

The Braes of Yarrow

An Historical Tale of the Sixteenth Century.

They were moving with the best speed the horse could make along by the riverside through a densely wooded vale, which terminated at Merlin's Cairn. The trees, gaunt and snow-whitened to cast grim shadows across their path, the wind swept the snow in white gusts before them, and the moon shone coldly down upon them.

Little Alice happily slept through it all, and Gilbert Elliot with an unspoken pain of his own gnawing at his heart, and tempting him to silence was faithful to his friend.

The struggle was nearly over, he said in a calmer tone than he had yet appeared able to command in addressing the lady; "and we were beginning to feel the truth forced upon us that we should bring no glory back to Scotland from Flodden Field, when I received your husband's message. We had barely light enough to distinguish the foe from friend when four men with whips of straw round the tops of their spears broke into the midst of the King's party. I did not see what followed. There was a sudden rush and a cry of—'Treachery, the King is betrayed.' I was unhorred, but gaining my feet was about to spring forward to the spot where I had last seen the King when my arm was grasped by Sir Walter.

"Speed you from the field," he said in a strange voice, "there is no hope here. Treason is rampant, and the day and our King are lost. If you have ever cared for me, or for the poor lass wearing for you yonder at Halstead, speed you to the castle of Gillinglet, and tell her when she receives its neighbor she will know my fate."

"He gave me his left hand gauntlet, and I have it here for you. I should have been with you many days ago, but I went to arrange the ransom of a prisoner; returning from our meeting place I was myself captured and carried to Newcastle. There I have been detained till two days ago; and so hindered from serving you as I might have done had fortune brought me hither in better time. Here is the token from the dark field of Flodden."

The lady pressed the cold blood-stained gauntlet to her lips with a suppliant, trembling in her veins. There was hope still. "Did my husband say nothing more to you?" she inquired presently.

"Yes, he spoke a few words more—few words, but they conveyed a secret so terrible that, were it spoken aloud, all Scotland would rise to tear piecemeal the men who dared to give it voice if he failed to prove its truth upon the accursed villain it accuses of the foulest crime."

He spoke with a feverish warmth, and his eyes glared as with fire.

His sudden change of manner alarmed the lady.

"Does it concern me?" she asked wonderingly.

"Ay, you and I, and all of us in Scotland."

"Why keep it hidden then?"

He bent his face close to hers as if fearing the wind would catch his words and blow them through the land.

"THE KING WAS BETRAYED INTO THE HANDS OF MURDERERS. Dare I proclaim that to our weeping country till I have found the means to lay the charge so safely on the villain's shoulders that he shall have no loophole to escape? I dare not. But, while there is a gleam of life within me, I will follow him like a shadow till the hour comes when I can spring upon him, and, with all the strength of thirty men, avenge our King."

"You know the man?"

"I do, and—"

He stopped abruptly, at the same checking the horse.

They were at the foot of Merlin's Cairn hill. The hill rose almost perpendicularly upon a base of rock. On the summit the moonlight showed the cairn, and the brink of the precipice a small square house.

Half-a-dozen horsemen were descending the side of the opposite hill.

"By St. Mary, the moon betrays us," muttered Gilbert beneath his breath. "Yonder is Tushielaw."

"We are lost," cried the lady, starting and trembling violently.

"They have not seen us yet."

As he spoke Gilbert slipped from the saddle to the ground, leaving Lady Margaret still upon the horse.

"Ride, lady," he said hastily, "ride for your life up the pass and gain the house; yonder I will keep the pass till you are safe."

Without giving her time to speak of her could he struck the horse smartly with his hand, and it bounded forward up the narrow pass which circled round the hill and conducted to the cairn.

CHAPTER IV.—THE KNIGHT OF THE MASK.

When the horse had borne the lady out of sight Gilbert turned to examine his position, and to calculate his chance of defence against the enemy.

Behind him rose the precipice of Merlin's Cairn, with its sharp, jagged boulders snow-capped and frowning down upon him; on either side crags, furze, and skeleton trees; all white with snow. A few yards from his feet ran the river, and on the other side rose hill and forest. Close at hand Tushielaw and his half dozen followers, proceeding rapidly in the direction from which Lady Spens and her protector had just come.

His position was a good one; for he stood upon a slight elevation, and the sharp crags which guarded the mouth of the pass would not permit two men to advance upon him together. But the disadvantage of the position was, that should any one come from the crags behind him he could have little hope of saving himself, hampered as he was by the care of the gentle little Alice. He half regretted now that he had not risked the delay of giving her to her mother, for he was in momentary dread that she would waken and draw the attention of the pursuers upon him.

The child wakened at the sound of the borders' voices as they passed by.

"I'm cold, cold," the little one cried piteously.

"Whistye, whist ye bairn," muttered Gilbert as softly as possible, watching the troopers intently the while.

The child was somehow frightened by the voice, and somewhat, perhaps, by her inexplicable surroundings. She held her breath.

"They have heard nothing," reflected Gilbert with a breath of relief, and he moved with the intention of proceeding up the pass.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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For further information, please address A. M. F. CIANELLI, Proprietor, Montreal, Montreal, 20th April. dw2

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Also, Preserve Dishes, Butter Plates, Sugar Bowls, Goblets, Centre Dishes, &c., Wholesale and Retail.

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The rate of interest allowed on all deposits will be four per cent. per annum, to commence from day of deposit, and five per cent. on all sums remaining in the Bank six months from 31st of June or 31st of December.

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1868.

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