



The True Witness

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LORD DACRE OF GILSLAND;
OR,
THE RISING IN THE NORTH.
AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ELIZABETH.
By E. M. Stewart.

CHAPTER XXI.—(CONTINUED.)

Elizabeth had already received the official despatches of Lord Hunsdon, detailing the discomfiture of Leonard Dacre, and her manner towards Morden was gracious and even kind.
"What will you, our faithful servant?" she said, as she extended her hand to him to kiss, "how comes it that my Lord of Hunsdon made not you the bearer of his despatches?"
"Alas, gracious Sovereign!" said Lord Morden, "it is upon an errand of mercy that my good Lord Hunsdon has spared me from my post to kneel at the feet of your Grace."
"An errand of mercy!" said Elizabeth; "right glad are we to hear the name of mercy on the lip of a true subject. Alas, we may be weak, foolish even in our compassion, as my Lord of Burleigh told us even now; but oh, that we could infuse into the spirits of the most faithful among our servants some touch of compassion which might make them bear with our own weakness. Alas, alas! shall we destroy our own sister, the unhappy Mary? Albeit, she did plot against our life, shall we return evil for evil?"
"Thus it is with your Grace," said Cecil, "duty towards your subjects is sacrificed to a false principle of mercy; I had hoped that the petition of your loyal servants of the Commons might have moved you to the rendering of justice to the Queen of Scots. It were well if the pious suggestion of Sir James Croft were acted upon, and that we daily implore Heaven to move the heart of your Grace to the rendering of justice."
"It were well indeed," remarked Leicester. "Sir James is a godly man, replete with the unction of the Spirit."
"Nay, we doubt it not," cried Elizabeth, "but oh, my Lords, ye put our womanly feelings too suddenly upon too hard a task; we will commend ourselves that we be in this matter of our unhappy cousin directed by the Spirit; and in the meantime let us even solace our poor heart, if it may be, by yielding pardon to some delinquent at the request of our good servant of Morden. Speak our faithful Lord; for whom seek ye mercy at our hands?"
"For the damsel of Grass Street, madam, for the unhappy Gertrude Harding," said Lord Morden, who had risen not from his knees during the foregoing conversation.

At that name Elizabeth started, and her lip became for a moment very pale, while her eye fell with a lynx-like keenness upon the face of Lord Leicester; that perfect master of dissimulation, however, quailed not under the glance; the color of the Queen returned, she remained for some minutes apparently lost in thought, then she said:
"Thy request is a bold one, young Lord, for fragment have been the treasons of that damsel; but we forget not that there is in her some touches of a noble spirit, we forget not that service which she rendered to ourselves, and which we may even the more esteem, that the foolish maiden was disconcerted with our rule. We would fain believe that her folly has had its lessons, and that she will disdain to be disloyal, when we have spared her forfeit life; you shall have an order under our own hand, young man, for the damsel's release; but tell her to sin against her Queen no more, for by Heaven's truth we will not pardon her again!"
"Most gracious and beneficent of Sovereigns," said Lord Morden, kissing in a kind of rapture the again extended hand of Elizabeth; "I stake my soul on Gertrude's future truth."
But here Lord Burleigh broke in with a stronger expression of discontent than he in general manifested towards any measure of his mistress upon which she seemed to be resolved.
"Does your Grace mean to spare that ungrateful maiden?—she, who is believed to have screened the two false Earls from your royal wrath, by a timely warning that their treason was discovered?—she, who is known to have been in company with Leonard Dacre himself, the most audacious of traitors?—Your Grace would not spare the damsel? It cannot be!"

