to see Captain Burd alone. Timidly and nervously, with downcast eyes, the poor man repeated the tale to which the Chancellor had already listened. In silence he heard it again, and then: "Do you not know me?" he asked, smiling.

"God's wounds! Dr. Wallace!" cried Captain Burd, and fell with tears of joy on the neck of the Chancellor, who was readily and gladly able to prove the innocence of his old companion.



Page 28

No sooner had Sir Patrick Home left Scotland than his estates were forfeited and given to Lord Seaforth, and although Lady Home went by sea to London, and there for a long time did all possible to obtain from Government an adequate allowance for the support of her family of ten, L150 a year was all that she was able to secure. Of course Grisell was her companion there, and her companion also when she sailed to Holland to join Sir Patrick. Of the ten, a little girl, Julian by name, had to be left behind with friends as she was too ill to travel, and when Grisell had safely handed over her mother and brothers and sisters to her father's care, she returned to Scotland alone, to act as escort to the little sister, "to negotiate business, and to try if she could pick up any money of some that was owing to her father." The brave and capable little woman of business, having managed affairs to her satisfaction, secured, for the passage, a nurse for the sister, who was still a weakly invalid. Moreover, the voyage to Holland, being in those days more than just the affair of a night, a cabin-bed—the only one in the ship, apparently—was engaged for Julian, and a good store of provisions laid in. But when the ship had sailed, Grisell found that the cabin-bed had been separately engaged and paid for by four other ladies, and at once these four began a violent dispute as to which should have it. "Let them be doing," said a gentleman, who had to share the cabin with the rest, "you will see how it will end."

So the disappointed little maid had to arrange a bed on the floor as best she could for herself and her sister, with a bag of books that she was taking to her father for pillow, while two ladies shared the bed and the others lay down where they could find room. Any place where they could lie flat must have been welcome, for a storm was brewing, and as a cradle the North Sea usually leaves a good deal to be desired. As they all lay, in fairly sickening discomfort, in the cabin, lit only by an evil-smelling oil-lamp that swayed back and forwards with each roll, the heavy step of the captain was heard coming down the companion way. Grisell had expected honesty from her fellow-travellers, and her store of provisions was laid out in what she had considered a convenient place. It did not take the captain long to devour every scrap of what had been meant to last the girls and their maid for days. His gluttonous meal over, he tramped up to the bed.

"Turn out! turn out!" he said to the women who lay there, and having undressed himself lay down to snore in that five time's paid for sleeping-place. It must have been somewhat of a comfort—if, indeed, comfort was to be found in anything that night—that the captain did not long enjoy his slumbers. A fierce gale began to blow, and during the furious storm that never abated for many an hour to come, the captain had to remain, drenched to the skin, on deck, working and directing with all his might, in order



Page 29

to save his ship. They never saw him again until they landed at the Brill. That night the two girls set out on foot to tramp the weary miles to Rotterdam, a gentleman refugee from Scotland, who had come over in the same boat, acting as their escort. The stormy weather of the North Sea had followed them to land. It was a cold, wet, dirty night, and Julian Home, still frail from illness, soon lost her shoes in the mud. There was but one solution to the difficulty. The gentleman shouldered their baggage along with his own; Grisell shouldered her sister, and carried her all the rest of those weary miles. At Rotterdam they found Sir Patrick Home and his eldest son awaiting them, to take them on to their new home in Utrecht, and wet and cold and tiredness were all forgotten at the sight of those dear faces, and Grisell “felt nothing but happiness and contentment.”

For three years and a half they lived in Utrecht, and once again during that time Grisell voyaged to Scotland to see to her father’s business affairs. It is difficult to discover what, during the rest of that time, she did not do for her parents and family. There were many Scottish refugees then in Holland, and the Homes kept open house, and spent nearly a fourth part of their income on a mansion sufficiently commodious to allow of their hospitalities. This made it impossible for them to keep any servant save a little girl who washed the dishes, and consequently Grisell acted as cook, housekeeper, housemaid, washerwoman, laundress, dressmaker, and tailoress. Twice a week she sat up at night to do the family accounts. Daily she rose before six, went to the market and to the mill to see their own corn ground, and—in the words of her daughter, who proudly tells the tale—“dressed the linen, cleaned the house, made ready the dinner, mended the children’s stockings and other clothes, made what she could for them, and in short did everything.” She was very musical and loved playing and singing, but when, for a small sum, a harpsichord was bought, it was her younger sister, Christian, who was the performer, and by it “diverted” her parents, and the girls had many a joke over their different occupations. Yet even with all her other work she found time to take an occasional lesson in French and Dutch from her father along with the younger ones, and even wrote a book of songs—many of them half written, broken off in the middle of a sentence as a pot boiled over or an iron grew hot enough to use. Some of them are dear to us still. Do we ever think of all the hardships that were nobly endured by a Scottish girl two hundred years ago when we quote the words of her exquisite song—

“Were na my heart licht, I wad dee.”



Page 30

Of all her brothers and sisters, her eldest brother, Patrick, was her closest friend, and, when he became one of the Prince of Orange's Guards, Grisell had extra labours, for the Guards wore little point-lace cravats and cuffs, and many a night she sat up to have these in such perfect order that no dandy officer in the service could compete with the young Scottish soldier. An added happiness to those happy, busy days came to Grisell through her brother's fellow-guardsman and greatest friend, for George Baillie, the lad she first met in the Tolbooth, gave his heart to her that day within the gloomy prison walls, and they were lovers still when, after forty-eight years of married life, death came to part them.

With the accession of the Prince of Orange the merry, light-hearted days in Holland came to an end. There was probably no poorer Scottish family to be found in all Holland. There was certainly no happier one. When they came home they were prosperous once again, and honours were showered upon Sir Patrick Home. Grisell was asked to become a maid of honour to the Princess but she preferred to go back to the quiet country life at Redbraes. Already, during their least prosperous days, Grisell's beauty and charm had made at least two Berwickshire gentlemen "of fortune and character" beg for her hand, and it was to her parents' regret that she refused them both, because her heart was already in the keeping of a penniless guardsman in the Dutch service. Only poverty kept them apart, and when King William gave back to George Baillie his lands, there was no other obstacle in the way, and they were married forthwith. They were man and wife for forty-eight years, "in all of which time," writes their daughter, "I have often heard my mother declare that they never had the shadow of a quarrel, or misunderstanding, or dryness betwixt them—not for a moment"; and that, "to the last of his life, she felt the same ardent and tender love and affection for him, and the same desire to please him in the smallest trifle that she had at their first acquaintance." To the day his last illness began, her husband never went out without her going to the window to watch him till he was out of sight of those kind, bright, beautiful eyes, through which shone as beautiful a soul as any that ever made the earth a better and a happier place for having been in it.

Grisell Home was Lady Grisell Baillie when, in 1703, her mother died.

"Where is Grisell," she asked, almost with her latest breath. And when Lady Grisell came and held her hand the old lady said, "My dear Grisell, blessed be you above all, for a helpful child you have been to me."



Page 31

Lady Grisell Baillie lived through the '15 and the '45, and those who suffered in the first of those years had the kindest of friends and helpers in her large-minded husband and in herself. She was eighty at the time of the '45, but during that year and during the next, when her death took place, she helped by every means in her power those who had suffered from fighting for a cause that was dear to their hearts. She always remembered what she herself had gone through. "Full of years, and of good works," as her somewhat pompous epitaph has it, Lady Grisell Baillie died in December 1746, and was buried at Mellerstain on the day upon which she should have celebrated her eighty-second birthday. And surely the angels who, on that first Christmas Eve, long, long ago, sang of "Peace on earth—goodwill towards men," must have been very near when she, who was a Christmas baby, and whose whole long life had been one of love and of peace, of goodwill and of charity to others, was laid in the earth as the snowflakes fell, on Christmas Day, one hundred and sixty-eight years ago.

KINMONT WILLIE

A venerable and highly respected Scottish professor of literature was once asked what was his ruling passion—his heart's desire? If the secrets of his soul could be laid bare, what, above all, would be found to be his predominant wish? The question was an indiscreet one, but he was tolerant. He tightly compressed his gentle mouth, and firmly readjusted his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I *wish*" said he, "to be a corsair."

It would have been interesting to know how many of a following he would have had from sedate academic circles had he been given his heart's desire and had sailed down the Clyde with the raw head and bloody bones showing on the black flag that flew at his mast-head. How many of us are there with whom law-abiding habits, decorous respectability, form but a thin covering of ice over unplumbed depths of lawless desire? Not long since, when a wretched criminal case in which the disappearance of a pearl necklace was involved, was agitating every Scottish club and tea-table, a charming old Scottish lady, whose career from childhood up has been one of unblemished virtue, was heard to bemoan the manner of commission of the crime. "She did it *very* stupidly. Now, if I had been doing it I should"—And her astounded auditors listened to an able exposition of the way in which she would successfully have eluded justice. Is it the story of the villain who is successfully tracked to his doom that attracts us most? or that of the great Raffles and his kind whose villainies almost invariably escape detection, and who burgles with a light and easy touch and the grace and humour of a Claude Duval? Let us be honest with ourselves. How many of us really wish to be corsairs? Which of us would *not* have been a reiver in the old reiving days? Have we

Page 32

not noticed in ourselves and other Borderers an undeniable complacency, a boastful pride in a mask of apology that would not deceive an infant, when we say, "Oh yes; certainly a good many of my ancestors were hanged for lifting cattle." And, however "indifferent honest" we ourselves may be, which of us does not lay aside even that most futile mask and boast unashamedly when we can claim descent from one of those princes among reivers—Wat o' Harden, Johnnie Armstrong, or Kinmont Willie?

William Armstrong, better known as Kinmont Willie, lived in the palmiest days of the Border reivers. The times of purely Scottish and purely English kings were drawing to a close, and with one monarch to rule over Britain the raider could no longer plead that he was a patriot who fought for king and country when he made an incursion over the Cheviots, burned a few barns and dwelling-houses, lifted some "kye and oxen," horses, and goats, and what household gear and minted money he could lay hands on, slew a man or two, and joyously returned home.

But with Elizabeth still on the English throne, and with Queen Mary, and afterwards her son, reigning in Scotland, the dance could go merrily on, and when we look at those days in retrospect it seems to us that the last bars of the music, the last turns in the dance, went more rapidly than any that had gone before.

In Kinmont Willie's lifetime the Wardens of the Marches had but little leisure. It was necessary for them to be fighting men with a good head for figures, for on the days of truce when the Wardens of the Scottish and English Marches met to redd up accounts, not only had they to work out knotty arithmetical problems with regard to the value of every sort of live stock, of buildings, of "insight," and the payment of such bills, but they had to have expert knowledge in fair exchange of a Scottish for an English life, an English for a Scotch. Little wonder if their patience sometimes ran short, as did that of a Howard of Naworth upon one famous occasion. He was deeply engrossed in studies that had no bearing upon Border affairs when an officer came to announce the capture of some Scottish moss-troopers, and to ask for the Warden's commands with regard to them. The interruption was untimely, and Lord Howard was exasperated. "Hang them, in the devil's name!" he said angrily, and went on with his studies. A little later he felt he could better give his mind to the consideration of the case, and sent for his officer. "Touching the prisoners," said he, "what have you done with them?"

Proud of being one of those who did not let the grass grow beneath their feet, the officer beamingly responded: "Everyone o' them's hangit, my lord!"



Page 33

It was a March day in 1596, when a Wardens' meeting took place at Dayholm, near Kershopefoot. The snow was still lying in the hollows of the Cheviots, the trees were bare, the Liddel and the Esk swollen by thaws and winter rains; but weather was a thing that came but little into the reckoning of the men of the Marches unless some foray was afoot. They got through the business more or less satisfactorily, and proceeded to ride home before the day of truce should be ended. From sunrise on the one day until sunset on the next, so the Border law ordained, all Scots and Englishmen who were present at the Wardens' meeting should be free of scathe. Now the Warden of Liddesdale at that time was Sir Walter Scott of Branxholme, laird of Buccleuch. He was one of the greatest men of his century; a "fyrebrande," according to Queen Elizabeth, and a fierce enemy according to those who incurred his enmity; but, according to all others, a man of perfect courage, stainless loyalty and honour, charming wit, and great culture. He never spared an enemy nor turned his back on a friend, and he was a born winner of hearts and leader of men. Amongst his retainers was Kinmont Willie, and as Willie rode from the Wardens' meeting, along the banks of the Liddel, in company with only three or four men, a body of two hundred English horsemen, commanded by Salkeld, Warden of the Eastern March, marked him from across the water. Truce or no truce, the chance seemed to them one that was too good to lose. Speedily some of them pushed on ahead, and an ambush was laid for Kinmont Willie. He and his friends were naturally totally unprepared for such a dastardly attack, but it took them but little time to gather their wits, and Willie gave them a good run for their money. For nearly four miles they chased him, but ran him down at length. After some hard giving and taking, he had to acknowledge his defeat, and, pinioned like a common malefactor—arms tied behind him, legs bound under his horse's belly—they rode with him into Carlisle town.

The news of the treacherous taking of his follower was not long in reaching Buccleuch, who at once raised an angry protest. Scrope, the English Warden, received this with an evasive and obviously trumped-up counter-charge of Kinmont Will having first broken truce. Moreover, he said, he was a notorious enemy to law and order, and must bear the penalty of his misdeeds. This was more than the bold Buccleuch could stomach.

"He has ta'en the table wi' his hand,
He garr'd the red wine spring on hie—
'Now Christ's curse on my head,' he said,
'But avenged of Lord Scrope I'll be!
O, is my basnet a widow's curch?
Or my lance a wand o' the willow-tree?
Or my arm a ladye's lilye hand,
That an English lord should lightly me?"

Page 34

No time was lost in making an appeal to King James, which resulted in an application to the English Government. But while the English authorities quibbled, paltered, and delayed—with a little evasion, a little extra red-tapism, a little judicious procrastination—the days of Kinmont Willie were being numbered by his captors. The triumph of putting an end to the daring deeds of so bold a Scottish reiver when they had him safely in chains in Carlisle Castle, was one that they were not likely lightly to forego. It would be indeed a merry crowd of English Borderers that flocked to Haribee Hill on the day that Will of Kinmont dangled from the gallows.

Buccleuch saw that he had no time to lose. He himself must strike at once, and strike with all his might.

The night of April 13, 1596, was dark and stormy. All the Border burns and rivers were in spate; the winds blew shrewd and chill through the glens of Liddesdale, and sleet drifted down in the teeth of the gale. The trees that grew so thick round Woodhouselee bent and cracked, and sent extra drenching showers of rain down on the steel jacks of a band of horsemen who carefully picked their way underneath them, on to the south. Buccleuch was leader, and with him rode some forty picked men of his friends and kinsmen, to meet some hundred and fifty or so of other chosen men. Scotts, Elliots, Armstrongs, and Grahams were there, and although Buccleuch had requested that only younger sons were to risk their lives in the forlorn hope that night, Auld Wat o' Harden and many another landowner rode with their chief. "Valiant men, they would not bide," says Scott of Satchells, whose own father was one of the number. Kinmont Willie's own tower of Morton, on the water of Sark, about ten miles north of Carlisle, was their rallying point. Buccleuch had arranged every detail most carefully at a horse-race held at Langholm a few days before, and one of the Grahams, an Englishman whose countrymen were not yet aware that the Graham clan had allied themselves to that of the Scotts, had conveyed his ring to Kinmont Willie to show him that he was not forgotten by his feudal lord. One and all, the reivers were well armed, "with spur on heel, and splent on spauld," and with them they carried scaling ladders, picks, axes, and iron crowbars. The Esk and Eden were in furious flood, but no force of nature or of man could stay the reivers' horses that night.

"We go to catch a rank reiver
Has broken faith wi' the bauld Buccleuch."

That was the burden of their thoughts, and although they well knew that ere the dawning each one of them might be claiming the hospitality of six feet of English sod, their hearts were light. To them a message that the fray was up was like the sound of the huntsman's horn in the ears of a thoroughbred hunter.

"Where are ye gaun, ye mason lads,
Wi' a' your ladders, lang and hie?"

'We gang to berry a corbie's nest,
That wons not far frae Woodhouselee.'



Page 35

No light matter was it to harry that corbie's nest. Carlisle Castle was a strong castle, strongly garrisoned, and to make a raid on an English town was a bold attempt indeed. But fear was a thing unknown to the Border reivers, and the flower of them rode with Buccleuch that night—close on his horse's heels Wat o' Harden, Walter Scott of Goldielands, and Kinmont's own four stalwart sons—Jock, Francie, Geordie, and Sandy. As the dark night hours wore on, sleet and wind were reinforced by a thunderstorm.

“And when we left the Staneshaw-bank,
The wind began full loud to blaw,
But 'twas wind and weet, and fire and sleet,
When we came beneath the castle wa'.”

When the besiegers reached the castle they found some of the watch asleep, and the rest sheltering indoors from the storm. The outside of the castle was left to take care of itself. It was dismaying to find the scaling ladders too short to be of any use, but a small postern gate was speedily and quietly undermined. Drifting sleet, growling thunder, and the wails of the wind drowned all sounds of the assault, and soon there was no further need for concealment, for the lower court of the castle was theirs. The guard started up, to find sword-blades at their throats; two of them were left dead, and the rest were speedily overpowered. Buccleuch, the fifth man in, gave the command to proclaim aloud their triumph:

“Now sound out trumpets!” quoth Buccleuch; “Let's waken Lord Scroope right merrilie!
Then loud the Warden's trumpet blew— *'O wha daur meddle wi' me?'*”

While Buccleuch himself kept watch at the postern, two dozen stout moss-troopers now rushed to the castle gaol, a hundred yards from the postern gate, forced the door of Kinmont Willie's prison, and found him there chained to the wall, and carried him out, fetters and all, on the back of “the starkest man in Teviotdale.”

“Stand to it!” cried Buccleuch—so says the traitor, a man from the English side, who afterwards acted as informer to the English Warden—“for I have vowed to God and my Prince that I would fetch out of England, Kinmont, dead or alive.”

Shouts of victory in strident Scottish voices, the crash of picks on shattered doors and ruined mason-work, and that arrogant, insolent, oft-repeated blast from the trumpet of him whom Scrope described in his report to the Privy Council as “the capten of this proud attempt,” were not reassuring sounds to the Warden of the English Marches, his deputy, and his garrison. Five hundred Scots at least—so did Scrope swear to himself and others—were certainly there, and there was no gainsaying the adage that “Discretion is the better part of valour.” So, in the words of the historian, he and the others “did keip thamselffis close.”



But no sooner had the rescue party reached the banks of the Eden than the bells of Carlisle clanged forth a wild alarm. Red-tongued flames from the beacon on the great tower did their best, in spite of storm and sleet, to warn all honest English folk that a huge army of Scots was on the war-path, and that the gallows on Haribee Hill had been insulted by the abduction of its lawful prey.



Page 36

“We scarce had won the Staneshaw-bank,
When a’ the Carlisle bells were rung,
And a thousand men on horse and foot,
Cam’ wi’ the keen Lord Scroope along.

Buccleuch has turn’d to Eden Water,
Even where it flow’d frae brim to brim,
And he has plunged in wi’ a’ his band,
And safely swam them through the stream.

He turned them on the other side,
And at Lord Scroope his glove flung he—
‘If ye like na’ my visit in merry England,
In fair Scotland come visit me!’

All sore astonished stood Lord Scroope,
He stood as still as rock of stane;
He scarcely dare to trew his eyes,
When through the water they had gane.

‘He is either himsel’ a devil frae hell,
Or else his mother a witch maun be;
I wadna’ have ridden that wan water
For a’ the gowd in Christentie.’”

At a place called “Dick’s Tree,” not far from Longtown, there still stands the “smiddy” where lived the blacksmith who had the honour of knocking off Kinmont Willie’s fetters. Sir Walter Scott has handed on the story of the smith’s daughter who, as a little child, was roused at daybreak by a “sair clatter” of horses, and shouts for her father, followed, as the smith slept soundly, by a lance being thrust through the window. Looking out in the dim grey of the morning, the child saw “more gentlemen than she had ever seen before in one place, all on horseback, in armour, and dripping wet—and that Kinmont Willie, who sat woman-fashion behind one of them, was the biggest carle she ever saw—and there was much merriment in the party.”

Furious was the hive of wasps that Buccleuch brought about his head by thus insultingly casting a stone into the English bike. The wrath of Queen Elizabeth was unappeasable. Scrope found it sounded better to multiply the number of the raiders by five, but Scottish tongues were not slow to tell the affronting truth, and the Englishmen of Carlisle had the extra bitterness of being butts for the none too subtle jests of every Scot on the Border. The success of so daring a venture made the Scottish reivers arrogant. Between June 19 and July 24 of that year, the spoils of the western Marches were a thousand and sixty-one cattle and ninety-eight horses, and some thirty steadings and other buildings, mostly in Gilsland, were burned. The angry English made



reprisals. It was in one of them that the Scots who were taken were leashed “like doggis,” and for this degradation Buccleuch and Ker of Cessford made the English pay most handsomely. Together those “two fyrebrandes of the Border” led an incursion into Tynedale, where, in broad daylight, they burned three hundred steadings and dwelling-houses, many stables, barns, and other outhouses, slew with the sword fourteen of those who had been in the Scottish raid, and brought back a handsome booty.



Page 37

King Jamie was in a most uncomfortable position. Queen Elizabeth demanded Buccleuch's punishment, and he argued. She nagged, and he wriggled. Finally, after continual angry remonstrances from the insulted English monarch, he had to give in, and Buccleuch and Ker had both, at different periods, to suffer imprisonment for the sin, in the virgin Queen's eyes, of the rescue of Kinmont Willie, and of its bloody consequences. We realise what was the reputation of Buccleuch and of his followers when we see into what a state of panic the mere prospect of having the Border chieftain as prisoner at Berwick-on-Tweed threw Sir John Carey, the governor. To Lord Hunsdon he wrote: "I entreat your Lordship that I may not become the jailor of so dangerous a prisoner or, at least, that I may know whether I shall keep him like a prisoner or no? for there is not a worse or more dangerous place in England to keep him than this; it is so near his friends, and, besides, so many in this town willing to pleasure him, and his escape may be so easily made; and once out of this town he is past recovery. Wherefore I humbly beseech your honor, let him be removed from hence to a more secure place, for I protest to the Almighty God, before I will take the charge to kepe him here, I will desire to be put in prison myself, and to have a keeper of me. For what care soever be had of him here, he shall want no furtherance whatsoever wit of man can devise, if he himself list to make an escape. So I pray your Lordship, even for God's sake and for the love of a brother, to relieve me from this danger." But there was no attempt at a rescue of Buccleuch. He did not desire it. Not as a criminal, but as a state prisoner he gave himself up to the English governor, and, having given his parole, he kept it, like the gentleman of stainless honour that he was.

Two years after his imprisonment at Berwick-on-Tweed, Buccleuch, on his way with two hundred followers to serve with Prince Maurice of Nassau in the Low Countries—a raid from which many a Borderer never returned—was sufficiently received into favour to be permitted to go to London and kiss the hand of her most gracious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. The remembrance of Kinmont Willie still rankled in that most unforgiving of royal breasts.

"How dared you," she imperiously demanded, "undertake an enterprise so desperate and presumptuous?"

"Dared?" answered Buccleuch; "what is it that a man *dares* not do?"

Elizabeth turned impetuously to a lord-in-waiting. "With ten thousand such men," she said, "our brother of Scotland might shake the firmest throne in Europe."

That Kinmont Willie avenged himself not once, but many times, on those who had treacherously trapped him and done their best to make him meat for the greedy English gibbet, is not a matter of surmise, but one of history. His ride into Carlisle on that bleak March day, and the long days and dreary nights he spent in chains in the English gaol, were little likely to engender a gentle and forgiving spirit in the breast of one of the most fiery of the "minions of the moon." When, in 1600, he raided Scrope's tenants, they

were given good cause to regret the happenings in which Scrope had taken so prominent a part.



Page 38

We have no record of the end of Kinmont Willie, and can but hope, for his sake, that he died the death he would have died—a good horse under him almost to the end, a good sword in his hand, open sky above him, and round him the caller breeze that has blown across the Border hills. In a lonely little graveyard in the Debatable Land, close to the Water of Sark, and near the March dyke between the two countries, his body is said to rest. Does there never come a night, when the moon is hidden behind a dark scud of clouds, and the old reiver, growing restless in his grave, finds somewhere the shade of a horse that, in its day, could gallop with the best, and rides again across the Border, to meet once more his “auld enemies” of England, and, to the joyous accompaniment of the lowing of cattle and the jingle of spurs, returns to his lodging as the first cock crows, and grey morning breaks?

“O, they rade in the rain, in the days that are gane,
In the rain and the wind and the lave;
They shoutit in the ha’ and they routit on the hill,
But they’re a’ quaitit noo in the grave.”

IN THE DAYS OF THE '15

Close on two hundred years back from the present time there stood far up the South Tyne, beyond Haltwhistle, on the road—then little better than a bridle-track—running over the Cumberland border by Brampton, an inn which in those days was a house of no little importance in that wild and remote country.

If its old walls could speak, what, for instance, might they not have told of Jacobite plottings? Beneath its roof was held many a meeting of the supporters of the King “over the water,” James the Eighth; and here, riding up from Dilston, not seldom came the unfortunate Earl of Derwentwater, to take part in the Jacobite deliberations. The young lord and the horse he usually rode were figures familiar and welcome to the country folk around, and at the inn they were as well known as was the landlord himself. It was not long after a secret meeting held here in the earlier half of the year 1715 that the warrants were issued which led to Derwentwater’s flight from Dilston, and precipitated the Rising that within a few months rolled so many gallant heads in the dust of the scaffold.

It might perhaps have been better for Lord Derwentwater had he been less beloved in Northumberland, and had his devoted admirers been unable to send him notice of the coming of the warrant for his arrest. He might not then have had opportunity to commit himself so deeply; and there might have been a romantic and pathetic figure the less in the doleful history of that unhappy period. As it was, he had time to get clear away, and was able to lie securely hid, partly in farmhouses, partly near Shaftoe Crag, till the news reached him that Forster had raised the standard of rebellion. On 6th October

1715, at the head of a little company of gentlemen and armed servants, he joined Forster at Greenrig.



Page 39

A poor affair at the best, this muster in Northumberland; and though the county was seething with excitement, and a few notable men went out with the Earl, his personal following did not exceed seventy in all. Then followed the march which ended so disastrously in pitiful surrender at Preston that fatal November day. However gallant personally, Forster was an incapable soldier, no leader of men, and General Wills had but to spread wide his net to sweep in the bulk of the insurgents—Forster, Derwentwater, Kenmure, Nithsdale, Carwath, Wintoun, and men less exalted in rank by the score and the hundred. The bag was a heavy one, that day of disaster to the Stuart cause; and alas, for many of those who filled it! Alas, too, for the wives and the mothers who sat at home, waiting! Not to everyone was given the opportunity to dare all for husband or son; to few came such chance as was seized by the Countess of Nithsdale, who so contrived that her husband escaped from the Tower disguised in woman's clothing. It was boldly schemed, and success followed her attempt. Others could but pray to God and petition the King. She not only prayed, but acted. Would that there might have been one so to act for Derwentwater! More happy had it been, perhaps, for his Countess had she never uttered the taunt that ended his hesitation to join in the Rebellion: "It is not fitting that the Earl of Derwentwater should continue to hide his head in hovels from the light of day, when the gentry are up in arms for their lawful sovereign." They say that her spirit mourns yet within the tower of Dilston.

Away up the valley of the Tyne, amongst the wild Northumberland hills, news went with lagging gait, those leisurely days of the eighteenth century; even news of battle or of disaster did not speed as it is the wont of ill news to do: "For evil news rides fast, while good news baits." Tidings, in those good old days, but trickled through from ear to ear, slowly, as water filters through sand. Little news, therefore, of Lord Derwentwater, or of the Rising, was heard in or around Haltwhistle after the insurgent force left Brampton; no man knew for a certainty what fortune, good or bad, had waited on the fortunes of his friends.

Night was closing down on the desolate Border hills on a drear November evening of 1715. Throughout a melancholy day, clinging mist had blurred the outline of even the nearest hills; distance was blotted out. Thin rain fell chillingly and persistently, drip, dripping with monotonous plash from the old inn's thatched eaves; a light wind sobbed fitfully around the building, moaning at every chink and cranny of the ill-fitting window-frames. "A dismal night for any who must travel," thought the stableman of the inn, as he looked east and then west along the darkening road. No moving thing broke the monotony of the depressing outlook, and the groom turned to his work of bedding down for the night the few animals that happened to be in his charge.



Page 40

They were not many; most of those that so frequently of late had stood here were away with their owners, following the fortunes of the Earl of Derwentwater; business was dull at the inn. Well, let the weather be what it liked, at least the groom's work was over for the night, and he might go sit by the cheerful peat fire in the kitchen, and drink a health to the King—the rightful King, God bless him; and it was little harm, thought he, if he drank another to the Earl—whom might the Saints protect.

Even as he turned to go, in the dusk at the door, framed, as it were, in a picture, there appeared a horseman leading a tired horse, the reins loose over his arm. Though seen only in that half light, the outline of man and beast were familiar to the stableman. Both seemed far spent; the horse held low its head, and sweat stood caked and thick on neck and heaving flanks, and dripped off inside down by the hocks.

“Ye've ridden hard, sir,” said the groom, bustling forward to take the horse.

The stranger said no word, but himself led the tired animal into an empty stall. Yet, as the groom remembered later, of the other horses in the stable, not one raised its head, or whinnied, or took any notice whatever as the new-comer entered.

The stableman turned to lift his lantern, and when, an instant later, he again faced about, he stared to find himself alone; the strange horseman was nowhere to be seen. And the horse in the stall? Him the groom knew well; there was no possibility of mistake; it was the well-known grey on which Lord Derwentwater had ridden away to cast in his lot with Forster.

“Mistress! Mistress!” he cried, hurrying into the house, “has his lordship come in? He's led his grey gelding into the stable the noo, and niver a word wad he say to me or he gaed oot. An' I'm feared a's no weel wi' him; he was lookin' sair fashed, an' kind o' white like.”

“His lordship i' the inn? Guide us!” cried the landlady, snatching up a tallow dip and hurrying into the unlit guest-room.

“Ye hae gotten back, my lord? And is a' weel wi' your lordship? And—e-eh! what ails —?” she gasped, as a tall figure, seated in the great oak chair by the smouldering fire, turned on her a face wan and drawn, disfigured by bloody streaks across the cheek. Slowly, like a man in pain, or one wearied to the extreme of exhaustion, the seated figure rose, stood for a moment gazing at her, and then, ere the landlady could collect her scattered wits, it had vanished. Vanished, too, was the grey horse that the groom had seen brought into the stable; and, what was more, the bedding in the stall where the animal had stood was entirely undisturbed, and showed no trace of any beast having been there.



It was long that night ere anybody slept within the walls of the old inn, and broken was their sleep. None doubted but that the Earl was killed, or if not killed, at least soon to die; and the news of Preston, when it came, was to those faithful friends no news, only confirmation of their fears. None, after that, dared hope; they knew that he must die. And the 24th of February 1716 saw a countryside plunged in grief, for that day fell on the scaffold the head of one whom everybody loved, who was every man's friend, who never turned empty away those who went to him seeking help.



Page 41

Blood-red were the northern lights that flashed and shimmered so wildly in the heavens that night, red as the blood that had soaked into the sawdust of a scaffold; never before in the memory of living man had aurora gleamed with hue so startling. But the sorrow in the hearts of his people passed not away like the fading of the northern lights. His memory lives still in Northumberland; still, when they see the gleam and flicker of the aurora, folk there call it "Lord Derwentwater's Light"; and even yet it is a tradition that dwellers by the stream which flows past Dilston were wont to tell how, on that fatal day, its waters ran red like blood.

When "a' was done that man could do, and a' was done in vain," there remained but to convey his headless body, if it might be, to the spot where his forebears lie at rest.

"Albeit that here in London Town,
It is my fate to die,
O, carry me to Northumberland,
In my fathers' grave to lie."

The Earl's body had been buried at St. Giles-in-the-Fields, and of those who went to recover it and to bring it home, there was one famous in Northumberland story, Frank Stokoe of Chesterwood. A remarkable man was Stokoe, of enormous personal strength and of great height—in stature a veritable child of Anak—a man without fear, brave to recklessness, a good friend and a terrible enemy. Added to all this, he was an extraordinarily expert swordsman. He was a man, too, of much influence and acknowledged authority in the county—a useful man to have on the side of the King—one to whom the people listened, and to whom often an appeal for help was made in ticklish affairs.

There was, for instance, that affair of the feud between Lowes of Willimoteswick Castle and Leehall of Leehall, which kept a great part of Tynedale in hot water for so many years. Leehall appears to have been physically the better man; at any rate, on more than one occasion Lowes seems to have escaped from the clutches of his enemy solely by the superior speed of the horse he rode, or possibly he was a light, and his enemy a heavy, weight, which would make all the difference in a rousing gallop across deep ground or heathery hill. In any case, as a general rule, Lowes was more often the hunted than the hunter. Yet, to the followers of Lowes—there must always be two sides to a story—it was he, and not Leehall, who was the finer man, for, of an encounter between the pair near Bellingham, when Lowes' horse was killed by a sword-thrust directed at the rider's thigh, the old ballad says:

"Oh, had Leehall but been a man
As he was never ne-an,
He wad have stabbed the rider
And letten the horse alean."



Page 42

But perhaps the animosity here shown to Leehall comes more from one who was a lover of horses—as who in Northumberland is not?—than from a partisan of Lowes. However, the feud ran on, year in, year out, as is the custom of such things, and no doubt it might have been bequeathed from father to son, like a property under entail, had it not been for the intervention of Frank Stokoe. Lowes and Leehall, it seems, had met by chance near Sewing Shields, with the usual result. Only, upon this occasion, the former was possibly not on the back of an animal the superior in speed and stamina of the horse on which Leehall was mounted. At least, Lowes was captured.

But, having got him, his enemy did not proceed to cut him into gobbets, or even to “wipe the floor” with him. Something lingering and long was more to his taste; he would make Lowes “eat dirt.” With every mark, therefore, of ignominy and contempt, he dragged his fallen foe home to Leehall, and there chained him near to the kitchen fire-place, leaving just such length of chain loose as would enable the prisoner to sit with the servants at meals. The position can scarcely have been altogether a pleasing one to the servants, to say nothing of the prisoner. Doubtless the former, or some of them, may have found a certain joy in baiting, and in further humiliating, a helpless man, their master’s beaten enemy. Yet that pleasure, one would think, could scarcely atone for the constant presence among them of an uninvited guest—a guest, too, who had not much choice in the matter of personal cleanliness. However, trifles of that nature did not greatly embarrass folk in days innocent of sanitary science. As for Lowes, it must have been difficult so to act consistent with the maintenance of any shred of dignity, or of conciliatory cheerfulness. If, for example, the cook should happen of a morning to have got out of bed “wrong foot first,” how often must the attentions of that domestic have taken the form of a pot or a pan, or other domestic utensil, flung at his head. Here, no soft answer would be likely to turn away wrath. On the spur of the moment, when a pot, or an iron spit, has caught one on elbow or shins, it might not be altogether easy to think promptly of the repartee likely to be the most conciliating. And he could not “make himself scarce.” The situation was embarrassing.

Now, the law, in those breezy times, took small cognisance of such little freaks as this; the law, indeed, was pretty powerless up among those wild hills. It wanted some force stronger, or, at all events, some force less magnificently deliberate, than that of the law.

Frank Stokoe was that force. To him went the friends of Lowes; and next morning saw the peel tower of Leehall besieged. Frank demanded the surrender of Lowes, uninjured. Leehall retorted that he might take him—if he could. But Leehall had reckoned without his retainers; they dared not fight against Frank Stokoe. So they said. But was it not, in reality, a sort of incipient Strike? Did they, perhaps, being wearied of the somewhat tame sport of baiting him, think the opportunity a fitting one to get rid of their uninvited guest for good and all? In any case, before an hour had passed, Leehall found it convenient to hand Lowes over to Stokoe, who safely deposited him by his own fireside at Willimoteswick, and the feud was pursued no further.



Page 43

Whether or not Leehall was content to have thus played second fiddle, one does not know. Perhaps it was his men who, a year or two later, paid a nocturnal visit to Stokoe's peel tower. Frank was roused from sleep one winter night by his daughter, who told her father that some one was attempting to force the outer door. Stokoe stole quietly downstairs, to find that some one outside was busy with the point of a knife trying gently to prise back the great oaken bolt which barred his door. A very little more, a few minutes longer of work, and the beam would have been slid back, the door would have been quietly opened, and the throats of all the occupants of the house might have been cut. Whispering to his daughter to stand behind the door, and softly to push back the bolt each time the attempt was made to prise it open, Frank snatched down, and loaded with slugs, his old musket. Then very quietly he let himself down through the trap-door into the cow-house, which in all, or nearly all, old peel towers formed the lower story of the building. Cautiously unclosing the door of the cow-house, which opened on the outer air close to the flight of stone steps leading up to the main door of the tower, he stepped out. There, plainly to be seen at top of the stair, were several men, busily employed in trying to gain an entrance.

"Ye bluidy scoundrels," roared Stokoe, "I'll knock a hole in some o' ye that the stars will shine through."

And with that he let drive at the nearest, the charge, at so close a range, literally "knocking a hole" in him. Like a startled covey of partridges the remaining robbers fled, not only without attempting reprisals, but without even waiting to use the steps as an aid to escape; they simply flew through the air to mother earth and made tracks towards safety, anywhere, out of the reach of Frank Stokoe's vengeance; which perhaps was the wisest thing they could have done, for Stokoe was the kind of man who in a case such as this would willingly have knocked a hole in each one of them. In those days people were not very squeamish, and Stokoe seems to have gone quietly back to bed without greatly troubling himself about the slain robber; but the man's friends must have stolen back during the night, for in a copse near by, in a shallow grave hastily scooped out of the frozen earth, the dead body was found next day.

It is almost needless to say that Frank Stokoe was of those who would be certain to concern themselves in an enterprise such as the Rising of 1715. His sympathies were entirely with the Stuart, and against the Hanoverian King. Moreover, though he owned his peel tower and the land surrounding it, he was yet, as regards other land, a tenant of the Earl of Derwentwater, as well as being a devoted admirer of that nobleman. Naturally, therefore, when the Earl took the field, Stokoe followed him; and had all been of his frame of mind, there had been no ignominious surrender at Preston. Whilst fighting was to be



Page 44

done, no man fought so hard, or with such thorough enjoyment, as Stokoe. "Surrender" was a part of the great game that he did not understand; he was not of the stuff that deals in "regrettable incidents." At Preston that day, when all was done, there stood King George's men on either side, as well as in his front; in his rear a high stone wall, even to a man less heavily handicapped than he by weight, an obstacle almost insurmountable. But his horse was good—Stokoe's horses *had* to be good—and it knew its master. Never hitherto had the pair refused any jump, and they were not like to begin now. With a rush and a scramble, and the clatter of four good feet against the stone coping, they were over; over and away, galloping hard for the North Country, the free wind whistling past their ears as they sped, Stokoe throwing up his arm and giving a mocking cheer as each ineffective volley of musketry from the troops spluttered behind him; and the great roan horse snatched at his bit, and snorted with excitement.

Yes, that part of it was worth living for, and the blood danced in the veins of horse and man while the chase lasted. But what of it when once more the hills of Northumberland were regained, when the great moors that lay grim and frowning under the dark November skies were again beneath his horse's feet? It was a different matter then, for the hue and cry was out, and the earths all stopped against this gallant fox. Chesterwood was closed to him, no friend dared openly give him shelter.

"He had fled, had got clear away to France," was the story they gave out. But Frank Stokoe all the time lay snug and safe in hiding, not so very far from his own peel tower. And he was one of those who, disguised—perhaps in his case not very effectually—ventured to London, intent on bringing back the body of their chief, that it might lie at rest in the grave where sleep the fathers of that noble race.

There, in London, Frank narrowly escaped being taken. As it chanced, at that time an Italian bravo was earning for himself an unsavoury notoriety by going about boastfully challenging all England to stand up before him to prove who was the better man. He would mark his man, pick a quarrel with him, and the result was always the same. The Italian's trick of fence was deadly, his wrist a wrist of steel. None yet had been able to stand long before him; not one had got inside his guard.

As he walked once near Leicester Field in the dusk of an evening, Stokoe's great figure caught the eye of this little Italian, in whose mind suddenly arose the irresistible longing to bring this huge bulk toppling to earth. That would be something not unworth boasting about—that he, a sort of eighteenth-century David, should slay this modern Goliath.



Page 45

No one had ever been able to complain that it was difficult to pick a quarrel with Frank Stokoe. Not that he was quarrelsome—far otherwise; but never was he known to shrink from any combat that was pressed on him, and on this occasion the venomous little foreigner found him most ready to oblige. It wanted but a slight jostle, an Italian oath hissed out, a few words in broken English to the effect that big men were proverbially clumsy, and that bigness and courage were not always to be found united. Stokoe knew very well who his assailant was, knew his reputation, and the slender chance the ordinary swordsman might expect to have against this foreigner's devilish skill, but his weapon was unsheathed almost before the Italian had ceased to curse. Cautiously keeping a check on his habitual impetuosity, calling to his aid every ounce of the skill he possessed, and content meanwhile if he could evade the vicious thrusts of his enemy, Stokoe for a time kept the fiery little man well at bay. Irritated at length by the giant's coolness, and by finding him, perhaps, not quite so easy a conquest as he had anticipated, unable to draw him on to expose himself by attacking, the Italian for a moment lost patience. None other in England had given him so much trouble. It was time this farce ended; he would spit the giant now. Once, twice, thrice—it was with the utmost difficulty that Stokoe saved himself from being run through the body, and once the sword of his enemy went through his clothes, grazing his ribs, and sending a warm stream trickling down his side. Then, suddenly, again the Italian lunged. This time it surely had been all over with Stokoe. But the foot of the hectoring little foreigner slipped, or he stumbled owing to some slight inequality of the ground. For a single instant the man was overbalanced and off his guard, and before he could recover, Frank Stokoe's sword passed through his body, sending out of this world one who whilst in it had wrought much evil.

