

The Braes of Yarrow

An Historical Tale of the Sixteenth Century.

With a coarse laugh he said- 'You speak bravely enough, as all braggarts do. You will find that there is meaning in the words if you will test me. But I waste words; do with me as your false heart may purpose. This you may mind, however-my fate will not pass unnoted; for there are those who, failing my return, will know that I have met foul play at your hands. Then look to yourself.'

'I can do nothing that you shall not pass scathless in surmounting me. I have a mind to try how far your friends would pass on Yarrow Braes or through Ectrick Vales without a pass from me. But as I have borne your hot words calmly by allowing for your youth and passion; on the same score I'll let them pass unpunished that you may know me better. Look you now, Master Elliot, how much breath you have wasted; I meant you no harm, and you shall go hence sound as you came hither. I have wished to make you see that I have your life hanging on the point of my finger.'

Gilbert was more amazed by this turn of affairs than by the treachery; that had captured him so easily. He was still suspicious, however, and remained silent. 'You doubt me?' the chief went on; 'well, I make no marvel at that; but you may doubt me more, mayhap, before I am done. Know then, I pledge the word of a Borderer to you not to raise finger against Spens or to let man of mine attempt to hurt him till the second sunrise hence.'

'In half that time I will be back here with the pardon,' cried Gilbert eagerly, and thrown entirely off his guard by being released from his bonds and having his sword given to him, he exclaimed: 'That we shall see; but meanwhile I must be held blameless in this affair,' proceeded Tushielaw; my despatches are distinct, and if I for a time waive fulfillment of their behests you must give me some authority to show for it.'

'What token can I give you that will satisfy you?' 'Sit you down there and scribe me a statement of how you lost the King's despatch and how I have agreed in my respect for his Majesty to wait your return. Gilbert willingly wrote as he was desired, and rose from the bench without suspecting the import of the document he had indited. Of course Tushielaw would only have to show this to prove that Master Elliot had quitted the Tower in safety.

'I can go now?' 'Freely; but you will break bread with us or drain a cup of wine?' 'Neither, until I have redeemed the wrong I have done Spens.' 'Ding-a-Doon conducted him from the hall. His horse was in the court fastened by the bridle to an iron ring. The bustle and life he had found there on his entrance had disappeared. The court was silent, sad and deserted. His guide, with a torch casting a lurid glare around them, was leading the way to the gate when Gilbert, who had mounted, felt something touch his feet. He glanced down and saw the dwarf Hornie, who had apparently something to communicate in secret, as his finger pressed warningly on his lip bokened.

Gilbert bent down to hear; the movement was observed by Ding-a-Doon, and he turned round. The dwarf, however, avoided him by slipping swiftly under the horse. Whether the giant suspected anything or not he continued to walk beside the horse till they were across the court. The moment, however, he advanced to open the gate, Gilbert stooped. Hornie darted forward out of the darkness and whispered - 'Ware the gien at Gilmanscleuch.'

He had no time to say more, for Ding-a-Doon threw the gate open and stood aside to let the rider pass. 'A safe journey to you maister,' said the giant grimly, 'though the night be dark and the road a lonely one.'

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