"Yet it is," said Elizabeth, sharply, "and we would commend our good Lord Treasurer to forbear such severe comments upon a point where we are resolved."
That evening a warrant for the unconditional release of Gertrude Harding was delivered to Lord Morden, and that evening did he set out on his return to Carlisle, transported by his unexpected success.
He was not, however, able to accomplish his journey with all the celerity that he wished; for as Master Williams had prognosticated on the preceding evening there had been a fall of snow, which, though in London so slight as scarcely to have excited Lord Morden's attention, had made the country roads difficult, and in some places dangerous.
This snow storm had also delayed Lucy Fenton and her companions, and the more expeditions travelling of Lord Morden threw him into their company before they reached Carlisle. His name meeting the ears of Lucy from one of his attendants in a hostel, where the young nobleman had stopped for refreshment, she immediately made herself known to him, and in company with her, her lover, and her father, did Lord Morden perform the remainder of his journey.
Oh, with what a palpitating heart did Lucy proceed with Lord Morden and Willoughton to the Castle of Carlisle, immediately on their arrival in that city. It was about mid-day, a wintry day with not a ray of sunshine to brighten the landscape, half veiled as it was by a covering of snow.
Lord Morden and his friends were immediately admitted to the presence of Lord Scrope, who received them courteously, and regretted that it was his office to dispense the rigors of the law. Lucy entreated permission to visit Gertrude in her prison, but her heart sunk, and she leaned heavily on the arm of her lover as they traversed the stone passages and the dreary vaults.
Once Lord Morden, who preceded them, turned, and, pointing with an agonized countenance to the moisture which hung upon the walls, he exclaimed: "Has she borne this?"
"Dear Lucy, be advised," said Willoughton. "Do not persist in descending to these dismal dungeons. Lord Morden and I will go alone and soon place our poor Gertrude in your arms."
"She has borne the damps and the cold of these dwellings night and day," said Lucy, "and cannot I bear once to descend to them for her sake?"
The key of the dungeon grated harshly in the lock, but there was no sound within as if the noise at that unusual hour had excited the attention of the captive. The door was thrown open, and the sickly array of the lamp gleamed upon the stone walls and the heap of straw, the only bed vouchsafed to the unhappy prisoner. A figure was stretched out, with the face concealed upon that miserable couch; a profusion of golden hair was scattered loosely over the black garments.
A piercing shriek broke from the lips of Lucy as she sprung forwards and looked that extended figure in her arms. Neither her voice nor touch, however, aroused the poor sufferer. Had she ceased to suffer? Her head fell helplessly backwards, and her eyes, those sunny hazel eyes, were their sweet light extinguished forever? Cold, cold as marble were the beautiful lips, which Lucy kissed in all the frenzy of despair, and the hand, which was clasped by the not less agonized Lord Morden. But might not that well be? Were not their own frames already chilled by the vapors of that dismal cell?—Is she dead, quite dead, or does she only swoon?

CHAPTER XXII.
Macbeth.—Both of you.
Know Banquo was your enemy.
Murderer.—True, my Lord.
Macbeth.—So he is mine, and in such bloody distance that every minute of his being thrusts Against my nearest of life. And though I could, With barefaced power, sweep him from my sight, And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not, For certain friends, that are both his and mine, Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall, Whom I myself struck down; and thence it is That I to your assistance do make love, Masking the business from the common eye, For sundry weighty reasons.

"And in heart and soul do I agree with you, my friend," said Sir Drue Drury; "but see how the sin would recoil on our own heads were we wrought upon to do this evil deed. Were the royal cousin of our mistress slain—the Queen of Scots slain by our hands—would not a severe justice call upon Elizabeth to avenge the blood of Mary upon their heads by whom it was split. Must not the Queen of England take cognizance of and punish a treachery so foul?" "Brother, brother," continued Sir Drue, lowering his voice to a whisper, while his face grew yet paler, and his eyes full of horror were fixed upon those of his companion, "a treachery, foul treachery to us lurks here. She who is most guilty in thought and in deed would remain at our cost forever guiltless in repute. Elizabeth would have us in secret murder the Queen of Scots, but in public would she condemn us for that murder."
"Good luck! good luck!" said Sir Amias, "can woman's heart be the abiding place of such a black deceit. See here, my friend, how in a letter of a date but briefly before this of the Secretary she calleth me 'her dear and faithful Paulet,' and promises me rewards without an end."
"Aye, and we see now, brother, how thou wast to purchase those rewards," said Sir Drue; "but I tell thee, Paulet, wert thou the man to dip thy hand in Mary's blood, the reward of Elizabeth would be to hang thee like a dog."
"So indeed do I believe," answered Sir Amias, "and see but here, my good brother, mark the cunning of deceit that is in this letter of the Secretary. We may not doubt, say they, of Mary's guilt after her trial, if her trial have condemned the Queen of Scots, in the name of that trial let her suffer; it were even to do our mistress herself a foul wrong, to shed the blood of her captive without law or warrant, assuredly would the world think that she suffered in secret, because in truth she merited not to suffer at all. Oh, may the Lord enlighten the wicked hearts of men! If these are the designs of those whom He sets in the high places, and whose souls He hath graced with a knowledge of the truth, may we not indeed pity the fallings of that poor Princess whose spirit is yet darkened by the delusions of Popistry?"
"We may so, indeed," answered Drury, "and night and day implore the Lord to enlighten that darkness. But see thou, good Paulet," he added, returning to the subject of the letter, "it behoves us at once to answer this missive."
"I shall do so," replied Paulet, "and state in all truth and honesty why, for once, I disobey the commands of her Grace, but verily the injunctions of God are high, even above our duties to princes."
"And say thou, my brother," exclaimed Sir Drue, "that in heart, even is my opinion like thine own."