"Well done, Stokoe! Old Northumberland for ever!" cried a voice from amongst the considerable crowd of spectators who had run up before the fight had been in progress many seconds. "Well done, Stokoe!"

Here was danger greater even than that from which he had but now escaped. He was recognised! And for him to be recognised in London probably meant instant arrest, and an almost certain end on the gallows. He was too deeply involved in the late Rebellion; King George's Government would show him as little mercy as they had showed to his chief.

Stokoe glanced round uneasily as he wiped his sword, but it was not possible to say which in the group of spectators was the man who had given that compromising cry; it might be one of several who, to Stokoe's extreme discomposure, seemed to look at him rather intently. Time to be out of this, thought he; the farther he was from London the more freely he would breathe just at present, and the less chance



Page 46

was there of that breathing being permanently stopped. Policemen had not been invented in those days, and there was not much chance of his being arrested for duelling, for what was then called “the watch” was singularly inefficient, and seldom to be found when wanted. Nevertheless, it was now no easy matter for Stokoe to shake off the little “tail” of admirers who insisted on following him; it was not every day that they had the chance of seeing a man killed in fair fight, and they were loth to lose sight of the man who had done it—a hero in their eyes. However, by dint of plunging down one narrow street and up some other unsavoury alley, and repeating the manoeuvre at intervals, blinding his trail as far as possible, he at length shook off the last persevering remnant of his admirers, and, without being tracked or shadowed, gained the shelter of the house where he lodged. A few days saw him and his friends safely out of London, bearing with them the body of the Earl of Derwentwater, which was later buried at Dilston.

Frank Stokoe’s position was an unfortunate one from now on. He was a proscribed man; his property had been seized, and those now in possession threatened if he put in an appearance, or made any attempt to regain the property, that they would give him up to Government. Times consequently became hard for poor Stokoe; his affairs went from bad to worse, and though his name was included in the general pardon which Government issued some time later, he never got back his land nor any of his possessions. Part of the land passed with the Derwentwater Estate to Greenwich Hospital, part, including the peel tower, where he and his ancestors had lived for generations, remained in the clutches of those who had seized it. Old age came upon Frank and found him poverty-stricken; want came, “as an armed man,” and found him too weak to resist. The spirit was there, but no longer the strength that should have helped the spirit. He sank and died, leaving behind him no shred of worldly gear.

Another noted Northumbrian who was “out” in the ’15 was him whom men then called “Mad Jack Hall” of Otterburn. Not that he was in any sense mad, or even of weak intellect—far from it; the name merely arose from the fiery energy of the man, and from the reckless courage with which he would face any danger or any odds. As a man, he was extremely popular, and no one could have been more beloved by his dependents. His fine estate he managed himself, and managed well, though before he went “out” misfortunes fell on him which no management could have averted. They were misfortunes so crushing, and following so immediately on each other’s heels, that amongst the simple country folk they were looked on, and spoken of, with awe, as manifestly judgments from Heaven for some fancied sin they supposed him to have committed. He might, people said, have prevented, but did not prevent, a duel which took place in the streets of Newcastle, in which a very popular young man was killed.



Page 47

It was “murder,” and no fair fight, folk said; and, whatever the rights of the case, at least the successful duellist was afterwards hanged for the murder. Hall’s failure to interfere seems to have strained his popularity for a time. In such circumstances people are prone to assume that an all-wise Providence, necessarily seeing eye to eye with them, inflicts some special punishment on the person who has sinned some special sin, or who has, at all events, done (or not done) something which, in the popular judgment, he should not have done (or done, as the case may be). Misfortune or accident comes to some one who has roused popular clamour. “I told you so,” cries the public; “a judgment!”

In this instance, the sin of not interfering to prevent a duel—or a murder, as popular opinion called it—was punished, firstly, by Hall’s house at Otterburn being burned to the ground, together with all his farm buildings and great part of his farm stock; and, secondly, this grievous loss was followed in the time of harvest by a devastating flood in the Rede, which swept away from the rich, low-lying haughs every particle of the fat crops which already had been cut, and were now merely waiting to be carried home.

By such drastic means having apparently been purged of his sin, Mr. Hall seems to have regained his normal popularity, and an incident which presently occurred raised it to an even greater height than before. As far back at least as the time of Cromwell it had been customary to send offenders against the law, political prisoners and the like who were not judged quite worthy of the gallows or the block, to what in Charles the Second’s day were called His Majesty’s Plantations—our colonies, that is, in America or the West Indies. Not only were “incorrigible rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars” thus dealt with, but those also who attended illegal prayer-meetings found themselves in the same box if they happened to have been previously convicted of this heinous offence; and the moss-troopers of Northumberland and Cumberland were treated in similar fashion when taken—deported from their own heathery hills and grey, weeping skies, to the hot swamps and savannahs of Jamaica or Virginia. In the beginning, those sentenced were merely compelled, under penalty of what Weir of Hermiston called being “weel haangit,” to remove themselves to the Plantations. Later, a custom sprang up under which criminals of all sorts were delivered over by the authorities to the tender mercies of contractors, who engaged to land them in the West Indies or America, it being one of the conditions of the contract that the services of the prisoner were the property of the contractor for a given number of years. On landing, these wretched prisoners were put up to auction and sold to the highest bidder—in other words, they were slaves. Many men made large sums of money in this inhuman trade, trafficking in the lives of their fellow-countrymen. The thing at last



Page 48

reached such a pitch that practically no able-bodied man was safe from the danger of being kidnapped, sold to some dealer, and shipped off to slavery in the Plantations. That was the fate of many a young man who mysteriously disappeared from the ken of his friends in those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century days. Once shipped to the Plantations, the chance was small of a man ever returning to his native land. Fever, brought on by exposure to the hot sun and heavy rain of a tropical or semi-tropical climate, took care of that; in the West Indies, at least, they died like flies. Not many had the luck, or the constitution, of one Henry Morgan, who, kidnapped in Bristol when a boy and sold as a slave in Barbadoes, lived to be one of the most famous—or rather notorious—buccaneers of all time, and died a knight, Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, and commander of our forces in that island.

It was “Mad Jack Hall’s” fortune to save from this fate of being kidnapped and sent to rot in fever-laden swamps of the West Indies a young Northumbrian at that time in his service. It was the time of year when Stagshaw Bank Fair was held, and Mr. Hall, meaning to attend the fair, had instructed this young man to join him there at a certain hour, and himself had ridden over to Corbridge, there to pass the night. In the morning, when Jack Hall reached the fair at the appointed hour, he was astonished to find his servant, very dejected in appearance, being led away in charge of a man on horseback. Hall questioned the lad, who brightened up vastly at sight of his master, but could give no explanation as to the cause of this interference. All he knew was that as he stood waiting for Mr. Hall, this man had ridden up, claimed him as a prisoner, and was now marching him off. Hall looked at the mounted man, and recognised him as one of a family named Widdrington, who claimed to be invested by the Government of Queen Anne with authority to arrest from time to time sundry persons who, so far as the general public knew, were guilty of no crime, but who nevertheless were in the end sent to the dreaded Plantations. These Widdringtons were greatly feared throughout the countryside, but as they had always selected their victims from amongst people who had few friends, and who were little likely to have the means of making any great outcry, no person of influence had yet been moved to take the matter up, or to make troublesome inquiries.

Hall, however, was not the man to let his servant be taken without protest, even if this Widdrington really had the authority he claimed to possess. But to all Hall’s remonstrances Widdrington merely replied haughtily that he was accountable to no one, save only to her most gracious Majesty the Queen; that he was there in the execution of his duty, and that anyone interfering with him did so at his own peril. The situation was awkward. On the one hand, if this man really was acting within his rights and in the execution of his duty, then Hall

Page 49

himself was likely to get into serious trouble; on the other, he was not going to see a young man, his own servant, a man, so far as he knew, innocent of all offence against the law, marched off in this way, if by any means he might be saved. As mere remonstrances appeared to be of no avail, Hall hotly pressed his horse close up to Widdrington's, completely barring his way, and demanded that, if he were really acting within the law, he should show his authority.

"*This is my authority,*" cried Widdrington, drawing his sword.

"We'll soon prove whether that's strong enough," replied Hall, jumping from his horse and also drawing his weapon. There was, as it chanced, close to the lane in which the two had been wrangling, a bit of nice level ground covered with short, crisp turf, and to this Hall quickly made his way, followed by Widdrington and by a crowd of people who had run up from the fair, attracted by the quarrel. A very few minutes sufficed to prove that Widdrington's "authority" was *not* strong enough. He fought well enough for a time, it is true, and his opponent had need of all the skill he could command, but within five minutes Hall had caught Widdrington's point in the big basket hilt of his sword, and with a sudden jerk had sent the weapon flying, leaving the disarmed man entirely at his mercy. That was enough to satisfy Hall, who was too much of a man to push his advantage further. But it by no means satisfied the surrounding crowd of country people. By them these Widdringtons had long been feared and detested, and only the belief in the minds of those simple country folk that, in some mysterious way beyond their ken, the law was on the side of their oppressors, had on more than one occasion prevented an outbreak of popular fury. Here, now, was one of the hated brood, proven to be in the wrong, and with no authority to arrest beyond that bestowed by bluster and brute force. The air grew thick with groans and savage threats, and a clod flung by a boy gave the mob a lead. In an instant sticks and stones began to fly. Widdrington was unable to reach his sword or to get to his horse; there was nothing for it but to take to his heels, pursued by a crowd thirsting for his blood. That was the last of the oppression of the Widdringtons; their horrible traffic in human beings was ended, and none of them ever again dared show their faces in that part of the country.

As for Hall, henceforward an angel of light could not have been more highly regarded, and his fate, a very few years later, brought grief on the county almost as universal as that felt for the Earl of Derwentwater himself.



Page 50

Hall was at Preston with Derwentwater, but he did not, like Frank Stokoe, ride for it when Forster surrendered. One would almost have expected a man of his fiery, reckless disposition to have made a dash for it, and to fight his way through or fall in the attempt. Perhaps he considered it a point of honour to stick by his friends, and share their fate, whatever it might be. Anyhow, he surrendered with the rest, and with the rest was condemned to death. Time after time he was reprieved, owing to the exertions of friends who happened to be high in favour with the Hanoverian King's Government, but time after time he was recommitted, and finally Tyburn saw the last of poor "Mad Jack Hall." They hanged him on the 13th of July 1716.

SEWINGSHIELDS CASTLE, AND THE SUNKEN TREASURE OF BROOMLEE LOUGH

The old castle of Sewingshields is one of which there are many legends. If local tradition might be accepted as a guide, we should find that Arthur the King lived there once on a time. But surely another Arthur than him of whom Tennyson sang. One,

"Not like that Arthur, who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings,"

but a being even more mythical than that Arthur to whom, with his knights, legend assigns so many last resting-places—in that vast hall beneath the triple peak of Eildon, here in a cavern below the rocks at Sewingshields, and in many a spot besides. This Arthur of Sewingshields in his feats was indeed more akin to the old Norse gods and heroes. And it is told that, as he talked with his Queen one day when they sat on those great rocks to the north of the castle, which still bear as names the King's and the Queen's Crag, Guinevere chanced to let fall a remark which angered Arthur; whereupon he, snatching up a rock that lay ready to his hand, hurled it at his royal consort. Now, Guinevere at the moment was combing her long, fair locks; but she saw the stone come hurtling through the air, and, with remarkable presence of mind and dexterity, with her comb she fended off the missile, so that it fell between them, doing no harm. And if anyone should presume to disbelieve this tale, there lies the rock to this day, and the marks of the teeth of the Queen's comb are on it still for all to see. The distance that the King hurled this missile is not above a quarter of a mile, and the pebble itself may weigh a trifle of twenty tons or so.

Local tradition tells also how once on a time there came to Sewingshields, to visit Arthur, a great chieftain from the wild north, one named Cumin. And when Cumin departed from the castle to go back to his own land, he bore with him a certain gold cup that Arthur, in token of friendship, had given to him. But sundry of the King's retainers, having learned that the Scot was bearing away with him this cup, greatly desired that



they might themselves possess it, and they pursued Cumin, and slew him ere he had gone many miles. Wherefore Arthur caused a cross to be erected there on the spot where the slain man fell; and the place is called Cumming's Cross to this day.



Page 51

Of the building of the castle of Sewingshields, or Seven-shields, there is the legend told in *Harold the Dauntless*:

“The Druid Urien had daughters seven,
Their skill could call the moon from heaven;
So fair their forms and so high their fame,
That seven proud kings for their suitors came.

King Mador and Rhys came from Powis and Wales,
Unshorn was their hair, and unpruned were their nails;
From Strath-Clywd came Ewain, and Ewain was lame,
And the red-bearded Donald from Galloway came.

Lot, King of Lodon, was hunchback'd from youth,
Dunmail of Cumbria had never a tooth;
But Adolph of Bambrough, Northumberland's heir;
Was gay and was gallant, was young and was fair.

There was strife 'mongst the sisters, for each one would have
For husband King Adolph, the gallant and brave;
And envy bred hate, and hate urged them to blows,
When the firm earth was cleft, and the Arch-fiend arose!

He swore to the maidens their wish to fulfil—
They swore to the foe they would work by his will,
A spindle and distaff to each hath he given,
'Now hearken my spell,' said the Outcast of Heaven.

'Ye shall ply these spindles at midnight hour,
And for every spindle shall rise a tower,
Where the right shall be feeble, the wrong shall have power,
And there shall ye dwell with your paramour.'

Beneath the pale moonlight they sate on the wold,
And the rhymes which they chaunted must never be told;
And as the black wool from the distaff they sped,
With blood from their bosom they moisten'd the thread.

As light danced the spindles beneath the cold gleam,
The castle arose like the birth of a dream—
The seven towers ascended like mist from the ground,
Seven portals defend them, seven ditches surround.



Within that dread castle seven monarchs were wed,
But six of the seven ere the morning lay dead;
With their eyes all on fire, and their daggers all red,
Seven damsels surround the Northumbrian's bed.

'Six kingly bridegrooms to death we have done,
Six gallant kingdoms King Adolf hath won;
Six lovely brides all his pleasure to do,
Or the bed of the seventh shall be husbandless too.'

Well chanced it that Adolf the night when he wed
Had confessed and had sain'd him ere bouned to his bed;
He sprung from the couch, and his broadsword he drew,
And there the seven daughters of Urien he slew.

The gate of the castle he bolted and seal'd,
And hung o'er each arch-stone a crown and a shield;
To the cells of St. Dunstan then wended his way,
And died in his cloister an anchorite grey.



Page 52

Seven monarchs' wealth in that castle lies stow'd,
The foul fiends brood o'er them like raven and toad.
Whoever shall questen these chambers within,
From curfew to matins, that treasure shall win.

But manhood grows faint as the world waxes old!
There lives not in Britain a champion so bold,
So dauntless of heart, and so prudent of brain,
As to dare the adventure that treasure to gain.

The waste ridge of Cheviot shall wave with the rye,
Before the rude Scots shall Northumberland fly,
And the flint cliffs of Bambro' shall melt in the sun
Before that adventure be perill'd and won."

Long afterwards, when Harold the Dauntless entered the castle, the seven shields still hung where Adolf had placed them, each blazoned with its coat of arms:

"A wolf North Wales had on his armour coat,
And Rhys of Powis-land a couchant stag;
Strath Clwyd's strange emblem was a stranded boat;
Donald of Galloway's a trotting nag;
A corn-sheaf gilt was fertile Lodon's brag;
A dudgeon-dagger was by Dunmail worn;
Northumbrian Adolf gave a sea-beat crag;
Surmounted by a cross,—such signs were borne
Upon these antique shields, all wasted now and worn."

And within the castle, in that chamber where Adolf repelled the embarrassing advances of that most unmaidenly band of sisters, and did "a slaughter grim and great":

"There of the witch brides lay each skeleton,
Still in the posture as to death when dight;
For this lay prone, by one blow slain outright;
And that, as one who struggles long in dying;
One bony hand held knife, as if to smite;
One bent on fleshless knees, as mercy crying;
One lay across the floor, as kill'd in act of flying."

Perhaps it is part of the wealth of those "seven monarchs" that now lies sunken in Broomlee Lough. Did some one, greatly daring, "adventure that treasure to win," and succeed in his attempt? Tradition tells that a dweller in Sewingshields Castle, long ago, being compelled to flee the country, and unable to bear away with him his hoard of gold, resolved to sink it in the lough. Rowing, therefore, far out into deep water, he hove



overboard a chest containing all his treasure, putting on it a spell that never should it be again seen till brought to land by aid of "Twa twin yauds, twa twin oxen, twa twin lads, and a chain forged by a smith of kind."

Long centuries the treasure remained unsought; yet all men might know exactly where lay the chest beneath the waves, for it mattered not how fierce blew the gale, above the gold the surface of the water was ever unbroken. At last there came one who heard the tradition, and set about the task of recovering the sunken chest. The twin horses, twin oxen, and twin lads he procured readily enough, but to find a



Page 53

smith of kind was not so easy—"a smith of kind" being a blacksmith whose ancestors for six generations have been smiths, he himself being the seventh generation. But this, too, at length was found, and the smith forged the necessary length of chain. Then, taking advantage of a favourable day, when breeze sufficient blew to reveal the tell-tale spot of calm water, the treasure-hunter started in his boat, leaving one end of the chain on shore and paying out fathom after fathom as his boat swept round the calm and again reached shore. Now hitching the yaulds to one end and the oxen to the other, the animals were cautiously started by the twin drivers. Slowly the chain swept over the bed of the lough, and tightened, fast in something heavy that gave and came shoreward in the bight of the chain. Cannily the drivers drove, and ever came the weight nearer to dry land. Already the treasure-seeker in his boat, peering eagerly down into the quiet water, fancied that he was a made man; he could almost see that box. But a few more yards and it was his. Alas! In his eagerness to secure "a smith of kind" he had made insufficient inquiries into that smith's ancestry. There was (as he discovered when too late) a flaw in his pedigree! Some ancestress, it was said, could not show her marriage lines, or something else was wrong. At any rate, there was a flaw, and that was sufficient to upset the whole thing, for the chain, not being made by a smith of kind, was of course not of the true temper. Hence, just when success was about to crown their efforts, the horses made a violent plunge forward—and the chain parted at a weak link! No further attempts to ascertain the exact bearings of that box have ever been successful. It is, as of old, at the bottom of the lough—at least so says tradition.

And Sewingshields Castle is now no longer a castle; its very vaults and its walls have disappeared.

"No towers are seen
On the wild heath, but those that Fancy builds,
And save a fosse that tracks the moor with green,
Is nought remains to tell of what may there have been."

THE KIDNAPPING OF LORD DURIE

"It is commonly reported that some party, in a considerable action before the Session, finding that Lord Durie could not be persuaded to think his plea good, fell upon a stratagem to prevent the influence and weight which his lordship might have to his prejudice, by causing some strong masked men to kidnap him, in the Links of Leith, at his diversion on a Saturday afternoon, and transport him to some blind and obscure room in the country, where he was detained captive, without the benefit of daylight, a matter of three months (though otherwise civilly and well entertained); during which time his lady and children went in mourning for him as dead. But after the cause aforesaid was decided, the Lord Durie was carried back by incognitos, and dropt in the same

place where he had been taken up.” (Forbes’s *Journal of the Session*, Edinburgh, 1714.)

Page 54

With the early part of the seventeenth century, moss-trooping in the Border country had not yet come to an end. Its glory, no doubt, and its glamour, had begun to fade before even the sixteenth century was far spent, and where were now to be found heroes such as the far-famed Johnnie Armstrong of Gilnockie? Yet, as a few stout-hearted leaves, defiant of autumn's fury, will cling to the uttermost branches of a forest tree, so, in spite of King or Court, there were even now some reckless souls, scornful of new-fangled modern ways and more than content to follow in the footsteps of their grandsires, who still held fast to precept and practice of what seemed to them "the good old days." It is true their reiving partook now somewhat more of the nature of horse-stealing pure and simple. No longer were fierce raids over the English Border permissible; not now could they, practically with impunity, "drive" the cattle of those with whom they were at feud, and live on the stolen beeves of England till such time as the larder again grew bare. The times were sadly degenerate; Border men all too quickly were becoming soft and effeminate.

Yet in Eskdale there was one patriot, at least, who boasted himself that as his fathers had been, so was he. Willie Armstrong of Gilnockie was that man—"Christie's Will," he was commonly called, a great-grandson of the famous Johnnie, and not unworthy of his descent. Had he lived when Johnnie flourished, there might indeed have been two Armstrongs equally famous. As it was, Willie spent his days at constant feud with the law, and even the strong walls of Gilnockie were not for him always a secure shelter. Once it befell that the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, the Earl of Traquair, visiting Jedburgh, there found Willie lying in the "tolbooth."

"Now, what's brought ye to this, Gilnockie?" the Earl inquired.

"Oh, nocht but having twa bit tethers in my hand, my lord," said Willie. But: "Weel, I wadna say but there micht mebbes hae been twa cowt at the tae end o' the tethers," he admitted, on being pressed by the Earl.

Now, it happened that Willie was well known to Lord Traquair—had, in fact, more than once been of considerable service to his lordship; and it was no failing of the Earl to desert a friend in trouble, if help might be given quietly and judiciously. So it came about that the prison gates swung back for Christie's Will, the halter no longer threatened his neck, and Lord Traquair acquired a follower who to repay his debt of gratitude would stick at nothing.

Some little time later it chanced that a great lawsuit fell to be decided in the Court of Session. In this lawsuit Lord Traquair was deeply concerned. A verdict in his favour was of vital importance to him, but he very well knew that the opinion of the presiding judge was likely to be unfavourable to his claim, and that should Lord Durie preside, the case in that event would almost certainly go against him. Could that judge, however, by any means be quietly spirited away from Edinburgh before the date fixed for the trial, with almost equal certainty he might count on a favourable verdict. In this predicament

Lord Traquair turned his thoughts to Christie's Will; if anyone could aid him it must be the bold Borderer.



Page 55

“Bethink how ye sware, by the salt and the bread,
By the lightning, the wind, and the rain,
That if ever of Christie’s Will I had need,
He would pay me my service again.”

And Lord Traquair did not plead in vain. It was a little thing to do, Will thought, for one who had saved him from the gallows tree.

“O mony a time, my lord,’ he said,
’I’ve stown the horse frae the sleeping loon;
But for you I’ll steal a beast as braid,
For I’ll steal Lord Durie frae Edinboro toon.”

* * * * *

A light northerly breeze piped shrill through the long bent grass beyond Leith Links, sweeping thin and nippingly across shining sands left bare by a receding tide; down by the rippling water-line, as the sun of a late spring day neared his setting, clamouring gulls bickered noisily over the possession of some fishy dainty. Out from near-lying patches of whin, and from the low, wind-blown sand-hills, rabbits stole warily, nibbling the short herbage now and then, but ever with an air of suspicion and manifest unease, for behind a big clump of whin, during half the day there had lain hid a thick-set, powerfully built man.

“De’il tak’ the body!” he grumbled, sitting up and stretching himself as he glanced along the beach; “he’s lang o’ comin’.”

As he gazed, the sight of a distant horseman riding westward brought him sharply to his feet, and snatching up a long cloak that lay by his side, he walked leisurely through the yielding sand till he reached the firm beach within tide mark, along which the horseman was now quietly cantering.

“Ye’ll be Lord Durie, I’m thinkin’,” he cried, raising his hand to stay the rider, a middle-aged, legal-faced man, who sat his sober steed none too confidently, with thighs but lightly wed to the saddle.

“Yes, I’m Lord Durie. What can I do for you?”

“Weel, my lord, I’ve come far to see ye. They say there’s no’ a lawyer leevin’ or deid that kens mair nor you on a’ thing. It’s jist a bit plea that I’ve gotten,” said the man, laying a hand on the horse’s neck and sidling along close to his rider’s knee.

“For onny advice on kittle points o’ law, ye maun go to counsel, my friend. I’m a judge, no’ an advocate. Gude e’en to ye.”



“Ay, but, my lord,” said the man, laying a detaining left hand on the near rein, “it’s this way it is; ye see—” and at that, with a sudden powerful upward push of the unskilled rider’s leg, Lord Durie was hurled from the saddle and lay sprawling on his back on the wet sand, as the horse sprang forward with a startled bound.

“Goad’s sake! what’s this o’t?” cried the poor judge, already tangled in the folds of the long cloak, and struggling to rise. “Wad ye murder are o’ his Majesty’s judges!”

“Lie still, my lord, lie still! There’s no skaith will come to ye ’gin ye but lie still. De’il’s i’ the body; wull the auld lurdane no hand sae!”



Page 56

Of small avail were the judge's struggles; as well might an infant struggle in the folds of a python. Ere even an elderly man's scant breath was quite spent, he lay among the whins, bound hand and foot, trussed like a fowl, and with the upper part of his body and his head wrapped in the stifling folds of the great cloak.

That was the last of the outer world that Lord Durie knew or saw for many a long day. His horse, with muddied saddle, and broken reins trailing on the ground (muddied and broken, no doubt, by the horse rolling), was found next day grazing on the links. But of the judge, no trace. He might—as some, with the superstition of the day, were disposed to believe^[1]—have been spirited away by a warlock; or, perhaps, even like Thomas the Rhymer, he had vanished into Fairyland. Tidings of him there were none. The flowing waters of the Forth had effectually wiped out his horse's tracks along the shore, and during the night a rising wind had effaced the footsteps of his captor in the dry loose sand between tide-mark and links. Thus every trace of him was lost. His body, maybe, might have drifted out to sea; perhaps it lay now by the rocks of some lonely shore, or on the sands, with mouth a-wash and dead hands playing idly with the lapping water. Wife and family mourned as for one dead. And after the first nine days' wonder, even in Parliament House and Law Courts, for lack of food speculation as to his fate languished and died. A successor filled his office.

[1: In the seventeenth century belief in witchcraft was almost at its height over the whole of Europe, and in Scotland the hunt after witches and warlocks was peculiarly vindictive. To obtain confession, the most incredible tortures—as cruel as anything practised by Red Indians on their prisoners—were inflicted on accused persons, men and women, and escape was seldom possible for these poor creatures. Nor were such beliefs and practices confined to the benighted times of the seventeenth century. Even as late as 1722, in Sutherlandshire, a woman was burned for witchcraft. Her crime was that she had transformed her own daughter into a pony, and had ridden her throughout an entire night. Conclusive proof of the charge was found in the fact that the poor woman's daughter was lame afterwards both in hands and feet.

Nothing was too absurd, no charge too wicked or too childish, to obtain universal belief in those times.]

Meantime, bound to the saddle in front of his captor, by little-known hill paths the judge had been borne swiftly through the night. The long, melancholy wail of a whaup, the eerie hoot of an owl, at times smote dully on his ear; but to all his entreaties and his questions no human voice made answer; in stony silence his abductor rode steadily on. Over hill and dale, over rough ground and smooth, splashing through marshy soil where the hoofs of the heavily laden horse sucked juicily, through burns, and across sodden peaty



Page 57

moor where the smell of swamp rose rank on the night air, they floundered; and once the homely smell of peat reek told the unhappy judge that they passed within hail of some human dwelling. But throughout the night he saw nothing, and gradually the long strain, the discomfort of being pitched forward or back as the horse scrambled up or down where the ground was extra rough and broken, the pain of sitting half in, half out, of a saddle, told upon a frame unaccustomed to much exercise, and at intervals he wholly or partially lost consciousness. Thus unutterably distressed in body and broken in spirit, in one of these partial lapses it seemed to the judge—as it might be in some disordered nightmare—that there came a respite from the torment of ceaseless motion, and that by means of some unknown agency he lay in heavenly peace, stretched full length on a couch or bed. He thought—or did he dream?—that he had heard, as it were far off, the muffled trairip of feet and the murmur of low voices; and it seemed almost as if his body, after falling from some vast height, had been lifted and gently swung in the air. But exhaustion of mind and body was so great that the problem of what might be happening was quite beyond solution; let him only rest and sleep.

Then, later, it seemed to him that he woke from broken, tossing slumber. But it was dark, and he fell again into an uneasy doze, in which every muscle and bone in his harassed old body ached pitifully, every spot of sorely chafed skin stung and burned, till the multitude of pains put an end to sleep. Where was he, and how had he got there? On a low couch, free and unbound, he lay; by his side, on a rude table, was food and a jack of small-beer. Whether the time was morning or evening he could not tell, but it was very dark; what little light entered the room came through a narrow slit, high up in the wall, and all things smelled strangely of damp. Somewhere he could hear faintly a slow, shuffling step and the rustle of a dress; then the mew of a cat. Where was he?

Few, very few, persons at that day were above the weakness of a firm belief in witchcraft; even a judge of the Court of Session would not dare openly to question the justice and humanity of the Mosaical law: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Superstition was rampant, and to Lord Durie there had ever seemed nothing incongruous in accepting belief in the undoubted existence of both witches and warlocks. Could it be that he was now actually in the power of such beings? His mind was yet in a whirl, and he could form to himself no connected account of yesterday's happenings, if indeed it was really yesterday, and not in some remote, far-away time, that he had last ridden along the sands of Leith. Thirst consumed him, but he hesitated to drink; if he were now in the hands of those wretches who, it was well known, that they might work evil sold themselves to the Prince of Darkness, then might it not be that



Page 58

by voluntarily drinking, his soul would be delivered into the clutches of the Evil One? The thought brought him painfully to his feet with many a groan, and roused him to a careful examination of his gloomy prison. Rough stone walls, oozing damp, an earthen floor, three stone steps leading up to a heavy iron-studded door in a corner of the room; and nothing else. The one small window was far out of his reach. A feeling of faintness crept over him; it might be a wile of Satan, or a spell cast over him by supernatural powers, but the time was past for hesitation, and he drank a great draught from the jack, sank feebly on the couch, and slept profoundly.

When the judge again awoke it was in a prison somewhat less gloomy, for a thin splash of pale sunlight now struck the wall, and gave light sufficient to show every corner of the room. Again Lord Durie went through his fruitless search, and then, feeling hungry, and having suffered no visible ill effects from his first incautious draught of small-beer, he ate and drank heartily. From the way in which the patch of sunlight crept up the wall, it was easy to tell that the time was evening. Could it indeed be that no more than twenty-four hours back he had ridden, secure and free from this horrible care, along the shining sands by the crisp salt wavelets of the Forth?

What was that voice that he now heard, thin and hollow, on the evening air? "Far yaud! far yaud!" and then, with eldritch scream, "*Bauty*," it cried. Such sounds, coming from he knew not where, fell disturbingly on the unaccustomed ears of a seventeenth-century Judge of Session, and Lord Durie's sleep that night was broken by grim dreams.

Day followed day, week pressed on the heels of week, and still never a human face smiled on the unhappy judge. Each morning he found on his little table a supply of food and drink, all good of their kind and plenty—boiled beef or mutton, oaten cakes, pease bannocks, and always the jack of small-beer—but never did he see human hand place them there, never did human form cheer him by its presence.

The solitary confinement and the utter want of occupation told on a nervous, somewhat highly strung temperament; and in the judge's mind superstition began to hold unquestioned sway. Things taught him in childhood by an old nurse, things which now folks, indeed, still believed, but which he himself had to some extent given up or dismissed from his thoughts, began to crowd back again into his brain. No mere human power, surely, could have brought him here as he had been brought. Was it in the dungeon of some sorcerer, of some disciple of the Devil, that he now lay? Then, the shuffling old step that he heard so frequently, the thin voice calling, "Hey! Maudge," followed always by the mewing of a cat—what could that be but some old hag, given over to evil deeds, talking to her familiar? It was but the other day that, with his own eyes, he had seen nine witches burned together on Leith Sands,



Page 59

and all, ere they died, had confessed to the most horrid commerce with the Devil. It was no great time since a witch, under torture, had revealed in her confession the terrible truth, of how two hundred women had been wont to flock at night to a certain kirk in North Berwick, there to listen eagerly to Satan preaching blasphemy and denouncing the King. Even a judge was not safe from their malice. And could he but escape from the snare in which he now lay entangled, assuredly, Lord Durie thought, there should be more witch-burnings.

So the weeks dragged past, and Lord Durie lost all reckoning of the flight of time; but ever the belief strengthened that it was no mere human power that held him in bondage. And this belief received confirmation at last, for he awoke one night from confused and heavy sleep, to find himself once more bound, and wrapped, body and head, in the thick folds of a cloak. Then, seemingly without moving from his bed, he was borne through the air and set upon a horse; and again began that awful journey which once before he had endured. This time, too, in confirmation of his theory of the supernatural, when he came to his full senses it was to find himself lying behind a clump of whins by the sands of Leith, near to the very spot where, ages before, he had met a strange-looking man who tried to draw him into conversation on law. And nowhere was any cloak to be seen, nor trace of human agency. Only, he ached sorely, and his legs almost refused to bear the weight of his body, and in his head was the buzzing as of a thousand bees.

It was warlocks who had dealt with him—so his family and all his friends agreed when his tale was told. But his successor in office mourned, perhaps, that their dealings had not been more effectual, for he liked ill to give up a post he had filled with ability for an all too short three months.

To Lord Durie's regret, his return was too late to enable him to preside in the famous case which was about to come on shortly after the date of his disappearance. That had already been decided in a manner of which he could not have failed to disapprove, and Lord Traquair had secured a verdict.

For long the judge held to the warlock theory, and he was not averse, after dinner, over a bottle, from telling at great length the story of his terrible experiences during those mysterious three months of captivity. Younger men, indeed, began to find the tale somewhat boring, and in private some had been known to wish that the devil had flown away permanently with Lord Durie. But those scoffers were chiefly a few rising young advocates; the judge's family and his friends accepted the tale in its entirety. Nor ever did any man, to the end of his days, actually hear Lord Durie express doubt as to the supernatural nature of his adventure.



Page 60

Yet something did happen, later, which at least seemed in some measure to have shaken his faith, and it was noticed that, towards the end of his life, he was not fond of dwelling on the subject—had even been known, in fact, to become irritable when pressed to tell his story. It fell out, a year or two after the events which he had loved to narrate, that Lord Durie had occasion to visit Dumfries. On the way back to Edinburgh, travelling with some colleagues, it chanced that a heavy storm caught them, and necessity drove them to take shelter for the night in a farmhouse near to an old peel tower which stood on the verge of the wild moorland country beyond Moffat.

That night Lord Durie, in his stuffy box-bed, dreamed a terrible dream. He was once more in the power of the wizard or warlock; and it seemed to him that in his dream he even heard again those mysterious words that had once so haunted him. With a start he woke, bathed in perspiration, to find that day had broken, and that from the hillside echoed the long-drawn cry: “Far yaud! Far yaud! *Bauty!*” While, ben the house, he could hear a slow, shuffling step, and a thin old voice quavering: “Hey, Maudge!” to a mewling cat.

“What was yon cry oot on the hill? Oh, jist oor Ailick cryin’ on his dowg, Bauty, to weer the sheep,” said the grey-haired, brown-faced old woman to whom they had owed their shelter for the night.

“Veesitors?” she continued, in reply to further questions. “Na. We hae nae veesitors here. There was aince a puir sick man lay twa three months i’ the auld tower yont by, a year or twa back, but there’s been nae veesitors. They said he was daft, an’ I was kind o’ feared whiles to gie him his meat. But, oh, he wad be jist a silly auld body that did naebody hairm. Na, I never richtly got sicht o’ his face, for I aye put his bit meat an’ drink doon beside him whan he was sleepin’. An’ them that broucht him took him awa again whan they thought he was some better.”

It was noted that after this visit Lord Durie no longer pursued the subject of warlocks.

[NOTE.—The story of Lord Durie’s abduction and captivity is differently told by Chambers in his *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, as far, at least, as the instigator of the kidnapping and its accomplices are concerned. It is there recorded that the maker of the plot to kidnap the judge was George Meldrum the Younger of Dumbreck. Accompanied by two Jardines and a Johnston—good Border names—and by some other men, Meldrum seized Lord Durie and a friend near St. Andrews, robbed them of their purses, then carried the judge across the Firth of Forth to the house of one William Kay in Leith, thence past Holyrood, and, by way doubtless of Soutra Hill, to Melrose, from which town he was hurried over the Border to Harbottle, and there held prisoner. An account of the trial of the perpetrators of the abduction is to be found in Pitcairns’ *Criminal Trials*. Sir Walter Scott, however, in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, gives to Will Armstrong of Gilnockie the credit, or discredit, of carrying out the abduction

single-handed. Will was certainly a much more picturesque ruffian than ever was Meldrum, and many a wild deed might be safely fathered on him.



Page 61

Tradition tells of his long ride to convey important papers from Lord Traquair to King Charles I, and of his perilous return journey, bearing a reply from his Majesty. Tidings of his mission had come to the ears of the Parliamentarians, and orders were issued to seize him at Carlisle. In that town, Will, unwitting of special danger, had halted an hour to refresh man and beast, and as he proceeded on his journey, and was midway over the high, narrow bridge across the Eden, the sudden clatter of horses' feet and the jingle of accoutrements at either end of the bridge showed him that his way was effectually blocked by the Roundhead troopers. Without a moment's hesitation, Will faced his horse at the parapet, and with a touch of the spur and a wild cheer over went the pair into the flooded river, disappearing in the tawny, foaming water with a mighty splash. Instead of hastening along the bank, Cromwell's troopers crowded on to the bridge, gazing with astonishment into the raging torrent. Thus, when Will and his horse, still unparted, came to the surface a considerable way down, there was time for them to reach the bank. But the bank was steep and the landing bad, and the weight of Will's saturated riding-cloak was the last straw that hindered the horse from scrambling up. With a curse Will cut the fastening that held the cloak about his neck, and, relieved from the extra weight, the animal with a desperate struggle gained the top of the bank and got away well ahead of the pursuing troopers. Had it not been for the speed and stamina of his horse, Will had surely been taken that night. As it was, ere they reached the Esk, one trooper was already far in front of his comrades, and thundering on Will's very heels. But a pistol pointed at his head by Will, a pistol with priming saturated, and incapable of being fired—had the man only thought of it—caused the trooper to draw back out of danger, and Will gained Esk's farther bank in safety, where, regardless of possible pistol shots, he waited to taunt his baffled pursuers.

THE WRAITH OF PATRICK KERR

This is a tale they tell at the darkening, and you who are Rulewater folk probably know it well. But however well you may know it, you have to own that it is an eerie thing to listen to when the fire is dying down, and there are queer-shaped shadows playing on the walls, and outside in the wood the owls are beginning to hoot, or, from the far moor, there comes a curlew's cry.

Not long after Prince Charlie's day there lived at Abbotrule, in Rulewater, a laird named Patrick Kerr. Patrick Kerr was a Writer to His Majesty's Signet, a dour man, with a mischancy temper. The kirk and kirkyard of Abbotrule, as still may be seen, lay near the laird's house—too near for the pleasure of one who had no love for the kirk and who could not thole ministers. Most unfortunately, too, the laird took a scunner at the minister of the

Page 62

parish of Abbotrule. It may be that he and the minister saw too much of each other, and only saw each other's faults, but of that no one now can tell. But, about the year 1770, Patrick Kerr set about to put an end to Abbotrule Parish and Abbotrule Kirk, that had seen many an open-air Sacrament on summer Sabbaths long ago. For four years the laird laboured to attain his end, and a blithe man was he when, in 1774, he got Elliott of Stobs and Douglas of Douglas to side with him and wipe out for evermore the kirk and parish of Abbotrule. The parish was joined to the parishes of Hobkirk and Southdean, and the glebe—twenty-five acres of good land—which should have been shared between the Southdean and Hobkirk ministers, was taken by Patrick Kerr for his own use. Fifty acres of poor soil lying between Doorpool and Chesters he certainly gave them in its stead, and must have had pleasure in his bargain, for he had gained a rich glebe and had for ever freed himself from his clerical neighbours. Speedily he pulled down the manse and unroofed the kirk. He would willingly have ploughed up the kirkyard, but this could not be. For a hundred years after he was gone, the Rulewater folk still buried there.

Now, in Patrick Kerr's day, a Sacrament Sabbath was not quite what it is now. They were solemn enough about the fencing of the tables, serious and longfaced enough were ministers and elders as the bread and wine were handed round, but the minister's wife, poor body, found it took her all her time to preserve an earnest spirituality and to search her soul as the roasts and pies and puddings spread out on the manse dining-table haunted her anxious mind. Harder still, too, it was for a tired minister and elders to abstain from all appearance of casualty as the hospitality of the manse went on far into the afternoon, and the whisky toddy had more than once gone the round of the table.

