

Cleughfoot. We hae seen an enemy nearer an' be glad to turn back again."

"They will reach us, faither," cried Archy—"do ye no see they hae muffled men before them."

"Muffled men! then, bairn, your faither's betrayed!" exclaimed the freebooter, "an' there's naething but revenge and death left for Sandy Armstrong!"

He stalked rapidly around the turret—he examined his pistols, the edge of his sword, his Jedburgh-staff and his spear. Elspeth placed a steel-cap on his head, and from beneath it, his dark hair, mingled with grey, fell upon his brow: he stood with his ponderous spear in one hand and a pistol in the other, and the declining sun cast his shadow across the moss, the very horses' feet of the invaders still. The horsemen, who amounted to several hundreds, drew nearer and nearer on every side, and impenetrable as the morass was to strangers, yet, by devious windings, as a hound tracks its prey, the muffled men led them on, till they had arrived within pistol shot of Cleughfoot.

"What want ye, friends?" shouted the outlaw—"think ye that a poor man like Sandy Armstrong can gie upputtin' and proven-der for five hundred horse?"

"We come," replied an officer, advancing in front of the company, "by the authority o' our gracious prince, James, king o' England and Scotland, and in the name o' his commissioner, Sir William Selby, to punish and hand over to justice Border thieves and outlaws, o' whom we are weel assured that you, Sandy Armstrong, o' the Cleughfoot, are, habit and repute, amangst the chief."

"Ye lie! ye lie!" returned the outlaw; "ye dyvors in scarlet an' cockades, ye lie! I hae lived thir fifty years by my ain hand, an' the man was never born that dared say Sandy Armstrong laid finger on the widow's cow or the puir man's mare, or that he scripmt the orphan's meal. But I hae been a protector o' the poor and helpless, an' a defender o' the cowaan-hearted, for a sma' but honest black-mail, that other men, wi' no

half the strength o' Sandy Armstrong wa'ta'en up at their foot."

"Do ye surrender in peace, ye boasting rebel?" replied the herald, "or shall we burn your den about your ears?"

"I ken it is death ony way ye take it," rejoined the outlaw—"ye would shew me an' mine the mercy that was shewn to my kinsman, John o' Gilnokie,* and I shall surrender as an Armstrong surrenders—when the breath is out."

Fire flashed from a narrow crevice which resembled a cross in the turrets—the report of a pistol was heard, and the horse of the herald bounded and fell beneath him.

"That wasna done like an Armstrong, Archy," said the freebooter; "ye hae shot th horse, an' it might hae been the rider—the man was but doing his duty, an' it was unfair and cowardly to fire on him till the affray began."

"I shall mind again, faither," said Archy, "but I thought, wi' sic odds against us, that every advantage was fair."

While these events transpired, Elspeth was busied placing powder and balls upon the roof of the turret; she brought up also a carbine, and putting it in her husband's hands, said—"Tak ye that, Sandy, to aim at their leaders, and gie Archy an' me the dage."†

The horsemen encompassed the wall;—Sandy, his wife, and his son knelt upon the turret, keeping up, through the crevices, a hurried but deadly fire on their besiegers. It was evident the assailants intended to blow up the wall. The freebooter beheld the train laid, and the match applied. Already his last bullet was discharged. "Let us fire the straw among the cattle!" cried little Archy. "Weel thought, my bairn!" exclaimed the riever. The boy rushed down into the house and in an instant returned with a flaming pine torch in his hand: he dropped it amongst the cattle: he dashed a handful of powder on the spot, and in a moment half of the court yard burst into a flame. At the same instant a part of the court-wall trembled—exploded

* This subject forms another of the Border Tales.

† Pistols.