It was a few days after this conversation at Fotheringay that Queen Elizabeth sat alone in her closet at Whitehall. Her eyes were fixed upon the blazing fire, but it would have been difficult to define the varying expression of her countenance.—The door opened, and her newly appointed Secretary, Davison, stood before her. The Queen looked up hastily.
"Oh, Davison, 'tis well," she exclaimed, "what hast thou done with that commission for the execution of the unhappy Queen of Scots, which we signed a few days since?"
"Gracious madam," answered the Secretary, "the great seal is already appended to that commission."
"Already?" said Elizabeth, with an air of surprise.
"Nay, thou needest not have made such haste."
"May it please your Grace," answered Davison, "it was not for me, on a matter of such import, to dally with your Majesty's commands."
"Well, well," replied Elizabeth, "it matters not, but—" and she spoke an ambiguous smile parted her lips—"Davison, our good Davison, we had a dream last night; we dreamed that our heart smote us that our cousin was no more, and that we punished thee as the cause of her death."
"Royal Lady," exclaimed Davison, starting, while his face grew pale at the danger he surmised, "if your resolution has changed, will you not say so, do you yet design the execution of that commission against the Queen of Scots?"
"Yes, by G—," but we like not the form of that rascally commission, of which ye are all so fond, for behold it imposes all the responsibility upon our neck. We stand forth as our kinswoman's sole destroyer."
"It is yet time for your Majesty to recall that commission," answered Davison, "if such a measure seem fitting to your royal will."
To this remark the Queen did not reply, but enquired "had no answer come from Paulet and Drury with regard to the service which she had required at their hands?"
"Gracious madam," said Davison, "they profess themselves true servants of your Majesty; their lives and their fortunes do they tender at your feet, but they protest that, for conscience sake, they cannot shed without a warrant the blood of the Scottish Queen."
Elizabeth started from her seat, and broke into a volley of oaths. "And that villain Paulet, too," she said, "that nice judging knave who stands, forsooth, upon his conscience. His squeamish conscience can even gulp it, seems, the breaking of his oath to us, his rightful mistress. Is not his name set to the bond of association; entered into by those who will defend us from the bloody designs of our cruel and ungrateful cousin? Yes, yes; but that oath can be broken by this conscience-keeping rogue, this precise and dainty fellow, when, forsooth, he wants to dip our royal hand in blood to make us seem avengeful murderers. And his companion knave, the scoundrel Drury, too, we will keep them both in our good memory for this. We will warrant them a reward for their disloyal refusal, and we may yet find a faithful servant, not troubled with such delicate conscience and such craven fears."
Davison trembled at this storm of rage, but he ventured to interpose a word in favor of Paulet and Drury.
"Consider," he says, "most royal Lady, the death of the Queen of Scots could not have been passed unnoticed by you. Her death, accomplished without a warrant, must have been by you avowed, or by you avenged. It would have suited your maiden and royal dignity to have avowed such an act, your own and as if it could have become your justice and compassion to ruin your faithful servants because they obeyed your will."
"Begone, villain," cried Elizabeth, "for I see thou art like the rest."
Davison immediately withdrew, but alarmed by the conduct of the Queen, he made it known to the Lords of the Council, who promising to screen him from blame, took upon themselves to dispatch that commission which Elizabeth had already signed. How these Lords abided by their promise, and how the unfortunate Davison was treated by the Queen after the death of Mary, the page of history will show.