Seventeen years after the doing away with Abbotrule Parish there took place at the manse of Southdean, after the Sacrament had been dispensed, one of these gatherings of sanctified conviviality. It was dusk before the party broke up, and it was probably due to the kindly forethought of the minister that he and his guests strolled in little companies of two's and three's out into the caller air before their final parting. Their gait was solemn—if a trifle uncertain—as they slowly daudered up the road between the trees. It was a still Sabbath evening, when one can hear the very whispers of the fir branches, the murmur of a burn far away—when suddenly the stillness was broken by the thud of a horse's hoofs. Beat—beat—beat—on the turf by the side of the road they came, and each man of the party cocked his ears and strained his eyes into the darkness to see who might be the horseman who profaned the Sabbath by riding in such hot haste. There was an elder there who, had the party been held at any time but on the Sacrament Sabbath and anywhere but in the manse dining-room, might have been said to have a trifle exceeded. So when, cantering on the turf between the two fir woods, they saw a white horse appear, he looked byordinary grave.



Page 63

"I mind," said he, "a passage in the Revelations, '*Behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death.*'" With that the horse was upon them, and one and all looked up at the rider's face. Fearsome and gash was the countenance they looked upon. Hatred and scorn was in the burning eyes—anger, and the hatred that does not die. And there was not one man of them but ran like hunted sheep back into the manse, and there, in the light, faced each other, forfeuchen and well-nigh greeting like terrified bairns, that did not know the face for that of Patrick Kerr, the laird of Abbotrule.

Next day they all had the news that Patrick Kerr, who hated the kirk and all ministers, and had done away with the parish of Abbotrule, had died in the darkening of that Sabbath evening and gone to his last account.

THE LAIDLEY WORM OF SPINDLESTON-HEUGH

In a land where fairy tales die hard, it is sometimes no easy task to discriminate between what is solid historical fact, what is fact, moss-grown and flower-covered, like an old, old tomb, and what is mere fantasy, the innocent fancy of a nation in its childhood, turned at last into stone—a lasting stalactite—from the countless droppings of belief bestowed upon it by countless generations.

Scientists nowadays crushingly hold prehistoric beasts, or still existent marsh gas, accountable for dragons and serpents and other fauna of legendary history; but in certain country districts there are some animals that no amount of Board School information, nor countless Science Siftings from penny papers can ever destroy, and to this invulnerable class belongs the Laidley Worm of Spindleston-Heugh.

High above the yellow sand that borders the fierce North Sea on the extreme north of the Northumbrian coast still stands the castle of Bamborough. Many a fierce invasion has it withstood during the thousand odd years since first King Ida placed his stronghold there. Many a cruel storm has it weathered, while lordly ships and little fishing cobbles have been driven to destruction by the lashing waves on the rocks down below. And there it was that, once on a day, there lived a King who, when his fair wife died and left to him the care of her handsome, fearless boy, and her beautiful, gentle daughter, did, as is the fashion of every King of fairy tale, wed again, and wed a wicked wife. To the south land he went, while his son sailed the seas in search of high adventure, and his daughter acted as chatelaine in the castle by the sea, and there he met the woman who came to Bamborough all those many years ago, and who, they say, remains there still.



Page 64

As the dawn rose over the grey sea, making even the dark rocks of the Farnes like a garden where only pink roses grew, the Princess Margaret would be on the battlements looking out, always looking out, for her father and brother to return. At sunset, when the sea was golden and the plain stretched purple away to the south, landward and seaward her eyes would still gaze. And at night, when the silver moon made a path on the sea, the Princess would listen longingly to the lap of the waves, and strain her beautiful eyes through the darkness for the sails of the ship that should bring the two that she loved safe home again. But when the day came when the King, her father, returned, and led through the gate the lady who was his bride, there were many who knew that it would have been well for the Princess had she still been left in her loneliness. Gracious indeed was her welcome to her mother's supplanter, for she loved her father, and this was the wife of his choice.

"Oh! welcome, father," she said, and handed to him the keys of the castle of which she had kept such faithful ward, and, holding up a face as fresh and fragrant as a wild rose at the dawn of a June day, she kissed her step-mother.

"Welcome, my step-mother," she said, "for all that's here is yours."

Many a gallant Northumbrian lord was there that day, and many a lord from the southern land was in the King's noble retinue. One of them it was who spoke what the others thought, and to the handsome Queen who had listened already overmuch to the praises her husband sang of his daughter, the Princess Margaret, the words were as acid in a wound. "Meseemeth," said he, "that in all the north country there is no lady so fair, nor none so good as this most beautiful Princess."

Proudly the Queen drew herself up, and from under drooped eyelids, with the look of a hawk as it swoops for its prey, she made answer to the lord from the south.

"I am the Queen," she said; "ye might have excepted me." Then, turning swift, like a texel that strikes its quarry, she said to the Princess: "A laidley worm shalt thou be, crawling amongst the rocks; a laidley worm shalt thou stay until thy brother, Wynd, comes home again."

So impossible seemed such a threat to the Princess that her red lips parted over her white teeth, and she laughed long and merrily. But those who knew that the new Queen had studied long all manner of wicked spells and cruel magic were filled with dread, for greatly they feared that the fair Princess's joyous days were done.

The Farne Islands were purple-black in a chill grey sea, and the waves that beat on the rocks beneath the castle seemed to have a more dolorous moan than common when next evening came. The joyous Princess, jingling her big bunch of keys and smiling a welcome to her father's guests, had gone as completely as though she lay buried beside the drowned mariners, for whom the silting sand under the waves makes a safe



graveyard all along that bleak and rugged coast; but a horror—a crawling, shapeless, loathsome thing—writhed itself along the pathway from cliff to village, and sent the terror-stricken peasants shrieking into their huts and battering at the castle gates for sanctuary. The old ballad tells us that:



Page 65

“For seven miles east and seven miles west,
And seven miles north and south,
No blade of grass or corn could grow,
So venomous was her mouth.”

Like an embodied plague, the bewitched Princess preyed on the people of her father's kingdom, who daily brought to the cave, where she coiled herself up at night to sleep, a terrified tribute of the milk of seven cows. All over the North Country spread the dread of her name, but now she was no longer the lovely Princess Margaret, but the Laidley Worm of Spindleston-Heugh.

“Word went east, and word went west,
And word is gone over the sea,
That a Laidley Worm in Spindleston-Heughs
Would ruin the North Countrie.”

Far over the sea, with his thirty-three bold men-at-arms, the Princess's brother, “Childe Wynd,” was carving a career for himself with his sword. Nothing on earth did Childe Wynd fear, yet ever and again, when success in battle had been his, he would have a heavy heart, dreading he knew not what, and often he longed to see again the castle on the high rock by the sea, and the fair little sister with whom so many happy days had been spent amongst the blue grass and on the yellow sand of the dunes at Bamborough. To his camp came rumour of the strange monster that was devastating his father's lands, and down to the coast he hastened with his men, a great home-sickness dragging at his heart—home-sickness, and a terror that all was not well with Margaret. Some rough, brown-faced mariners, whose boat had not long before nearly suffered wreck on the rocks of the Northumbrian coast, were able to tell the Prince that rumour spoke truth, and that a laidley worm was laying waste his father's kingdom. Of the Princess they could give no tidings, but the Prince needed no words from them to tell him that all was not well.

“We have no time now here to waste,
Hence quickly let us sail:
My only sister Margaret
Something, I fear, doth ail.”

And so, with haste, they built a ship, a ship for a Prince of Faery, for its masts were made of the rowan tree, against which no evil witchcraft could prevail, and its sails were of fluttering silk. With fair winds and kindly waves the Prince and his men soon sped across the sea, and gladly they saw again the square towers of the castle King Ida had built, proudly looking down on the fields of restless water that only the bravest of the King's husbandmen durst venture to plough. From her turret window the Queen watched the sails of the gallant ship gleaming in the sun, and knew full well that Prince Wynd was nearly home again. Speedily she summoned all the witch wives along with



whom she worked her wicked magic, and set them to meet the ship, to use every spell they knew that could bring shipwreck, and disaster, and death, and to rid her of the youth whom she had always dreaded. But they returned to her despairingly.



Page 66

No spell was known to them that could work against a ship whose masts were made of the rowan tree. Then, casting aside magic, the Witch Queen dispatched a boat-load of armed men to meet the ship, to board it, and to slay all that they could. Little cared Wynd and his men for a boat-load of warriors, and few there were left alive in the boat, and those sore wounded, when Wynd's ship came to anchor in the shallows under the dark cliff.

But here a more dangerous adversary met Prince Wynd. Threshing through the water came the horrible, writhing thing that Northumbrians knew as the Laidley Worm; and ever as they would have beached the ship, the huge serpent beat them off again, till all the sea round them was a welter of froth and slime and blood. Then Childe Wynd ordered his men to take their long oars once more and bring the ship farther down the coast and beach her on Budle sand. Down the coast they went, while the Queen eagerly watched from the battlements, and the Laidley Worm followed them fast along the shore, and all the folk of Bamborough scrambled up the cliff side, and, holding on by jagged bits of crags and tough clumps of grass and of yellow tansy, kept a precarious foothold, waiting, wide-eyed, to see what would be the outcome of the fray. As near the sandy beach of Budle as they durst venture their ship came Prince Wynd and his thirty-three men, then the rowers sat still, and the Prince leapt out, shoulder deep, into the water, and waded to the shore. Like a wounded tiger that has been baulked of its prey but gets it into its power at last, the Laidley Worm came to meet him, and all who watched thought his last hour had come. But like the white flash of a sea-bird's wings as it dives into the blue sea, the Prince's broad sword gleamed and fell on the loathsome monster's flat, scaly head, and in a great voice he cried aloud on all living things to witness that if this creature of evil magic did him any harm, he would strike her dead. Then there befell a great wonder, for in human voice, but all hoarse and strange and ugly, as though almost too great were the effort for human soul to burst through brute form, the Laidley Worm spoke to her conqueror: "Oh! quit thy sword and put aside thy bow!" it moaned—so moans the sea through the crash of the waves on nights when the storm strews the beach of the North Country with wreckage—"Oh! quit thy sword, for, poisonous monster though I be, no scaith will I do thee." Then those who heard the wonder felt sure that the Worm sought by subtilty to destroy their Prince, for still as a white, dead man he stood, and gazed at the brute that shivered before him like a whipped dog that would fain lick his master's feet. But again it spoke, in that terrible, fearsome voice of mortal pain:

"Oh! quit thy sword and bend thy bow,
And give me kisses three;
If I'm not won ere the sun go down,
Won I shall never be."



Page 67

Brave men, well-proved soldiers, were Childe Wynd's three-and-thirty, but they cried out aloud to him, and some let go of their oars and sprang shoulder-deep in the sea that they might drag their lord back from this noisome horror that would destroy him. Prince Wynd's heart gave a great stound, and back rushed the blood into his face, that had been so pale and grim, and none was quick enough to come between him and what his heart had told his mind, and what his mind most gladly willed. As though he were kissing for the first time the one he loved, and she the fairest of the land, so did he bow his head in courtly fashion, and three times kiss with loving lips the Laidley Worm of Spindleston-Heugh. And at the third kiss a great cry of wonder rose from his men, for lo, the Laidley Worm had vanished, as fades an evil dream when one awakes, and in its place there stood the fairest maid in all England, their own dear Princess Margaret. With laughter and with tears did Childe Wynd and his sister then embrace; but when the Princess had told her tale, her brother's brow grew dark, and on his sword he vowed to destroy the vile witch who had been his gentle sister's cruel enemy. With tears and with laughter, and with gladsome shoutings the folk of Bamborough came in haste to greet their Prince and Princess, and to speed them up to the castle, where the King, their father, welcomed them full joyously. But there were angry murmurs from the men of Northumbria, who called for vengeance on her who had so nearly ruined their dear land, and who had striven to slay both Prince and Princess. Childe Wynd held up his hand: "To me belongs the payment," he said, and the men laughed loud when they saw his stern face, for those were days when grim and bloody deeds were gaily done, and blithe they were to think of torture for the Witch Queen. Cowering in a corner of her bower in the turret, white-faced and haggard, they found her, and dragged her out to Childe Wynd. But no speedy end by a clean sword blade was to be hers, nor any slower death by lingering torture.

"Woe be to thee, thou wicked witch!" said the Prince; and she shivered and whimpered piteously, for well she knew that in far-off lands across the sea Childe Wynd had studied magic, and that for her were designed eternal terrors.

"Woe be to thee, thou wicked witch,
An ill death mayst thou dee;
As thou my sister hast lik'ned,
So lik'ned shalt thou be.

I will turn you into a toad,
That on the ground doth wend;
And won, won, shalt thou never be,
Till this world hath an end."

To the fairy days of long, long ago belong Prince Wynd and the Princess Margaret and the wicked Witch Wife. But still in the country near Bamborough, as maids go wandering in the gloaming down by the yellow sands and the rough grass where the sea-pinks grow, they will be suddenly startled by a horrible great dun-coloured thing that



moves quickly towards them, as though to do them a harm. With loudly beating hearts they run home to tell that they have encountered the venomous toad that hates all virtuous maidens, who once was a queen, her who created the Laidley Worm of Spindleston-Heugh.



Page 68

A BORDERER IN AMERICA

It would be matter for wonder if, in the histories of old Border families, record of strange personal experiences did not at times crop up. Sons of the Border have wandered far, and have sojourned in many lands, and borne their part in many an untoward event. But it is not likely that any can lay claim to adventures more strange and romantic than those which, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, befell a youthful member of one of the most ancient of these Border clans. This story of his adventures is literally true, as the family records prove, but the descendants of the person to whom they happened prefer that he should not figure in the tale under his own name. For convenience, therefore, it must suffice here to call him Andrew Kerr.

The responsibilities of life began early in his day. A boy who would now find himself in a very junior form at school, was then considered old enough to serve his Majesty in a marching regiment, or left his home to engage in business whilst yet his handwriting had scarcely emerged from childhood's clumsy formation, and veritable infants served as midshipmen in ships of war. Young Kerr was no exception to this general rule. Long before the boy had reached the age of sixteen he was shipped off to New York, there to join an uncle who, in order to engage in commerce, had lately retired from the 60th "Royal American" Regiment, then a famous colonial corps.

Those were stirring times, and for a passenger the voyage to America was no hum-drum affair devoid of excitement or peril. We were at war with France and Spain. Every white sail, therefore, that showed above the horizon meant the coming of a possible enemy; no day passed, in some part of which there might not chance to arise the necessity to employ every device of seamanship if escape were to be effected should the enemy prove too big to fight, or in which there was not at least the possibility of smelling powder burned in earnest.

Nor were danger and excitement necessarily ended with the ship's arrival in New York harbour. We were still fighting the French in Canada; men yet told grim tales of Braddock's defeat and of the horrors of Indian warfare. To him whom business or duty took far from the sea-board into the country of the savage and treacherous Iroquois, there was the ever-present probability that he would some day—perhaps many times—be compelled to fight for his life, with the certainty that, if disabled by wounds he fell into the enemy's hands, the scalp would be torn from his skull ere death could put an end to his sufferings; whilst capture meant, almost for a certainty, the being eventually put to death after undergoing the most hideous tortures that the cruelty of the Redskins could devise. To the colonists, "the only good Indian was a dead Indian"; and doubtless, by the newly-landed Andrew Kerr, the order at once to proceed up-country with a convoy



Page 69

in charge of military stores must have been received with somewhat mixed feelings. On the one hand, his boyish love of adventure would be amply satisfied, while, on the other, there were risks to be faced which might well have caused more than uneasiness to many an older man—risks which the boy's acquaintances possibly were at no pains to conceal, which, indeed, a few of them would probably take pleasure in painting in the gloomiest of colours. But duty was duty, and the lad had too great a share of Border stubbornness and grit to let himself be badly scared by such tales as were told to him.

The destination of the convoy was Fort Detroit. In those far-off days New York was but a little city of some twenty thousand inhabitants, and the western part of New York State was quite outside the bounds of civilisation. To reach the Canadian frontier there were then two great routes of military communication—one, up the Hudson River, and so by way of Lakes George and Champlain and down the Richelieu to the St. Lawrence; the other, by the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, then by way of Lake Oneida and the Oswego River to the first of the great lakes, Lake Ontario; thence the journey to Fort Detroit would be chiefly by canoe, up Lakes Ontario and Erie. Between the last military post at the head of the Mohawk, however, and the mouth of the Oswego River, there was a great gap in which no military post had been established. Thus the route of the convoy to which Kerr was attached necessarily took them through country overrun by hostile Indian tribes.

No mishap, however, befell the party; probably they were too strong, too wary and well skilled in Indian warfare, to give the enemy a chance of ambushing or taking them by surprise on their march through the woods.

At Fort Detroit, it was found that a small exploring party, under a Captain Robson, was about to set out with the object of determining whether or not certain rivers and lakes were navigable, and young Kerr, boylike, eagerly volunteered to join the expedition.

Here began his strange adventures. The party, all told, consisted but of eleven persons—Captain Robson, Sir Robert Davers, six soldiers, two sailors, and young Kerr. Apparently they did not think it necessary to take with them any colonists, or Indian scouts. It is a curious characteristic of the average Britisher who finds himself in a new land, that he appears to regard it as an axiom that he must necessarily know much more than the average colonist; can, in fact, teach that person “how to suck eggs.” The colonist, of course, on his part—and in the majority of cases with justice—regards the “new chum,” or “tender foot,” as a somewhat helpless creature. But the Britisher despises, or at least he used to despise, the mere colonist. Hence have arisen not a few disasters. The little—travelled Britisher does not readily learn that local conditions in all countries are not the same, that dispositions and customs which



Page 70

suit one are totally out of place and useless in another. That was how General Braddock made so terrible and absolute a fiasco of his expedition; it was the custom of the British army to fight standing in line—(and, in truth, many a notable victory had they won before, and many have they won since, in that formation)—therefore fight thus in line they must, no matter what the nature of the country in which they fought. Hence, in dense forest, surrounded by yelling savages, our men stood up to be shot by a foe whom they never saw till it was too late, and panic had set in amongst the few survivors. Had our troops been taught to adapt themselves to circumstances and to fight as the colonists fought, as the French in Canada had learned to fight, as the Red Indians fought, taking every advantage of cover, Braddock need not thus unnecessarily have lost nearly seventy per cent, of his force. In matters appertaining to war or to fighting, it was beneath the dignity, most unhappily it was beneath the dignity, of a British general to regard as of possible value the opinion of a mere colonial, no matter how experienced in Indian fighting the latter might be, or how great his knowledge of the country. It was that, no doubt, which induced Braddock to disregard the opinion, and to pooh-pooh the knowledge of his then A.D.C. George Washington. Yet it was nothing but Washington's knowledge that saved the van of Braddock's defeated force.

In like manner, had this little exploring expedition been accompanied by colonists experienced in Indian ways, or had they chosen to make use of Indian scouts, disaster might have been averted. As it was, almost on the threshold of their journey they were ambushed, and cut off by the Redskins. Robson, Davers, and two of the men were speedily picked off by the concealed enemy, or were killed in the final rush of the painted, yelling savages. The little force was scattered to the winds. One or two, taking to the water, under cover of the darkness, and protected by that Providence which sometimes watches over helpless persons, eventually reached safety. But young Kerr was not amongst these fortunate ones. For him, experiences more trying were in store. In the last melee he fell into the hands of a grim-looking, powerfully-built warrior, who bound him to a tree, and in that most unpleasant predicament the lad for a time remained, from moment to moment anticipating for himself the treatment he saw being dealt out on the bodies of his friends. His youth saved him. Too young to be considered by the Indians as fit to be a warrior, his scalp was not added to the other bloody trophies of victory; for him was reserved the fate of slavery, the disgrace (from an Indian point of view) of performing menial offices, of doing the work usually performed by squaws. Kerr's captor, a warrior named Peewash, of the tribe of the Chippeways, dragged his prisoner home to his wigwam. There the boy was stripped naked, painted as Indians



Page 71

were painted, his head clean shaved except for one tuft on top called “the scalp lock,” which amongst the Indians it was the custom to leave in order to facilitate the operation of scalping by their enemies should the owners chance to fall in battle. A scalp was the recognised trophy of victory. It was not regarded as absolutely necessary to kill an enemy; if his scalp could be torn from his head, no more was required, and not infrequently a wounded man was left scalplless on the ground, writhing in speechless agony, to linger and die miserably.

After undergoing the preliminaries of an Indian toilet, young Kerr had moccasins given to him, and a blanket to wear—a costume perhaps more convenient than becoming—and he entered on a round of duties new and strange. He was not, after a time, unkindly treated by Peewash and his squaw. But the work was far from pleasant, and many were the terrible sights forced on his unwilling notice at this time. Once, when the little garrison of Detroit sent out a small party, which, making a dash at the Indian camp, succeeded in killing a Chippeway Chief, the Redskins in revenge tortured and killed Captain Campbell, a Scot, who had been captured by the Ottawas. Such sights filled the boy with sick horror, and with a not unnatural dread of the fate which might yet await himself. Rather than remain to furnish in his own person the leading feature of an Indian festival, it was surely better, he thought, to die in attempting escape.

As it chanced later, a French trader—these tribes were the allies of the French—arrived in camp, and remained there some time. Moved to pity by the boy’s unhappy condition, this man, with some difficulty, persuaded Peewash to sell the lad to him for goods to the value of L40. Great was Kerr’s exultation; once more he was free, free too without having had to face the terrible ordeal of attempting to escape from these murderous Indian devils. All would now be well, for assuredly he, or his friends, would repay to the Frenchman the ransom money. The boy felt as if his troubles were already over; in a day or two at longest he would sleep again under the flag of his own land; perhaps even, at no distant date, he might once more gaze on scenes for which throughout his captivity his soul had hungered, see, once more, Cheviot lying blue in the distance, the Eildons with their triple crown, hear the ripple of the Border streams. What tales of adventure he would have to tell.

Alas! he counted without his hosts. The Chippeways when they heard of the transaction would have none of it. The captive boy had been the property of the tribe, they said, and they refused to part with him; he must be given up by the Frenchman. And the latter had no choice but to comply.

Black now were the nights, gloomy the days, for Andrew Kerr, the blacker and the more gloomy for the false dawn that for brief space had cheered him; unbearable was his burden, more hopeless and wretched than ever before, a thousandfold, his captivity. It was as it might be with a man dying of thirst if a cup of cold water were dashed from his

lips and spilt on the sandy desert at his feet. Who can blame the boy if only the knowledge of what treatment he would avowedly receive from the young Indians if he should play the squaw and weep, kept him from shedding tears of misery and vexation.



Page 72

A new master was now his, a chief of the Chippeways; a new squaw set him hateful, degrading tasks, and ordered him about; the young men and the squaws laughed him to scorn; life became more bitter than ever before.

Gradually, however, Kerr's new owners relaxed their severity of treatment, and his lines grew less unpleasant. Time, indeed, made him almost popular—embarrassingly popular—for there came a day when the tribe more than hinted its desire that the Pale-face should wed one of its most beautiful daughters. Happily, the question of who should be bride was left in abeyance. He became, too, almost reconciled to his dress, or want of dress—though, to be sure, a coat of paint and a blanket cannot, at the best, be regarded as more than a passably efficient hot-weather costume. With the easy adaptability of boyhood, Andrew Kerr had become almost a veritable Indian.

Now, Peewash all this time had looked with covetous eye on his former slave, and desired to repossess him. A big price would have to be paid, no doubt; but Peewash was prepared to bid high, and the owner could not withstand a temptation, backed, as it was, by that bait irresistible to a Red Indian, “firewater.” The boy again changed hands, and now for some time served his original captor.

About this period the Tribes again “dug up the hatchet,” and set out on a big war-trail. Cruel and bloody was the fighting, many the prisoners taken and brought into camp from time to time. On one occasion young Kerr was compelled to stand, a horrified spectator, among the exulting Redskins as with yells of gratified triumph, warriors and squaws, young men and children, gloated fiercely over the brutal torture and lingering death of eight English prisoners. It was a grim and grisly spectacle, for no form of torment—from the nerve-wracking test of knife and tomahawk, arrow or bullet, aimed with intent to graze the flesh and not immediately to kill, to the ghastly ordeal of red-hot ramrods and blazing pine-root splinters thrust into the flesh or under the nails—was omitted by those bloodthirsty red devils. Many a sleepless hour, many a night broken by awful dreams, must the sight have cost the boy. But it determined him to attempt escape at all hazards whenever kind fortune should put the chance in his way.

And fortune did help him ere long. There was a French trader named Boileau who came much about the camp. To him Andrew very cautiously made advances, and succeeded at last in enlisting the man's sympathies. Kerr confided to the trader his desire to attempt escape, and, none too willingly at the beginning, Boileau agreed to take the risk of helping. It was no easy task to lull the suspicions and to evade the watchful eye of the crafty Indians; but the boy had never, so far, shown any desire to escape, and he was not now so everlastingly under supervision. In very bad English on Boileau's part, and in worse French on that of Kerr, a plan of escape was devised. Early in the day, Boileau, after his usual habit, was to leave camp in his canoe, ostensibly setting out on an ordinary trapping expedition. After nightfall, he would return to a certain rock on the lake shore, and then Kerr was to steal out and attempt to join

him; thereafter, a night's paddling ought to take the fugitive out of the immediate danger-zone.



Page 73

The night was cloudy and black, and not too still; everything, in fact, was in the boy's favour as, with beating heart, he wormed his way out of the wigwam and crawled stealthily on his belly from the camp towards the dense gloom of the forest. Then, almost as he had succeeded in gaining the comparative safety of the trees, beneath his moccasined foot a stick snapped, and a cursed Indian dog gave tongue, rousing the entire pack, and the sleeping camp, like an angry swarm of bees, woke at once to venomous life.

But Kerr by this time was at least clear of the wigwams; if he could but reach that rock by the lake-side, and if the Frenchman had kept faith, he might get safely away. Boileau would surely never fail him. Hampered and constantly tripped up by roots and tangled undergrowth, confused by the blackness of the night, the boy toiled on with thumping heart and shortening breath; and at last, looming above him, was the welcome outlines of the great rock. But on neither side of it could he find sign of the trader or of his canoe. And already by the rustlings in the woods and the occasional snapping of dry sticks, he could tell that the pursuing Indians were drawing perilously near him.

"Boileau!" he whispered. "Boileau!" And then, in an agony of mind he risked all, and shouted:

"Boileau, Boileau! *A moi!*"

An angry whisper from almost at his side replied viciously:

"*Pas de chahut, malheureux! A bord vite, mille dieux!*"

And as the canoe silently glided from the shore with the boy safely on board, the form of an Indian could be dimly seen where Kerr had stood the previous moment, and a bullet sang past his ear.

There for the time his more acute troubles ended. A few days later, at Detroit, a throng of persons, half helpless with laughter, noisily escorted to the Fort a forlorn, bald-headed, painted scare-crow, clad in a tattered Indian blanket, which scare-crow presently introduced itself to the commandant as Andrew Kerr, lately a prisoner of the Indians.

Once recovered from his fatigues and hardships, Andrew, as one of a small force, was sent to Niagara to obtain supplies for the Detroit garrison. The outward voyage down Lake Erie was safely and pleasantly accomplished. But these vast American lakes are subject to sudden and violent storms, and on the return trip, during an exceptionally fierce squall, the little 40-ton sloop, heavily laden as she was with military stores, sprang a leak, and to save themselves the crew were forced to run her aground on a gravelly beach under the lee of a projecting headland. The situation at best was most critical, for if the wind should shift but a few points the sloop must inevitably break up; and not only



was the one boat available a mere skiff incapable of living in a heavy sea, but even should they all succeed in safely getting ashore with muskets intact and ammunition dry, their position would still be in the last degree precarious. For well they knew in what manner of country they were about to set unwilling foot—forest land occupied by the fiercest and most treacherous of the hostile Indian tribes. Capture meant death, probably with torture to precede it.



Page 74

With great difficulty and some danger the ship-wrecked crew did at length succeed in getting ashore, with their rifles and a fair supply of powder and lead, and without an instant's delay they set about building a rude breastwork for protection if matters should come to a fight. The stranded vessel must certainly have been already seen by the Indians; at any moment they might appear. But the breastwork was completed without interruption, and still no sign of the Redskins had been seen. It was at least breathing space, though all knew what must assuredly follow, and to some the actual immediate combat would have been less unwelcome than was now the suspense.

After consultation, a few of the party, including Kerr, whose knowledge of Indian ways it was thought might be useful, left the breastwork to spy on the enemy—or at least to try to pick up some knowledge of their whereabouts. Had it been into that enchanted land that they now entered, where lay the Sleeping Beauty, the forest shades could not have been more still, more apparently devoid of life. No breath of wind stirred leaf or bough, all nature breathed peace, and, lulled to a sense of security, the little party ventured farther among the trees than was prudent. In Indian warfare, appearances were ever deceitful; the greater the apparent security, the greater the need for caution. So it was now here.

“I guess it ain't all right,” one man was saying; “I don't like it. Get back, boys.”

And even as he spoke, “crack” went a rifle on their left—“crack,” “crack,” “crack,” came the sound of fire-arms on three sides; and as they turned and ran for the breastwork, a man hiccupped and fell on his face, clutching at the grass, coughing up his life-blood. No time to turn and help; the yelling Redskins were at their heels, tomahawk and scalping knife in hand; delay meant certain death for all, and the fugitives tumbled into the breastwork just in time. Then, save for one awful scream of agony, again for a time all was quiet; for any sign that might be seen of them by the white men, the forest might have swallowed up the enemy. But let one of these white men for but an instant show his head over the breastwork, or in any way expose an arm or even a hand, then from the concealed foe came at once a hail of bullets, and the forest rang with the crack of rifles. Several of the little garrison, careless, or too impatient to fire only through the roughly made loopholes, lost their lives in this way; and some others were picked off by Indians who had managed to get into the high branches of neighbouring trees, and thence, concealed behind thick foliage, fired on the garrison, for a time with impunity, till by chance it was discovered from where the fatal shots were coming.

Meantime, for the white men it was almost like letting off their rifles into the night; seldom could a Redskin be seen, and men fired only at the spots where the smoke of Indian muskets hung about the undergrowth, or where they saw a spirt of flame.



Page 75

And so the fight went on, hour after hour, till many of the defenders had fallen, and the necessity of husbanding ammunition slackened the fire of Kerr and his comrades. Then the Indians, knowing that the white men were few, abandoning caution tried to rush the breastwork. But now necessarily they exposed themselves, and as the white men had reloaded the empty rifles of their dead and wounded comrades, and thus had at least two apiece ready, heavy toll was taken of the stormers, and the Redskins were beaten back. Time and again was this repeated, once even during the night—just before dawn. But each attempt failed, and the baffled Indians finally drew off.

With thankful hearts, if with sore labour, the surviving white men, by lightening their vessel, got her off the ground, and succeeded in finding and stopping the leak. A few days saw them again safely at Detroit.

No more, as a civilian, did Andrew Kerr face the Indians. On getting back to New York in 1764 he was given a commission as ensign in the 1st battalion of the 42nd Regiment, and in various parts of the world he saw much service, finally retiring about 1780 with the rank of captain. He did not wholly, however, sever his connection with the service, for later, after he had purchased an estate in the Border, and had married, he became a major in the Dumfries Militia.

It is given to few to pass a youth so stormy as Kerr's, and to end, as he did, by becoming a peaceful, prosperous Border laird.

BORDER SNOWSTORMS

“St. Agnes' Eve—ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold.”

The great round-backed, solemn Border hills, in summer time kindly sleeping giants, smiling in their sleep, take on another guise when winter smites with pitiless blast, when

“The sounds that drive wild deer and fox
To shelter in the brake and rocks,”

bellow fearsomely among the crags, and down glen and burn rushes the White Death, bewildering, blinding, choking, and at the last, perhaps, with Judas kiss folding in its icy arms some luckless shepherd whom duty has sent from his warm fireside to the rescue of his master's sheep. You would not know for the same those hills that so little time gone past nursed you in their soft embrace. Then, in the warm, sunny days, shadows of great fleecy clouds chased each other leisurely up the braes through the bracken and the purpling heather; the burn sang to itself a merry tune as it tumbled from boulder to



boulder, rippling through pools where the yellow trout lay basking; on the clear air came the call of grouse, and afar off a solitary raven croaked in the stillness of a sun-steeped glen. Now the bracken is dead, the bent sodden and chill with November's sleet; against a background of heavy, leaden-grey sky the



Page 76

heather lies black as if washed in ink. Across from the wild North Sea comes a wind thin and nipping, waxing in strength, and with the gathering storm piping ever more shrilly down the glen, driving before it now a fine, powdery white dust that chokes nostril and mouth, and blinds the eyes of those whom necessity compels to be out-doors. It is “an oncome,” a “feeding storm.” Thus have begun many of the great snowstorms that from time to time have devastated the Border and taken heavy toll of man and beast.

In March 1615 snow fell to such a depth, and drifted so terribly, that not only did many men perish, but likewise “most part of all the horse, nolt, and sheep of the kingdom.” In the years 1633 and 1665 there were great storms, when vast numbers of sheep perished, and “the frost was severe enough to kill broom and whins.” But greater than these, both in devastating effect and in duration, was the memorable storm of 1674. The early part of that year was marked by extraordinarily tempestuous weather. In January came a violent gale from east and by north that strewed the coasts with wreckage. Down by Berwick and Eyemouth, by St. Abb’s, and along all that rugged shore, the cruel sea sported daily with bodies of drowned sailors, flinging them from wave to wave, tossing them headlong on to a stony beach, only with greedy far-stretched grasp to snatch them back again to its hungry maw. In every rocky fissure, where angry waves spout cliff-high and burst in clouds of spray; in every rugged inlet, where the far-flung roaring seas boil furiously, timbers and deck-hamper of vessels driven on a lee-shore churned ceaselessly, pounding themselves to matchwood.

Throughout January, and till February was far advanced, this bitter easterly gale blew fiercely. In mid-February the wind died down, leaving a sky black with piled-up cloud gravid with coming evil. Inland, hill and river lay frost-bound, white with snow, and already the pinch of winter had begun to make itself seriously felt amongst the sheep. In those days, beyond driving the flocks, when necessary, from the hill to more sheltered, low-lying country, but little provision was ever made for severe weather, and even the precaution of shifting the sheep to lower ground was frequently too long delayed. Turnips, of course, had not yet come into cultivation in Scotland, and feed-stuffs were generally unknown.

This time farmers were caught napping. On 20th February a rising wind drove before it snow, fine powdered and dry as March dust, and with the waxing gale, and cold “intense to a degree never before remembered,” the drift quickly became a swirling blizzard which no living thing could face. Day and night for thirteen days this maelstrom of snow continued, and till the 29th of March no decided improvement took place in the weather; the snow lay deep, and the frost held, so that there was “much loss of sheep by the snow, and of whole families in the moor and high lands; much loss of cows everywhere, also of wild beasts, as of doe and roe.”



Page 77

"The Thirteen Drifty Days," folk called this storm, and by that name it has gone down to history. "About the fifth and sixth days of the storm," says the Ettrick Shepherd, writing in *Blackwood's Magazine* of July 1819, "the young sheep began to fall into a sleepy and torpid state, and all that were affected in the evening died over-night. The intensity of the frost wind often cut them off when in that state quite instantaneously. About the ninth and tenth days, the shepherds began to build up huge semicircular walls of their dead, in order to afford some shelter for the remainder of the living; but they availed but little, for about the same time they were frequently seen tearing at one another's wool with their teeth. When the storm abated on the fourteenth day from its commencement, there was, on many a high-lying farm, not a living sheep to be seen. Large misshapen walls of dead, surrounding a small prostrate flock, likewise all dead, and frozen stiff in their lairs, was all that remained to cheer the forlorn shepherd and his master."

As a matter of fact, something like nine-tenths of all the sheep in the south of Scotland perished in this one storm, or if they did not then actually perish, their vitality was so lowered, their constitutions so wrecked, by the intense cold and the long deprivation of food, that they never again picked up condition, but died like flies when the spring was further advanced. Hogg says that in Eskdalemuir, out of 20,000 sheep "none were left alive but forty young wedders on one farm, and five old ewes on another. The farm of Phaup remained without a stock and without a tenant for twenty years subsequent to the storm." On another farm all the sheep perished save one black-faced ewe; and she was not long left to perpetuate her breed, for dogs hunted her into a loch, and she too went the way of her fellows.

Amongst other great storms, Hogg also mentions one in this same century, long remembered as the "Blast o' March." It occurred on a Monday, the twenty-fourth day of March, and was of singularly short duration, considering the havoc it wrought. The previous Sunday was so warm that lassies returning from Yarrow Kirk in the evening took off shoes and stockings and walked barefoot; the young men cast plaids and coats. To their unconcealed astonishment, as they sauntered homeward these young people found that an old shepherd, named Walter Blake, had driven his entire flock of sheep into a sheltered position by the side of a wood, near the road. Now, Blake was a deeply religious man, one to whom the Sabbath was in the strictest sense a holy day, a day too sacred to be broken in any fashion whatever, except for some extraordinarily powerful reason. On being asked how it came to pass that he was found thus following his worldly vocation, to the neglect of church-going, he said that in the morning he had seen to the northward so ill-looking a "weather-gaw" that he was convinced a heavy storm was coming, and that probably before morning there would be a dangerous drift. The young men laughed the old one to scorn. A snowstorm! The auld man was daft! Why, the air was like June; no sensible body would even so much as dream of snow.



Page 78

“Belike we’ll be up to oor oxters in snaw, the morn, Wattie,” chirruped one damsel, in the bicker of rustic wit and empty laughter that flew around.

“Weel, weel, lads! Time will show. Let them laugh that win,” said old Wattie.

That night there came a sudden shift of wind, and ere morning the country-side was smothered in snow. Twenty thousand sheep perished, and none but old Walter Blake came out of that storm free from loss.

The years 1709, 1740, and 1772 were all notable for unusually heavy falls of snow. In the latter year the country was snow-clad from mid-December till well on in April, and the loss of sheep was very great, chiefly because partial thaws, occurring at intervals, encouraged hill farmers to believe each time that the back of the winter was broken. Hence, they delayed too long in shifting their sheep to lower lands, and when the imperative necessity of removal at length became obvious, if life were to be saved, it was too late; from sheer weakness the poor animals were unable to travel.

Then came that terrible storm of 1794, a calamity that old men of our own day may yet remember to have heard talked about by eye-witnesses of the scenes they described. Nothing in nature ever wrought such havoc in the Border. Seventeen shepherds perished in the endeavour to rescue their flocks; no less than thirty others, overwhelmed by the intense cold, the fury of the gale, and the blinding, choking whirlwind of snow, dropped and lay unconscious, to all intents dead, sleeping the dreamless sleep of those whom King Frost slays with his icy darts. And dead would those thirty assuredly have been, but for the timely aid of brave men, themselves toil-worn to the verge of collapse, who, through the deep drifts and the swirling snow, bore home the heavy, unconscious bodies, to revive them with difficulty.

The storm began on the 24th of January, and though the snow lay but a week, whole flocks were overwhelmed, in some instances buried fifty feet deep. Countless numbers of sheep, driven into burns and lochs by the pitiless strength of the wind, were never again seen, swept away into the sea by the tremendous floods that followed the melting of the snow. There is on Solway Sands a place called the Beds of Esk, where with terrible persistency the tides cast up whatever may have been carried to sea by the rivers which in this neighbourhood empty themselves into the Firth. Ghastly was the burden here strewn when the floods now went down. In those Beds lay the lifeless bodies of two men and of one woman; the swollen carcasses of five-and-forty dogs, eighteen hundred and forty sheep, nine black cattle, three horses, one hundred and eighty hares; and of rabbits and small animals a multitude innumerable. Death held high carnival in Eskdalemuir that January of 1794.



Page 79

Hogg gives a vivid picture of his own adventures in this storm. He had gone from home the previous day, tramping over the Ettrick hills many a long mile to attend some friendly meeting of fellow-shepherds, leaving his sheep in charge of his master. Arrived at his destination, and rendered uneasy by the unwonted appearance of the sky, without waiting for rest or for anything but a little food and drink, he turned and set out straightway on his homeward journey. A tramp of thirty or forty miles over the hills is ordinarily no great matter for a young and active shepherd. But now snow was falling; already it lay to some depth, making the footing toilsome and insecure. Moreover, a curious yellow mist had spread over the hills, shrouding the hollows from sight; darkness must be on him hours before he could hope to reach home, and the night promised to be wild. But what would daunt an ordinary pedestrian has no terrors for the Border shepherd, and Hogg safely reached his home before bedtime, to learn, greatly to his dismay, that his master, good easy man, had left the sheep that evening on an exposed part of the hill. Not even the master's "Never mind them the nicht, Jamie; they're safe eneuch, and I'll gie ye a hand in the morning," could calm his anxiety. However, on looking out before going to bed, he was comforted to find the wind coming from the south, and apparently a thaw beginning. He might sleep in peace after all; things were going to turn out less bad than he had feared.

Tired as he was, however, try as he might, sleep would not come that night; an unaccountable feeling of restlessness and of vague apprehension had him in its grip. Hour after hour he lay, listening irritably to the snoring of his fellow-shepherd, Borthwick, starting nervously at every scraping of rat or creak of timber. At last, long after midnight, he rose and looked out. The wind had fallen, but snow still fell; there was nothing abnormal in the night, and the weather might have been described as merely "seasonable." But away in the northern sky, low down, appeared a strange break in the mist, such as in all his experience he had never before seen. And it came to his mind that the previous day, when on his homeward way he had "looked in" at his uncle's house, the old man had predicted the coming of a violent storm, which would surely spring from that quarter in which should first be seen a phenomenon such as that on which Hogg was now looking. The shepherd returned to bed, and had almost succeeded in falling into a doze, when again some impulse caused him to sit up and listen. From far in the distant hills came quivering a strange low moaning that brought with it something of awe and suspense. Nearer it drove, and nearer, rising at length to a fierce bellow; and then, with appalling roar, as of thunder, the gale hurled itself on to the building, shaking it to the foundations. In the pitch blackness of the night Hogg groped his way to an opening in the byre over which he and Borthwick slept, and thrust out a hand and arm. "So completely was the air overloaded with falling and driving snow that, but for the force of the wind, I felt as if I had thrust my arm into a wreath of snow," he writes.



