

FORLORN ADVENTURERS

PROLOGUE

THE glen lies shimmering in the hot August sunshine, clothed in the purple of heather as in a royal mantle. The airs are full of aromatic pungency ; for, down yonder in the ferny hollows, the silver-grey bracken has a scent of its own to mingle with the honey sweetness of the higher heather ; and where the moor slopes abruptly towards the dark frontier of the woodland, and the burn runs more lazily, spreading into pools, the bog-myrtle grows thick amid the rank grass and sends up wild, incomparable incense to the sky.

Upwards, the glen reaches towards jutting crags, heights barren even of heather ; a circular group of pines dominating the moorland, stands nobly in dark isolation. Midway between crag and grove, the ruins of a small chapel, open to the winds and the heavens, clings to the hill-side. It subsists, a monument of destruction, as Covenanting zeal left it in the days of the long struggle ; roofless, windowless. A bush of gorse thrusts its spines between the shattered flags, where once the altar stood ; a rowan-tree flings its branches, red clustered, through the archway that was a door. Sweet thyme and other delicate mountain herbs have taken root between the wall stones within ; and, without, the brambles clasp the buttresses with jealous embrace.

Very blue, this day, is the sky that overarches the four