But it is even here worthy of remark, that on the very morning of the Scottish Queen's execution Elizabeth expressed to Davison her surprise that the warrant had not yet been executed.
CHAPTER XXIII.
See, the whyte moone shynes on hie,
Whyter is my true love's shroude;
Whyter than the morninge skie,
Whyter than the evenyng cloude.
CHATTERTON.
The day was cheerless, a heavy wintry day; the snow which had fallen in the night and in the earlier part of the morning still lay in ridges upon the larger branches of the trees and hung about the small twigs, undisturbed either by a breath of wind or the symptoms of a thaw, while the level ground and rocky precipice were alike wrapped in an uniform covering of white.
The cheerlessness, however, of the scene without could add but little to augment the distress which prevailed in the house of Henry Willoughton. In a chamber of that house knelt Lucy Fenton, weeping by the bed of the dying Gertrude. Lord Morden and Willoughton, and old Richard Fenton were all there, for they knew that the last hour was approaching, and the stainless spirit, indeed, about to wing its flight.
Gertrude had only swooned when she was taken from her dungeon, and for some days after her removal to the house of Henry Willoughton she appeared to revive; it was the last gleam of the lamp ere its light departed forever. Her late hardships of body and mind had exhausted the delicate frame of Gertrude, and now the friends who hung over her couch knew that she must die. But the spirit of the unfortunate girl clung to its mortal dwelling. Nothing since the day of the battle had been heard of Leonard Dacre; but Gertrude was impressed with a conviction that she should see him once again—"And then, love," she whispered to Lucy, "then I shall depart in peace."
The chamber in which she lay overlooked a wide extent of country, and Gertrude would have her bed so placed that she could see the far hills through her window, over which she would never suffer the curtains to be drawn, and there she lay watching for hours for her lover's coming. The frenzy of the hope had indeed, her medical attendants said, alone supported the life of the unhappy girl so long. But now nature seemed at last to sink; the eyes, the anxious eyes which had watched so long the dazzling waste of snow, grew dim and dropped, and from time to time, as the agonized Lord Morden bent over her, he perceived her beautiful features agitated by a slight convulsion. Once, however, Gertrude looked up, and seeming all herself again, she said to Lucy Fenton: "He will come, love, he will come yet."
Then as her sweet eyes once more closed, her friends looked mournfully at each other, for they thought that the hope of the dying girl was indeed vain. The shades of the early evening were already beginning to descend over the dismal landscape, and Henry Willoughton, unable to bear any longer the still and horrible watches of the death chamber had stolen from it into the gallery from which it opened. This was a long gallery, and while one end communicated with the grand staircase, at the other a narrower flight of steps led to one of the garden entrances. As Henry slowly paced this gallery, he perceived the figures of two men cautiously advancing from the garden. He hurried towards them; but ere he could speak, the foremost of the two grasped his hand, and in his voice, though suffocated by grief, he recognized the tones of Leonard Dacre.
"Let me see her whom I have slain; let me look upon the face of Gertrude Harding."
"Oh, Dacre, I had feared that you were no more," said Willoughton.
"Would that I had been indeed no more," replied Leonard. "Oh, would that I had died ere she had known me, ere she had been mingled with my fatal, fatal schemes."
Lord Dacre had stood in the chamber of death, and what was the sorrow of those who were there assembled to the majesty of grief that was written on his brow?
A terrible torpor had seemed for the last hour to have seized upon Gertrude Harding; but the first murmured accent of his voice, the first burst of his anguish appeared to stay her spirit in its upward flight. With a strength almost supernatural, she started up, and threw her arms about his neck, exclaiming with a shriek of joy. "You have come mine own love, I know that you would come."
Lord Dacre clasped her to his heart, he kissed her cold white lips, but the light of life had vanished even in that moment from the hazel eyes, and the spirit in its brief rapture had departed.
Who shall describe the grief of Leonard Dacre—that grief that great for utterance, which was henceforth to be his soul's companion through the weary pilgrimage of a blighted existence? Forever were those last mortal accents of the being who had so loved him, that the spell even of her love had confined the gentle soul for a time to its tenement of clay—forever were those accents, those impassioned accents, of her matchless love to ring in his ears. And that face so sweet in its pale beauty, with a smile, lingering on the wan lip, will it not be forever present to his mental eye? Tenderly, cautiously, as though he feared to disturb her in a pleasant sleep, did Lord Dacre loose the form of Gertrude from his clasp. There was a sublimity of despair in his silence, which none present dared to break upon, with speech.
"Then," as they perceived, as he bent like one entranced over the body of Gertrude, that sickness which he was at last so deservingly brought—
But there were others among the foes of the hap-