Page 80

Presently he roused Borthwick, who had slept soundly through the hubbub, and at once his fellow-shepherd dressed and tried to make his way from the byre to the kitchen, a distance of no more than fourteen yards. But even in the little time which had elapsed since the breaking of the storm the space between kitchen and byre had drifted up with snow as high as the house walls, and Borthwick straightway lost himself; neither could he find his way to the house, nor succeed in regaining the byre. Eventually both men with no small toil made their way to the kitchen, where they found master and maids already assembled, and in a state of no little alarm.

Their first concern was manifestly the safety of the sheep. But at such an hour, in such a night, what could be done? Nevertheless, two hours before daylight shepherds and master started for the hill, taking first the precaution to sew their plaids round them, and to tie on their bonnets. For the thrilling details of the dangerous undertaking one must refer to Hogg's own account, but it may here be noted that no sooner was the kitchen door closed on the men than they lost each other, and lost also all sense of direction; it was only by the sound of their voices that the little party succeeded in keeping in each other's neighbourhood. And such was the fury of the wind and the confusion of the drift that frequently, in order to draw breath, they were compelled to bend till their faces were between their knees. The farmhouse stood within what in Scotland is called a "park," in this instance a small enclosure, the wall of which might be at most three hundred yards distant from the house door. It was two hours before daylight when they entered this park; when morning broke, they had not yet succeeded in making their way out of it.

Hogg's own story must be read, to learn how, and at what dire peril to the searchers, Borthwick's flock was at length found. They were huddled together, and buried deep in a snow wreath so compact that when the outside sheep had been extricated, most of the remainder were able of themselves to walk out, leaving where they had stood a sort of vast cave. Hogg himself, when the bulk of Borthwick's sheep had been at length saved, started alone to rescue his own flock. With comparatively little trouble he found them, got them by slow degrees to a place of safety, and then turned to make his way home. Of the course to steer, it never occurred to him to doubt; he had known the hills from infancy, and could have walked blindfold across them. His instinct for locality was as the instinct of some wild animal, or of an Australian black-fellow. But what put some dread in his mind was the knowledge that between him and home lay the Douglas Burn, possibly by now in spate, and dangerous to cross. The noise of the wind would prevent him from hearing the roar of the swollen torrent, the driving snow prevent him from seeing the danger, and a false step on the bank might



Page 81

deposit him where he would never come out alive. To a man alone on the hill in such weather, the task was arduous, the danger great; moreover, in the last thirty-six hours he had walked far, had undergone great toil, and he had been without sleep all night. The prospect was no pleasing one. But he struggled on through the blinding, wind-driven snow, heading, as he confidently believed, straight for home. Yet doubt presently began to fill his mind. He should long ago have reached the Douglas Burn, but not a sign even suggestive of such a thing as a watercourse had he yet seen. Presently he roused with a start, for now he stood amongst trees, stretching apparently in endless succession to an infinite distance. After all, it seemed that he *had* missed his way. Where he was he could not tell; and it needed some minutes of anxious groping ere he could clear his mind and make certain of his position. He stood not much more than fifty yards from the farm-house door, by the side of a little clump of trees, which in that blurred light and in the confusion of the drifting snow took on the semblance of some vast forest. Without being aware of it, Hogg had crossed the gully of the Douglas Burn on a bridge formed by the deep snow, and crossed over the park wall in similar fashion.

Many have been the terrible winters since those of which Hogg wrote, many the lives lost, and more, perhaps, the narrow escapes from what seemed certain death. In 1803 the frozen, deep-buried body of a man was found near Ashestiel, within what—but for the raging storm the previous night—must have been easy hail of his own cottage, where, sick with anxiety, his wife and little ones sat waiting his return from the hill. In that same storm a young shepherd, within sight of his own father, fell over a precipice near Birkhill, and, with spine hopelessly injured, lay helpless amongst the snow-covered boulders in a place inaccessible to the distracted father. A party succeeded in rescuing him, but rescue availed him little; he lay afterwards at home for several weeks unable to stir hand or foot, and in great pain, till death mercifully released him.

In 1825 came an on-fall so sudden and violent that scores of people who happened to be on journeys were compelled to remain for weeks wherever they had chanced to be when the storm broke. There was no possibility of getting away; except those in the immediate vicinity of large towns, all roads were completely blocked, and communication was absolutely cut off. The mails had ceased to run, and of course in those days the electric telegraph was unknown. Thus, many a man, the father of a family, was parted indefinitely from wife and children without possibility of allaying their anxiety for his welfare; many a commercial traveller passed week after week in some roadside inn, waiting vainly for the long-delayed thaw to enable him to communicate with his employer. And had country people in those days depended for their supplies on tradesmen's carts, as is the custom now, many a family must have found itself in the direst straits ere the storm was half over.



Page 82

Then a few years later came that memorable storm of 1831, of which men in Tweedsmuir still speak almost as if it were an event of yesterday. It was in the days of the old mail coaches, and the event which served to fix this storm indelibly in the public mind occurred on or near the old coach road from Dumfries to Edinburgh. The road runs past Moffat and up something like five miles of very heavy gradient to the Devil's Beef Tub, ascending in that distance nearly nine hundred feet; from the Tub it crosses the lonely, desolate watershed which divides Tweed from Annan, then by easy slope drops past Tweedshaws and Badlieu, and so by Tweedsmuir and the old Crook Inn—with Broad Law upheaving his massive shoulder on the right—slips gradually into country less unkind in days of storm than are those bleak upper regions.

Snow had been falling all day on the 1st of February 1831, and the morning mail from Dumfries to Edinburgh was already late in reaching Moffat. Would "she" go on, would "she" risk the terrible drifts that even now must have formed nearer the bleak moorland summit? And the little knot of faithful admirers who, according to custom, daily assembled by one's and two's about the inn door at Moffat to wait the coming of the coach—their one excitement—agreed that "MacGeorge would gang on if the de'il himsel' stude across the road." MacGeorge was guard of the mail-coach, a fine, determined man, an old soldier, one imbued with abnormally strong sense of duty. Once before, for some quite unavoidable delay, the Post-Office authorities had "quarrelled" him (as he expressed it), and this undeserved blame rankled in the old soldier's heart. It should not be said of him a second time that he had failed to get his mails through on time. So it came to pass that, in spite of rising gale and fiercer driving snow, in spite of earnest remonstrance from innkeepers and spectators, with "toot-toot" of horn away into the white smother, spectral-like, glided the silent coach. A mile from the inn she was blocked by a huge drift. That safely won through, a couple of miles farther she plodded on, slowly and ever more slow; and finally, in a mighty wreath, stuck fast; "all the King's horses" might not have brought her through that. MacGeorge was urged to turn now, to make the best of a bad business and to go back to Moffat. The delay was unavoidable; no one could cast blame on him, for the worst part of the road was yet to come, and no power on earth could get the mails through that. But no! It was his duty to go on, and go he would.

The horses were taken out of the coach. Some were sent back to Moffat in charge of the lads who rode the extra tracers used in snowy weather for the few miles of heavy collar-work out of Moffat; of the rest, loaded with the mail-bags, MacGeorge led one, Goodfellow, the coachman, another; and the two set off for Tweedshaws, accompanied by a man named Marchbanks, the Moffat roadman, who had been a passenger on the coach. It was but four miles to Tweedshaws, yet before they had struggled through half the distance the horses had come to a standstill, utterly blown and exhausted; nothing could get them to stir forward, or longer to face the drift. Marchbanks suggested that now at length they might reasonably turn and fight their way back. Goodfellow hesitated.



Page 83

“What say ye, Jamie?” he asked of MacGeorge.

“Come ye or bide ye, I go on,” answered the stern old soldier. “I can carry the bags mysel’.”

“Then that settles the maitter. If ye gang, I gang.”

So the horses were turned adrift to find their own way home, and the two men went off into the mirk, carrying the bags; whilst Marchbanks, on their urgent advice, turned to force his arduous way back to Moffat.

Snow still fell in the morning, but the worst of the storm seemed over when Marchbanks again started to try for Tweedshaws to ascertain if MacGeorge and Goodfellow had won their way through. The country was one vast drift; the snow-posts by the roadside, where not altogether buried or so plastered with the driving snow on their weather side as to be invisible, pushed their black heads through the universal ghostly shroud; where the road had been, the abandoned coach itself loomed, a shapeless white mound. On and on Marchbanks toiled, and, far past the spot where last night he had parted from his comrades, something unusual hanging to a snow post caught his eye. It was the mail-bags, securely tied there by hands which too evidently had been bleeding from the cold; but of guard or coachman there was never a sign. The meagre winter day was already drawing to a close; with the gathering darkness a rising wind drove the snow once more before it, and the clouds to windward piled black and ominous. By himself Marchbanks was powerless to help, if help were indeed yet possible; he could but return to Moffat and give the alarm.

That night men with lanterns and snow-poles fought their way to Tweedshaws, only to learn there what all had feared—neither guard nor coachman had come through. Therefore, if by remote chance they still lived, the men must lie buried in the snow, perhaps within very few yards of the high-road. For two days scores of men searched every likely spot, but never a clue they found, except Goodfellow’s hat, which lay in a peat-hag at no great distance from the post where the mail-bags had been hung.

Then—some said it was a dream that guided them—some one thought of an old, disused road along which there was possibility the lost men might have made their way. There, from a drift protruded something black—a boot; and on his back, deep buried, lay Goodfellow. Near at hand they found MacGeorge, in an easy attitude, as if quietly sleeping, on his face a smile—“a kind o’ a pleasure,” the finders called it—such a smile, perhaps, as the face of the “good and faithful servant” may wear when he entereth into the joy of his Lord.



Page 84

Many have been the snowy years since that in which MacGeorge threw away life for duty's sake. Besides winters, such as that hard "Crimean" one of 1854-5, there have been, for example, the terrible season of 1860-1, the bitter winter of 1878-9, when snow lay, practically unbroken, from November till March, and the frost was unrelenting in severity; and there have been others, too numerous to specify. Many a man has perished on the hill, before and since, but no tragedy ever seized the popular imagination so firmly as did that on the Moffat road in 1831. It is a district lonely enough even in summer time, that joint watershed of Tweed, Annan, and Clyde, but when winter gales sweep over those lofty moorlands, and snow drives down before the bitter blast, let no man unused to the hill attempt that road. It was but the other year that a lonely shepherd's wife near Tweedshaws, one stormy evening when snow drove wildly across the moor, thought that she heard the cry of a human voice come down the gale. Again and again, as she sat by her cosy fire of glowing peat she imagined that some one called for help. Again and again she rose, and opening the door, listened, but never, when she stood by the open door waiting for the call to come again, was anything to be heard but the noise of the storm and the rush of the wind, anything to be seen but the driving snow. Long she listened, but the cry came no more, and naturally she concluded that imagination had fooled her. In the morning, not very many yards away from the door, half-covered by its snowy winding-sheet, lay the stiff-frozen body of a young man. There had been the breakdown of some vehicle down the road the previous evening, and he had thought to make his way to Moffat on foot. Of what do men think when they are lost in the snow? Of nothing, probably, one may conclude; very likely, before it has dawned upon them that there is danger, the mind, like the body, has become numbed with the cold, and they probably only think of rest and sleep. To some spot sheltered from the blast they may perhaps have stumbled, and they pause to take breath. After the turmoil through which they have been struggling, this sheltered spot seems a quiet little back-water, out of the raging torrent, peaceful, even warm, by comparison. A little rest—even, it may be, a few minutes' sleep—will revive them, and afterwards they will push on, refreshed. All will be well; it is not far to safety. And the snow falls quietly, ceaselessly, softly lapping them in its gentle folds, and the roar of the wind comes now from very far away—their last lullaby, heard vaguely through "death's twilight dim." The desire to sleep, men say, is irresistible, and once yielded to, sleep's twin brother, death, is very near at hand. There was found many years ago in the Border hills the body of a man, who had taken off his plaid, folded it carefully to make a pillow, on it had rested his head, and so had passed to his long rest, contented enough, if one might judge from the smile on his face.



Page 85

But men do not always thus lose consciousness when buried in the snow. There was the case of Mr. Alexander Laidlaw of Bowerhope, on St. Mary's Loch, in the year 1842. One wild day of storm and deep-lying snow he started out to see after the safety of his sheep. Hours had passed, darkness had fallen, and he did not come home. Then a shepherd remembered having seen him crossing a certain hill where snow lay extra deep. To this hill in the morning the searchers betook themselves, to find that a great avalanche had taken place, leaving the hill bare but for the night's coating of snow. At the hill-foot the old snow was piled in giant masses. Here a dog sniffed, and whimpered, and began to scrape. They found Laidlaw buried there in tons of snow, uninjured save in one arm, and after fourteen hours burial in his snowy sepulchre he was still partly conscious. When the tumbling snow mass overwhelmed him he had had presence of mind and strength to clear from before his face breathing space sufficient to preserve life. Laidlaw lived for many years after, in no permanent respect a sufferer from his burial and resurrection.

His was an experience of no common order, yet it was a case less strange than that of a sportsman, many years ago, who, unused to the hills, was lost amongst the snow one evening of sudden storm. Far and long he wandered, till, utterly exhausted, dropping from fatigue and cold, he chanced on a roof-less cottage, the crumbling walls of which promised some shelter from the wind and the terrible drifting snow. By the empty chimney-place he sat down, thankful that at least the bitter gale no longer buffeted him. But the snow fell thick and fast, eddying into every corner, gently covering his feet and stealing up over his body. A drowsy languor crept over his senses, an irresistible feeling of warmth and comfort came to him; his head fell forward. Again and again, knowing the deadly peril, he roused himself with ever-increasing effort; again and again his head sank. Then suddenly it seemed that all was well. How *could* he have fancied that he was out amongst the snow? The sound of the gale still thundered in his ears, but dully, muffled by thick walls, and he stood in a bedroom wherein burned a cheerful fire. On the bed lay a man, who presently, with a start, sat up, looked at him, and lay down again. Three times this happened, but the fourth time the man in bed got up and hurriedly began to dress. He was a man unknown to the dreamer—if dreaming he was—but his features were strongly marked, and bore a scar on the cheek, unmistakable to anyone who had once seen it. Then, suddenly, except for himself, the room was empty, and, as the dreamer in his dream strove to reach the fire, to thrust cold hands close to the pleasant glow, room and fire faded, and he knew no more till a bright light shone in his dazed eyes, and by his side, a hand on his shoulder, vigorously shaking him, knelt the man whom he had seen in his dreams. "I knew you were coming," drowsily murmured the awakened sleeper, glancing feebly at his rescuer, and immediately dropping off to sleep again.



Page 86

When next he came to full consciousness, it was in a warm bed in a comfortable room, where every evidence of luxury met his eyes. In an armchair by the fire, with outstretched feet, sat his rescuer, his face turned towards the bed. And presently:

“Why did you say last night that you knew I was coming?” he asked.

And when the dreamer had told his dream:

“It is strange,” said the other, “that last night I should have been forced, as it were, to get up and go to the old cottage by the wood. Over and over again I woke, plagued by an unaccountable impulse to visit those ruined walls. Struggle as I might against it, argue with myself as I would on its folly, it always returned; and at last, about midnight, it conquered me, and I arose and went.”

THE MURDER OF COLONEL STEWART OF HARTRIGGE

Since a time long prior to the Raid of the Redeswire—when on Caterfell the rallying cry, “Jethart’s here,” fell like sweetest music on the ears of a sore-pressed little band of armed Scots, fighting for their lives, and giving back sullenly before superior English strength—the worst enemies of Jedburgh have never been able to taunt her with apathy, or with want of strenuousness. In the fighting of days long gone by, in questions social or political of more modern times, lack of zeal has not been one of her characteristics; nor, perhaps, in past times have her inhabitants, or those resident in the district, been conspicuous for tolerance of the religious or political convictions of neighbours who might chance not to see eye to eye with them in such matters.

The first half of the eighteenth century was a time more fully charged than most with questions which, on the Border as elsewhere, goaded men to fury. There was, for example, the Union; there had been, prior to that, the unhappy Darien Scheme, which ruined half Scotland and raised hatred of England to white heat; there was, later, the advent of George the First and his “Hanoverian Rats,” to the final ousting of the rightful King over the water; there was the Rising of 1715, and, finally, there was the gallant attempt by Bonnie Prince Charlie to regain his father’s crown in 1745. Thus they had, indeed, a superfluity of subjects over which men might legitimately quarrel. And when it is remembered that gentlemen in those days universally carried swords, and as a rule possessed some knowledge of how to use them, and that the man who did not habitually drink too much at dinner was a veritable *rara avis*—a poor creature, unworthy to be deemed wholly a man—the wonder will be, not that so many, but rather that so few, fatal quarrels took place.

Whatever in other respects might be their failings—and these were, indeed, many and grave—Scottish inns in those days were noted for the goodness of their claret. As a



consequence of our ancient alliance and direct trade with France, that wine was not only good, but was plentiful and cheap—cheap enough, indeed, to become almost the national drink—and vast quantities were daily consumed; though there were not wanting those who, protesting that claret was “shilpit” and “cauld on the stomach,” called loudly for brandy, and with copious draughts of that spirit corrected the acidity of the less potent wine.



Page 87

Possibly the very depth of the drinking in those days guarded many a life from sacrifice; the hand is not steady, nor the foot sure, when the brain is muddled by fumes of wine, and it was perhaps more often chance than design that guided the sword's point in some of these combats. Still, even so, Death too often claimed his toll from such chance strokes.

A duel between opponents equally armed was fair enough, provided that the skill and sobriety were not unequally divided, and that one of the fighters did not chance to be unduly handicapped by age. If a man wore a sword, he knew that he might be called upon to use it—even the most peace-loving of men might not then, without loss of honour, always succeed in avoiding a brawl; the blame was his own if he had neglected to make himself proficient in the use of his weapon. At that period the tongue of the libeller was not tied by fear of the law; for the man insulted or libelled there existed no means of redress other than that of shedding, or trying to shed, his insulter's blood. It was a rough and ready mode of obtaining justice; and if it had its manifest disadvantages, it was at least not wholly unsuited to the rough and ready times.

But cases, unhappily, were not unknown in which one or other of the tipsy combatants—in his sober moments possibly an honourable and kindly-natured man—thrust suddenly and without warning, giving his opponent small time to draw, or even, perhaps, to rise from his chair, a course of action which, even under the easy moral code of those days, was accounted as murder.

Such a case occurred at Jedburgh in the year 1726. Sir Gilbert Elliott of Stobs and Colonel Stewart of Stewartfield (now called Hartrigge) were the principals in the affair.

Sir Gilbert (father of the General Elliott afterwards so famed for his defence of Gibraltar in the great siege of 1779-83) was a man who had spent some part of his youth in London, a place then, as ever, little calculated to repress leanings towards conviviality in young men possessing the command of money. Probably the habits there contracted were emphasized later, when ebbing fortune consigned him for good to what no doubt then seemed to him the deadly dull life of a dull country-side. More than likely, too, he was a little scornful of his neighbours who knew not the delights of London, a trifle contemptuous of their country manners, and possibly he may have been of quarrelsome disposition, when in his cups quick to take offence and to see slights where none existed. In any event, if one may judge from the evidence given later at an inquiry held in Jedburgh, throughout the affair with Colonel Stewart, Sir Gilbert Elliott was the aggressor. Possibly, after the fashion of the day, both were more or less tipsy; certainly, without any doubt, Sir Gilbert was greatly the worse of liquor, and did not carry that liquor as a gentleman was expected to carry it. He persistently forced a quarrel on the Colonel.



Page 88

It was in the old Black Bull Inn at Jedburgh that the meeting took place. There had been a Head Court that forenoon to determine the list of voters for the year, and a large and already somewhat convivial company assembled afterwards in the dining-room of the Black Bull. Wine flowed, and as the evening waned, guest after guest prudently took himself off, till of the original party there were left but five—Sir Gilbert, Colonel Stewart, two officers of the Royal Regiment of North British Dragoons (the Scots Greys), and the proprietor of Timpendean—the latter described in the evidence as being “very noysie.”

It is easy to imagine the scene. The long, low-ceilinged room, lit by candles, reeking of dinner and of wine. Eliott, still brooding over his defeat in the recent parliamentary election, bent on picking a quarrel; Stewart, amiable and for a time conciliatory, till goaded beyond endurance; the two officers, very red in the face, laughing and treating the whole affair as a huge joke; and Timpendean, the while, in a monotonous loud bawl, chanting, very much out of tune, a song, most of the verses of which he forgot before he had sung two lines, ever starting afresh *ad nauseam*, after the manner of drunken men. It was not a seemly spectacle, but it was the fashion of the day, and but for Eliott all might have ended with no worse effect than a bad headache next morning. But for Eliott—unfortunately. Nothing, apparently, would satisfy that gentleman. Colonel Stewart had let fall words which were twisted into an affront. The Colonel assured him that no such words had passed his lips; but that if he had by chance uttered anything which could be construed as an insult, or if anything said by him had hurt Sir Gilbert’s feelings, he was sorry for it, and he willingly apologised.

Then Sir Gilbert must needs drag in politics. There was the burning question of the late election. Why had Colonel Stewart voted against him? He would have expected the Colonel’s vote sooner than anybody’s, and he took it ill that it had not been given to him. Colonel Stewart explained that as he lay under very great obligations to Sir Patrick Scott and his family, he considered that he had no choice but to vote as he had done; but this did not satisfy Sir Gilbert; the vote *should* have been his by rights, and all the efforts of Captain Ross as peacemaker could not keep him from harping on this one string—the supposed slight put upon him in the matter of the vote. Colonel Stewart was more than willing to drop the subject, and at last Captain Ross, thinking the matter settled, momentarily turned away, in an endeavour to stop the monotony of Timpendean’s tuneless, dreary song.

And then the mischief began. Sir Gilbert used words which, owing to Timpendean’s noise, Ross did not catch, but he heard Colonel Stewart’s reply: “Pray, Sir Gilbert, you have said a great deal already to provoke me; don’t provoke me further.” Then more hot words from Eliott, and Colonel Stewart threw a glass of wine in the baronet’s face. With that, Eliott started to his feet, drew his sword, and plunged it into Stewart’s stomach before the latter could rise from his chair or defend himself in any way.



Page 89

Thereupon arose a babel of sound—a shout, the scuffle and tramp of unsteady feet, noise of chairs pushed aside and overturned on the bare boards, servants running to and fro. And Colonel Stewart, with clammy brow and failing limbs, sat silent in his chair, a dying man.

Captain Ross and his brother officer secured the swords of both men—shutting the stable door, indeed, after the steed was stolen; in hot haste doctors were sent for; and 'mid the bustle and “strow” Eliott stumbled from the room and down the stair, “wanting his wig,” as the landlady, whom he passed on the way, deponed. Sir Gilbert's old and faithful servant hurried his master out of the inn, and behind a great tombstone in the Abbey churchyard hid him till the cool night air gave him sense to attempt escape.

In a thick wood near the head of Rulewater Sir Gilbert Eliott lay concealed, till his friends succeeded in smuggling him aboard a small craft off the coast of Berwickshire, and an outlaw, with a warrant out against him, he lived an uneasy life in Holland for some years, until influential friends with difficulty got him pardon, and enabled him again to return to the Border.

That is the story as it is usually known. But it is fair to add that the tale is differently told in Chambers' *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, where it is stated that Colonel Stewart was “a huffing, hectoring person,” and that he had given “great provocation, and gentlemen afterwards admitted that Stobbs was called upon by the laws of honour to take notice of the offence.” Evidence given at the inquiry, however, hardly seems to favour this view. Possibly neither side was quite free from blame; wine has other effects than to make glad the heart of man.

AULD RINGAN OLIVER

Amongst the flying, broken rabble that represented all that was left of the Covenanting army after the disastrous business of Bothwell Bridge, a dismounted Borderer, with one or two other stout hearts by no means disposed even now to give up the day, continued still to strike fiercely at Claverhouse's pursuing troopers. But their efforts to stem the tide of disaster were utterly without avail, and the Borderer, zealously protesting and struggling, was at length swept off the field by a wild panic rush of the fugitives. Missing his footing on the broken ground as the flying mob pressed on to him, the Borderer fell, and, hampered by the bodies of a couple of wounded and exhausted countrymen, ere he could again struggle to his feet, the horse of more than one spurring rider had trampled over him, and he lay disabled and helpless, at the mercy of any dragoon who might chance to ride that way.

“The Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger,” groaned the Covenanter. “He hath made my strength to fall; the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.”



“Aye!” whimpered a wounded man who lay partly across the Borderer’s legs. “The Lord was as an enemy; He hath swallowed up Israel.’ And I’m thinkin’, ’gin He send nae help, and that sune, we’re no muckle better than deid men. Eh! weary fa’ the day I left my ain pleugh stilts, an’ my ain fireside.”



Page 90

“Na, na, freend. He that setteth his hand to the plough, let him not look back,” answered the Borderer. ““Gin I win oot o’ this, I trow I’ll ‘hew Agag in pieces before the Lord,’ or a’s dune. We will yet smite the Philistines, destroy utterly the Amalakites! Aye! smite them hip and thigh, even from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof!”

This fiery Borderer, Ringan Oliver by name, a man of gigantic strength and great courage, a strong pillar of the Covenant, was a native of Jedwater, where he and his fathers before him had for generations occupied the small holding of Smailcleuchfoot. From the turmoil of the disastrous flight after the battle of Bothwell Bridge, and from the close search of the pursuing soldiers, Ringan Oliver did eventually escape, sore battered, and not without much difficulty and danger, and for many a month thereafter he lay in hiding; caves, holes in the moors, and dripping peat hags, were his shelter, heather and ferns his bed, many a time when the hunt waxed hot. And in 1680, hearing of the return from Holland of the outlawed Hall of Haughhead, he speedily joined that noted Covenanter, hiding with him, “lurking as privily as they could about Borrowstounness and other places on both sides of the Firth of Forth”; and he was with Hall and “worthy Mr. Cargill” when “these two bloody hounds, the curates of Borrowstounness and Carriden, smelled out Mr. Cargill and his companion,” and sent to the Governor of Borrowstounness that information which led to the death of one of the three Covenanters. Mr. Cargill and Ringan Oliver got clear away from the house at Queensferry where Colonel Middleton, single-handed, tried to arrest them, but Hall, severely wounded in the head, was taken, and died before he could be carried even so far as Edinburgh.

For some years after this we have no record of Ringan’s doings; possibly part of the time he spent on his farm at Smailcleuchfoot. In 1689, however, he was with General Mackay at Killiecrankie. And again, as at Bothwell Bridge, sorely against his inclination he experienced the horrors of headlong flight in company of a broken rabble. Reaching Dunkeld in an exhausted condition early in the following morning, he and a few comrades found shelter in the house of a friend. But as they sat, about to fall to on a much needed meal, down the little street came the “rat-tat-tat” of a drum, and past the window swaggered an unkempt Highland drummer, halting at intervals to hurl defiance at all Whigs, and a challenge to them to fight the famous Highland champion, Rory Dhu Mhor. And this is something after the fashion of what Ringan and his weary comrades heard drawled out with fine nasal whine:

“This will pe to pe kiving notice to aal it may pe concerning, tat Rory Dhu Mhor of ta Clan Donachy will pe keeping ta crown of ta causeway in ta toun of Tunkel for wan hour and mhore. And he iss civilly tesiring it to pe known tat if there will pe any canting, poo-hooing, psalm-singing whig repellioner in ta toun, and he will pe so pould as to pe coming forth his hiding holes, and looking ta said Rory Dhu Mhor in ta face, ta said Rory Dhu Mhor herepy kifs promise to pe so ferry condescending as to pe cutting ta same filthy Whig loon shorter by ta legs, for ta honour of King Tchames. Ochilow! Cot save King Tchames!”



Page 91

A few paces behind this tattered herald strutted the champion, Rory Dhu Mhor, swinging his kilt, and like the wild stag of his native mountains, haughtily sniffing the breeze.

At this sight, all the fierce old Border blood began to surge through Ringan Oliver's veins. The contemptuous challenge goaded him to fury; for the Christianity of our Covenanting ancestors was seldom of that cast which prompts the turning of the other cheek to the smiter, and Ringan was one of the most militant of a militant sect.

"God do so to me, and more also," shouted he, springing to his feet, "gin I humble not this blethering boaster, and stop his craw, or he maun stop mine."

"Na, na, Ringan," cried his friends, "haud sae, man, haud sae. Ye'll be clean dung-ower; ye're ower sair spent to fecht thenow."

But this only goaded Ringan the more.

"As the Lord liveth, he shall lick the dust. Hinder me not, friends, withstand me not; I maun do battle with this Philistine."

And with that, he rushed into the street, broadsword in hand.

"Diaoul! Fwhat will this creatur pe tat will pe approaching in such ways and manners before a Hieland shentleman?" cried the Highlander with a snort, giving an extra cock to his bonnet.

"I am an unworthy follower of Christ, our spiritual Redeemer, and a soldier of King William, our temporal deliverer; and I stand here to bid you make good your profane boasting."

"Fhery goot inteet! Fhery goot inteet! you haf been suppering at Killiecrankie, and now you would pe after breakfasting at Tunkeld? By Cot, you shall haf it!"

And Rory drew his claymore. They were not ill-matched. Both were big men, both of gigantic strength, both skilled swordsmen. But the Highlander had by far the greater experience of duelling; it was, in fact, the pride of his life to pick a quarrel and to slay his antagonist. Moreover, he had his target, which was of immense assistance in warding off blows; and Ringan had no guard other than his sword, which fact, in itself, made the combat unequal. And, to crown all, the Highlander was infinitely the fresher. But the dour, fiery, old Border blood had brought Ringan to this pass, when he was in no way fit to fight, and, whatever the cost, he must now go through with it.

So to it they fell. Long they fought, and fiercely, till the breath came hard-drawn and short, and the red blood ran fast from both combatants. Only, the Highlander was less distressed than Ringan, his wounds fewer and less serious. Still, they kept on without pause, till to the fierce joy of the Highland onlookers, and the dull misery of others, it



became quite plain that Ringan's time had come. Human nature could do no more; he was beaten, and was being driven slowly back and back, his defence each minute getting less vigorous and confident, his attack less to be dreaded. Loud rang the exulting Gaelic yells to Rory to finish him, to "give his flesh to the eagles."



Page 92

And now Ringan, blood flowing from a dozen gashes, was down on one knee, but still almost mechanically guarding head and body from the whirlwind final attack of the Highlander. Sick at heart, the Lowland onlookers turned their looks aside; they hated to see such an end of a brave comrade, and they were too few to avenge him. Suddenly, and with bent heads, they turned away from looking at the figure of the wearied Borderer, beaten down on to his knee, away from sight of the flashing claymore that was now so near to tasting their friend's life-blood. And then to their ears came a roar, as of the routing of some mighty bull of Bashan. Glancing back quickly, their astonished eyes saw Rory Dhu Mhor standing rigidly erect and stiff, an expression of blank wonder on his hairy face, and the point of Ringan's broadsword appearing out between the Highlander's shoulders. Then, with another mighty roar, as the sword was withdrawn, he sprang convulsively off the ground, and with a clatter fell heavily on his target, dead. It was a spent man that he was dealing with, he had rashly thought. Too well he knew the game; he had played it successfully so often before. It needed but to go in now and slay. In his over confidence the Highlander neglected for one moment to be cunning of fence, and during that moment he exposed his body. It was enough for a swordsman so skilled as Ringan Oliver. Exhausted as he was, like a flash his weapon leapt forward, and the great Highland champion had fought his last fight.

It was near to being a dearly bought victory. Murder was in the hearts of the Highlanders, as for the moment they stood in savage silence, hungering for the life of their champion's overthrower. And Ringan was fainting from loss of blood, unable to raise himself from the trampled, muddy ground on which he had fallen. Things indeed looked ill for him and for his friends. And ill, no doubt, it would have fared with them, if just then it had not chanced that the certain news reached the Highlanders in Dunkeld of the death of him they called "Ian Dhu nan Cath" (Black John of the Battles), John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, slain the previous day in Killiecrankie fight. Thus it happened that, instead of falling sword in hand on the little party of Lowlanders, the dismayed clansmen began to slip away, and Ringan's friends succeeded in getting their sorely wounded comrade into safety.

It was some time after this, when life had become less stormy, that Ringan again took up his residence at Smailcleuchfoot. Here he continued to live till he was quite an old man. It was here, too, that the incident befell which gave rise to the ballad written by Mr. James Telfer early in last century.

Page 93

Ringan had ever been known as well for his rigid ideas of faith and honour as for his great strength and undaunted courage, and these qualities had brought him greatly into the esteem and friendship of his landlord, one of the earliest of the Marquesses of Lothian. It is said that when the Marquess, towards the end of his life, found it necessary to take what was then the tedious and toilsome journey to London, he sent for Ringan, and giving him the key of a room in Ferniehurst in which were kept important and valuable deeds and family papers, charged him on no account to allow anyone to enter the room or to interfere with the papers until he (the Marquess) should return. It happened, however, shortly after Lord Lothian's departure that his heir had occasion to wish to enter this locked room, and he sent to demand the key from Ringan. The old man, naturally and rightly, refused to depart from the instructions he had received when the key was delivered to him, and the reply he sent to the young lord may probably have been somewhat blunt and uncompromising. In any case, hot words passed between him and the indignant heir, who considered, perhaps not unnaturally, that prohibition to enter the locked room, to whomsoever else it might apply, certainly could not under any circumstances apply to him. Perhaps had he gone in the first instance himself to Ringan and explained matters the affair might without much difficulty have been arranged. But he had taken the other course, and had demanded the key as a matter of right. Hence came hot words between the two, and the upshot was that the younger man left boiling with resentment at the "old Cameronian devil, Ringan Oliver," and threatening to pay him out.

No very long time after this the old Marquess died, and Ringan's enemy reigned in his stead. Nor was it long ere he began to show that no portion of the wrath conceived by him against the old man had been allowed to die for want of nursing. One September day, when Ringan's crop was all but ready to cut, there came across the water from Ferniehurst the new Marquess accompanied by several mounted men, servants, and others, with dogs. Soon the party began riding over the farm, ostensibly looking for hares; finally, they all went into the standing crop, trampling it down wantonly, hallooing their dogs here, there, and everywhere, and galloping furiously about wherever the corn stood thickest. Ringan had been rapidly becoming more and more angry as he found that the damage done was so manifestly wilful damage; and at last, finding remonstrance to be so much waste of breath, he snatched up an old musket, which possibly had not seen the light since Killiecrankie, and shot one of the dogs.

That was enough for the Marquess; he had got the old man in the wrong now. Off he went at once and lodged with the Sheriff of Roxburghshire a complaint against Ringan, and a summons was issued. Ringan refused to appear in court.

"Na!" he said. "I've done nae wrong. I daur them to lay a hand on me."



Page 94

But the Law was not to be thus flouted. If he wouldn't come freely, then he must be made to come, said the sheriff. Here a difficulty arose. Ringan's reputation for gigantic strength and utter fearlessness still survived, and no one dared even attempt to apprehend the old man. In such circumstances the sheriff pressed into his service the Marquess and his men, and this party set off for Smailcleuchfoot. Friends warned Ringan of their coming and counselled him to fly. But the dour old Cameronian's spirit refused to let him do aught that might even remotely suggest a doubt as to his being absolutely in the right. He only retired into his house, and resolutely set about barring doors and windows; and when that was done—

“Let them touch me that daur,” he cried, taking up and carefully loading the same old musket with which he had shot the dog.

Soon came the sheriff's summons, to which Ringan paid no heed, beyond letting the party know that he was at home, and had no intention of surrendering. There was in the house with him at this time a young girl (whether an adopted daughter or merely a maid who cooked and looked after the old man's house, one does not know), but she had refused to leave when he began to barricade the place, and Ringan's sole anxiety was now apparently for her. Of his own safety or that of his house, he seemed to think not at all; the grim old dourness and determination that had distinguished him at Bothwell Bridge and elsewhere were again smouldering, ready to burst into flame.

“Keep oot o' the licht, lass, and rin nae risk; gang in ahint yon press door,” he said to the girl, when the men outside began firing at the windows.

Then he, too, began to fire back at his enemies, and for a time he was too much absorbed in his practice to pay attention to what the girl might be doing. Thus, he had just fired a shot which clipped away one of the curls from the Sheriff's wig, when a gasp, and the sound of a heavy fall on the floor behind him, caused the old man hastily to look round. Curiosity had overcome her caution; the girl had ventured from her shelter, and, standing behind Ringan, had been trying to see, past the edge of the window, how things were going outside. Perhaps she had a lover in the attacking party, and feared for his safety. Anyhow, as she lent forward, forgetting her own danger, a bullet meant for the old man found its billet in her throat. For a moment Ringan stood aghast, then knelt by the dying girl, striving in vain to staunch the blood that gushed from her wound. And as he realised that such a hurt was far beyond his simple skill, the lust to kill was born again in the old man's breast. He forgot that he was old, forgot how the treacherous years had stolen from him the vigour and spring that had been his, forgot everything but the half-crazy desire for vengeance.



Page 95

With the roar of a wounded tiger he tore down the barricades fixed by himself not an hour before, snatched from its place over the fire the trusty old broad-sword that had served him so well in former days, flung wide the door, and charged blindly out on his enemies. Alas for Ringan Oliver! Even as he crossed the threshold, a rope, or some part of his discarded barricade, caught his foot, and like the Philistines' mighty god Dagon lang syne before the Ark of the Lord, he fell prone on his face, and the enemy was on him in an instant.

Even then, disarmed and smothered by numbers as he was, the struggle for a time was by no means unequal, and more than once, with gigantic effort, he had all but flung off his captors. Perhaps, in the end, the task might even have been too much for the sheriff's party had it not been that a treacherous tinker, named Allan, with a hammer struck the old man a heavy blow on the face, fracturing the jaw and partially stunning him. Then, bound hand and foot, Auld Ringan was carried to Edinburgh. There, in the Tolbooth, he lay for eight long years, suffering tortures, first from his broken jaw, and later from old wounds that now broke out afresh. He that had lived so long a life in the pure fresh air of the Border, who had loved more to hear the lark sing than the mouse cheep, now languished in a foul, insanitary prison, and it was but the ghost of his former self that at the end of his long confinement crept away to pass the brief remainder of his days in a house in the Crosscauseway, Edinburgh.

Auld Ringan Oliver died in 1736. He sleeps among the martyrs in Greyfriars Churchyard.

A LEGEND OF NORHAM

In the days, now happily remote, when folks, provided as for a picnic, laboriously travelled great distances in order to be present at the execution of some unhappy wretch; in the days when harmless old women, whose chief fault may probably have been that they were poor and friendless, and perhaps by age and privation rendered little better than half-witted, were baited, and dragged by an ignorant and credulous populace to a fiery or to a watery death, there survived in Scotland yet another barbarous custom not unworthy to take rank with witch-burning. It was a custom so pitiless and revolting that the mind shrinks from its contemplation, for if its victims were not necessarily frail old women, they were yet human beings guilty of no crime, innocent perhaps of all but misfortune.

The study of medicine in those days was in its infancy, and many were the strange virtues attributed to certain herbs, vast the powers claimed for certain things in nature. Aconitum (or wolf's-bane) for example, was reputed to "prevail mightily against the bitings of Scorpions, and is of such force that if the Scorpion pass by where it groweth, and touch the same, presently he becometh dull, heavy, and senseless, and if the same Scorpion by chance touch the White



Page 96

Hellebore, he is presently delivered from his drowiness.” A certain root, too, was of sovereign efficacy in the prevention of rabies in human beings who had been bitten by a mad dog. In Gerard’s *Herbal*, a medical work published in 1596—“Gathered by John Gerarde of London, Master in Chirurgerie”—it is laid down that “the root of the Briar-bush is a singular remedy found out by oracle against the biting of a mad dog.” Then, as now, rabies was regarded with a sickening dread, but in that remote day there had arisen no Pasteur, and dread too frequently degenerated into panic, and panic, as it ever does, revealed itself in brutality.

In olden days the remedies generally administered to patients suffering from the bite of a dog were many and curious, and probably by the average patient they were regarded in reality rather as something in the nature of a charm than as medicines. Doubtless they gave confidence to the person who had been bitten, and, so far, were good. But in very many cases they got the credit of being infallible remedies solely because in most instances the dog which had given the bite was no more afflicted with rabies than was the person whom it bit; probably it was some poor, hunted, frightened beast which had lost its master, and against which some panic-stricken individual had raised the senseless cry of “mad dog.”

One remedy prescribed by a famous physician who lived so late as mid-eighteenth century, was “ash-coloured ground liver-wort a half-ounce, black pepper a quarter-ounce,” to be taken, fasting, in four doses, the patient having been bled prior to beginning the cure. Thereafter for a month, each morning he must plunge into a cold spring or river, in which he must be dipped all over, but must stay no longer than half a minute. Finally, to complete the cure, he must for a fortnight longer enter the river or spring three times a week. It is all eminently simple, and tends at least to show that our ancestors after all were not wholly ignorant of the virtues of cold water. Amongst other remedies, also, was a medicine composed of cinnabar and musk, an East Indian specific, and one of powdered Virginian snake-root, gum asafoetida, and gum camphire, mixed and taken as a bolus. So far, at least, if the various treatments did little good, they did no great harm. Brutality began where a person had been bitten by a dog that really was mad, and when undoubted symptoms of hydrophobia had shown themselves. Then it was no uncommon practice to deliberately bleed the unhappy patient to death, or, worse still, to smother him between mattresses or feather beds. Necessarily, a custom so monstrous opened wide the door to crimes of violence, and doubtless many a person whose presence was found to be inconvenient to relatives, or whose permanent absence would further certain desires or plans of those relatives, was opportunely found to be suffering from an attack of hydrophobia, and came to his end miserably in some such fashion as has been indicated. The popular mind was credulous to an extent inconceivable at the present day, and the mere accusation of madness was seized on and swallowed with an avidity that discouraged investigation of individual cases.



