

The Braes of Yarrow

An Historical Tale of the Sixteenth Century.

With a woeful aching eagerness the sad eyes of the poor lady were strained toward the city seeking vainly for the appearance of Gilbert.

There were other eyes than hers turned with eagerness toward the city; those dark eyes of Mistress Douglas.

The boom of the heavy gun from the Castle proclaimed that the sun had reached its meridian, and even the Queen glanced quickly in the direction whence the champion should have arrived.

The Sheriff advanced into the lists and read the terms and cause of the trial by combat that was about to take place.

Tushielaw stepped from his tent answering to the designation of the "Unknown." He wore a mask upon his face and close fitting garments of velvet and wool.

He advanced to the Royal pavilion amidst the shouts of the people, and made his reverence; after that he retired to his tent again.

The opponents were a second time summoned. Tushielaw rode out in complete armour, and then, resting upon his spear, waited in readiness for his antagonist.

"Will he never come?" moaned the lady, her heart growing sick with terror.

A third time Gilbert Elliot, Esquire, and Gentleman of the Queen's Guard, was summoned by name. Thrice the trumpet sounded its challenge.

But Gilbert Elliott did not answer.

CHAPTER XVII.—THE MYSTERY OF THE ABBEY CHAPEL.

"A noble temper dost thou show in this; And great affections, wrestling in this bosom, Do make an earthquake of nobility."

Oh what a noble combat hast thou fought! Between compulsion and a brave respect! Let me wipe off this honorable dew That silvery doth progress on thy cheeks.

When the last sound of the trumpet had died among the hills; when the people for a moment dumb with mingled disappointment of their sport, and wonder at the non-appearance of the lady's champion, let loose their voice in one loud shout of congratulation to the victor of the unfought field; when the child King, directed by Angus, and little dreaming of the sad import of his act, threw down his truncheon—then Mistress Spens knew that it was all over, and that dishonor must rest upon her husband for ever.

A cold hand of ice seemed to enclasp her heart, and benumbed in limb and brain, she sat with her eyes closed spasmodically staring blankly before her.

The Queen, pale and excited herself, averted her gaze; she could not endure the speechless agony of the woman who, in happy days long ago, was her companion and friend.

The smooth white brow of Mistress Douglas was dark; her pretty mouth was compressed tightly; and her eyes burned angrily as she glanced from the single combatant in the lists to the condemned lady.—Gloomy thoughts occupied her mind; gloomy doubts were really driven away by still more gloomy fears.

"'Death," muttered Arran frowning, 'there is something out of joint here.' 'The fellow has repented his rashness in championing a worthless cause,' suggested Angus, smiling coldly.

"By my sword, my lord Angus, he is no true man who can smile at the ill-lap of yonder poor lass with her in sight."

Angus glanced toward the lady and the smile left his countenance. For once the quenchless thirst of ambition and all its attendant jealousies were forgotten in an honest impulse.

"You are right, Arran; this is no jest, albeit I had a mind to treat it so."

In truth he had smiled rather at the discomfiture of the rival than with any thought of those who were to suffer the consequences of the mishap that had occurred.

Having waited his due time in the lists for his opponent, Tushielaw raised his lance from the ground, and touching his horse lightly with his heels cantered up to the front of the Royal Pavilion.

The Queen rose to proclaim the decision of the event. A stern expression overcast her masculine features, and none doubted what the decision would be.

The attendant with her black robe stood ready to throw it over the condemned, and the murmurs of the populace were gradually becoming subdued.

There was a movement amongst the gentlemen of the Guard which at this moment attracted attention. An old man was forcing his way amongst the horses. His head was uncovered, and his long iron grey hair was tossed about his head and face by the wind. His look was wild and anxious, and he seemed to be indifferent to all danger and all awe of the august personages toward whom he was pushing his way. Several attempts were made to stop him.

"It's the life of yon puir leddy and her bairn ye're taking in stopping me," he cried. The look of anguish and the whole bearing of the man corroborated his words, and he was allowed to pass.

He reached Captain Lindsay, and presently the Captain advanced with him to the pavilion, holding in his hand a scrap of paper which Andrew had given him.

The attention of the Queen and her Court had been attracted by this unusual scene, and the business which was going forward was for an instant interrupted.

"Pardon, my liege," said the captain in his abrupt way, but with a degree of earnestness visible through his sharp cold manner, 'pardon the boldness with which I present myself, but it concerns the business in hand nearly.'

"Speak on."

There was a quick movement of her Majesty's brows as if she almost hoped that some explanation was about to relieve her of the necessity of pronouncing the verdict which, for the sake of the poor lady before her, she would fain have averted.

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