as well as sorrow had been his companion, and that on his brow was a scarcely cicatrized wound. Once more did he press those icy hands to his heart to his lips; than breaking through the friends, who would have detained him, he rushed from the house and in a few minutes they beheld him riding with his head bare, and with the speed of one distracted towards those snow covered hills on which Gertrude had gazed so anxiously all day. He was followed by another horseman, the faithful Norbert, who had never left his lord from the time that he had been struck down by the robber Miles.
By that attached retainer Lucy and Willoughton afterwards discovered that Lord Dacre had been conveyed insensibly to the retreat of the poor monks at Lanercost; there his wounds had been dressed, and there he had been concealed till the day of Gertrude's death, when Norbert, whom he had sent to procure intelligence of her fate at Carlisle, had brought him word that she had been removed. It was thought, in a dying state, to the house of Willoughton. No entreaties of the good monks, no fear of danger to himself, no weakness from his scarce healed wounds, could now detain him at the abbey. Norbert would not suffer him to depart alone! and throughout that miserable night, when Lord Dacre rushed half-frantic from the house of his friend—throughout that night did his true vassal track his course, till the moment when the mind out wore the body's endurance, and he sunk from his horse overcome with wretchedness and fatigue.
Lucy Fenton and her lover never saw Lord Dacre more. Long afterwards they learned that he was living an exile in Flanders, but his retreat, said those who gave the information, profound. The greatness of his mind was wrecked, and the court and the camp were like shunned by the once gallant and ambitious Leonard Dacre. Most anxious nevertheless, again to behold that beloved friend, Henry Willoughton undertook a journey to Flanders, for the express purpose of finding his retreat; but he was studiously avoided by Lord Dacre, who seemed to fly before his friend, and all that Henry could learn in addition to the knowledge which he had already possessed, was that the unfortunate nobleman was constantly attended by Norbert. The next that Henry heard of Leonard Dacre, was that he had died in his exile.
On the night, however, after the ill-fated Gertrude was consigned to her timeless grave, Lord Morden stole from the house of Willoughton to vent upon that grave the anguish of his heart. It was an old village church yard in which rested all that now remained of the beautiful and high-souled Gertrude. The plain, solemn-looking edifice had been built in Saxon times, and many an ancient yew tree kept watch over the slumbers of the dead. It was a clear night; the moon was up, and touched with her gold lustre the grey church towers, the dark yew trees, and the glittering surface of the snow. The churchyard hung upon the side of a hill, and as Lord Morden approached it he heard the tread of horses, and perceived a man riding leisurely along a path, and holding by the rein another horse than that which he rode. The young nobleman entered the churchyard; but as he approached the grave of Gertrude he perceived that the watch was already kept. A bitter groan startled the silence of the night, and it needed not the moon-beam, which broke at that moment over the noble countenance of the mourner, to make that mourner known to Lord Morden. He turned hastily away; for what was his grief, who had loved Gertrude, to that of him who had been himself the beloved of the ill-fated maiden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

How wistful she looks
Now all she's leaving, now no longer hers!
A little longer, yet a little longer,
Oh, might she stay to wash away her stains,
And fit her for her passage! Mournful sight,
Her very eyes weep blood, every groan
She heaves is big with sorrow. But the foe,
Like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close through every lane of life,
Nor misses once the track, but presses on,
Till forced at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin.
BLAIR.
Years, long years had rolled away, and many a spring had the sweet wild flowers bloomed and faded upon the grave of Gertrude Harding; and what meanwhile had become of those, the great and triumphant ones, whose wickedness and success had stretched her at that early grave? And those for whose cause she had so terribly suffered and had dared so much, how, in the ruin of that cause had it fared with them? Alas! the page of history which tells their fate, may be blotted with many tears. What became of the long descended Nevil, and of Percy, the noblest of England's peers? Let Scotland blush in mentioning the last.
Doubly was the Earl of Northumberland betrayed; on his first arrival in Scotland he was treacherously given into the hands of Murray, by one of the Armstrongs, in whom he had confided. After two years imprisonment in the Castle of Lockleven, he was sold to Elizabeth by the execrable Morton, and beheaded without a trial at York.
Well it would be for the honor of Scotland if this had been the last time that the followers of John Knox had stained her annals by their Judas like bartering of blood for gold. Who knows not that the Earl of Westmoreland and Lord Dacre died in exile; and Norton, the venerable, he too expired far from the land which his virtues might have graced, in a state, say some accounts, of pure poverty. His daughter-in-law, the gentle Blanche, who had been conveyed in Scotland by the retainers of Lord Dacre, died there of that slow but sure disease a broken heart.
Such was the fate of the oppressed; and what was that of the oppressor? Murray the false, ungrateful Murray, cut off even amid the enjoyment of his ill-gotten power, lived long enough, thanks to supernatural justice, after he had been shot by Bothwellhaugh, to know that the power for which he had delivered up his soul was departing from him. And the miserable Morton—revenge, herself, might be content in remembering his agonies upon that scaffold to which he was at last so deservingly brought.
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and compassion to ruin your faithful servants because they obeyed your will."
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