Page 97

In the Border, if all tales are true, at least one crime of this nature was perpetrated.

Not far from Norham Castle, it is said that there stood till well on in the eighteenth century a large mansion, of which no trace now remains. As the story goes, the place once belonged to an old Border family, but the folly and extravagance of more than one generation had brought in their train what these failings ever must bring, and evil times fell on that house. Piece by piece, one after the other, the ancient possessions passed away from their former owners, sacrificed to gratify some passing whim or to pay some foolishly contracted debt, till, finally, the house itself and what land remained had also been flung into the melting-pot, and the last male heir of the old line, with his only child, a daughter, sat homeless in their old home, awaiting the hour which should bring with it the new owner, and to them the sorrow of for ever quitting scenes dear to them from infancy.

By the dying embers of a wood fire they two lingered one December night, wrapped in no pleasant thoughts, and idly listening to the shrill piping of a wind that dismally foretold the coming of snow. The father was a man well advanced in life, on whose good-looking, weak face dissipation had set its seal; the daughter, a woman of six or seven and twenty, who preserved more than all her father's good looks, but—as is so often the case in the females of a decadent family—who, in her expression, showed no trace of weakness. Indeed, if a fault could be found in face or figure, it was that the former for a woman told of too much firmness and resolution, qualities which circumstances might very readily develop into obstinacy, and even into cruelty. Her mother had died when Helen was but an infant, and thus it chanced that, as a child, her upbringing had been left pretty well to nature, aided (or perhaps hampered) only by the foolish indulgence of an ignorant and not very high-principled nurse, in whom fidelity was perhaps the only virtue, and who now, in her old age, almost alone of a once large staff of servants, still clung to “her bairn,” and to the fallen fortunes of her master. Of education the child received but what little she chose to receive, and of discipline she knew nothing, for to the hopelessly weak father her will had too soon become law.

Naturally, Helen grew up headstrong and self-indulgent, recognising no rule but that of her own inclinations, and before her eighteenth birthday she had, without the knowledge of her father, engaged herself to a penniless youth of good family, the younger son of a neighbour. An entire lack of funds, however, seemed—at least to the lad—sufficient cause for delaying the marriage, and “to mak' the croon a pound,” he went, not “to sea,” but (as was then not uncommon with young Scotsmen) to the wars in High Germanie.

Since that date, no direct word had come from the young man, only the rumour grew that in the storming of some town he had fallen. Years had passed since then; years that came and went and brought neither confirmation nor denial of the rumour. In Helen's heart hope at last was killed, and with the death of hope seemed to die all that had ever been womanly or soft in her character. The one tender spot left was a kind of pitying affection for her weak old father.



Page 98

Now, as they two sat here together this bitter winter evening, the old man grumbling, as ever, half to himself, half to his daughter, of the ill-luck that had steadily dogged him all his days, there came suddenly to them the sound of horses' feet on the stones of the courtyard outside, and presently one of the few remaining servants entered the room to say that a stranger was outside begging shelter for himself and for his groom. Nor did the stranger wait to be invited, for, brushing past the servant, and carelessly, as he entered, dusting from his riding-coat the light snow with which it was grimed, taking stock the while with pinched-up little grey eyes of the room and its occupants, he pulled in a chair towards the fire and coolly seated himself. He was a man considerably over fifty—probably nearer sixty than fifty—with a frame burly and coarse, and a face seared by tropical suns and disfigured by the ravages of small-pox; obviously a man of low origin whose mind probably lacked refinement or consideration for others as much as his body lacked grace.

Father and daughter for a minute gazed mutely at their uninvited guest, the girl at least in no very amiable mood. But whatever her father's faults might be, want of hospitality was not one of them, and what the house could supply of meat and drink was speedily set before the stranger. He was, as he made haste to inform them, the new owner of the property, come down to take possession. "And egad! sir," said he brusquely, "it strikes me it's not before it was time. There's a bit o' money wanted here, anybody can see with half an eye." And with choice criticisms of a similar nature he lightened the time in the intervals of shovelling food into his heavy-lipped mouth.

"Yes, I've bought it—and paid for it, too—lock, stock, and barrel," he resumed; "and we'll put things to rights in a brace of shakes. For what's the use o' having money, says I, if a man don't spend it on his whim! Ay! whether it's a fine lass, or what not, plank it down, and enjoy yourself while ye can. That's what I say. What's the sense o' waiting till a man's too old? And I'm not so young as I was, thinks Missie, eh? But let me tell you, there's many a fine lass, yet, that would snap me up if she had the chance, if it was only for the sake of the ducats. Now, when I was in the Spanish Main—hey! *that* was the place!—I mind...."

But what he "minded" Helen had no wish to hear, and she retired, leaving her father and the stranger, both rapidly becoming somewhat over-loose of speech under the influence of brandy.

"A likely wench!" cried the stranger as the door closed. "A likely wench, sir. He'll be a lucky dog that get's her. Now ... ah!... hum!... here's you, an old man, leaving this place—and not likely to get another, says you; and here's me, a bachelor, or anyways a widower, with plenty of cash and wanting a wife. Come I what's against our making a bargain? You give me your daughter, and I'll see that you don't want a home. Eh? What do you say to that, now?"

Page 99

It was not very delicately put, but neither were the times very delicate, and the upshot was that Helen's father, weak and selfish, agreed to use his influence towards bringing the marriage about. The stranger did not tell—and perhaps it would have made little difference if he had told—his full history; how as a boy in London, the son of a petty tradesman, he had been kidnapped and sold to the Plantations (a common enough fate in those days); how in the West Indies, after a varied and not over reputable career, in which buccaneering played no small part, he had at length persuaded the wealthy old widow of a planter to marry him; and how, when she had suddenly ended her days, in a way which gave rise to more than a little talk in the island, he had sold the estate and the slaves without haggling much over the price, and had abruptly left for England, where—the talk ran—he meant to settle down and found a family.

Helen's scornful rejection of the proposal at first was scathing, and little less her scorn of a parent who could urge it. "It's to save me from want, and from worse than want," he whimpered. Finally, ere many days had passed, wearied by her father's importunity, she gave her consent.

A pair more ill-matched could not have been found; the man by nature coarse, brutal, and cowardly; the woman, insolent, fearless, and of ungoverned temper. From the first things went badly, and when, within a week of the wedding, Helen's father was drowned in attempting to ford the Tweed on horseback, she chose to consider that her part of the bargain was ended. Henceforward she was a wife only in name. Bluster and storm as he might, she was more than the master of her husband, and after one wild outburst he cringed before her. And as, before her marriage, the wife had insisted on reinstating the greater number of the old servants, who to fidelity to the old line added hostility to a master whom they looked on as an interloper, the husband soon found it to his advantage to conciliate the household by giving way to the whims of his wife. Thereafter, the two met, if at all, only at meals.

For something over a year things continued on this unpleasant footing. Then there came a day in spring, when Tweedside was tender with the bursting of buds and the lush green of young grass, when birds sang gaily from every thicket, and the hurrying brown water was dimpled into countless rings by the rising trout. To Helen, listless and indifferent even to Tweed's charm in springtime, came one of the younger servants saying that a gentleman, desiring to speak to her, waited below. A gentleman to see *her*? Nay, there must certainly be some mistake, thought Helen. It must assuredly be one of the useless hangers-on of her husband come to ask her to plead for him in regard to some trumpery loan. Well! anything for a novelty, and to take her thoughts away from herself. In this frame of mind she entered the lower room, where the visitor stood with his back to the door, gazing from the window, beside him a large deerhound.



Page 100

“Well, sir,” she exclaimed sharply, “what is there that I ... My God! You!... Back from the dead! Back from the dead!” she wailed.

“Nay. Back from sickness and wounds; back from captivity. Many a message have I sent you, Helen, during the long years; little did I think to find you thus.”

Apathy and listlessness no longer held her in bondage; the full horror of the irrevocable gripped her. Tied for ever to a brute whom she despised and hated, sacrificed to no purpose; whilst here, alive and well, stood the man to whom in ardent youth she had plighted her undisciplined heart. The thought maddened her. And as she struggled to choke back this overwhelming rush of feeling, her husband’s unwelcome entrance broke the tension of a scene the strain of which was past bearing.

Surely it was in an evil moment for himself that her husband entered that room. In a clumsy effort to propitiate his wife’s guest, the unfortunate man laid his hand on the head of the visitor’s dog, and with vicious side-snap the animal bit his hand to the bone.

No consideration had the wife for her husband’s sufferings, no trace of sympathy did she show, as, with an oath, he hurried from the room to bind up the ugly wound—her whole being was centred in the man before her. And her very heart stood still when her stunned ears realised that that man was now saying farewell. Lamentations and entreaties were of no avail. “There remained nothing else for a man of honour to do,” he said. All these years he had been faithful to her; all these years no other woman had entered his thoughts. Had she been as true to him as he had ever been to her, the dearest wish of his heart would have been fulfilled. Nay, had he come home to find her a widow, even so all might yet perhaps have been well. But now, when, with his own eyes, he had seen what, manner of man she had preferred to him, the old love was killed—killed by her act.

The clatter of his departing horse’s feet rang loud in her ears; and now, great as of old had been her detestation of the man to whom she was tied, it was but a feeble flame in comparison with the furnace of hate that began to rage in her heart. Daily and hourly the anguish of the “might have been” tormented her. Incessantly the words her lover had spoken seethed in her brain: “If even you had been a widow,” he had said. “A widow?” ... Ever to the same word her thoughts returned—“a widow.” What if he were to die now? If only...! Then she thought of the bitten hand. Was it not more than likely that the dog was mad when, unprovoked, it bit a man? And if it *were* mad ... But assuredly it was mad! She would ask old Elspeth. Who so wise as Elspeth, who so skilled as she in the treatment of wounds? And if she could *cure* wounds, why ... perhaps...! Did not wounds sometimes refuse to heal, and did not the patient sometimes gradually sink and die without anybody being to blame?



Page 101

But no comfort was found in Elspeth—no help. Surely the woman was in her dotage. Fool! Why did the feckless old idiot not know that the dog *must* have been mad? The man was drinking heavily now, goaded by grim terror of that very thing, and sodden with drink. Body and soul the old nurse was hers, she believed. Then, what so easy to make as a mistake in her treatment of the wound—to dress it with an irritating salve instead of with a healing one? what so easy as to inflame a mind already stricken by fear and maddened by drink? *Must* she speak more plainly the thing that had arisen in her mind?

* * * * *

Day followed day, and soon rumour spread and grew to certainty that of a surety the dog was mad that had bitten the master. From his room, they said, came the sound of ravings and of shouts. Folk spoke below their breath of how it was said he foamed at the mouth, and few dared venture near.

At last there came a night when Elspeth's son crept stealthily by the back stairs to aid his mother in holding down the sick man in the paroxysms of his madness; and the guilty wife, cowering alone in her room, stopped her ears lest awful sounds should reach them.

* * * * *

Summer was spent, and Tweed murmured seaward between banks ruddy and golden with autumn's foliage.

In a house in Edinburgh, not far removed from Holyrood, clad in deep black, there lingered restlessly a Border woman, for whom the months had dragged with halting foot since a certain spring night near Norham.

"Will he come?" to herself she whispered for the hundredth time. "Surely he must come."

And as she waited, a flush leapt to her cheek at the sound of a step nearing her door. A man entered, grave, almost stern, of face, and she sprang to her feet with a cry, and with outstretched arms, that sank slowly to her side, as her eyes questioned those of her visitor.

"You have come," she said unsteadily; "you have come. And you know ... my husband ... is dead?"

"Rumours had reached me," he answered coldly. "When did he die?"

"It was in the spring, five months since. He was bitten by a dog, and he died ... raving mad."



“Bitten by a dog?” he queried.

“Do you not remember? The dog you brought with you bit him. He never recovered. And ... and he died mad.”

“It was my dog that bit him? And he died mad in consequence of that bite? I do not understand. My dog is alive and well; he was never mad.”

Her eyes fell. What need to plead further! She knew now too well that his love for her was indeed dead and buried. Had a spark of it yet lived in his heart, suspicion could have found no place. Gone now was all pride, all control; at his feet she threw herself, clasping her knees.

“Have you no pity—no pity? He is dead, I tell you. I always cared only for you.”



Page 102

“Good God!” he cried hoarsely, and pushed her from him; and the horror in his eyes smote her as his bitterest words could not have done.

Alone once more in the room, she lay face downwards on the floor, and the echo of his footfall on the stair beat into her brain like the stroke of doom. Alone till the end of her days she lived a friendless, wretched woman, eating out her heart with the canker of “the might have been.”

THE GHOST OF PERCIVAL REED

When we look back on the past history of the Border, we might almost think that St. Andrew and St. George, who are supposed to keep watch and ward over North and South Britain, had overlooked that hilly stretch of country that lies between the Solway and the Tyne, leaving the heathen god Mars to work his turbulent will with it. From the days of the Roman Wall it was always a tourney-ground, and in the long years when English and Scots warred against each other, scarcely one day in any year went past without the spilling of blood on one or other of its hills or moors. Not only did the Borderers fight against those of other nations. Constantly they fought amongst themselves. A quick-tempered, revengeful lot were the men of those Border clans. On the Northumberland side the quarrels were as frequent as they were amongst those hot-headed Scots—Kers and Scotts, Elliots and Turnbells and Croziers.

In the sixteenth century one of the most powerful of the clans in the wild Northumbrian country was that of the Reeds of Redesdale. Even now it is a lonely part of the south land, that silent valley down which, from its source up amongst the Cheviots, the Rede flows eastward. Bog and heather and bracken still occupy the ground to right and to left of it, and there are few sounds besides the bleat of sheep or the cries of wild birds to break the silence of the hills and moors. But when the Reeds held power the hills often echoed to the lowing of driven cattle, to the hoof-beat of galloping horses, and to the sounds of a fight being fought to the death. A foray into England brought many a sturdy Scottish reiver riding over the Carter Bar; and Reeds, and Halls, and Ridleys were never averse from a night ride across the English Border when a Michaelmas moon smiled on the enterprise. The Reeds were a strong clan, but in power and in reputation they took only a second place, for the family of the Halls was stronger still. The head of the Hall clan lived at Girsonfield, a little to the north of Otterburn, a farmhouse which had belonged to the proprietors of Otterburn Castle since the time of Queen Elizabeth. Only a few stones of it now remain, and the new house stands on a much more exposed situation; but when Hall was its occupant, Girsonfield stood on a plot of rich green sward on the east side of the Otter.



Page 103

Now it must have seemed to Hall of Girsonfield, the head of the chief of the northern clans, a very clear error in judgment for any of the powers that existed to pass him over and appoint as keeper of Redesdale his friend and neighbour, Percival Reed. To have to bow to Reed's authority, to obey his summons when called on to help to intercept a party of reiving Scots or to pursue them, hot trod, into Scotland, to hear the praises of Percival Reed in all mouths—these were bitter things to be swallowed by him who has come down to us as “the false-hearted Ha'.” And so, having opened the door of his heart for the messengers of Satan to come in, Hall of Girsonfield had not long to wait for his tenants.

Clearly Percival Reed had no right to be keeper, but as he did his duties bravely and well, there was no chance of his being deposed, save by death. Never a day or a night was there when Hall and his friend Reed cantered together to meet some of the Scott or Elliot clan, or to rescue a drove of cattle or sheep from them, or from some of the Croziers or Turnbells, but what Hall rode with murder in his heart. Reed was utterly unconscious. There was no scheme that he did not confide to him whom he took for his loyal friend, no success for which he did not jubilantly claim Hall's sympathy and congratulations. He laid bare the whole of his innocent heart, and Hall hated him all the more bitterly because of it. “If he were not so handy with his Ferrara,” brooded Hall.... “If only he had been a little slower that time in getting out his dag when Nixon had covered him.” ... “If only his mare had not only stumbled, but had fallen there by the peat hag when Sandy's Jock so near had him....”

To Hall of Girsonfield Providence seemed to take special care of Percival Reed, for no other reason than to goad him to extremity. The devils who possessed him were skilfully nursing their prey.

There came at last a day, when no raids were afoot, when Hall met some of the Crozier clan, and opinions were frankly expressed with regard to the keeper of Redesdale. Things had been going badly with the Croziers. Their beef-tubs were empty. The Borders were evidently going to the dogs. It was no longer possible for any hard-working reiver to make a living on them. Percival Reed would have to get his leave, or it was all up with reiving in Redesdale. To all of these complaints Hall lent a willing ear; nay, more, to their surprise, a sympathetic one. Apparently he, too, had some little schemes afoot, with which the keeper's over-vigilance had seriously interfered. What a merry jest it would be, next time the Croziers crossed the Border by moonlight, if the keeper's plans for that night were known to them, and if, instead of finding in the clan Hall enemies, they found them allies. The Croziers might have all the spoil, but the Halls would share the joke, and Percival Reed would crow less crouse for the future.

It was a quite simply arranged affair. The Halls entered with zest into the plot. Second place was not good enough for them, and the Reeds had boasted long enough.



Page 104

And Percival Reed, in all innocence, soon heard rumour of a foray by the Croziers, and confided in his friend Girsonfield exactly how he meant to meet it. This information speedily found its way to the Scottish side of the Border, and in Hall of Girsonfield Reed found a more than usually willing supporter. The appointed night came, and ere they started in the uncertain light of a misty moon the keeper of Redesdale supped at Girsonfield. "Ye're loaded, are ye, Parcy?" asked the genial host in the burring Northumbrian voice we know so well even to-day. "I'll give a look to our primings while ye drink a stirrup-cup." More than a look he gave. Strong spirit from the Low Countries might be good jumping powder for the Keeper of Redesdale, but it was a damping potion for the keeper's musket when gently poured on its priming. At Batenshope, on the Whitelee ground, Reeds and Halls and Croziers met, and a joyous crew were the Croziers that night as they homewards rode up the Rede valley. For at the first fire of Percival Reed's musket it burst, and he dropped from his horse a murdered man. The Reeds knew it for treason, and the subsequent conduct of the Halls left them no room for doubt. It was, indeed, a fine foundation for a family feud, and for generation after generation the feud went on.

What was the end of Hall of Girsonfield no one has chronicled; it is not hard to imagine the purgatory of his latter years.

But it is not of him but of his innocent victim that tales are still told in the Rede valley.

From the night when his spirit was by treachery and violence reft from his body, there was no rest for Percival Reed.

In the gloaming, when trees stand out in the semblance of highway robbers, and a Liddesdale drow meets a North Sea haar, his sorrowful spirit was wont to be seen by the lonely traveller, making moan, seeking rest. Far and near, through all that part of the Border that he had so faithfully "kept," the spirit wandered. A moan or sigh from it on the safe side of the Carter Bar would scatter a party of Scottish reivers across the moorland as no English army could have done. Any belated horseman riding out of the dark would take the heart out of the most valiant of Northumbrians because they feared that they saw "Parcy Reed." Not always in the same form did the Keeper appear. That was the terror of it. At times he would come gallantly cantering across the moorland as he had done when blood ran warm in his veins. At other times he would be only a sough in the night wind. A feeling of dread, an undefinable something that froze the marrow and made the blood run cold. And yet, again, he would come as a fluttering, homeless soul, whimpering and formless, with a moaning cry for Justice—Justice—Judgment on him who had by black treachery hurried him unprepared to his end. The folk of Redesdale bore it until they could bear it no longer. The blood of many a Hall was spilt by the men of Percival Reed's



Page 105

clan without giving any ease to that clamouring ghost. At last they sought the help of a "skeely" man. He was only a thatcher, but whilst he plied his trade of covering mortal dwellings with sufficient to withstand the blasts of heaven, he had also studied deeply matters belonging to another sphere. "Gifted," says his chronicler, "with words to lay it at rest," he summoned the ghost to his presence, and "offered it the place and form it might wish to have."

Five miles of land did that disembodied spirit of the Keeper of Redesdale choose for his own. As might be guessed, he fixed on the banks of the Rede, and he chose that part of it that lies between Todlawhaugh and Pringlehaugh. The fox that barks from the bracken on the hillside at early morning, the grouse that crows from the heather, the owl that hoots from the fir woods at night, to those did the ghost of Percival Reed act as keeper. By day he roosted, like a bat or a night bird, on some tree in a lonely wood. By night he kept his special part of the marches. Still the Keeper of Redesdale was Percival Reed. Todlaw Mill, in ruins long ago, was his favourite haunt, and there, as the decent folk of the valley went on the Sabbath to the meeting-house at Birdhope Cragg, they often saw him, a dreary sight for human eyes, patiently awaiting his freedom. The men would uncover their heads and bow as they passed, and the Keeper of Redesdale, courteous in the spirit as in the body, would punctiliously return their salutations.

Thus did the years wear on until the appointed days were fulfilled, and the Rede Valley knew its Keeper no more. On the last day of the time fixed by him, the skeely man was thatching a cottage at the Woollaw. Suddenly he felt something touch him, as though the wing of a bird had brushed by. He came down the ladder on which he stood, and it seemed as though the bird's feathers had brushed against his heart, and had come from a place where the cold and ice are not cold and ice as mortals know them, for "he was seized," says the chronicler, "with a cold trembling." Some power, too strong for his own skill to combat, had laid hold on him, and shivering, still shivering, he fell into the hands of Death.

Such was the passing of Percival Reed, Keeper of Redesdale, who took with him, when at length he relinquished his charge, a humble henchman, a hind of the Rede Valley.

DANDY JIM THE PACKMAN

It was the back end of the year. The crops were all in, and but little was left of the harvest moon that had seen the Kirn safely won on the farms up "Ousenam" Water. A disjaskit creature she looked as the wind drove a scud of dark cloud across her pale face, or when she peered over the black bank below her, only to be hidden once more by an angry drift of rain. It was no night for lonely wayfarers. Oxnam and Teviot were both in spate, and their moan could be heard when the wind rested



Page 106

for a little and allowed the fir trees to be still. Only for very short intervals, however, did the tireless wind cease, and always, after a short respite, the trees were attacked again, and made to beck and bow their dark heads like the nodding plumes of a hearse. The road from Crailing was in places dour with mud, heavy-rutted by harvest carts, with ever and anon a great puddle that stretched across from ditch to ditch. But dismal or not dismal, the night had apparently no evil effect on the spirits of the one man who was trudging his homeward way from Crailing to Eckford.

Dandy Jim, the packman, was a young fellow who wanted more than evil weather and a dreich, black night to depress him. A fine, upstanding lad he was, with a glib English tongue that readily sold his wares, and which, along with a handsome, merry face, helped him with ease into the good graces of those whom he familiarly knew as “the lasses.” Dandy Jim had had many a flirtation, but now he felt that his roving days were nearly past. He was seriously thinking of matrimony.

“She’s a bonny lass,” thought he contemplatively, dwelling on the charms of the young cook at the farmhouse he had left just past midnight, “bonny and thrifty, and as fond o’ a laugh as I am mysel. That bit shop as ye come out o’ Hexham, with red roses growing up the front o’t, and fine-scented laylock bushes at the back, that would do us fine....”

And so, safely wrapped up in happy plans and in thoughts of his apple-cheeked lady-love, Jim manfully splashed through puddles and tramped through mud, conscience free, and fearful of nothing in earth or out of it. The graveyard at Eckford possessed no horrors for him. “Bogles,” quoth he, “what’s a bogle? I threw muckle Sandy, the wrestler, at Lammas Fair, an’ pity the bogle that meddles wi’ me.”

But, nevertheless, Jim, glancing towards the old church with its surrounding tombstones as he went by, saw something he did not expect, and quickly checked the defiant whistle that is, somehow, an infallible aid to the courage of even the bravest. There was a light over there among the graves, a flickering light that the wind lightly tossed, and that, somehow, did not suggest likeable things, even to Dandy Jim. Stock-still he stood for a couple of minutes watching the yellow glimmer among the tombstones, and then, with grim suspicion in his mind, he walked up to the churchyard gate. Nowadays we have only an occasional “watch-tower” in an old kirkyard, or a rusted iron cage over a grass-grown grave to remind us of times when human hyaenas prowled abroad after nightfall, and carried off their white, cold prey to be chattered for by surgeons for the dissecting-rooms. But Dandy Jim’s day was the day of Burke and Hare, of Dr. Knox, and of many another murderous and scientific ghoul, and a lantern’s gleam in a churchyard in the small hours usually meant but one thing. As he expected, a gig stood at the churchyard gate; a bony, strong-shouldered, chestnut mare tethered to the gate-post, munching, mouth in nose-bag. In the gig was a sack, standing upright—a remarkably tall sack, five foot ten high at least, stiffly balanced against the seat.



Page 107

“Aye, aye,” said Jim to himself, “it was a six-foot coffin when they planted Jock the day. Him an’ me was much of an age and of a height, poor lad; and here he is now, off to Edinburgh to be made mincemeat of.”

But even as he thought, he acted. The mare threw up an inquiring head as she felt a light step in the gig, and a sudden lightening of her load. But the wind wailed round the church and the rain beat down, dimming the glass in the flickering lantern, and every now and then Jim could hear a pick striking against a stone or a heavy thud as of a spadeful of damp earth being beaten down. Out of the gig came the sack, and out of the sack speedily came the packman’s erstwhile acquaintance, Jock. A gap in the hedge across the road conveniently accommodated Jock’s unresisting body, over he went into the next field, and once again the mare started as Dandy Jim sprang into the gig with one bound and quickly struggled into the empty sack. He was only just in time. A parting clatter of pickaxe and thud of spade, a swing of the lantern, that sent a yellow light athwart some grey old headstones, rough voices and hasty steps, and two men appeared, pushed their implements into the back of the gig, released the mare from her nose-bag, clambered in, one on either side of the upright sack, and drove off at a quick trot.

For some time they proceeded in silence.

“A good haul,” at last one man remarked; “a young chap—in fine condition.”

“A heavy load for the little mare,” said he who held the reins; “fifteen stone if he’s a pound. Not an easy one to tackle afore he died for want o’ breath.”

Packman Jim lurched against the speaker ere the words were well out of his mouth. With an oath the man shoved him back, and Jim stiffly leaned against the seat in as nearly the attitude of the corpse, to whom he was acting as understudy, as he was able to assume. They had got a little beyond Kalefoot, and the flooded river was sending its moaning voice above the sough of the wind and the drip of the rain when one of the men spoke again to his companion. His voice was husky, and he spoke in a low tone as though he feared some eavesdropper.

“Before God, man,” he said, “I can feel the body moving.” The other, in his voice all the horror of a dread he had been trying to hide, answered in a shrill scream, “It’s *warm*, I tell ye!—the corpse is *warm*!”

Then came Dandy Jim’s opportunity. His face was white enough in the uncertain glimmer of the gig’s lamps when he thrust his head out of the sack and looked first at one and then at another of his companions. In a deep and hollow voice he spoke:

“If you had been where I hae been, your body would burn too,” said he.



A screech and a roar were, according to Dandy Jim, the result of his remark, and on either side of the gig a man cast himself out into the darkness, the rain, and the mud, and ran—ran—in heedless terror for an unknown sanctuary. What happened to the pair no subsequent historian has recorded, but when Dandy Jim shortly afterwards wed an apple-cheeked cook and took up his abode in a rose-covered cottage near Hexham, he no longer trudged the Border roads with a pack on his back, but drove a useful gig, drawn by a very willing, strong-shouldered, chestnut mare.



Page 108

THE VAMPIRES OF BERWICK AND MELROSE

At Berwick-on-Tweed a man had died. In life he was a man of much weight, one of the wealthiest of the freemen. He did his good deeds with pomp. The devoutness of his religion was visible for every man to see, and his look of sanctity as he went to pray was surely an example and a reproach to every rough mariner whose boat was moored in the harbour beneath the walls.

But when death came to him, an evil thing befell the reputation of that holy man of means.

Those tongues that had been tied in his lifetime began to wag. The dark passages of his history, of the doors to which he had held the keys, were thrown open. And a horrified town discovered that their respected fellow-citizen had been a man of foul life, guilty of many a fraud and of many a crime, and that a dog's death had been too good a death for him. What wonder that every decent person in the town spoke of him with horror? But the horror they had of him who had so deceived them was but a little thing when compared with the hideous dread that the impostor inspired ere he had lain for a week in his grave in Berwick. Men who lived in those days had many an evil thing to dread, for wolves, ghouls, and vampires were as terribly real to them as in our day are the microbes of cancer, of fever, or of tuberculosis. And when a man who was notoriously a sinner came to his end, there was in the grave no rest for him, nor was there peace for his fellow-men. Night after night he was sure to rise from his tomb and go a-hunting for a human prey. He sucked blood, and so drained the life of the innocent clean away. He devoured human flesh. He chased his victims as though he were a mad dog, sending them crazed by his bite, or worrying and mangling them to a dreadful death.

This citizen, then, was not likely to rest in peace, and but a night or two after the earth had been heaped over his grave, he was up and out and rushing through the dark streets where his decorous footsteps had so often fallen solidly by day, so often slunk stealthily by night.

By Satan's agency he was set free, all men averred, yet the master that he had faithfully served did but little to pleasure him. For all the night through, as long as darkness lasted, the dead sinner was hunted through the deserted streets by a pack of baying hell-hounds. Round the walls, down by the quay, up Hyde Hill, through the Scots Gate, down lanes and byeways and back again round the walls—a weariful hunt it was. Thankfully must the quarry have welcomed the first streaks of light on the grey sea line, when the chase was ended and he was permitted to rest in his coffin once more.

Only the bravest durst venture out of doors after dusk, and the good people of Berwick lay a-trembling in their beds as the hunt swept past their very doors, and the blood-curdling howls of the hounds turned their hearts to water within them.



Page 109

But always, in such a case, there are to be found one or two bold spirits, or one or two so heedless of what is passing around them that they rush into danger unawares. Such there were at Berwick-on-Tweed, and to them the hunted soul spoke as he fled past, the hell-hounds slaving at his heels. "Until my body is burnt," he cried, "you folk of Berwick shall have no peace!" And as they rushed for sanctuary into the nearest dwelling they fancied they could still hear the tormented wretch's shriek, shrill above the baying of the dogs—"Burn! burn! Peace! peace!"

So the people of the town took counsel together, and having solemnly concluded that "were a remedy further delayed, the atmosphere, infected and corrupted by the constant whirlings through it of the pestiferous corpse, would engender disease and death to a great extent," they resolved to follow the vampire's own suggestion. Ten young men, "renowned for boldness," were appointed to lay the Horror. They went to the grave, dug up the corpse, cut it limb from limb, then burned it until a little heap of white ash was all that remained of the man of evil life, whose shade had brought dread to all the citizens of Berwick. But their wise action must, unfortunately, have been taken too late. Very soon afterwards a great pestilence arose, and decimated the town's population. "Never did it so furiously rage elsewhere," says William, Canon of Newburgh, the learned churchman, who has chronicled for us the tale, "though it was at that time general throughout all the borders of England." According to him, the vampire had done his evil work. And as man, woman, and child were carried by night to the graves prepared for the plague-stricken, there were those who vowed they could still hear the distant sound of baying hounds, and above them the shrill scream of the man who in life had seemingly walked so godly a walk, and who had given example to the rough mariners down at the quay as he daily went to pray.

Such is the story of the vampire at Berwick, and of the way in which valiant men laid him. But the old Canon of the Austin Friars has yet another tale to tell of a vampire on the Border. Destruction by fire was not the only means of laying the unholy spirit that "walked" to the hurt of its fellow-creatures. When a suicide was buried, or when one who was a reputed witch, warlock, or were-wolf, or who had been cursed by his parents or by the church, was laid in the grave, it was always well to take the precaution of driving a stake through the body. Such a stake (in Russia an aspen) driven at one blow bereft the evil thing of all its power. Only in the reign of George IV was the custom in the case of suicides abolished. If the precaution had not been taken at burial, in all probability when the vampire had already done some harm, the corpse was exhumed and the ghastly ceremony gone through. And always, so it was declared, the body of the vampire was found with fresh cheeks and open, staring eyes, well nourished by the blood of his victims. In such condition was found the vampire of Melrose, whose tale is also told by William of Newburgh.



Page 110

Many a holy man has chanted the Psalms under the arches of Melrose Abbey, but the vampire priest had never lived aught but a worldly, carnal life. He held a post that suited him well, as chaplain to a certain illustrious lady whose property lay near the Eildons, and who, so long as her Mess John performed his duties as family priest, paid no heed to his mode of occupying his time when these were performed.

The chaplain was of the type of the sporting parson of later days. He loved the hunt. He loved a good bottle, a good horse, a good dog. "*The Hundeprest*" was the name he went by. Other things he also loved that made not for sanctity, and when, at last, he died, his death was no more holy than his selfish, sensual life had been. No protecting aspen stake had been driven through his body, and so when he was laid to rest under the shadow of the monastery, for him rest there was none. The holy brothers inside the walls protected themselves from him, when he came a-wandering, by vigils and by prayers. The lady whose chaplain he had been was less well protected, and when, night after night, her sleep was broken by horrible groans and murmurings from a thing that always seemed just without her room, and almost about to enter, she became nearly frantic. She came to Melrose, and with tears besought the holy fathers, who owed much to her bounty, to wrestle for her in prayer and drive this evil thing away. The monks of Melrose did for her what they could. Not only did they pray, but two stout-hearted friars and two powerful young laymen all well armed were appointed to guard the grave of the lady's late chaplain, and to go on duty that very night.

It was chill autumn, and as they paced the damp grass of the graveyard there was a smell of dead leaves in the air, and a grey mist crept up from the Tweed that moaned as it bore its flooded waters to the sea. When midnight came they expected to see the Hundeprest, but midnight passed in safety, and in "the wee, sma' hours" the two laymen and one of the monks went into the nearest cottage to warm their icy feet. Now came the chance of the vampire. With "a terrible noise" the Hundeprest suddenly appeared, a thing of horror, and rushed at the monk who was slowly pacing towards the grave. The holy man bravely stood the charge, and, as the monster was almost touching him, he swung the axe which he carried, and drove it with all his might into the body of his diabolic adversary. With a groan, the vampire turned and fled away, and the friar, the tables turned, ran in pursuit until the grave of the Hundeprest was reached, and the horror vanished.

Nothing of the encounter was to be seen when the other three watchers returned, but grey dawn was near, and at the first sign of light the four men, with pick-axe and spade, opened up the grave. Even as they dug their spades turned up mingled blood and clay, and when they came to the corpse of the Hundeprest, they found it fresh as on the day he died, but with a terrible wound in the body, from which the blood still oozed away.



Page 111

With horror they bore it out of sight of the monastery of which he had been so unworthy a brother. A cleansing fire burned it to ashes, and a shrewd, clean wind that blew from over the Lammermoors swept away all trace of the accursed thing. No pestilence came to Melrose. Perchance in the twelfth century it was by prayer and fasting that the holy men won the day.

A BORDER MIDDY

One blustering February evening towards the close of the eighteenth century there sat in a back room in a little inn at Portsmouth three midshipmen, forlorn-looking and depressed to a degree quite at variance with the commonly accepted idea of the normal mental condition of midshipmen. It was a room, not in the famous "Blue Posts"—that hostelry beloved by lads of their rank in the service—but in a smaller, meaner, less frequented house in a very different quarter of the town, a quarter none too savoury, if the truth were told.

Why they had betaken themselves to this particular tavern in preference to that generally used by them, who can say. Perhaps—as Peter Simple's coachman remarked on that occasion when Peter first made acquaintance with Portsmouth—perhaps it was because they had too often "forgotten to pay for their breakfastesses" at the "Blue Posts," and had not the wherewithal to pay up arrears. In any case, here they were, and, midshipman-like, during their stay they had recklessly run up a larger bill than they had means to settle. There was no possibility of following the course recommended by the drunken sailor, namely, to "cut and run," for the landlady of the inn was much too astute a personage to make that a possibility, and she had too little faith in human nature generally, and in that of midshipmen in particular, to let her consent to wait for her money till time and the end of their cruise again brought their frigate back to Portsmouth. Pay they *must*, by some means or other, for already the Blue Peter was flying at the fore and the *Sirius* would sail at daylight. If she sailed without them it was very plain that there was an end of their career in the Navy—they would be "broke." Small wonder that the three middies were in the last stage of gloom. Their entire possessions, money and clothes, could not cover one half of what they owed, and every compromise had been rejected by the obdurate landlady. Appeal to their friends was useless, for time did not admit of an answer being received before the ship sailed. And escape was hopeless, for the one window that the room possessed was heavily barred, the door carefully locked, and the key kept in the capacious pocket of the landlady.

It was the very deuce of a situation—the devil to pay and no pitch hot. Again and again as the evening wore on they discussed possibilities; again and again the same conclusion was arrived at. Hope was dead. No doubt in the end their friends might pay up, but they groaned as the certainty forced itself on them that their career at sea was as good as over. If only they had been entitled to any prize-money! But prize-money

there was none, and the few guineas each had had from home had long been idly squandered.



Page 112

"We're done, my boys; we're done! Oh, Lord, what swabs we have been!" cried the senior of the three with a groan, laying his head on the table.

"Oh, never say die!" said another, a cheery-faced, ruddy lad with a noticeable Scottish accent. "I've been in as tight a hole before and got out of it all right. We've a few hours yet to come and go on. Something's pretty sure to turn up."

As he spoke the key was put in the door, and in came the landlady.

"Well! wot's it goin' to be? Am I to get that there money you owes me, or am I not? You ain't got much time for shilly-shallyin', I can tell you, young gentlemen. An' paid I'm agoin' to be, one way or other."

She was a big-boned, florid, dark-eyed woman, well over thirty, somewhat inclined to be down-at-heel and slatternly, though not yet quite destitute of some small share of good looks; a woman solid of step and unattractive to the eye of youth; moreover, as they knew from recent experience, possessed of a rasping tongue.

"None o' ye got anything to say? Well, then, I'll tell you what I'm ready to do and let you go. One of you shall marry me! I don't care two straws which of you it is. But if you three're to get aboard your ship afore she sails, one of you's got to come with me to the parson this night an' be spliced. Take it or leave it; them's my terms. For the good o' my business I must 'ave a 'usband, now my old dad's gone aloft. Whether he's on the spot or not I don't care not the value of a reefer's button, so long as I can show my 'lines.' I'll give you 'alf an hour to make up your minds an' settle atween you who's goin' to be the lucky one."

And with that she left the room, again carefully locking the door and taking away the key.

Truly were they now between the devil and the deep sea. And no amount of discussion improved the prospect.

"We *can't* do it, you know," piteously cried one. "I'll see her shot first."

"Blest if I see any other way out of it," said another.

"And she's pretty old. She *might* perhaps die before we came back, mightn't she?" hopefully ventured the third.

"Oh, stow that! She's not more than forty, and she's likely to live as long as any of us."

"Well, if you won't allow that *she's* likely to oblige us by leaving this world, at anyrate you'll admit that there's always a goodish chance that the husband-elect may run up against a French cannonball and get out of the scrape *that* way. Anyhow, we've come



to the end of our tether. The alternative's ruin. It's pretty black to windward, whichever way you look at it, but one way spells ruin for the lot of us; the other, at the worst, means disaster for only one. I vote we draw lots, and the man who draws the shortest lot wins—er ... at least he marries the lady," said the cheery-faced boy, with rather a rueful laugh.

"You'll laugh perhaps on the wrong side of your face before all's done. But, all right. If we must, we must. You make ready the lots, Watty, and I'll take first draw. Only, I think if the bad luck's mine, I'll slip over the side some middle watch," said the senior midddy miserably.



Page 113

With haggard young faces two drew, leaving the third lot to the Scottish boy.

“Thank Heaven!” cried the first, wiping his brow as he saw that his, at least, was not a short lot. “It’s yours, Watty, old boy,” he said to the middy from north of the Tweed.

“My God! what will my dear old mother say?” groaned the poor boy, with face grey as his own Border hills in a November drizzle. “Promise me, on your honour, both of you, to keep this miserable business a dead secret for ever.... Well, I’ve got to face it. Bring the woman in, and let’s have it over and get aboard.”

Watty Scott was a scion of a good Scottish Border family, a youth careless and harum-scarum as the most typical of middies, but a gentleman, and popular alike with officers and men. He was about eighteen, had already distinguished himself in more than one brush with the enemy, and was looked on as a most promising officer. But now...!

“Oh, little did my mother ken,
The day she cradled me,”

(might he have wailed), in what dire scrape the recklessness inherent in her boy would land him.

“I *thought* you’d take my terms,” said the landlady, when she came into the room. “Faith! an’ I’ve got the pick o’ the basket! Well, come along, my joker; we’ll be off to the parson. But you’ll take my arm all the way, d’ye see!—as is right an’ nat’ral for bride and bridegroom. You ain’t agoin’ to give *me* the slip afore the knot’s tied, I can tell you. Not if *I* knows it, young man.”

Broken clergymen, broken by drink or what not, ready to go through anything for a consideration, were never hard to find in those days in a town such as Portsmouth, and all too soon the ceremony, binding enough, so far as Watty could see, was over. Then the new-made wife insisted, before the three lads left her, that she should stand them a good dinner, and as much wine as they cared to drink to the health of bride and bridegroom.

“An’ now,” she said to her husband ere the youngsters departed, “I aint agoin’ to send my man to sea with empty pockets. Put *that* in your purse!”

But Watty would have none of the five guineas she tried to force on him.

“Well, I think none the worse of you for that,” she cried. “Come, give us a kiss, at anyrate.” And with a shudder Watty Scott saluted his bride.

Never did the grey waters of the English Channel look more cheerless than they appeared to one unhappy midshipman of H.M.S. *Sirius* next morning, as the frigate beat down channel in the teeth of a strong westerly breeze; never before had life seemed to

him a thing purposeless and void of hope. "To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part." The words rang in his ears still, with a solemnity that even the red-nosed, snuffy, broken-down parson



Page 114

who hiccuped through the service had not been able to kill. But, God! the irony of the thing—the ghastly mockery! *To love and to cherish till death us do part!* Verily, the iron entered into his soul; day and night the hideous burden crushed him. The castles in the air that, boylike, he had builded were crumbled into dust. Was *this* the end of all his dreams? Well, at least there was that friendly cannon-ball to be prayed for, or a French cutlass or pike in some boat expedition, if the Fates were kind.

The frigate's orders were—Halifax with despatches; thereafter, the West India Station for an indefinite time. Six or eight weeks at Halifax, varied by some knocking about off the Nova Scotia coast, did not tend to relax Watty's depression, but rather the contrary. For just before the frigate took her departure from those latitudes a lately received Portsmouth journal which reached the midshipmen's berth had recorded the arrest on a serious charge of, amongst others, a woman giving her name as "Mrs. Walter Scott, licensee of the Goat's Head Tavern, Portsmouth." Now the Goat's Head Tavern was that little inn where in an evil moment the three lads had taken up their abode before the sailing of the *Sirius*, and to Watty it appeared as if his disgrace must now be spread abroad by the four winds of heaven.

It was mental relief to get away out to sea, and to feel that now at least there was again some probability of the excitement of an action. To Bermuda, thence to Jamaica, were the orders; and surely in no part of the world was a ship of war more certain of active employment. Those were days removed by no great number of years from Rodney's famous victory over de Grasse, and not yet had we completed the reduction of the French West India Islands; the greatest glutton of fighting could scarce fail to have his fill.

One night, after the frigate had left Bermuda, it had come on to blow desperately hard from the north-west, and with every hour the gale increased, till at length—when sail after sail, thundering and threshing, had come in—the ship lay almost under bare poles, straining in every timber and nosing her weather bow into the mountainous seas that swept by at intervals, ere they roared away into the murk to leeward.

It was the middle watch, and Watty had been standing for some time holding on by the lee mizzen rigging, peering eagerly into the darkness.

"I've thought two or three times, sir, that I can see something to leeward of us," he reported to the officer of the watch.

And presently the "something"—a mere patch of denser black in a darkness emphasized more than relieved by the grey-white crests of breaking seas—resolved itself into a large vessel, which as day broke was seen to be a frigate, like themselves under the shortest of canvas, and with all possible top-hamper down on deck. Pitching



and rolling heavily, she lay; sometimes, as a sea struck her, half buried in a grey-green mountain of foam and flying spray that left her spouting cascades of water from her scuppers; one moment, as she rose, heaving her fore-foot clean out of the water, showing the glint of the copper on her bottom; the next, plunging wildly down, till some mighty billow, roaring aloft between the vessels, hid each from the other's ken as effectually as if the ocean had swallowed them.



Page 115

The stranger had hoisted French colours, and the *Sirius* beat to quarters. But as far as possibility of engaging was concerned, the ships might have been a hundred leagues apart: the sea ran far too high. And so there all day they lay, impotent to harm each other.

When grey dawn came on the second morning, bringing with it weather more moderate, the French frigate was seen under easy sail far to leeward, evidently repairing damage aloft, and, in spite of every effort on the part of the *Sirius*, it was late afternoon ere the first shot was fired.

Darkness had begun to fall as the French ship struck her colours after a bloody action in which her losses mounted to over one hundred men, including her captain and several officers. In less degree the *Sirius* suffered; and of those who fell, Watty was one. Early in the engagement he was carried below, badly torn by a severe and dangerous splinter wound in the head.

“There goes poor Watty—out of his trouble, anyhow,” cried one of the three friends.

Thereafter, the life in him hovered long ’twixt this world and the next, and weeks passed ere, in the house of a friend at Kingston, Jamaica, he came once more to his full senses. Even then his progress was but dilatory.

“I can’t make the boy out,” said his doctor. “He *ought* to get well now. Yet he doesn’t. Doesn’t seem to make an effort, somehow. If he was a bit older you’d think he didn’t *want* to live. It’s not natural. If he were to get any little complication now, he’d go.”

And so the listless weeks dragged on, and it was but a ghost of the once merry boy that each morning crept wearily and with infinite labour from his room to the wide, pleasant verandah. And there he would pass his days, vacantly listening with dull ears to the cool sea-breeze whispering through the trees, or brooding over his misery. Sometimes, in his weak state, tears of self-pity would roll unheeded down his cheeks; he pined for the heather of his native hills, for the murmur of Tweed and Teviot, and for the faces of his own people. Never again could the happiness be his to live once more in the dearly loved Border land; for how could he face home when that terrible fate awaited his landing at Portsmouth. “Oh! *why* had he been guilty of folly so great? Why had he thus made a shipwreck of life’s voyage almost at its very outset?”

Yet at last there came a morning when the cloud of depression began to lift from his mind. An English packet had arrived, bearing despatches for the Admiral, and, as Watty languidly turned the pages of a late Steel’s List, ambition once more awoke on finding his name amongst the promotions. Braced in mind, and roused from his apathy by this unlooked-for good fortune, he turned to other papers brought out by the packet, and waded steadily through the news sheets. There was little at first that interested him. But presently, as he picked up a little Portsmouth journal, a paragraph that caught his

eye fetched from him a shout that roused the house and brought his host flying to the verandah.



Page 116

“What the deuce ails you? Confound it, the boy’s off his head again!” he cried.

“Heaven be thanked! My wife’s hanged!” shouted Watty.

“Oh! mad as a March hare!” fussed his host, running into the house. “Mad, sure enough. Must send off a boy for the doctor.”

But Watty’s news was true. The paragraph which had caught his eye as he picked up the Portsmouth paper was, in effect, the continuation and conclusion of that other announcement which he had seen at Halifax, and was indeed an account of the execution for robbery and murder of certain persons, amongst whom, as “accessory before the fact,” was the landlady of the “Goat’s Head” Tavern.

It is uncertain if Lieutenant Walter Scott ever returned to settle in the Border; but he was a cousin of Sir Walter, who gave to Captain Basil Hall, R.N., some outline of such a story as is here told.

SHEEP-STEALING IN TWEEDDALE

“The cattle thereof shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves.”
(Josh. viii. 2.)

“The men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle.”
(Gen. xlv. 32.)

In days even earlier than those of the early Israelites, to a certain class of persons the flocks and herds of a neighbour have been an irresistible temptation. The inhabitants of few, if indeed of any, lands have been quite free from the tendency to “lift” their neighbour’s live-stock (though probably it has not been given to many, in times either ancient or modern, to emulate the record in “cattle duffing” of Australia and Western America). In the Scottish Border in the days of our not very remote forefathers, to take toll of the Southron’s herds was esteemed almost more a virtue than a vice, and though times had changed, even so recently as a couple of centuries back it may have seemed to some no very great crime to misappropriate a neighbour’s sheep. March dykes or boundary fences were then things unknown; the “sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill.” What, therefore, so natural as that the flocks should in time draw together and blend; what so easy for a man, dishonestly inclined, as to alter his neighbour’s brand and ear-mark, hurry off to some distant market, and there sell a score or two of sheep to which he had no title? The penalty on conviction, no doubt, was heavy—at the least, in Scotland, flogging at the hands of the common hangman, or banishment to the Plantations; but more commonly death. The fear of punishment, however, has never yet put an end to any particular form of crime, and here detection was improbable if the thief were but clever. He might be aided, too, by a

clever dog, for “some will hund their dowg whar they darna gang themsel’,” and a really clever dog may be taught almost anything short of speaking.



Page 117

In the year 1762 men's minds, in the upper reaches of the Tweed, began to be sore perplexed by an unaccountable leakage in the numbers of their sheep. Normal losses did not greatly disturb them; to a certain percentage of loss from the "loupin' ill," from snowstorm, from chilly wet weather during lambing, they were resigned. But the losses that now disquieted them were quite abnormal. It was not as if the sheep were perishing on the hillside; then at least their skins would have been brought in, and the element of mystery would not have agitated the minds of owners. But here were sheep constantly vanishing in large numbers without leaving even a trace of themselves. Something must be very far wrong somewhere. They were angry men, the Peeblesshire hill farmers, that summer of 1762, angry and sore puzzled, for up Manor Water and the Leithen, by Glensax Burn and the Quair, and over the hills into Selkirkshire, the tale was ever the same, sheep gone, and never a trace of them to be found.

In Newby was a tenant, William Gibson, whose losses had been particularly severe, and, not unnaturally, Gibson was in a very irritable frame of mind; so upset, indeed, was he that, before the faces of the men, he blurted out on one occasion the statement that in his opinion these continued losses were due chiefly to carelessness or ignorance of their work, if not to something even worse, on the part of the shepherds. Now, to throw doubt on their knowledge or skill was bad enough, but any insinuation as to their honesty was like rubbing salt on open wounds. It touched them on the raw, even though no direct accusation had been made, for a finer, more capable, careful, and honest class of men than the Border shepherd has never existed anywhere. Deep, therefore, was their anger, wrathful the mutterings that accompanied them in their long tramps over the windy hills; it would have gone ill with any one detected in possession of so much as a lamb's tail to which he might fail to establish his legal right.

Eyes sharpened by resentment were continually on the watch, yet the losses continued, now less, now more, but always a steady percentage, and it seemed beyond mortal power to guess how and when these losses occurred. But at last it chanced one day that Gibson, for some purpose, had mustered his ewes and lambs, and as the men went about their work, one of the older shepherds, Hyslop by name, halted abruptly as a lamb ran up to a certain ewe, and suckled.

"Dod!" cried Hyslop, "thon's auld Maggie an' her lamb!"

Now "Maggie" was a black-faced ewe, so peculiarly speckled about the face that no one, least of all a Border shepherd, could possibly make any mistake as to her identity. She had been missing for some days, and was given up as lost for good and all. Yet here she was suckling her lamb as if she had never been away.

Something prompted Hyslop to catch the ewe. Then he whistled long and low, and swore beneath his breath.



Page 118

“Hey!” he cried to Gibson. “What d’ye think o’ that?”

“God! It canna be,” muttered Gibson.

And:

“Aye! *That’s* gey queer like!” chorused the other shepherds.

What had caught the quick eye of old Hyslop was a fresh brand, or “buist,” on the ewe’s nose; the letter “O” was newly burned there, nearly obliterating an old letter “T.” The latter was Mr. Gibson’s fire-brand; “O” that of his not distant neighbour, Murdison, tenant in Ormiston. Gibson and Murdison were on friendly terms, and both were highly respectable and respected farmers. Necessarily, this discovery anent the brands was most disturbing, and could not fail to be difficult of satisfactory explanation. Gibson did not wish to act hastily, but all his private investigations pointed only to the one conclusion, and there was no room for doubt that the ewe had been seen by shepherds on other farms making her way across the lofty hills that lie between Newby and Wormiston, as the latter place was locally called. Still, he hesitated to act in so ugly looking an affair, and it was only after long and painful consultation with a neighbour, himself of late a heavy loser, that Gibson went to Peebles in order to get the authority necessary to enable him to inspect the flocks on Ormiston.

With heavy heart, Gibson, accompanied by Telfer, a well-known Peebles officer of the law, trudged out to Ormiston. As they neared the farm-house a shepherd, leaning against an outbuilding, turned with a start at sight of them, slipped suddenly round a corner of the outhouse, and presently was seen, bent nearly double, in hot haste running for a field of standing corn.

“Aye! yon’s John Millar awa’. I’m feared things looks bad,” muttered Gibson to his companion as they approached the door of the farm-house. “You keep ahint in the onstead, John Telfer, and I’ll get Murdison to come oot. We’ll never can tell him afore his wife.”

“Wulliam Gibson! Hoo are ye? Man, this is a sicht for sair een,” cried Murdison heartily to his visitor. “Come awa’ in ben, and hae a glass.”

A greeting so friendly brought a lump into Gibson’s throat that he found it hard to swallow.

“Na, I canna come in,” he answered in a low voice; “John Telfer’s ahint the onstead, wantin’ to speak to ye.”

“John Telfer! what can *he* want wi’ me?” cried Murdison, going grey in the face. “Oh, aye! In one minute,” he said, hastily stepping back into the kitchen and whispering a few words to his wife. Gibson did not hear the words, but his heart sank like lead as he



noticed Mrs. Murdison fling herself into a chair, bury her face in her hands, and wail, "Oh God! my heart will break."

"Alexander Murdison, I hae a warrant here, and I maun hae a bit look at a when o' your sheep," said the officer of the law when Murdison came with Gibson into the Steading.

Page 119

Quite enough was soon seen to make it necessary for Murdison and Millar, his shepherd, to be taken to Peebles, where bail was refused. The case came on a few months later, in Edinburgh, before Lord Braxfield, and it created intense interest, not only throughout the Border but amongst the entire legal faculty. It was proved that thirty-three score of sheep were found on Ormiston bearing Murdison's buist branded over, and, as far as possible, obliterating, the known buists of other farms. None of these sheep had been sold to the prisoners. Many of the animals were known, and were sworn to, by the shepherds on sundry farms, in spite of brands and ear-marks having been altered with some skill. It was proved also that Murdison had sold to farmers at a distance many scores of sheep on which the brands and ear-marks had been "faked." Evidence in the case closed at 5 P.M. on a Saturday, the second day of the trial; speeches of the counsel and the judge's summing up occupied until 11 P.M. of that day; and the jury sat till 5 o'clock on Sunday morning, when they brought in a verdict, by a majority, against Murdison, and an unanimous verdict against Millar, his shepherd. Both prisoners were sentenced to death, and though an appeal was made on various grounds, the sentences were eventually carried out.

Whilst he lay in prison under sentence Millar confessed the whole affair to a friend, and the story, as told by the shepherd, possessed some very curious features. He and his master, Murdison, had jointly conceived a scheme by means of which it seemed possible to defraud their neighbours almost with impunity. And, indeed, but for some mischance against which no one could guard, such as happened here when the ewe made back to her old home and her lamb, they might have gone undetected and unsuspected for an indefinite time. The shepherd owned an extraordinarily clever dog, without whose help the scheme could not possibly have been worked, and operations were carried out in the following manner.

Murdison knew very well what sheep his neighbours possessed, and where on the hills they were likely to be running. Millar, with his dog "Yarrow," was sent by night to collect the sheep which master and man had determined to steal, and to one so familiar with the hills this was no difficult task. The chief danger was that in the short nights of a Scottish summer he might be seen going or returning. Therefore, when daylight began to appear, if the sheep had already been got well on their way towards Ormiston, Millar would leave "Yarrow" to finish the drive single-handed, a task which the dog always carried out most successfully if it could be done reasonably early, before people began to move abroad out of their houses. But as soon as the dog caught sight of strangers he would at once leave the sheep and run home by a circuitous route. One such instance Millar particularly mentioned.

Page 120

He had collected a lot of old ewes one night, but had utterly failed, even with “Yarrow’s” help, to get them down a steep hill and across Tweed in the dark. Accordingly, as usual when day broke, he left the ewes in charge of the dog, and by low-lying ways, where he would be little likely to attract attention, he betook himself home. From a spot at some distance Millar looked back and for a time watched “Yarrow,” in dead silence, but with marvellous energy, trying to bustle the ewes into the river. Time and again he would get them to the edge of the pool and attempt to “rush” them in; time and again he failed, and the ewes broke back—for of all created creatures no breathing thing is so obstinate as an old ewe. Finally, the dog succeeded in forcing two into the water, but no power on earth could drive the others farther than the brink, and the only result was that by their presence they effectually prevented those already in the water from leaving it, and in the end the two were drowned. At last “Yarrow” seemed to realise that he was beaten, and that to persevere farther would be dangerous, and he left the ewes and started for home. The sheep were seen later that day making their way home, all raddled with new keel with which Millar had marked them in a small “stell” which he had passed when the ewes were first collected.

“Faking” the brands, Millar confessed, used to be done by him and his master on a Sunday, in the vault of a neighbouring old peel tower, and at a time when everyone else was at church. It was easy enough, without exciting suspicion, to run the sheep into the yards on a Saturday night, and thence to the vaults, and no one would ever see the work of altering the buists going on, for “Yarrow” sat outside, and always, by barking, gave timely notice of the approach of any undesirable person.

The report was current in the country after the executions that the dog was hanged at the same time as his master, a rumour probably originated by the hawking about Edinburgh streets of a broadside, entitled the “Last Dying Speech and Confession of the Dog Yarrow.” In reality “Yarrow” was sold to a farmer in the neighbourhood of Peebles, but, strange to say, though as a thief he had been so supernaturally clever, as a dog employed in honest pursuits his intelligence was much below the average. Perhaps he was clever enough to be wilfully stupid; or maybe he had become so used to following crooked paths that the straight road seemed to him a place full of suspicion and dread.

In his *Shepherd’s Calendar* Hogg tells several tales of dogs owned by sheep-stealers, to which he says he cannot attach credit “without believing the animals to have been devils incarnate, come to the earth for the destruction of both the souls and bodies of men.” And certainly there was something uncanny, something almost devilish and malevolent, in the persistency with which they lured their masters on to crime. One young shepherd,



Page 121

for instance, after long strivings succumbed to the temptation to steal sheep from a far-distant farm, where at one time he had been employed. Mounted on a pony, and accompanied by a dog, the young man arrived at the far-off hill one moon-lit night, mustered the sheep he meant to steal, and started to drive them towards Edinburgh. Then, before even he had got them off the farm, conscience awoke—or was it fear of the consequences?—and he called off his dog, letting the sheep return to the hill. Congratulating himself on being well out of an ugly business, he had ridden on his homeward way a matter of three miles when again and again there came over him an eerie feeling that he was being followed, though when he looked back nothing was to be seen but dim moor and hill sleeping in the moonlight. Yet again and again it returned, that strange feeling, and with it now something like the whispering of innumerable little feet brushing through bent and heather. Then came a distant rushing sound and the panting as of an animal sore spent, and hard on the shepherd's tracks there appeared over a knoll an overdriven mob of sheep flying before the silent, demoniacal, tireless energy of his own dog. He had never noticed that the animal had left him, but now, having once more turned the sheep towards their home, and severely chid his dog, he resolved that it should not again have the chance to play him such a trick. For a mile all went well, then suddenly the beast was gone. Dawn was breaking; he dared not stop where he was, nor dared to return to meet the dog. All that he could do was to take a route he was certain his dog did not know, and so would be sure not to follow, and thus he might abandon the animal to its own devices, hoping that he himself might not be compromised. For in his own mind he was very sure that the dog had once more gone back to collect the sheep. By a circuitous route which he had never followed before, going in at least one instance through a gate, which he securely fastened behind him, the shepherd at length reached a farm-house, where, as it chanced, both his sister and his sweetheart were in service. Here he breakfasted, and remained some time, and still there was no sign of the dog. All was no doubt well; after all, the beast must have somehow missed him in the night and had gone home; after the punishment he had received he would never have gone back again for the sheep. So, comparatively light of heart, the shepherd was just about to start on his journey, when up there came to him a man:

“Ye’ll hae missed your dowg, I’m thinking? But ye needna’ fash; he’s waitin’ for ye doon by the Crooked Yett, wi’ a’ your yowes safe enough.”

It was useless after this. The wretched man gave in; he struggled no more, but actually went off with the sheep and sold them. And the gallows ended his career. But how the dog followed him is a mystery, and why he waited for him at the “Crooked Yett.” For miles he must have tracked him by the scent of the feet of the pony the shepherd rode. But he never came within sight of the farm-house, and how did he know to wait at the gate?



Page 122

Instances of depravity amongst animals are not altogether unknown, though they are rare. A case is mentioned in *Blackwood's Magazine* of October 1817, where a lady walking along a London street had her bag snatched from her by a drover's dog. The animal, apparently without any master, was noticed lying, seemingly asleep, by the pavement-side, but on the approach of the lady it sprang suddenly up, snatched from her hand what is described as her "ridicule," and made off at full gallop. On inquiry it was ascertained that the dog was well known as a thief, and that his habit was to lie in the street, apparently taking no notice of passers-by until a lady with a bag, or some poor woman carrying a bundle, came by, when he would jump up, snatch the bag or bundle from its bearer's hand, and make off, no doubt to join a master who waited in security whilst his dog stole for him. On the special occasion here mentioned the lady lost with her bag one sovereign, eighteen shillings in silver, a pair of spectacles, and various papers and small articles.

There is also on record the case of a good-looking spaniel which was bought in London from a dog-fancier by a wealthy young man. The new owner soon observed that, when out with the dog, if he entered a shop the animal invariably remained outside for a time, and that, when at last he did follow his master, the presence of the latter was persistently ignored, nor would the spaniel take any notice when his master left the shop, but continued unconcernedly to sniff about; or else he would lie down and seem to fall asleep. Invariably after this the animal would turn up at home, carrying in his mouth a pair of gloves, or some other article which his master had happened to handle whilst in the shop. By going to establishments where he was known, and giving notice of what he expected to happen, the owner of the dog was enabled to try a series of experiments, and he found that the spaniel would sometimes remain quietly in a shop for hours until the door chanced to be left open, when, if no one appeared to be watching him, he would jump up on the counter, seize some article, bolt with it down the street, and make his way home.

There was also known to the writer, some years ago, a big, honest-looking, clever mongrel, which was taken by his master to India. "Sandy" became quite a regimental pet, but, though friendly with the whole regiment, he clung throughout faithfully to his master. He was a big, heavy dog, with a good deal of the bull in him, and more than a suspicion of collie. The combination of these two breeds made him an exceptionally formidable fighter. Nothing could flurry him, and his great weight and powerful jaw gained him an easy victory over anything he ever met, even when tackled one dark night by a young panther. Unfortunately he developed a passion for killing everything that walked on four legs—short of a horse or an elephant—and of domestic pets and of poultry he took heavy toll. Nothing



Page 123

could break him of this propensity; he would take any punishment quite placidly, and then straightway repeat the offence at the first opportunity. And he developed also a curious habit of tracking his master when he dined out. No matter how "Sandy" was fastened up in barracks, before the meal was half over in the bungalow where his master happened to be dining, in would march the dog, quite calm and apparently at home, and would make willing friends with everyone at table, except with his master, whom he would steadily ignore throughout the evening. Though "Sandy" was very far from being a lady's dog, and though at ordinary times he would take small notice of ladies, yet now he would most gently and affectionately submit to be caressed and fondled by all the ladies at table, and would apparently in reality be the "sweet," good-natured "pet" they styled him; yet too well his master knew from bitter experience that already that evening had Death, in the shape of "Sandy," stalked heavy-footed amongst the domestic pets and poultry of that bungalow. And morning always revealed a formidable list of dead. "Sandy's" bite was sure; he left no wounded on the field of his labours.

A PRIVATE OF THE KING'S OWN SCOTTISH BORDERERS

As the evening closed in, the heavy south-westerly gale that had raged throughout the long-drawn summer's day gradually dropped, and blew now only in fitful gusts. Instead of the sullen, unending roar of artillery, which till past mid-day had stunned the ear, there was now to be heard only the muttering of distant thunder; the flash of guns was replaced by the glare of lightning flickering against the dark background of heavy cloud that hung low on the horizon; and, except for an irregular splutter of musketry, or an occasional dropping shot from direction of the town, the ominous, sustained rattle of small-arms had now entirely ceased.

The night of the 31st July 1759 had seen the French army march out beyond the ramparts of Minden, to take up position against the Allied Forces under Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick. So fiercely blew the gale then that it drowned the sound of the town clocks striking midnight; so furiously raged the storm with the coming of day that, to windward, even the roar of cannon could not be heard, and it was only the dense clouds of smoke that told they were engaged.

As day broke on the 1st of August the French, under a heavy artillery fire, had attacked with fury, but now, repulsed and broken at every point, they were driven back to their old position behind the town ramparts, where for a few hours longer they staved off surrender.



On the Allied right, where fighting had been hottest and most stubborn, the chief brunt of the action fell on six regiments of British infantry, supported by three battalions of Hanoverians. Never have troops of any nation reaped greater glory, nor earned more lasting fame, than that day fell to the lot of those battalions.



Page 124

In the first line were the 12th, 37th, and 23rd Regiments; in the second line, the 20th, 51st, and 25th, the latter that famous regiment raised in Scotland in the year 1688 by the Earl of Leven, and then called "Leven's" or the Edinburgh Regiment. At Minden it fought as Sempil's Regiment, later it was known as the King's Own Borderers, and now it is familiar to all as the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Entirely unsupported, these two lines of scarlet-clad men marched steadily against a mass of cavalry, the flower of the French army. Without haste, without even a sign of hesitation or of wavering, over ground swept by the fire of more than sixty cannon, they moved—a fire that ploughed through their ranks and mowed down men as the hurricane blast smites to the earth trees in a forest of pines. Not till the threatening squadrons of horse began to get into motion did these British regiments halt, and then, pausing coolly till the galloping ranks were all but within striking distance, they fired a volley so withering that men and horses fell in swathes, while the survivors reeled in confusion back on their supports. Never before had volley so crushing been fired by British troops. Up to that day, musketry had seldom been blasting in effect; firelocks then in use were singularly clumsy weapons, noted for anything but accuracy, and, to add to their inefficiency, it was not the practice to bring the cumbersome piece to the shoulder, and thus to take aim, but rather, the method was to raise the firelock breast high and trust to chance that an enemy might be in the line of fire. Now all was changed. During the Peace troops had been taught to aim from the shoulder, and Minden showed the effect.

In spite of their losses, however, the French horse rallied and came again to the attack, this time supported by four brigades of infantry and thirty-two guns. "For a moment the lines of scarlet seemed to waver under the triple attack; but, recovering themselves, they closed up their ranks and met the charging squadrons with a storm of musketry which blasted them off the field, then turning with equal fierceness upon the French infantry, they beat them back with terrible loss."^[2]

[2: Fortescue, *History of the Army.*]

Yet again the enemy came on; squadrons that up to now had not encountered those terrible islanders, thundered down upon them, undaunted. Through the first line this time the horsemen burst their way, and surely now they must carry all before them. But no farther went the measure of their success; the second line shattered them to fragments, and all was over. Back behind the ramparts fell the French, crushed and dispirited, for nothing now remained to them but surrender. And for this great victory Prince Ferdinand's thanks were chiefly bestowed on those British regiments whose magnificent valour and steadiness had alone made it possible.



Page 125

But the British cavalry, under Lord George Sackville, did not come in for equal commendation. Lord George and the Prince had long been at daggers drawn. Hence, probably, it may have been, that when the French were broken and in full flight, and Prince Ferdinand's repeated orders to bring up his cavalry reached Lord George, that officer ignored or wilfully disobeyed them. The Marquis of Granby, Lord George's second in command, had already begun to move forward with the Blues, and behind were the Scots Greys and other famous regiments, thirsting to be at the throats of the French. But Lord George Sackville's peremptory orders brought them to a grudging and reluctant halt. Thus, throughout an engagement which brought honour so great to their countrymen, the British cavalry stood idle in the rear, chafing at their inaction and openly murmuring.

And now that all chance of further fighting was over for the day, parties of the men, irritated and bent on picking a quarrel, had strayed from their own lines, and made their way over to the bivouacs of the British infantry regiments, where already camp fires were twinkling, and the men around them slaking with wine throats parched by long hours of marching and fighting.

Those were days when, after a victory, discipline went to the wall and was practically non-existent; they were days when the bodies of those who were killed in action were robbed, almost as they fell—nay, when even the wounded, as they lay helpless, were stripped naked by their own comrades and left to perish on the field (though *that*, indeed, was common enough amongst our troops even in the Peninsular War half a century later). And now, here at Minden, as ever after a great engagement, when villages or towns are sacked, much plunder had fallen into the hands of the victorious army; wine and brandy from the wine-houses of the wrecked villages was being poured recklessly down the ever-thirsty throats of the men, and soldiers, already half drunk, were to be seen knocking out the heads of up-ended wine-casks the quicker to get at their contents, whilst others, shouting and singing, reeled about, many of them perhaps with a couple of loaves, or a ham, or what not, stuck on their bayonets. Such scenes, and scenes worse by far, were but too common in those days, and even the authority of officers was of small avail at such a time.

Into the midst of such a pandemonium as this came small parties of the cavalry, most of them already excited with drink and ready for any devilry. Among the noisiest and most quarrelsome of the dragoons were two non-commissioned officers—brutal-looking ruffians both of them—who made their way from group to group, drinking wherever the chance offered, shouting obscene songs, and making themselves insufferably offensive whenever a man more quietly disposed than his comrades happened to be met. Boastful and quarrelsome, these two, with a few dragoons of different regiments, at length attached themselves

Page 126

to Sempil's Regiment, amongst whom it chanced that a group of men, more quiet and well-behaved than the general run, sat around a fire, cleaning their arms or cooking rations, and discussing the battle and the heavy losses of the regiment. It was not difficult to guess that the majority of the group were men bred among the great, sweeping, round-backed hills of the Scottish Border—from “up the watters” in Selkirk or Peeblesshires, some of them, others again perhaps from Liddesdale, Eskdale, or Annandale, or one of the many dales famous in Border history; you could hear it in their tongue. But also there was in those quiet, strongly-built men something that spoke of the old, dour, unconquerable, fighting Border stock that for so many centuries lived at feud with English neighbours. Many of them had joined the regiment four years earlier, when it had passed through the Border on its march from Fort William to Buckinghamshire.

But if they had seen much service since then, never had they seen anything to approach this famous day of Minden, and as the long casualty list was discussed, many were the good Border names mentioned that belonged to men now lying stiff and cold in death, who that morning when the sun rose were hale and well.

“Rob Scott's gane,” said one.

“Ay, and Tam Elliot,” said a grizzled veteran. “I kenned, and *he* kenned, he wad never win through this day. He telled me that his deid faither, him that was killed at Prestonpans, had twice appeared tae him. And we a' ken what *that* aye means. Some o' you dragoon lads maybe saw as muckle as ye cared for o' auld Scotland that day o' Prestonpans?”

“And if we did, Scottie, we made up for it later,” bawled one of the two dragoon non-commissioned officers.

“Ay? And whan was that, lad? At Falkirk, belike!”

“No, it wasn't at Falkirk, Scottie. But fine sport we had when we went huntin' down them rebels about your Border country, after Culloden had settled their business. By G——! I mind once I starved an old Scotch witch that lived up there among your cursed hills. She was preaching, and psalm-singing, and bragging about how the Lord would provide for the widowed and fatherless, or some cant of that sort. But *I* soon put her to the test.”

“Ay?” said a stern-faced, youngish man, dressed in the uniform of a private of Sempil's Regiment, jumping up hurriedly in front of the dragoon, “ay? And what did ye do?”

“Do?” replied the cavalryman; “why, I just sliced the throat of the old witch's cow, and I cut all her garden stuff and threw it into the burn. I'm thinking it would take a deal o'



prayer to get the better o' that! But, oh! no doubt the Lord would provide, as she said," sneered the man.

"And was that in Nithsdale?" asked the young Borderer.

"It was," said the dragoon.

"An' ye did that, an' ye hae nae thocht o' repentance?"

"Repentance! What's there to repent? D—— you, I tell you she was a witch, and I gave her no more than a witch deserves," roared the half-tipsy dragoon.



Page 127

“Then, by God! I tell *you* it was my mother that you mishandled that day. Draw! you bloody dog! Draw!” shouted the now thoroughly roused Borderer, snatching from its scabbard the sabre of a dragoon who stood close at hand.

It was no great fight. The cavalryman had doubtless by far the greater skill with the sabre; but drink muddled his brain and hampered his movements, and the whirlwind attack of the younger man gave no rest to his opponent nor opportunity to steady himself. In little more than a minute the dragoon lay gasping out his life.

“Had ye rued what ye did, ye should hae been dealt wi’ only by your Maker,” muttered the Borderer as the dead man’s comrades bore away the body. “Little did I look to see *you* this day after a’ they years, or to have *your* bluid on my hands. It was an ill chance that brought us thegither again, and an ill day for me an’ mine that lang syne brought you into our quiet glen.”

But the incident did not end here. The private soldier had slain his superior in rank, and but for the strenuous representations of his company commander and sure friend, a native of his own part of the Border, it had gone hard with Private Maxwell.

The story, as told to his captain, was this. Maxwell, then a half-grown boy, lived with his mother in a lonely cottage in a quiet Dumfriesshire glen. They came of decent folk, but were very poor, sometimes in the winter being even hard put to it to find sufficient food. The father, and all the family but this one boy, were dead; the former had perished on the hill during a great snowstorm, and the sons, long after, had all died, swept off by an outbreak of smallpox. Thus the widow and her one remaining boy were left almost in destitution; but by the exercise of severe economy and by hard work, they managed to cling to their little cottage.

One morning—it was a day in the summer of 1746; the heather was bursting into bloom, shadows of great fleecy clouds trailed sleepily over the quiet hillsides, larks sang high in the heavens, blue-bells swung their heads lazily in the gentle breeze, and all things spoke of peace—there came the tramp of horses down the glen, past the rocks where the rowan-trees grew, and so up to the cottage door.

“Hi, old lady!” shouted the sergeant in charge of a half-dozen dragoons, “we must ha’ some’at to eat and drink. We’ve been scouring them infernal hills since break o’ day, and it’s time we picked a bit.”

“Weel, sirs,” said the poor widow, “it’s but little I hae gotten, but that little ye shall freely hae.” And she brought them “lang kale” and butter, and for drink offered them new milk, saying, as she handed it to the man, that this was her whole stock.



“Whole stock!” growled one who did not relish such food, “whole stock! A likely story! I daresay, if the truth was known, the old hag’s feeding a rebel she’s got hidden away in some snug hole hereaway.”



Page 128

“Deed, sirs, there’s no rebels here. An’ that’s a’ my son an’ me has to live on.”

“How do you live in this outlandish spot all the year round, then, mistress?”

“Indeed, sir,” said the woman, “the cow and the kailyaird, and whiles a pickle oat meal, wi’ God’s blessing, is a’ my *mailen*. The Lord has provided for the widow and the faitherless, and He’ll aye provide.”

“We’ll soon see about that,” said the ruffian. With his sabre, and paying no heed to the helpless woman’s lamentations or to the half-hearted remonstrances of his comrades, he killed the poor widow’s cow; then going to the little patch of garden, he tore up and threw into the burn all the stock of kail.

“There, you old rebel witch,” said he, with a heartless laugh, as the party set forward again, “you may live on God’s blessing now.”

It broke the poor toil-worn widow’s heart, and she died ere the summer was ended. Lost to the ken of his few friends, her boy wandered sorrowfully to another part of the country, and winter storms soon left but the crumbling walls and broken roof of what had been his home.

Thirteen years, almost to a day, passed ere fate brought together again the man who committed that foul wrong and his surviving victim. If retribution came with halting foot, it came none the less surely, for “though the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceeding small.”

HIGHWAYMEN IN THE BORDER

It can scarcely be said that the Border, either north or south of Tweed, has ever as a field of operations been favoured by highwaymen. Fat purses were few in those parts, and if he attempted to rob a farmer homeward bound from fair or tryst—one who, perhaps, like Dandie Dinmont on such an occasion, temporarily carried rather more sail than he had ballast for—a knight of the road would have been quite as likely to take a broken head as a full purse.

There has occasionally been some disposition to claim as a north country asset, Nevison, the notorious highwayman, who is said to have been the true hero of the celebrated ride to York, which, in his novel, *Rookwood*, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth assigns to Dick Turpin. Nevison, however, was a north countryman only in the sense that he was born in Yorkshire, and he never did frequent any part of the north country, but confined his operations chiefly to districts adjacent to London, where he flew at higher game than in those days was generally to be found travelling Border roads. Nor in reality was it he who took that great ride to York. The feat was accomplished in the year 1676 by a man named Nicks, if Defoe’s account is to be relied on. Nicks committed a



robbery at Gadshill, near Chatham, at about four o'clock one summer's morning. Knowing that, in spite of his crape mask, his victim had recognised him, Nicks galloped to Gravesend, where, together with his mare, he crossed the Thames by boat, then



Page 129

swung smartly across country to Chelmsford, and thence on, with only necessary halts to bait his horse, by way of Cambridge, through Huntingdon, and so on to the Great North Road. Without ever changing his mount, he reached York early that evening, having taken only fifteen hours for a journey of two hundred miles. If the time is correct, she must have been a great mare, and he a consummate horse-master. At his subsequent trial, as it was proved beyond question that in the evening of the day on which the robbery took place he had played bowls in York with well-known citizens, the jury, holding it to be impossible that any person could have been on the same day in two places so far apart as Gadshill and York, on that ground acquitted the prisoner.

But if Nevison, nor Nicks, nor Turpin, ever crossed into Scotland, there were others, less known to fame, who occasionally tried their fortune in that country. In the early part of the year 1664, robberies, highway and otherwise, were of extraordinary frequency in Scotland, and this was attributed to the great poverty then prevalent amongst the people, owing to "the haill money of the kingdom being spent by the frequent resort of our Scotsmen at the Court of England."

In 1692-3 there seems to have been what one might almost call an epidemic of highway robbery over the southern part of Scotland, and he was quite a picturesque ruffian who robbed William M'Fadyen near Dumfries on 10th December 1692. Or, rather, there were two ruffians engaged in the affair. M'Fadyen was a drover who had been paid at Dumfries a sum of L150 for cattle sold. Sleeping overnight in the town, the drover started for home next morning before daylight. Possibly he had seen at the inn the previous evening some one whose appearance or manner made him uneasy, and being a cautious man, with a good deal of money in his possession, he had hoped by an early start to give this suspected person the slip.

A clear, cold December morning, stars winking frostily in a cloudless sky, and a waning moon casting sharp black shadows over the whitened ground, saw him out of Dumfries, and well on his homeward road. And, as he blew on his fingers, and beat his unoccupied hand briskly against his thigh, to warm himself withal, M'Fadyen chuckled to think how cleverly and quietly he had slipped unnoticed from the inn and through the town. They must be up early indeed who would weather on *him!* And so, ruminating somewhat vain-gloriously, he pushed on over the ringing ground, his horse snorting frosty breaths on the chill air, and inclined to hump his back and squeal on the smallest excuse. Mile after mile slipped easily behind him, and the sun began to show a blood-red face over the hill; a "hare limped trembling through the frozen grass," and crows cawed hungrily as they flew past on sluggish, blue-black wing, questing for food. The world was awake now, and M'Fadyen reckoned that by a couple of hours after noon he should



Page 130

be safe home with his money. Only—who was that on the road ahead of him? A soldier by his coat, surely, with his servant riding behind. Well, so much the better; that would be company for him over the loneliest part of his ride, across the moor which bore an evil name. So M’Fadyen pressed on, and soon he caught up the two riders, first the servant, “mounted upon ane dark grey horse” and armed with a “long gun”; then the master, also riding a dark grey horse, and dressed in a scarlet coat with gold-thread buttons. A tall man, the latter—a striking-looking man, quite a personage, with thin refined face and high Roman nose; instead of a wig he wore his own brown hair tied in a cue behind, and over one eye he had a notable peculiarity, “a wrat (wart) as big as ane nut.” In his holsters this gentleman carried a brace of pistols.

Surely here was good fortune for M’Fadyen! A party so well armed could afford to look with contempt on any highwayman that ever cried “Stand and deliver” over all broad Scotland. And it was not long before the honest drover, in the joy of his heart at finding himself in such goodly company, had expressed to the red-coated stranger the pleasure it would give him if he might be granted the escort across the moor of a gentleman so well armed and mounted; “for,” said he, “in sic ill times it was maist mischancey wark to ride far ane’s lane.” Little objection had the tall gentleman in red to make to such a proposition, and on they rode, amicably enough, with just such dryness of manner on the stranger’s part as the humble drover might expect from an army officer, yet nothing to keep his tongue from wagging. “It was a gey kittle bit they were comin’ to, where the firs stude, and he wad hae liked ill to be rubbit. Muckle? O—oo, no; just a wee pickle siller, but nae man likit to lose onything. And folk said they highwayman wad skin the breeks aff a Hielandman. No that he was a Hielandman, though his name did begin wi’ a “Mac.”

And so chattering, they had already won half-way across that lonely stretch of moor regarding which the drover had had misgivings. And even as they came abreast of that thick clump of stunted firs, up to M’Fadyen rode the servant, pointing towards the trees, and saying: “This is our way. Come ye wi’ me.”

There were few roads—such as they were—in the south of Scotland with which M’Fadyen’s business as a drover had not made him familiar, and naturally he refused now to leave a track which he knew to be the right one. Whereupon the servant up with his “long-gun” and struck him heavily over the head with the butt; and as M’Fadyen strove to defend himself and to retaliate, up rode the master, clapped a pistol to his breast, and forced him to go with them behind the clump of trees. The last M’Fadyen saw of his pleasant escort was the two knaves cantering over the heath, bearing with them his cloak-bag containing his L150.



Page 131

A great fuss was made over this robbery, and the Privy Council took the matter up. The chief robber was undoubtedly an officer, said M'Fadyen, and besides the large wart over his eye, there were other marks which made him noticeable—for example, “the little finger of his left hand bowed towards his loof.” Notwithstanding these tell-tale marks, neither robber was ever found; M'Fadyen and his hard-earned L150 had parted company for ever. And though the Privy Council went so far as to “recommend Sir James Leslie, commander-in-chief for the time being of their Majesties' forces within this kingdom, to cause make trial if there be any such person, either officer or soldier, amongst their Majesties' forces, as the persons described,” no one was ever brought to book, either amongst the troops in Scotland, or amongst “the officers which are come over from Flanders to levy recruits.”

Not so fortunate as this scarlet-coated gentleman was Mr. Hudson, *alias* Hazlitt, who in 1770 stopped a post-chaise on Gateshead Fell, near Newcastle, and robbed the occupant, a lady who was returning to Newcastle from Durham. A poor-spirited creature was this Hudson, a little London clerk gone wrong, and he trembled so excessively when robbing the lady that she plucked up spirit, and, protesting that half a guinea was all she had, got off with the loss of that modest sum, not even having her watch taken. Despite his pistol, one cannot but feel that of the two the lady was the better man, and that, had it occurred to her, she might very readily have bundled the highwayman neck and crop into her chaise, and handed him over to the authorities.

His career, however, was almost as brief as if she had done so. That same evening he robbed a mounted postman of his mail-bags—having first ascertained that the postman was unarmed. And here Hudson came to the end of his tether. The postman gave the alarm, and the robber was arrested in Newcastle the following day, some of the property lost from the mail-bags still in his possession. At his trial the following week at Durham Assizes he did not attempt to make any defence, but after conviction, by confessing where the booty was hid, he made what reparation lay in his power. Poor wretch! He had not even the posthumous satisfaction of going down to posterity as a bold, bad man, a hero of the road. Not for him was it to emulate Jack Shepherd or Dick Turpin; he was of feebler clay, unfitted to excel in evil-doing.

After the barbarous fashion of the day, they hanged his body in chains on the scene of his poor, feebly-executed crimes; and there, on Gateshead Fell, through many a dreary winter's night, fringed with loathly icicles, lashed by rains, battered by hail, dangled that pitiful, shrunken figure, creaking dolefully, as it swung to and fro in the bitter blasts that come howling in from a storm-tossed North Sea. And far from acting as the warning intended to others, so little was this gruesome thing a “terror to evil-doers,” that the vicinity of the gibbet actually became a place noted for the frequency of crimes of violence.



Page 132

There have been others, of course, who might perhaps be recognised as Border highwaymen, though not many of them could claim to have achieved even moderate notoriety. Drummond, who was hanged at Tyburn in 1730, certainly began his infamous career in the north, but that was quite a petty beginning, and—at least after his return from transportation to the Virginian Plantations—his chief haunts were Hounslow or Bagshot Heaths, or other places in the neighbourhood of London.

But at least there was one Border highwayman—or is “footpad” here the more correct term?—who, if the story is true, may surely claim to have been the most picturesque and romantic of criminals. In this instance the malefactor was a woman, not a man, and her name was Grizel Cochrane, member of (or at least sprung from) a noble family, which later produced one of the most famous seamen in the annals of naval history. Her story is very well known, and it may therefore be sufficient to say here that her father, having been concerned in one of the many political conspiracies which in those days were judged to merit death, lay in prison under sentence, and that, to save his life, the brave lady, disguised as a man, on two separate occasions, on Tweedmouth moor, robbed the mail by which her father’s death warrant was being conveyed from London to Edinburgh. Thus she twice prevented the sentence from being carried out, and eventually the prisoner was pardoned.

The greater number of highway robberies in the Border, however, were accomplished without the aid of a horse or the disguise of a crape mask. The Border highwayman, as a rule, was no picturesque Claude Duval, no chivalrous villain of romance who would tread a measure in the moonlight with the lady whose coach he had plundered, thereafter returning her jewels in recompense for the favour of the dance. He was much more often of the squalid type—in a word, a footpad—frequently a member of some wandering gipsy gang, who, attending country fair or tryst, had little difficulty in ascertaining which one of the many farmers present it would be easiest and most profitable to rob as he steered his more or less devious course homeward in the evening across the waste. What the farmer had that day been paid for his cattle or sheep he usually carried with him, probably in the form of gold; for in those days there were of course no country agencies or banks in which the money might be safely deposited. Not unusually, too, the farmer had swallowed enough liquor to make him reckless of consequences; and the loneliness of the country-side, and the absence of decent roads, too often combined with the condition of the farmer to make him an easy prey to some little band of miscreants who had dogged him from the fair.



Page 133

Frequently, too, these robbers were in league with the keepers of low roadside public-houses, where passengers on their homeward way were encouraged—nothing loth, as a rule—to halt and refresh steed and rider, and possibly whilst they drank their pistols were tampered with. Who does not remember the meeting of Harry Bertram and Dandie Dinmont in such a place? And who has not read in the author's notes to *Guy Mannering*, Sir Walter's account of the visit to Mump's Ha' of Fighting Charlie of Liddesdale, and what befell him thereafter? In spite of a head that the potations pressed on him by an over-kind landlady had caused to hum like an angry hive of bees, Charlie had sense enough, after he had travelled a few miles on his homeward way, to examine his pistols. Finding that the charges had been drawn and tow substituted, Charlie, now considerably sobered, carefully reloaded them, a precaution which certainly saved his money, and possibly his life as well, for he was presently attacked by a party of armed men, who, however, fled on finding that "the tow was out."

Mump's Ha' was in Cumberland, near Gilsland. In olden days it was a place of most evil repute, but one may question if in ill name it could take precedence of a similar establishment which in the days of our great-grandfathers stood on Soutra Hill, on the Lauder road. Travellers had need to give this place a wide berth, for it was a veritable den—indeed "Lowrie's Den" was the name by which it was known, and feared, by every respectable person. Many a bloody, drunken fight took place there, many were the evil deeds done and the robberies committed; not even was murder unknown in its immediate vicinity.

Well for us that in our day we know of such places only by ancient repute. When we talk regretfully of "the good old days," we are apt to leave out of the reckoning those Mump's Ha's and Lowrie's Dens of our forefathers' times; we forget to add to the burden of a journey such items as indifferent roads and highway robbers, and the possibility of reaching one's destination minus purse, watch, or rings. From an encounter with highwaymen, few passengers emerged with flying colours, having had the best of the deal. Not to many persons was such fortune given as fell to the lot of a country lass near Kelso one winter's evening. She had little enough to lose in the way of money or valuables, and it was "bogles," more than the fear of footpads that disturbed her mind as she stumped along that muddy road in the gathering gloom. Consequently, after one terrified shriek, it was almost a relief to her to find that the two figures which bounced out on her from the blackness, demanding her money, were flesh and blood like herself, and not denizens of another world. Five or six shillings was all that the poor lass possessed, but they took that paltry sum. Only, when she pled hard that they should leave her at least a trifle to take to her mother, who was very poor, one of the



Page 134

footpads relented, and with a gruff, "Hey, then!" thrust three coins back into her not unwilling hand. With a mixture of joy and fear the girl fled into the darkness, but as she ran, she thought she heard a shout, and soon, to her consternation, she made certain that hurrying footsteps were coming up behind her. In dire terror now, she left the road, and crept into some bushes in an adjacent hollow. There, with thumping heart, she cowered whilst two men ran past, and presently, whilst she still lay hid, they returned, vowing loud vengeance on some person who had "done" them. It was long ere the poor girl dared leave her shelter, late ere she got home to tell her tale to an anxious mother. But when the three rescued shillings were produced, the cause of the robbers' anger was not far to seek; they were not shillings that came this time from the depths of a capacious pocket, but three golden guineas.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

When the skipper of some small coastal trading craft is able to retire from leading a seafaring life, it is usually within close range of the briny, tarry whiffs that with every breeze come puffing from the harbour of some little port out of which he has formerly traded that he sets up his shore-going abode. There, when he has paid off for the last time, and everything, so to speak, is coiled down and made ship-shape, he settles within easy hail of old cronies like himself; and if he should chance to be one of those who have lived all their days with only their ship for wife, then he not unnaturally falls easily into the habit of dropping, of an evening, into the snug, well-lit bar-parlour of the "Goat and Compasses" or the "Mariner's Friend," or some such house of entertainment, with its glowing fire and warm, seductive, tobacco-and grog-scented atmosphere, there to wile away the time swopping yarns with old friends. Sometimes, if opportunity offer, he is not averse from a mild game of cards for moderate points; and usually he takes, or at least in old days he used to take, his liquor hot—and strong.

Captain Alexander Craes was one of those retired merchant skippers; but he had not, like the majority of his fellows, settled near the sea-coast. It was Kelso that had drawn him like a loadstone. An inland-bred man, in his boyhood he had run away to sea, and the sea, that had irresistibly wooed his youthful fancy, had no whit fulfilled his boyish dreams. It was not always blue, he found; the ship was not always running before a spanking breeze; more kicks than ha'pence, more rope's-endings than blessings, came his way during the first few years of his sailor life. Perhaps it was because he had been ashamed to go back and own himself beaten, or perhaps it was his native Border dourness that had caused him to stick to it; but at any rate he did stick to it—though, like most sailors, he growled, and even swore sometimes, that he hated the life. And now, in the winter



Page 135

of 1784-5, here he was in Kelso, stout, weather-beaten, grey-headed, over fifty, living within earshot of the deep voice of flooded Tweed roaring and fretting over the barrier with which the devil, at bidding of Michael Scott the Wizard, long syne dammed its course. Many a time when the captain's little vessel, close hauled, had been threshing through leaden-grey seas under hurrying, leaden-grey skies and bitter snow squalls, with a foul wind persistently pounding at her day after day, he had thought, as some more than ordinarily angry puff whitened the water to windward and broke him off his course, with the weather leech of his close-reefed topsail shivering, how pleasant it must be to be a landsman, to go where he pleased in spite of wind or weather. Ah! they were the happy ones, those lucky landsmen, who could always do as they chose, blow high, blow low.

Well, here he was at last, drinking in all a landsman's pleasures, enjoying his privileges—and not too old yet, he told himself with self-conscious chuckle, to raise a pleasant flutter of expectation in the hearts of Kelso's widows and maidens. Not that he was a marrying man, he would sometimes protest; far from it, indeed. Yet they did say that the landlord of a rival inn was heard to remark that “the cauptain gaed ower aften to Lucky G——'s howf. It wasna hardlys decent, an' her man no deid a twalmonth.” Maybe, however, the good widow's brand of whisky was more grateful to the captain's palate, or the company assembled in her snug parlour lightsomer, or at least less dour, than was to be found at the rival inn, where the landlord was an elder of the kirk and most stern opponent of all lightness and frivolity. Whatever the cause, however, it is certain that the captain did acquire the habit of dropping in very frequently at the widow's, where he was always a welcome guest. And it was from a merry evening there that, with a “tumbler” or two inside his ample waistcoat, he set out for home one black February night when a gusty wind drove thin sleety rain rattling against the window panes of the quiet little town, and emptied the silent, moss-grown streets very effectively.

An hour or two later, it might be, two men, Adam Hislop and William Wallace, were noisily steering a somewhat devious and uncertain course homeward, when one of them tripped over a bulky object huddled on the ground, and with an astonished curse fell heavily.

“What the de'il's that? Guide us, it's a man! Some puir body the waur o' his drink, ah'm thinkin'. Haud up, maister! Losh! it's the cauptain,” he cried, as with the not very efficient aid of his friend he tried to raise the prostrate man. But there was more than drink the matter here.



Page 136

"There's bluid on him!" cried one who had been vainly essaying to clap a battered hat on to the head of the form that lay unconscious in the mud. A hard task it was presently, when his senses began to return, to get the wounded sailor unsteadily on his legs; a harder to get him home. The captain could give but a poor account of how he came to be lying there; thickly and indistinctly he tried to explain that he had laid a course for his own moorings, and had been keeping a bright look-out, when suddenly he had been brought up all standing, and he thought he must have run bows on into some other craft, for he remembered no more than getting a crack over his figurehead. Morning was treading on the heels of night before Hislop and Wallace had got the damaged man home and had left him safely stowed in bed, and themselves were peacefully snoring, unconscious of coming trouble.

A day or two passed quietly, and the damaged man already was little the worse of his adventure. Then, however, the rumour quickly spread that not only had the Captain been assaulted, but that he had been robbed. Gossip flew from tongue to tongue, and folk began to look askance on Wallace and Hislop, muttering that "they aye kenned what was to be the outcome"; for who, thought they, but Wallace and Hislop could have been the robbers? They had found him lying, the worse of liquor, having damaged his head in falling, and they had robbed him, either then or when they undressed him in his room, believing that he would have no recollection of what money he had carried that night, nor, indeed, much of the events of the entire evening. It was all quite plain, said those amateur detectives. They wondered what the fiscal was thinking of that he had not clapped the two in jail lang syne. So it fell out that, almost before they realised their danger, the two men were at Jedburgh, being tried on a capital charge.

The evidence brought against them was for the most part of no great account, and the old sea captain was unable to say that either man had assaulted him, or, indeed, that he had any clear recollection of anything that had happened after he left the inn. They might have got off—indeed they *would* have got off—but for one unfortunate circumstance, which in the eyes of the jury completely damned them. In possession of one of them was found a guinea, which the captain had no hesitation in identifying as a peculiarly-marked coin which he had carried about with him for many years. That was enough for the jury. They and counsel for the prosecution would credit no explanation.

The story told by Hislop and Wallace was that on the night of the assault they had been drinking and playing cards in a public-house in Kelso; that late in the evening a soldier had come in and had joined in the game, losing a considerable sum; that in consequence of his losses he had produced a guinea, and had asked if any of the company could change it. Hislop had given change, and the guinea found in his possession was that which he had got from the soldier. "A story that would not for a moment hold water," said counsel, when the unfortunate men failed to produce evidence in support of their story; and the judge, in his summing up, agreeing with the opinion of counsel for the prosecution, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, and both men were condemned to be hanged.



Page 137

On May 17, 1785, this sentence was carried out. But here arose circumstances which caused the credulous—and in those days most people were credulous—first to doubt, and finally to believe implicitly in the innocence of the convicted men. From first to last Wallace and Hislop had both most strongly protested that they were entirely guiltless. That, of course, went for nothing. But when, on the day of execution, the ropes which were used to hang the poor creatures both broke; when the man who ran to fetch sounder hemp fell as he hurried, and broke his leg, then the credulous and fickle public began to imagine that Providence was intervening to save men falsely convicted. Then, too, the tale spread abroad among a simple-minded people how a girl, sick unto death, had said to her mother that when Hislop's time came she would be in heaven with him; and it was told that as Hislop's body, after execution, was carried into that same tenement, in a room of which the sick girl lay, her spirit fled. Judgment, also, was said to have fallen on a woman who occupied a room in that house, and who had violently and excitedly objected to the body of a hanged man being brought to defile any abode which sheltered her. That same evening the body of her own son, found drowned in Tweed, was carried over that threshold across which she had tried to prevent them from bringing the corpse of Hislop. All these events tended to swing round public opinion, and those who formerly had been most satisfied of their guilt, now most strenuously protested their entire belief in the innocence of the hanged men. The years slipped away, however, and there had arisen nothing either to confirm or to dissipate this belief; only the story remained fresh in the minds of Border folk, and the horror of the last scene grew rather than lessened with repeated telling.

But there is a belief—not always borne out by facts—that “murder will out”; a faith that, “though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.” Ten years had passed, and the spring of 1795 was at hand, when it chanced one day that a citizen of Newcastle, homeward bound from Morpeth, had reached a point on the road near Gosforth; here, without word or challenge, a footpad, springing on to the road, fired a pistol at the postillion of the postchaise, knocking off the man's cap and injuring his face. The frightened horses plunged, and dashed off madly with the vehicle, leaving in the footpad's possession no booty of greater value, however, than the postillion's cap.

Later in the same day the same footpad fired, without effect, on two mounted men, who galloped off and gave the alarm, and a well-armed band setting out from Gosforth soon captured the robber, still with the incriminating postillion's cap in his possession. He was a man named Hall, a soldier belonging to the 6th Regiment of Foot, of which a detachment was then stationed in the district. And he was in uniform, though, as a measure of precaution, and not to make himself too conspicuous, he wore his tunic turned inside out—a disguise that one would pronounce to be something of the simplest.



Page 138

There was, of course, no possible defence—indeed, he owned up, and at the next assizes was condemned to death. And here the link with the fate of Wallace and Hislop came in. As he lay awaiting execution, Hall confessed that it was he, that February night in 1785, who had stunned and robbed Captain Craes. He had seen the old sailor making his not very steady way homewards, and had followed him, and at the loneliest part of the street, where no house showed a light, he came up behind and tripped him; and as the captain essayed to get again on his feet, Hall had struck him a violent blow on the head with a cudgel, stunning him. The man told, too, how a little later he had gone into a public-house to get a drink, and that there he found some men playing at cards; he had joined them, and had lost money, and one of the men (Hislop, as he afterwards understood) had changed for him a guinea which he had a little time before taken from the pocket of the man he had stunned.

Thus were Wallace and Hislop added to the long list of the victims of circumstantial evidence.

ILLICIT DISTILLING AND SMUGGLING

From about the close of the seventeenth until well on in the nineteenth century, smuggling was carried on to a large extent in the Border counties of England and Scotland, not only as regards the evasion of customs duties on imported articles, but as well in the form of illicit distillation.

In the good old times, better than half-way through the eighteenth century, cargoes consisting of ankers of French brandy, bales of lace, cases of tobacco, boxes of tea, and what not, were “run” almost nightly on certain parts of the coasts of Berwick, Northumberland, and Galloway, borne inland by long strings of pack-horses, and securely hid away in some snug retreat, perhaps far up among the Border hills. Few of the inhabitants but looked with lenient eye on the doings of the “free-traders”; few, very few, deemed it any crime to take advantage of their opportunities for getting liquor, tea, and tobacco at a cheaper rate than they could buy the same articles after they had paid toll to the King. Smuggled goods, too, were thought to possess quality and flavour better than any belonging to those that had come ashore in legitimate fashion; the smuggler’s touch, perhaps, in this respect was—

“... sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes
Or Cytherea’s breath”;

it imparted to the brandy, apparently, a vague, unnameable something that tickled the palate of the drinker, to the tobacco an extra aroma that was grateful to the nostrils of those who smoked it. Nay, the very term “smuggled” raised the standard of those goods in the estimation of some very honest folk, and caused them to smack their lips in

anticipation. Perhaps this superstition as to the supreme quality of things smuggled is not even yet wholly dead. Who has not met the hoary waterside ruffian, who,



Page 139

whispering low,—or at least as low as a throat rendered husky by much gin *can* whisper,—intimates that he can put the “Captain” (he’d promote you to be “Admiral” on the spot if he thought that thereby he might flatter you into buying) on to the “lay” of some cigars—“smuggled,” he breathes from behind a black and horny paw, whose condition alone would taint the finest Havanna that ever graced the lips of king or duke—the like of which may be found in no tobacconist’s establishment in the United Kingdom. There have been young men, greatly daring, who have been known to traffic with this hoary ruffian, and who have lived to be sadder and wiser men. Of the flavour of those weeds the writer cannot speak, but the reek is as the reek which belches from the Pit of Tophet. However, in the eighteenth century our forefathers, for a variety of reasons, greatly preferred the smuggled goods, and many a squire or wealthy landowner, many a magistrate even, found it by no means to his disadvantage if on occasion he should be a little blind; a still tongue might not unlikely be rewarded by the mysterious arrival of an anker of good French brandy, or by something in the silk, or lace, or tea line for the ladies of his household. People saw no harm in such doings in those good old days; defrauding the revenue was fair game. And if a “gauger” lost his life in some one or other of the bloody encounters that frequently took place between the smugglers and the revenue officers, why, so much the worse for the “gauger.” He was an unnecessarily officious sort of a person, who had better have kept out of the way. In fact, popular sentiment was entirely with the smugglers, who by the bulk of the population were regarded with the greatest admiration. Smuggling, indeed, was so much a recognised trade or profession that there was actually a fixed rate at which smuggled goods were conveyed from place to place; for instance, for tea or tobacco from the Solway to Edinburgh the tariff was fifteen shillings per box or bale. A man, therefore, owning three or four horses could, with luck, make a very tidy profit on the carriage, for each horse would carry two packages, and the distances were not great. There was certainly a good sporting chance of the convoy being captured in transit, but the smugglers were daring, determined men, and the possibility of a brush with the preventive officers merely added zest to the affair.

Of the other, the distilling branch of the smugglers’ business, a great deal was no doubt done in those lonely hills of Northumberland and Roxburgh and the other Border counties. There they had wealth of fuel, abundance of water, and a plentiful choice of solitary places admirably adapted to their purpose; it was easy to rig up a bothy, or hut of turf thatched with heather, in some secluded spot far from the haunts of inconvenient revenue officers, and a Still that would turn out excellent spirit was not difficult to construct. With reasonable care the thing



Page 140

might be done almost with impunity—though there was never wanting, of course, the not entirely unpleasurable excitement of knowing that you were breaking the law, that somebody *might* have turned informer, and that at any moment a raid might be made. Every unknown face necessarily meant danger, each stranger was a person to be looked on with suspicion till proved harmless. Even the friends and well-wishers of the illicit distiller did not always act in the way most conducive to his comfort and well-being, for if his still turned out a whisky that was extra seductive, he speedily became so popular, so run after, and the list of his acquaintances so extended, that sooner or later tidings of his whereabouts leaked round to the ears of the gaugers, and arrest, or a hasty midnight flitting, was the outcome. Besides, such popularity became a severe tax on the pocket of the distiller, for the better the whisky the greater the number of those who desired to sample it, and the oftener they sampled it, the more they yearned to repeat the process. Nor was it safe to make a charge for the liquor thus consumed, lest it might chance that some one of those who partook of it might, out of revenge for being charged, lay an information.

About the end of the eighteenth century there lived in a remote glen on Cheviot a Highlander, one Donald M'Donald, who was famous for the softness and flavour of the spirit he distilled. Whether it was a peculiar quality imparted to his whisky by some secret process known only to Donald himself, a knowledge and skill perhaps handed down from father to son from generation to generation, like the secret of the brewing of heather ale that died with the last of the Picts, one cannot say. Only the fact remains that, like the heather ale of old, Donald's whisky was held in high esteem, its effects on the visitors who began in numbers to seek the seclusion of his bothy, as "blessed" as were ever those of that earlier mysterious beverage beloved of our Pictish ancestors:

"From the bonny bells of heather
They brewed a drink long-syne,
Was sweeter far than honey,
Was stronger far than wine.
They brewed it, and they drank it,
And lay in a blessed swound
For days and days together
In their dwellings underground."

Donald M'Donald had formerly been a smuggler, but he had wearied of that too active life, and he had longed for an occupation more sedentary and less strenuous. Distilling suited his temperament to a nicety. It was what he had been used to see as a boy when his parents were alive, for his father before him had been a "skeely" man in that line. So Donald built to himself a kind of hut in a wild, unfrequented glen. A little burn, clear and brown, ran chattering past his door; on the knolls amongst the heather grouse cocks crowed merrily in the sunny August mornings, and the wail of curlews smote



sadly on the ear through the long-drawn summer twilights. Seldom did human foot tread the heather of that glen in the days before Donald took up his abode there; to the raven and the mountain-fox, the muir-fowl and the whaup, alone belonged that kingdom.



Page 141

From afar you might perhaps smell the peat reek as he worked his primitive Still, but unless the smoke of his fire betrayed him, or you knew the secret of his whereabouts, it had been hard to detect the existence of Donald's hut, so skilfully was it constructed, so gently did it blend into the surrounding landscape. Even if it were accidentally come upon, there was nothing immediately visible which could excite suspicion. At a bend in the stream, where the banks were steep, and the burn tumbled noisily over a little linn, dashing past the rowan trees that clung there amongst its rocks, and plunging headlong into a deep black pool, stood Donald's hut. Little better than a "lean-to" against a huge rock, it seemed; at one end a rude doorway, filled by a crazy door that stood ajar, walls of turf, windowless and heather-thatched, innocent of chimney, but with an opening that allowed the smoke of his fires to steal up the face of the rock before it dispersed into the air. That was all that might be seen at first glance—that and a stack of peat near the door. Inside, there were a couple of rough tables, made of boards, one or two even rougher seats, a quantity of heather in a corner, tops upper-most, to serve as a bed; farther "ben," some bulky things more than half hidden in the deep gloom of that part of the hut that was farthest from the door and from the light of the fire. And over and through everything an all-pervading reek of peat that brought water to the eyes of those not inured to such an atmosphere, and caused them to cough grievously. To the Highlander it was nothing; he had been born in such an atmosphere, and had lived in it most of his days. But to visitors it was trying, till Donald's Dew of Cheviot rendered them indifferent to the minor ills of life.

One day, as Donald was busily engaged with his Still, a charge for which he was just about starting, there came to the door of his hut a man leading a horse from which he had just dismounted. This man did not wait for an invitation to enter, but, having made fast his reins to the branch of a neighbouring rowan tree, walked in and sat down, with a mere "Good day."

"A ferry goot tay," politely replied Donald. But he was not altogether happy over the advent of this stranger; there was a something in the manner of the man that roused suspicion. However, there he was. It remained only to make the best of it, and to be careful not to show that he suspected anything. Perhaps the man was harmless after all; and, in any case, it might be just as well to pretend that he was not possessed of any great knowledge of English. There was nothing to be gained by talking.

"Have ye not such a thing as a drop of spirits in the house?" inquired the stranger. "I'm tired with my ride."

Donald "wasna aaltogether sure. Mebbes perhaps there micht pe a wee drappie left in ta bottle." But there was no dearth of fluid in the bottle that, with Highland hospitality, he set before the strange man, along with cheese and oatcake. Donald took a liberal "sup" himself, and sat down, purposely near the door, just in case of any possible coming trouble, and out of the corner of his eye he kept a wary gaze on his uninvited guest, who

had also helped himself liberally to the whisky, and was already making a great onslaught on the cheese and oatcake.



Page 142

“Aye, capital whisky; cap-i-tal whisky,” said the stranger graciously. “And I daresay there’s more where that came from, if the truth were kenned.”

But that was a suggestion which Donald found it convenient to ignore. He had “ferry little English,” he said.

“And I daresay, now,” pursued the stranger, in tones if anything perhaps a trifle over-hearty, “I daresay, now, the devil a drop of it will ever have helped to line the King’s pocket? Eh?”

But here, again, Donald’s knowledge of English was at fault; he “wad no pe kennin’ that his honour’s sel’ wad pe sayin’.”

“And what might your name be?” presently inquired this over-inquisitive guest.

“Ach, it micht joost pe Tonal,” said the Highlander.

“Donald? Aye, and what more than Donald?”

“Ooh, there wull pe no muckle mair. They will joost be calling me Tonal M’Tonal.”

“Donald M’Donald? Aye, aye. I thought so. Well, Donald, I’m an excise officer, and you’ve been distilling whisky contrary to the law. I’ll just overhaul your premises, and then you’ll be coming with me as a prisoner. And you’d best come quietly.”

“Preesoner?—*Preesoner?* Her honour will no be thinkin’ o’ sic a thing. There micht aiblins pe a thing or twa in ta hoose tat his honour wad pe likin’ to tak’ away, but it iss no possible tat he can do onything wi’ her nainsel’.”

“It’s no use talking, my mannie. Duty’s duty. You must come wi’ me.”

“Ochon! Ochon! Tuty wull pe a pad thing when it’s a wee pit pisness sic as this. Yer honour wull joost be takin’ the pits o’ things in ta bothy, an’ her nainsel’ wull gang awa’ an’ no say naething about it at aal.”

“I’m not here to argue with you,” cried the exciseman, getting impatient. “You’re my prisoner. I confiscate everything here. If there’s any resistance, I can summon help whenever I please. You’d best come quietly.”

“Oh, ’teed tat’s ferry hard; surely to cootness very hard indeet. But she wull no pe thinkin’ aaltogether tat she wull pe driven joost like a muckle prute beast either. Her nainsel’ wull mebbes hef a wheen freends tat could gie her help if she was wantin’t. Could ye told me if there wud pe ony o’ them tat wad pe seem’ yer honour comin’ in here?”



“Not one of *your* friends, my mannie. Nor nobody else.”

“Then, by Gott, there wull pe nopody tat wull pe seem’ ye go oot,” shouted Donald in an excited, high-pitched scream, as he snatched a heavy horse-pistol from behind the door, and cocked it. “If ye finger either your swort or your pistol, your plood wull pe on your ain head. She wull pe plowin’ your prains oot.”

A very different man this from the submissive, almost cringing, creature of a few minutes back! Now, there stood a man with set mouth and eyes that blazed evilly; the pistol that covered the gauger was steady as a rock, and a dirk in the Highlander’s left hand gleamed ominously as it reflected the glow from the fire in the middle of the room.



Page 143

The exciseman had jumped to his feet at Donald's first outburst. But he had underrated his man, and now it was too late. To attempt to draw a pistol now would be fatal—that was a movement with which he should have opened the affair. The exciseman was disposed to try bluster; but bluster does not always win a trick in the game, more especially when the ace of trumps, in the shape of a pistol, is held by the adversary. In this instance, after a long glance at the Highlander, the gauger's eyes wavered and fell; he swallowed hard in his throat once or twice, and lost colour; and finally he sat down in the seat from which a minute ago he had sprung full of fight. Then slowly, and almost as it seemed, against his own volition, his hand went out and closed on the whisky bottle. He helped himself largely, drank copiously, without diluting too much with water, but still said never a word. Now his colour came back a little, and he nibbled at the oatcake and cheese. Then more whisky. Gradually the man became talkative—even laughed now and then a trifle unsteadily. And all the time Donald kept on him a watchful eye, and had him covered, giving him no opportunity to turn the tables. For here the Highlander saw his chance. He had no wish to murder the gauger, but, at any price, he was not going to be taken. If, however, he kept the man a little longer in his present frame of mind, it was very evident that presently the exciseman would be too tipsy to do anything but go to sleep. And so it proved. From being merely merry—in a fashion somewhat tempered by the ugly, threatening muzzle of a pistol, he became almost friendly; from friendly he became aggrieved, moaning over the insult that a breekless Highlander had put on him; then the sentimental mood seized him, and he wept maudlin tears over the ingratitude and neglect shown to him by his superior officers; finally, in the attempt to sing a most dolorous song, he rolled off his seat and lay on his back, snorting.

As soon as he had satisfied himself that the enemy was genuinely helpless and not shamming, Donald promptly set about saving his own property. The exciseman's horse still stood where his master had left him, hitched to a rowan tree a few yards from the door. Him Donald impressed into his service, and long before morning everything in the hut had been removed to a safe hiding-place, and scarcely a trace was left to show that the law had ever been broken here, or that illicit whisky had been distilled.

Before daylight came, however, the exciseman had awakened in torment—a racking headache, deadly thirst, a mouth suggestive of a bird-cage, all, in fact, that a man might expect who had partaken too freely of raw and fiery whisky. He felt, indeed, extremely and overpoweringly unwell, as, with an infinity of trouble, he groped his devious way to the open air, and to the burn that went singing by. Here, after drinking copiously, he lay till grey dawn, groaning,



Page 144

the thundering of the linn incessantly jarring his splitting head. Then, when there was light enough, the unhappy man rose on unsteady feet, and started looking for his horse. A fruitless search; no sign of a horse could be seen, beyond the trampled space where he had stood the previous night, and a few hoof-prints in the soft, peaty soil elsewhere. There was no help for it; he must tramp; and with throbbing temples he pursued a tottering and uncertain course homewards. Next day he returned, full of schemes of revenge, and with help sufficient to overcome any resistance that Donald and his friends could possibly make, even if they thought it wise to attempt any resistance whatever, which was unlikely.

It was a crestfallen gauger that reached Donald's bothy on this second visit. He found his horse, it is true, pinched and miserable, and with staring coat, and without saddle or bridle. But of Donald or of the Still, or the products of that Still, not a sign—only a few taunting, ill-spelled words traced in chalk, with evident care and much painful toil, on the knocked-out head of an old cask.

In another part of this volume mention has already been made of Frank Stokoe, who, after being "out" in the '15 with Lord Derwentwater, died in great poverty. His family never again rose to anything like affluence, nor even to a status much above that of the ordinary labouring classes, but his descendants were always big, powerful men, perhaps slow of brain, but ready with their hands, and there was at least one of them who was afterwards well known in Northumberland. This was Jack Stokoe, a noted and very daring smuggler.

Jack lived in a curious kind of a den of a house far up one of the wild glens that are to be found in that moorland country which lies between the North and the South Tyne. It could scarcely be claimed that he was a farmer—indeed, in those days there was nothing to farm away up among those desolate hills—and therefore Stokoe made no attempt to pose as anything in the bucolic line; it was a pretty open secret that his real occupation was neither more nor less than smuggling. But he had never yet been caught while engaged in running a contraband cargo, and, whatever reason there may have been for suspicion, no revenue officer had ever had courage to make a raid on his house. There came, however, to that district a new officer, one plagued with an abnormally strong sense of duty, a "new broom," in fact, an altogether too energetic enthusiast who could by no means let well alone, but must ever be poking into other people's affairs in a way that began at length to create extreme annoyance in the minds of those honest gentlemen, the smugglers.



Page 145

Now it chanced that this officious person had lately received sure information of the safe landing of an unusually valuable cargo, large part of which was reported to be stowed somewhere on Stokoe's premises, and he resolved to pay Jack a surprise visit. Accordingly, the Preventive man went to the nearest magistrate, demanding a warrant to search. The magistrate hummed and hawed. "Did the officer think it necessary to disturb Stokoe, who was really a very honest, douce lad? Well, well, if he must, he must, and there was an end of it! He should have the warrant. But Jack Stokoe was a man, he'd heard say, who had no liking to have his private affairs too closely inquired into, and if ill came of it—well, the officer must not forget that he had been cautioned. A nod was as good as a wink."

Notwithstanding these well-meant hints, the gauger made his way across the hills to Stokoe's house. He was alone, but then he was a powerful man, well armed and brave enough, and never in all his experience had a bold front, backed by the majesty of the law, failed to effect its end. If he found anything contraband there was no doubt in his mind as to the result. Stokoe should accompany him back as a prisoner.

There was no one at Stokoe's when the officer arrived, except Jack himself and a little girl, and when the gauger showed his warrant and began his search, Stokoe made no remark whatever, merely sat where he was, smoking. The gauger's search was very thorough; everything was topsy-turvy before many minutes had passed, but nothing could he find. There remained the loft, to which access was given by a ladder somewhat frail and dilapidated. Up went the gauger, and began tossing down into the room below the hay with which the place was filled. Quite a good place in which to hide contraband articles, thought he. And still Stokoe said never a word. Then, when all the hay was on the floor below and the loft bare, and still nothing compromising had been found, down came the gauger, preparing to depart.

"Hey! lassie," at length then came the deep voice of Stokoe; "gie me Broon Janet."

The little girl slipped behind the big box-bed, and handed out a very formidable black-thorn stick. Up then jumped Stokoe.

"Ye d——d scoundrel, ye've turned an honest man's hoose upside doon. Set to, and leave it as ye fand it. Stow that hay where it was when ye cam' here; and be quick about it, or I'll break every bane in your d——d body."

The gauger backed towards the door, and drew a pistol. But he was just a fraction of a second too late; "crack" came Stokoe's cudgel and the pistol flew out of his hand, exploding harmlessly as it fell, and before he could draw another he was at Stokoe's mercy. There was no choice for the man; Stokoe took away all his arms, and then compelled him to set to and put back everything as he had found it. There was nothing to be gained by obstinately refusing. Stokoe was a man of sixteen or seventeen stone, a giant in every way, and as brave as he was big—a combination that is not always



found. He could, literally, have broken every bone in the gauger's body, and the chances in this case were strongly in favour of his doing it if his adversary chose to turn rusty. Truly "the de'il was awa' wi' the exciseman."



Page 146

So for hours the unhappy Preventive officer toiled up and down that rickety ladder, carrying to the loft again all the hay he had so lately thrown down, and putting the whole house as far as possible again in the state in which it had been when he began his search. And all the while Stokoe sat comfortably smoking in his big chair by the fire, saying never a word.

At length the task was ended, and the gauger stood dripping with perspiration and weary to the sole of his foot and the foot of his soul, for all this unwonted work came on top of an already long day's duty. Then:

“Sit doon!” commanded Stokoe, an order that the poor man obeyed with alacrity and thankfulness. Stokoe slipped behind the box-bed, was absent a few minutes, and then returned, bringing with him a keg of brandy. Setting that upon the table, he was not long in drawing from it in a “rummer” a quantity of spirit that four fingers would never half conceal. “Now, drink that,” he said, handing the raw spirit to his involuntary guest. Then when the liquor had all disappeared, said he: “You are the first that has ever searched my house. See you be the last! Ye’re a stranger i’ thae parts, so we’ll say nae mair about it this nicht. But mind you this—if ever ye come again, see that ye be measured for your coffin before ye start.”

Tradition has no record of Jack Stokoe having ever again been disturbed.

SALMON AND SALMON-POACHERS IN THE BORDER

What is it that causes a salmon to be so irresistible a temptation to the average Borderer? He knows that it is illegal to take “a fish” from the water at certain seasons, and at other times except under certain circumstances. Yet at any season and under any circumstances the sight of a fish in river or burn draws him like a magnet, and take it he must, if by any means it may be done outside the ken of the Tweed Commissioners and their minions. Even if he be a rigid observer of the law, a disciplinarian of Puritan fervour, in his heart he takes that salmon, and his pulse goes many beats faster as, standing on the bank, he watches the “bow wave” made by a moving fish in thin water, or sees it struggle up a cauld.

One can remember the case of a middle-aged gentleman, the most strict of Presbyterians, a church-goer almost fanatical in his attendance, one who would have suffered martyrdom rather than be compelled to forego long family prayers morning and evening; a man ordinarily rigid in his observance of the law to its last letter, unforgiving of those who even in the mildest manner stepped an inch beyond the line. Yet that old man, returning after long years to the scenes of his boyhood from a far land, where like Jacob of old he had “increased exceedingly, and had much cattle,” when in remote Border waters one day he was tempted by the Evil One with a salmon, fell almost without a struggle. To secure that salmon the old gentleman



Page 147

must needs get exceeding wet; moreover, it was close time. There was no shadow of excuse. But he was a boy again; fifty years had slipped off his shoulders. And I know not what came of the salmon, but it left the water; nor do I know what the watcher said who came over the hill inopportunistly. Maybe the trouser-pocket where the old gentleman kept his silver was a good deal lighter, and that of the watcher a good deal heavier, when the twain parted. And therein the old gentleman sinned doubly; for himself he broke the law, and he put temptation in the way of the watcher, and caused him also to sin and to be guilty of grave dereliction of duty. Yet there it was! The most rigid of his kind in pursuit of virtue and in observance of the law, saw “a fish”—and straightway, irresistibly the old Adam moved within him. Nay! Under certain circumstances hardly would one trust even a black-coated Border minister if a salmon provoked him too sorely.

In former days, many were the ways whereby a fish might be induced to quit his native element. Now, it is different; though even now possibly his end might not in every case endure too close scrutiny. But in the days when our grandsires and great-grandsires were young, salmon were regarded as of small value; they sold possibly at *2d.* the pound, and servants in Tweedside homes were wont to bargain that they should not be forced to eat salmon every day of the week. Then, practically no method of capture was illegal; you might take him almost when, where, and how you pleased. Indeed, one reads that at St. Boswells in 1794 the neighbourhood was “seldom at a loss for a small salmon, which proves a great conveniency to families.” It was not as if such a thing as a close season had never been known. Five hundred years before the date above mentioned there were laws in existence regulating the capture of salmon, and in the reign of James I of Scotland the law was most stringent. In 1424 it was enacted that “Quha sa ever be convict of Slauchter of Salmonde in tyme forbidden be the Law, he shall pay fourtie shillings for the unlaw, and at the third tyme gif he be convict of sik Trespasse he shall tyne his life.” But the law had fallen into disuse—was, in fact, a dead letter; practically there was no “tyme forbidden,” or at least the close season was as much honoured in the breach as in the observance, and, especially in the upper waters of Tweed and her tributaries, countless numbers of spawning fish were annually destroyed.

But as the salmon fisheries of Great Britain grew in value, so were various destructive methods of capturing the fish declared to be illegal, and many a practice that in earlier days was regarded as “sport” may now be indulged in not at all. Some of those practices were picturesque enough in themselves, and brimmed over with excitement and incident; indeed, as portrayed in the pages of *Guy Mannering*, they were, to use Sir Walter’s own words, “inexpressibly animating.” Such, for instance, were “burning the water” and “sunning.” Others, such as rake-hooking, cross-lining, and decking salmon out of shallow water, were mere poaching devices with little redeeming virtue, commending themselves to nobody, except as a means of filling the pot.



Page 148

Then there was the taking of salmon from the “redds” as they spawned, of all methods of capture the least allied to “sport,” for the fish then were soft and flabby, and almost useless as food. Nevertheless, there was in that, too, a strong element of excitement, for the weapon used, the clodding or throwing leister, required no mean skill in the using. This throwing leister was a heavy spear, or rather a heavy “graip,” having five single-barbed prongs of unequal length but regularly graduated. To the bar above the shortest prong was lashed a goats’-hair rope, which was also made fast to the thrower’s arm, carefully coiled, as in a whaling-boat the line is coiled, so that it may run free when the fish is struck. This leister (or waster) was cast by hand at fish lying in not too deep water—generally, in fact, when they were on the spawning beds. It was with this weapon, as one may read in Scrope’s *Days and Nights of Salmon Fishing*, that Tam Purdie—Sir Walter’s Purdie—when a young man captured that “muckle kipper” that seemed to him to be the “verra de’il himsel’,” so big was he. One Sunday forenoon, as he daundered by the waterside (instead of being, as he should have been, at church) Tam saw him slide slowly off the redd across the stream.

“Odd! my verra heart lap to my mouth whan I gat the glisk o’ something mair like a red stirk than ought else muve off the redd. I fand my hair creep on my heid. I minded it was the Sabbath, and I sudna hae been there. It micht be a delusion o’ the Enemy, if it wasna the de’il himsel’.”

All that peaceful Sabbath day Tam’s meditations were disturbed by visions of great salmon. And as at family worship that night his master read aloud from “the Word,” Tam quaked to realise that no syllable had penetrated his dulled ears, but that, with the concluding solemn “Amen,” had come to his mind the resolution to clip the wings of the Sabbath, and at all costs to capture that fish before anyone could forestall him. According, as soon as his too ardent mind judged that the hands of the clock must be drawing near to midnight, Tam arose, and, rousing a farm boy to bear the light for him as he struck, with “clodding waster” in hand set off for the river. Now this clodding waster (or leister) was a possession of which Tam was inordinately proud; amongst his friends its temper and penetrating power were proverbial. It had been made for him by the Runcimans of Yarrowford, smiths celebrated far and wide for the marvellous qualities they imparted to all weapons made by them. As Purdie said: “I could hae thrawn mine off the head o’ a scaur, and if she had strucken a whinstane rock she wad hae been nae mair blunted than if I had thrawn her on a haystalk.” Yet when anon he came to cast this leister at the muckle kipper, “the 14 lb. waster stottit off his back as if he had been a bag o’ wool.” That was proof enough, if any were needed, that a fish so awesome big must be something uncanny and beyond



Page 149

nature. In a cold sweat, Tam and the boy fled from the waterside and cast themselves shivering into their beds over the byre at home. But as he lay awake, unable to close an eye, Purdie's courage crept back to him, and again he resolved that have that fish he would, muckle black de'il or no. So again he roused his now reluctant torch-bearer, and having with difficulty convinced him that the fish was actually a fish, and not the devil let loose on them for their sin in having broken the Sabbath—"Irr ye *sure*, Tam, it wasna the de'il?" the boy quavered—before daylight they again found the spot where the great kipper lay. And whether it was that this time, knowing that it really was Monday morning, Purdie threw with easier conscience and consequently with surer aim, or to what other cause who may say, but certain it is that the man and the boy, soaked to the skin and chilled to the marrow, triumphantly bore home that morning to the mill, where Purdie's father then lived, a most monstrous heavy fish.

The leister used in "sunning" or in "burning the water" differed somewhat in shape from the weapon with which Tam Purdie secured his big kipper. It, too, had five single-barbed prongs, but these were all of equal length, and the wooden handle of this implement was straight, and very much longer than that of the throwing leister; sixteen feet was no unusual length for the handle of the former weapon.

Burning the water, as its name implies, was a sport indulged in at night by torchlight. Sunning, on the other hand, was the daylight form of "burning," but it could be practised only when the river was dead low, and then not unless the weather were very calm and bright. The salmon, as they lay in the clear, sun-lit water, were speared from a boat, and vast numbers were so killed; indeed, the frightened fish had small chance of escape, for spearing began at the pool's foot, and men with leisters blocked the way of escape up stream. No doubt into this, as into its kindred sport "burning," excitement in plenty, and boisterous fun, entered largely; many a man, miscalculating the depth of water in which a fish lay, to the unfeigned delight of his comrades, took a rapid and involuntary header into the icy stream. But both sports partook too much of the nature of butchery—carts used to be needed to carry home the spoil—and they are "weel awa' if they bide." "Bide" they must, though in times not remote one has heard faint whisperings of the burning of the waters in some far-off district of the Border. Nor are there wanting those who yet openly defend the practice, deeming it indeed no sin, but rather a benefit to the water, to take from it some of the superfluous fish, which, say they, would otherwise almost certainly die of disease and contaminate the stream.



Page 150

Yet, if in our day the water has been burned, it cannot have been oftener than once in a way, and probably no great harm has resulted. Nor can the game be worth the candle, one could imagine, for watchers now are many and alert, in the execution of their duties much more conscientious than was common in days gone by. There are none now, we may hope, like the bailiff of Selkirk in the early part of last century, who constantly find salmon in close time mysteriously appearing on their dinner-table. Yet this early nineteenth-century bailiff could truly swear that such a thing as salmon on his table he never had seen. For it appears that his wife, canny woman, having first brought in a platter of potatoes, was wont to tie round his eyes a towel before she brought in the boiled fish; and before she again took away the towel, every vestige or trace of salmon had been carefully removed from the room. Obviously that bailiff, honest man, could not report a breach of the law which had never come under his observation!

Of various forms of netting which in olden days were legal, but now, happily, are forbidden, there was that by means of the Cairn net, a most destructive form, and that by the Stell net, which was worse; but to describe these obsolete instruments is unnecessary, and might be tedious. There was also the Pout net, an implement somewhat like a very large landing-net, wherewith a man might readily whip many a fish out of flooded water. That, however, need not be considered as in these days a serious form of poaching.

Of all poachers of salmon, perhaps that one with whom one is least out of sympathy was the man—is he now extinct, one wonders?—who, fishing with trout-rod and fly, and bearing on his back the most modest of trout creels, instantly, when he came to a likely cast for a fish, was wont to change his trout fly for a salmon one. If he hooked a salmon and a watcher appeared on the scene, invariably the fish “broke” him. If no watcher put in an appearance, generally the angler found that he had sudden and pressing business at home, and that fish left the riverside snugly smuggled inside the lining of a coat, or in a great circular pocket made for the purpose. It was such an one that, nigh on a hundred years ago, Mr. Scrope caught red-handed one day on his rented salmon water near Melrose. The man was a guileless creature from Selkirk, too innocent, it appeared, to be able to account for the salmon flies in the inside of his dilapidated hat, or for the 10 lb. salmon reposing in his pocket.

“Dodd! I jalouse it’s mebbes luppen in whan I was wadin’ the watter,” he said with artless smile. “They’re gey queer beasts, fish.”



Page 151

Still to this day there may perhaps be found instances where they have “luppen in” to a too capacious pocket; for the nature of the salmon has not changed, and they are still “gey queer,” and are found occasionally in “gey queer” places. There was, one remembers, not so long ago, a certain boy from Eton, or from some other of the great public schools, who, with a sister, wandered one lowering autumn evening by the brown waters of a Border stream. And how it happened there is none to say, save those who dimly saw it, but there came a vision of a water-bailiff, scant of breath, pounding heavily across the fields, whilst a maiden, fleet of foot, sped away through the gloom, sore handicapped by the antics of a half-dead and wholly slippery fish that nothing would induce to stay inside her jacket. And whether she won free, I know not. But it is said there was salmon steak for breakfast next morning in that maiden’s home.

Surely the devil played but an amateur part when he essayed to break down the stern virtue of St. Anthony with temptations no stronger than those over which the good Saint so easily triumphed. Had he clapped the holy man down by the banks of a Border stream when fish were running in the autumn, there might have been another tale to tell—that is, if a close season had existed in mediaeval times. I trow we should have seen St. Anthony nipping hot-foot over the hill, with the bosom of his monk’s gown protruding in a way at which no honest water-bailiff could possibly have winked. Things as strange have happened in our own day; but maybe they were due to that drop of reiver blood which courses more or less swiftly through the veins of most Border folk, and which, now that there are no cattle to “lift” from the English side, impels them for want of better to lift from the water a salmon whenever opportunity may offer.

There was lately, it is said, a lady of ancient Border lineage, who sat one day with a grown-up daughter in the library of her ancestral home. It was the hunting season, and at intervals the two glanced anxiously from the windows in full expectation of seeing the hounds sweep in full cry over the fields of which the library commanded a view.

“They must be coming,” cried the daughter, starting up. “There’s one of the stable-boys running over the lawn.”

And, indeed, past the old trees a youth was to be seen skirting the lawn, flying down terraces, making towards a burn which ran through the grounds before joining a small tributary of Tweed. At best speed mother and daughter followed the boy, who had halted excitedly by the burn side. But what the cause of his agitation might be they could not for the moment conjecture; certainly the burn had no apparent connection with hunting, nor indeed was there sign of horse or hound. What they found was something very different. A mile or so up the rivulet there was a farm-steading, and in that steading was the usual water-driven threshing-mill.



Page 152

It happened that this particular day had been selected by the farmer as one on which he might advantageously thrash part of his crop. Consequently, the water from his mill pond was now making a temporary spate in the little stream, which, in the course of nature, had caused many salmon to run their noses into the burn's unexplored meanderings. When the two ladies reached the stream's bank, they found the stable-lad up to his knees in the water, and a fish, not over silvery, already floundering high and dry, far from its native element; in shallow, broken water, two or three others vainly struggled to gain higher latitudes.

"Oh-h! *mother!*" cried the daughter excitedly.

And said the elder lady with little hesitation:

"Get them out, Jim; get them out. We'll kipper them." Then, after a thoughtful pause: "I think I'd like to catch one myself."

So into the water she plunged, and the three—the lady and her daughter and the stable-boy—were so busily and excitedly plowtering in the burn, engaged in this most nefarious and illegal capture of fish, that they failed to hear or to see that hounds and a full field had swept over the hill in front, and had checked, in full view of them, at a small strip of wood in their immediate neighbourhood; in fact, there was little doubt these poachers must, a few minutes before, have headed the fox. Most embarrassing of all, however, was the fact that amongst the riders was one in immaculate pink, whose face flushed a deeper shade than his coat as he pulled up not a hundred yards distant. For what must be the feelings of a Justice of the Peace, of strictest principles, who, without warning, lights upon the wife of his bosom, his innocent daughter, and one of his servants, all engaged in the most barefaced poaching?

"Good *Gedd!*" he was heard to say—if indeed the words were no stronger—as, mercifully, the hounds picked up the scent again at that moment, and the chase swept on.

There are none so blind as those who will not see, however, and nothing more was ever heard of this episode. But report has it that the lord of that manor has no great partiality for kippered salmon.

But salmon-poaching is perhaps not entirely confined to the human species. There have been instances known where dogs have been the most accomplished of poachers—generally, it must be said, in conjunction with a two-legged companion. The lurching, vagabond hound that one sees not infrequently in certain parts of the country, following suspicious-looking characters clad in coats with suspiciously roomy pockets, might, no doubt, be easily trained to take salmon from burns, or from the shallow water into which,



in the autumn, the fish often run. And, to the present writer's mind, a black curly-coated retriever recalls himself as a poacher of extreme ability. A most lovable dog was "Nero," but—at least as regards salmon—he was a most immoral breaker of the law. It was well, perhaps, that



Page 153

he lived in days when water-bailiffs were neither so numerous, nor so strict in the execution of their duties, as they now are, for nothing could cure him of the habit, when he saw a fish struggling up a shallow stream, of dashing in, seizing that salmon in his teeth, and laying it at the feet of his embarrassed master, who, far from being connected with the poaching fraternity, was, indeed, a magistrate, to whom the gift of a salmon in such circumstances brought only confusion.

After all, is there not generally a something lovable in the man who poaches purely for *sport's* sake? Who can fail to mourn the end of poor, harmless, gallant, drucken Jocky B——, who gave his life for his love of what he conceived to be sport? “Here’s daith or glory for Jocky,” he cried, when the watchers surrounded him, leaving but the one possibility of escape. And in that swollen, wintry torrent into which he plunged, the Bailiff Death laid hands on Jocky. Perhaps even now in the shades below, his “ghost may land the ghosts of fish”; mayhap, with a cleek such as that to which his cold fingers yet stiffly clung when they found him in the deep pool, he may still, now and again, be permitted with joyous heart to lift from the waters that ripple through Hades spectral fish of fabulous dimensions.

Salmon do not now appear to be so numerous in Tweed as apparently they were eighty or a hundred years ago; it is said that in 1824, when the nets had been off the lower reaches of the river for the Sunday, sometimes as many as five hundred salmon and grilse would be taken at Kelso of a Monday morning by the net and coble. It is a prodigious haul of fish. One’s mouth, too, waters as one reads of the numbers that were in those days taken in most stretches of the river by rod and line—though probably a goodly number of them were kelts.

Yet, even now, if in the month of November, when waters are red and swollen, one stands by Selkirk cauld, the fish may be seen in numbers almost incredible. By scores at a time you may see them, great and small, hurl themselves into the air over the great wave which boils at the cauld-foot. And the bigger fish, landing—if one may use the term—far beyond the first upheaval of the wave, will rush stoutly up the swirling, foaming rapid, perhaps half-way to the smooth water above the cauld, ere they are swept back, still valiantly struggling, into the seething pool below. The smaller fish less frequently succeed in clearing the wave, but generally pitch nose foremost into the water where it begins to rise, and are hurled back head over tail in impotent confusion. Some of the heavier fish, too, after their jump may be seen to come down with portentous skelp on top of the retaining wall of the salmon-run in mid-stream, thence—apparently with “wind bagged”—to be ignominiously hurried back into the deep pool from which they have but the moment before hurled themselves. The general effect of the spectacle is as if one watched



Page 154

an endless kind of finny Grand National Steeplechase; one grows dizzy with the constant rise and fall of innumerable fish over the big jump, and it is almost a relief to turn and watch the bailiffs with their landing-nets lift from the shallow, rushing water at the cauld-side fish after fish, which they carry up and carefully put in the smooth water at top of the cauld. How many hundreds of salmon one may thus see in the course of a couple of hours, on a day when the river is in spate too heavy for the fish to succeed in ascending the cauld, it is impossible to estimate.

Big fish do not seem to have been so common in olden days as they are now. Mr. Scrope mentions that in all his twenty years' experience he never caught one above 30 lbs. weight, and very few above 20 lbs. Fish of that size are common now almost as sparrows in a London street, more especially in the lower stretches of Tweed. Thirty pounds hardly excites remark, and salmon up to 40 lbs. or over are caught with fly nearly every autumn. Much larger fish, too, have been taken of recent years; one of 57 lbs. was landed in 1873, one of 57-1/2 lbs. in 1886, and various fish of over 50 lbs. weight at later dates, whilst in December 1907 a dead fish of 60 lbs. was found in Mertoun Water.

Then there was that giant fish lost near Dryburgh by Colonel Haig of Bemersyde, "perhaps the greatest salmon ever hooked in Tweed," as Sir Herbert Maxwell remarks in his *Story of the Tweed*. Lost fish are proverbially the largest fish, but in this instance it was not the fisher who boasted of the weight. Late one evening, fishing in the Haly Weil, the Colonel got fast in something heavy which, resistless as fate, bored steadily down the river a full half mile to the Tod Holes in Dryburgh Water. Here, heavy and sullen, and never showing himself, he ploughed slowly about, and Colonel Haig, already overdue at home, became impatient, believing that he must have foul-hooked a moderate-sized fish. Darkness was fast coming on, and at last the Colonel told his attendant to wade in and try to net the fish.

"He's that muckle I cannot get him in, sir," cried the lad after a time.

But the Colonel could not wait.

"Nonsense," he said. "Get his head in. I can't stop here all night."

Then came the not uncommon result of trying to net a big fish in an uncertain light; the rim of the net fouled the gut cast, and away went the fish. It would spoil the story not to tell the rest of it in Sir Herbert Maxwell's own words.

"The Colonel did not realise the magnitude of his disaster until two or three weeks later, when he happened to be waiting for a train at St. Boswells Station. The porter came to him and said:



“Hae ye ony mind, Colonel, o’ yon big fush ye slippit in the Tod Holes yon nicht?”

“Oh, I mind him well,” replied the Colonel; ‘a good lump of a fish he was, I believe, but I never saw him rightly.’



Page 155

“‘Ay,’ said the other dryly; ‘yon wad be the biggest sawmon that ever cam oot o’ the water o’ Tweed, I’m thinking.’

“‘Why, what do you know about him?’ asked the Colonel.

“‘Oh, I ken fine aboot the ae half o’ him, ony way,’ replied the porter. ‘Ye see, there was twa lads clappit amang the trees below the Wallace statue forenenst ye, waiting till it was dark to set a cairn net, ye ken. Weel, didna they see you coming down the water taigled wi’ a fish? And when ye cam to the Tod Holes, they saw ye loss him, and they got a visee o’ the water he made coming into the east bank, ye ken. There’s a wee bit cairn there, ye ken, wi’ a piece lound water ahint it, where they jaloused the fish wad rest himsel a wee. Weel, they waited till it was mirk night, and then they jist whuppit the net round him, and they sune had him oot. He was that big he wadna gang into the bag they had wi’ them; so they cuttit him in twa halves; and the tae half they brocht to the station here to gang by rail to Embro’. Weel, if the tither half was as big, yon fish bud to be seeventy pund weight; for the half o’ him I weighed mysel, and it was better nor thirty-five pund. Ay, a gran’ kipper!’”

Yet occasionally, in olden days, a salmon big as Tam Purdie’s muckle kipper was got by rod and line. In 1815 Rob Kerss, the famous “Rob o’ the Trows,” hooked a leviathan in Makerstoun Water—the biggest fish, he said, that ever he saw; so big that it took even so great a master as Rob hours to land, and left him “clean dune oot.” At last the fish lay, a magnificent monster, stretched on the shingle. With aching arms but thankful heart, Rob moved away a trifle to lift a stone wherewith to smite his captive over the head. And with that, Rob’s back being partly turned, from the tail of his eye he saw the salmon give a wammlie. In novels, it is usually “but the work of a moment” for the hero to turn and perform some noted feat. Here, alas! it was different. It was but the work of a moment, certainly, for Rob to turn, and to jump on the huge salmon. But there all resemblance to the typical hero ceased, for the line fouled his foot, and broke as it tripped him up; and before the fisherman knew where he was, he and the salmon were struggling together in deep water. It was only Rob that came out. *Sic transit*. Trust not a fish till the bag closes on him.

THE GHOST THAT DANCED AT JETHART

Six centuries before Edward the Peacemaker reigned over Britain, the people of Scotland knew the blessing of having for a King one who was known as “The King of Peace.”



Page 156

Alexander the Third was a child of eight when he inherited the Scottish crown, and was only two years older when he married the Princess Margaret, eldest daughter of Henry the Third of England. Even in his early boyhood the young King displayed a wisdom, an energy, and a forcefulness in his management of affairs that marked him for a great ruler, and made his royal father-in-law's fond vision of gradually gaining such an ascendancy over Scotland, that he might in time be able to claim that kingdom as an appanage of England, fade altogether away. Alexander had only recently come of age when he had to defend his country against her old enemies, the Norsemen, and his complete victory was a triumph for him and for his people. Nineteen years later, his only daughter, Margaret, married Eric, King of Norway, and the Scots saw peace for them and for their children smiling on them from every side. But if prosperity as a monarch was his, misfortune overshadowed King Alexander's private life. His wife died; his children died. His eldest son, born at Jedburgh, and married, as a lad, to a daughter of the Count of Flanders, died childless. His daughter, the young Queen of Norway, died the year after her marriage, leaving behind her the baby who has come down to us, even through chilly history, as a pitiful little figure, known as "The Maid of Norway."

In 1285 King Alexander was wifeless and childless, and the heir to the Scottish crown was his two-year-old grandchild in "Norroway ower the faem."

In the eyes of all his people the King's duty was plain. He was only forty-four, a brilliant *parti* for the daughter of any royal or noble house, and the Scots wished a man, not a maid, to rule over them. He must, obviously, marry again. Joleta, also called Yolande, daughter of the Count de Dreux, and a descendant of the Kings of France, was his chosen bride. She was of surpassing fairness, and even most of those who had harboured scruples with regard to the match, because the maid had been destined for a nunnery, forgot such scruples when they looked upon her beauty.

On All Saints' Day, 1285, the wedding—a more brilliant function than anything that had ever before been held in Scotland—was celebrated in Jedburgh Abbey. The little grey town on the Jed was packed with Scottish and French nobles and their retinues. Few were the noble houses that were not there represented, and the monks of Beauvais—the black-cloaked Augustinian friars from St. Quentin's Abbey—who held rule at the Abbey of Jedburgh in those days, must have had their ears gladdened by the constant sound of the French tongue coming from seigneur, squire, and page-boy who passed them on the causeway.



Page 157

There was nothing wanting in pomp or in splendour at the royal wedding. The trees were shedding their leaves, the bracken and the heather on the moors were brown, and winds that swept across the Carter Bar and down from the Cheviots had a winter nip in them; but indoors there was warmth enough, and all the gorgeousness and feasting and merrymaking that the most exacting of guests could desire for the marriage of a great king. The banquet after the wedding was followed by a masque. Musicians ushered into the banqueting hall of the castle a gorgeously attired procession of dancers, many of them armed men. It was a radiant scene for the bright eyes of Queen Yolande. Lights flashed on swords and on armour, and on the sumptuous trappings and brilliant-coloured attire of lords and of ladies, for courts in those days looked like hedges of sweet-peas in the summer sun. The musicians played their best, the guests mingled gaily with the dancing mummers, and then, suddenly, above all the sounds of music and of revel, there arose a cry, a woman's cry, shrill and full of fear. What was that grisly figure that appeared amongst the dancers?—a grinning skeleton—a dancing Death. No masquer this, but a grim messenger from the Shades, bringing dire warning to one, at least, of that gay company. As it had come, so it vanished, but all the gaiety had gone from the merry throng. The ill-omened dancer had laid a chilly hand on the heart of many a wedding guest.

There were some who said it was a monkish trick, contrived for his own ends by one of the brethren from Beauvais, but, less than six months later, all Scotland believed that the skeleton masquer at Jedburgh had, indeed, come to warn an unfortunate land of its approaching doom.

On a dark March night of 1286, King Alexander rode along the rough cliff path between Burntisland and Kinghorn on a horse that stumbled in the darkness, and in the morning, on the rocks far down below, the grey waves lapped against the ashen dead face of a mighty king.

Not only was the fair Queen Yolande a widow. Scotland was widowed indeed. For long years thereafter she was to be a battlefield for fiercely contending nations, and if the ghost that danced at Jethart was truly a portent of the death of the King of Peace, it also was a portent of the death of many a gallant warrior and of much grievous spilling of innocent blood in the woeful years to come.

A MAN HUNT IN 1813

It was a clear, crisp, sunny day, early in March 1813, that the laird of Wauchope was riding into Hawick. A little snow still lay on the crest of Cheviot and on some of the foothills, and a smirr of hoar-frost silvered the turf by the roadside; but the sun was bright—strong to overcome frost and snow—and in it the leaves that still clung to the beech hedges shone like burnished copper.



Page 158

Walter Scott of Wauchope was one of the most popular men in Liddesdale. He it was who had, by his own exertions, raised the Light Company of Roxburghshire Volunteers, a band of nearly a hundred men of fine physique and first-rate horsemanship, whose bearing was the admiration of everyone when the laird marched them into Hawick on that momentous night in 1804 when “Boney” was supposed to have landed on Scottish shores. Mr. Scott’s services had not been forgotten. A captain’s commission in the 1st Regiment of Roxburgh Local Militia now belonged to him, and he squared his shoulders with an air and gave the military salute to those on the road with whom he exchanged greetings.

It was a morning for only peace and goodwill to be abroad, and the laird rode on in cheerful frame, and put his horse to a canter along the turf. But as he cantered, the good steed’s ears suddenly went back, he plunged, swerved, and answered his master’s voice and heels by standing stock-still, staring affrightedly at what at first, to his rider, seemed a mere limp, inanimate bundle of old clothing lying half in, half out of the ditch. In a moment the laird was standing beside the mysterious heap, and found an old, white-haired man, grievously mishandled, with blood on his face, blood dabbling the dead leaves in the ditch, blood on the turf where the pure hoar-frost had lain. There was but little life left in him, and it was not easy for him to explain his sorry plight when the words came only with hard-fought breathing, hoarse and low.

“She will pe a pedlar,” he said, “an’ she will haf peen robbed and murdered.... Och, so little she will pe hafing, and now all gone.... Ochone, ochone!” Gently the laird put his questions to the dying man. The robbery had been committed only a short time before. The assailant was a big man—“a fery big man”—an Irishman, and he could not have gone far. Up again on his wondering steed sprang the laird, and at steeplechase pace rode on. Near Birney-knowe he came in sight of his quarry, a powerful six-footer, but carrying too much flesh to do more than a good sprint without failing. In a neighbouring field a ploughman with his pair of horses was turning up the rich brown loam. “Hup, Jess! Woa-*hi*, Chairlie!” sounded his cheerful voice from over the dyke, above the jingle of his horses’ harness as they turned at the head-rig with their greedy following of screaming, white-winged gulls.

“*Hi!* Will Little!” shouted the laird. “Leave the plough, lad! There’s murder afoot the day! Come and help catch the murderer!”



Page 159

William Little, a handsome fellow of six feet, clean built and athletic, required but little explanation. In two minutes his pair was unyoked and tied to the beam of the plough, his coat off and cast at the back of the dyke, and as sturdy a pair of legs as any in Liddesdale had joined in the chase. The robber had not failed to hear the laird's shouts, and as Little unyoked his horses, he ran on, adding still more to the distance that already separated him from his pursuers. Clearly his best chance was to leave the high-road and get on to ground where it was impossible, or, at least, most unlikely, that a mounted man could follow him. Through hedges he clambered, vaulted dry stone dykes, leapt ditches, made somewhat heavy weather over the plough, but got away on rough turf up the hillside. The morning wore on, and both hunters and hunted wished that the sun had shone less warmly on that March day. On a steep part of High Tofts Hill, however, the chase at last came to an end. The steep face of the hill was more than the laird's good steed could manage, though nobly, in response to his call, did it do its best. He had to turn back and come round by a part where the ascent was less steep, while Little, hot but undaunted, went on with the chase alone. The robber's extra weight was telling on him, and he was not in the hard training of the young Border farmer. The hill pumped him, he stumbled as he ran, and, as Little gained on him yard by yard, he saw that he could run no longer, but must come to bay. He turned round and faced his pursuer, breathing hard, and with all his might tugging at a big butcher's knife in his pocket. Ordinarily the knife came easily to his hand, but he had forgotten that the pocket was stuffed with articles stolen from the old pedlar. The knife was hopelessly jammed, and Little was almost upon him. A large, sharp-pointed stone stuck out of the ground at his feet. "*Keep off!*" he yelled to the ploughman. "Hands off! or I'll scatter your brains!" And as he threatened, he stooped to seize the stone and make good his threat. But the Fates that day had signed the Irish villain's death-warrant. The good Border earth clung to the stone, refusing to let it go. With all his force he tugged and tugged, but ere the earth could give way, Little had thrown himself upon him, and when Mr. Scott appeared over the brow of the hill, the sturdy farmer was still holding his own with a kicking, biting, struggling, cursing ruffian who would have had no compunction in adding another to his list of victims that day. Between them, Little and the laird tied their captive's hands behind his back with part of the bridle reins, and walked him back to Kirkton. There help was sent to the old Highlander, but no doctor could undo the ill that had been wrought him, and he died a few days later. In one of the Kirkton farm-carts the old man's murderer was conveyed to Hawick, and from thence to Jedburgh jail. It was too much a case of "hot trod" for him to do anything but plead guilty, and he hung on a gallows at Jedburgh, as many a worthier man had done in earlier days. The laird lived for more than twenty years after his man hunt on that March day in 1813, and his worthy fellow-huntsman had no cause to forget his morning's work, for he was presented with a baton and relieved from paying taxes for the rest of his natural life.



Page 160

LADY STAIR'S DAUGHTER

The story of the Bride of Lammermoor is one that all the world knows, but how many are there who realise that the tragedy which Sir Walter Scott's genius has given to the world is in truth one of the annals of a noble Scottish family? Possibly among all the "old, unhappy, far-off things" there is none more pitiful than the tale of the Earl of Stair's daughter and her luckless lover, Lord Rutherford.

They were never laggards either in love or in war, those Border Rutherfurds. "A stout champion," according to contemporary history, was Colonel Andrew Rutherford, Governor of Dunkirk, and afterwards of Tangier, ennobled for his doughty deeds in foreign lands under the title of Earl of Teviot, and when, in 1664, he was slain by the Moors, his distant relative, Lord Rutherford, inherited most of his fortune. Presumably the fortune was not great, and even in the old reiving days no Rutherford ever rolled in wealth. Moreover, Lord Stair was a staunch Whig, and Rutherford an ardent Jacobite, and so it was that when the young lord became a suitor for the hand of Janet Dalrymple, daughter of that famous lawyer, James Dalrymple, first Lord Stair, neither her father nor her mother smiled on his suit.

Sir James Dalrymple was made a baronet in the same year that Andrew Rutherford got his title, and both he and his wife, Dame Margaret, a daughter of Ross of Balniel, were ambitious folk. The worldly success in life of her husband and of all her family was what Lady Stair constantly schemed and planned and worked for. A clever, hard, worldly woman, with a witty and unsparing tongue, was Lady Stair, but obviously she was not a popular member of the society in which she lived, and when her plans succeeded in spite of all obstacles, there were many who were ready to say that she belonged to the blackest sisterhood of her day, and that to be "worried at the stake" and burned would only be the fate that she deserved.

Lady Stair's daughter was singularly unlike the mother who bore her, for the beautiful Janet Dalrymple was a gentle, shrinking, highly strung girl, who was like wax in the hands of one who ruled her household with a rod of iron. As a child her will had always had to bend to her mother's. Scarcely had she dared to hold an opinion on anything save under her mother's direction, and so when it came about that the tricky god of love made her give her heart passionately and utterly to a man of whom her parents disapproved, poor Janet Dalrymple must have felt as though she were the victim of a sort of moral earthquake. Naturally she could see no reason why the man who in her eyes was peerless was not approved by her parents. Surely his politics did not matter. He had money enough for all their needs, and he would make her the Lady Rutherford; and, besides, what more could they want than just this—that he loved her and she loved him, and they would love each other until death—and after it.



Page 161

These reasons given to a woman of Lady Stair's type were scarcely likely to be listened to with much patience, and Janet Dalrymple and Lord Rutherford soon saw that all their love-making must be done under the rose, and that they must wait as best they could for the obdurate parents to change their minds. Together they broke a gold coin, of which each wore a half, and solemnly called upon God to witness them plighting their troth, and together imprecated dreadful evils upon the one who should prove faithless. Doubtless Lady Stair was too clever a woman not to have a shrewd suspicion that her daughter's attachment to Lord Rutherford was something more than a mere piece of girlish sentiment; but if she did know, the knowledge did not overburden her. Obviously another suitor must be provided without loss of time. The expulsive power of a new affection must promptly be tried on the love-sick girl, whose pale face was in itself enough to betray the condition of her heart.

To Lord Stair belonged the credit of finding one who was approved of by Lady Stair as an entirely suitable match. David Dunbar, younger, of Baldoon in Wigtonshire, a solid young man with a good, solid fortune, was the son-in-law of their choice; and Lady Stair found no difficulty in getting him to see that her beautiful daughter was undoubtedly the right wife for him.

Contemporary history furnishes us with no description of Andrew, Lord Rutherford, but we learn from the Edinburgh printer who furnished the Dunbar family with an enthusiastic elegy on the death of David Dunbar of Baldoon that apparently he was a little red-faced man, ardently keen about agricultural pursuits, and deeply interested in the breeding of cattle and horses. Moreover, he was a student, well versed in modern history and in architecture, and with a good head for arithmetic (did he add up the figures of the fortune of Janet Dalrymple entirely to his own satisfaction?), and he had the additional amazing distinction chronicled by his eulogising biographer—

“He learned the French, be't spoken to his praise,
In very little more than forty days.”

It is impossible to tell how much of the love story of the girl whom he proposed to make his wife was known to young Baldoon. Possibly he had had it lightly sketched to him by Lady Stair's skilled hand, as a mere girlish fancy, likely to be very soon past and already entirely on the wane. In any case, Baldoon evidently saw no more difficulties in the way of his nuptials than did Lord and Lady Stair. The fact that the bride “canna thole the man” must ever be a purely secondary consideration in such matrimonial arrangements. Meantime the unhappy bride-elect had the scheme laid before her, and in spite of her sobbing protests, was commanded to conform to the wishes of her parents.



Page 162

The news of Lady Stair's triumph was not long in coming to Lord Rutherford's ears, and he at once wrote to Janet Dalrymple to remind her that she was pledged to him by everything that they both considered holy. No reply came from the unhappy girl, but a letter from Lady Stair informed the distracted lover that her daughter was fully sensible of the grave fault of which she had been guilty in entering into an engagement without the sanction of her parents, and that she now retracted her vows, and was about to give her hand to Mr. David Dunbar of Baldoon. Such an answer, written by the mother of his betrothed, and not by the girl herself, was scarcely likely to be received with meekness by one of the Rutherfurds of that ilk. Lord Rutherford demanded an interview with Janet Dalrymple, and absolutely declined to accept any reply that did not come to him from her own lips. It was a struggle between a high-spirited, determined man, deeply in love with her that he strove for, and a woman whose heart was as hard as her brain was keen, and who did not scruple to use any means, fair or foul, by which to gain her own ends. The lion and the snake are unequal combatants, and in this case the lion was worsted indeed. Lady Stair granted the interview, but took care that not for one moment was her daughter permitted to be alone with her lover. Lord Rutherford had many arguments that he had deemed unanswerable, but the lady's nimble wits and ready tongue found an answer for each one.

It must have been a strange scene that took place that day in the old mansion of Carsecreugh. The girl herself was present, but, had the tales of Lady Stair's dealings with the Evil One been true, she could not have substituted for her beautiful, happy daughter any witch-made thing that looked more lifeless than the poor, white-faced creature that sat with silent lips and down-cast eyes, terror-ridden, broken-hearted.

With every impassioned word he spoke Rutherford hoped to bring some sign of life to her, to glean a look from her eyes that showed that her love was still his, but he pled in vain. As for his arguments, Lady Stair could quote Scripture with any minister in the land, and the texts she hurled at him were fearful missiles for one who had not the book of Numbers at his fingers' ends.

"If a woman vow unto the Lord, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth; and her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the Lord shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her."

So quoted the pitiless voice. Even the devil, they say, can quote Scripture for his own ends. Finally, the mother, again telling Rutherford that her daughter acknowledged the wrongness of her conduct and desired to hold no further intercourse with him, turned to the white, marble creature, who seemed to hear nothing, to understand nothing, and commanded her to restore the broken half of the golden coin to him who had bestowed

it. For the fraction of a second her icy fingers touched Lord Rutherford's, and yet she spoke no word.



Page 163

To the fiery Borderer it was an insupportable situation. His temper went. The broken coin was cast to the ground, and with furious words he poured out on Lady Stair all his long pent-up anger. Then, turning to her who, so short a time before, had been all the world to him, he cast on her the curse, "For you, madam, you will be a world's wonder," and strode from the room, his face ablaze with wrath, black murder in his heart. Scotland was no longer a friendly home for Andrew, Lord Rutherford. He went abroad, and died there sixteen years later.

Meantime the preparations for the marriage of young Baldoon with Lord Stair's daughter went on apace. The bride showed no active dislike to the bridegroom her parents had provided, but behaved as a mere lay figure on which wedding garments were fitted, and which received with cold unresponsiveness all the attentions of the man who was to be her husband. When the wedding day—August 24th, 1669—arrived, a large assemblage of relations and friends of both bride and bridegroom mustered at Carsecreugh. And still the white-faced lay figure mechanically went through all that was required of her, received the compliments and jests of the company with chill politeness, but with never a smile—a bride of marble, with a heart that had turned to stone. She rode pillion to church behind a young brother who afterwards said that the hand which lay on his as she held her arm round his waist was "cold and damp as marble." "Full of his new dress and the part he acted in the procession, the circumstance, which he long afterwards remembered with bitter sorrow and compunction, made no impression on him at the time."

Great were the festivities that Lord and Lady Stair had prepared for the wedding of their daughter with so eligible a suitor as the young laird of Baldoon, and when the ceremony in the church was over, there were great doings at Carsecreugh. Baldoon must either have been a very stupid man or a wilfully blind one, for his bride of snow seemed to look on everything that took place with vacant, unseeing, unsmiling eyes, and spoke and acted as one in a dream.

In the evening there was a dance. One can see the bright lights, the gaily-coloured wedding garments of the festive company, hear the sound of clarinet and of fiddle gaily jigging out country dances, and the loud hum of talk and laughter of the many guests. Baldoon, a proud husband, tricked out in all the finery of a bridegroom of that day, leads out his bride, the beautiful Janet, in her white bridal robe. Can he not feel the clammy chill of the little hand he takes in his? Why does he not understand the piteous look in the eyes of the girl whose feet are treading so gay a measure? No trapped bird with broken wing was ever more pitiful.

While the guests still were making merry, the bride and her bridesmaids went up to the bridal chamber. The virgins who prepared Iphigenia for her sacrifice had a task no less terrible. Then, amidst the animal jocularities that were looked on as wit in that day, the bridegroom followed, and the best man locked the door on the married pair and put the key in his pocket.



Page 164

The dance went gaily on, but not for long. High above the sound of the violins, the laughter that grew more unlicensed as the night wore on, the sound of voices, the thud of feet, the tap of heels and rustle of brocades on a polished floor, came terrible shrieks and groans that made the heart of each wedding guest stand still. There could be no doubt from which room they came, and the panic-struck company dashed upstairs like a breakaway mob of cattle. The best man, livid-faced and with a shaking hand, unlocked the door, and on the threshold stumbled over the body of the bridegroom, terribly wounded and streaming with blood. At first they could see no bride, and then, in the corner of the wide chimney, they found her crouching, with no covering but her shift, and that dabbled with gore.

“She sat there grinning at them, mopping and mowing,” so says Sir Walter Scott—“in a word, absolutely insane.”

“Tak’ up your bonny bridegroom!” she screamed, with hysterical laughter, and pointed mockingly at what seemed to be the corpse of young Baldoon.

Sick in body she was, as well as sick in mind, and on September 12th, 1669, a little over a fortnight from the day she was married, the Bride of Baldoon died.

David Dunbar of Baldoon recovered from his wounds, but during the thirteen years that remained for him to live, he declined to help the curious to elucidate the mystery of his attempted murder. In the words of Sir Walter Scott: “If a lady, he said, asked him any question upon the subject, he would neither answer her nor speak to her again while he lived; if a gentleman, he would consider it as a mortal affront, and demand satisfaction as having received such.”

Many, of course, were the explanations given by the general public as to the real happenings on that tragic wedding-night. The majority inclined to think that the bride herself, crazed by grief at the loss of her lover, tried to kill her husband rather than be his wife in anything save legal formality. Others swore that the assailant was none other than the discarded lover, and that Lord Rutherford, having left Baldoon for dead, had escaped by the chimney where the unfortunate bride was crouching. But in those days there was bound to be yet another factor brought into the tale. Witches were held responsible for many a crime in Scotland in the seventeenth century, and of course Lord Stair’s “auld witch wife” was adjudged guilty of the whole tragedy. In a sense, doubtless, so she was, but the description given by the credulous of how, on her marriage night, Janet Dalrymple was “harled” through the house by evil spirits in such a way as to cause her death shortly afterwards, is slightly at variance with the actual facts. Yet others there were who said that she who had sworn solemnly by all that was holy to keep her plighted troth with Andrew Rutherford, had obviously handed herself over, body and soul, to Satan when the troth was broken, and that he who would have slain David Dunbar was the Evil One himself.



Page 165

“He threw the bridegroom from the nuptial bed,
Into the chimney did so his rival maul,
His bruised bones ne'er were cured but by the fall.”

The “fall” referred to by this scurrilous lampoon, written by Sir William Hamilton, a bitter enemy of Lord Stair, was the accident by which Dunbar of Baldoon met his death. While riding from Leith to Holyrood on March 27, 1682, his horse fell with him. His injuries proved fatal, and he died next day, and was buried in Holyrood Chapel.

Of the other actors in the tragedy there is little to tell. That great and able lawyer, Viscount Stair, has left behind him permanent record of the ability that brought him his title. For fifty years his wife and he lived together, and history tells us that “they were tenderly attached to the last.” A witty, brilliant, worldly woman, she had the power of keeping the love of her husband fresh and living to the very end. She it was who is reported by a local historian, whose standard possibly may not have been of the very highest, to have made “one of the best puns extant.” “Bluidy Clavers” was Sheriff of Wigtown in her day, and in her presence he dared to inveigh against one who was still the idol of Presbyterian Whigs, John Knox.

“Why are you so severe on the character of John Knox?” asked the Lady Stair. “You are both reformers: he gained his point by clavers; you attempt to gain yours by knocks.”

When the lady died, in the year 1692, she left an order regarding the disposal of her body which entirely confirmed the popular belief that, early in life, she had bargained with the Evil One for the worldly success of herself and her descendants, and had paid her soul as price.

She asked that her body might not be buried underground, but that the coffin containing her should be stood upright in the family vault of Kirkliston. While she remained so placed, she said, the Dalrymples should flourish. But woe betide the line when that coffin should be moved and laid on common earth as those of common people. Her orders were carried out. Does she, a dismal sentry, keep guard there still? And what sort of a Purgatory has her poor soul had to pass through to atone for the cruel murder of the child she bore?