LANG JEAN, LANG JOHN

STORIES OF THE BORDER MARCHES

John Lang

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Содержание

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PREFACE

The quotation that speaks of "Old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago," has grown now to be hackneyed. Yet, are not they those "old, unhappy, far-off things" that lure us back from a very commonplace and utilitarian present, and cause us to cling to the romance of stories that are well-nigh forgotten?

In these days of rushing railway journeys, of motor cars, telegrams, telephones, and aeroplanes, we are apt to lose sight of the tales of more leisurely times, when lumbering stage-coaches and relays of willing horses were our only means of transit from one kingdom to the other.

Because the "long ago" means to us so infinitely valuable a possession, we have striven to preserve in print a few of the stories that still remain – flotsam and jetsam saved from the cruel rush of an overwhelming tide.

One or two of the tales in this volume are perhaps not quite so familiar as is the average Border story, and some may contain less of violence and of bloodshed than is common. Yet it must be owned that it is no easy task to divorce the Border from its wedded mate, violence.

JOHN LANG. JEAN LANG.

THE WHITE LADY OF BLENKINSOPP

Among the old castles and peel towers of the Border, there are few to which some tale or other of the supernatural does not attach itself. It may be a legend of buried treasure, watched over by a weeping figure, that wrings its hands; folk may tell of the apparition of an ancient dame, whose corpse-like features yet show traces of passions unspent; of solemn, hooded monk, with face concealed by his cowl, who passes down the castle's winding stair, telling his beads; they whisper, it may be, of a lady in white raiment, whose silken gown rustles as she walks. Or the tale, perhaps, is one of pitiful moans that on the still night air echo through some old building; or of the clank of chains, that comes ringing from the damp and noisome dungeons, causing the flesh of the listener to creep.

They are all to be found, or at least they *used* all to be found, somewhere or other in the Border, by those who love such legends. And, perhaps, nowhere are they more common than amongst the crumbling, grass-grown ruins of Northumberland.

Away, far up the South Tyne, and up its tributary the Tipalt Burn, close to the boundary of Cumberland, there stands all that is left of an ancient castle, centuries ago the home of an old and once powerful family. The building dates probably from early in the fourteenth century. In the year 1339 "Thomas de Blencansopp" received licence to fortify his house on the Scottish Border, and it is supposed that he then built this castle.

Truly that was a part of England where a man had need be careful in his building if he desired to sleep securely and with a whole skin, for on all sides of him were wild and turbulent neighbours. From the strenuous day of the old Romans, who built across those hills that long line of wall, which stands yet in parts solid and strong, for centuries the countryside was lawless and unruly, the inhabitants "ill to tame," and every man a freebooter. The Thirlwalls, the Ridleys, the Howards of Naworth, the wild men of Bewcastle; the Armstrongs, Elliots, Scotts, and others across the Border, they were all of them – they and their forebears to the earliest times – of the stuff that prefers action, however stormy, to inglorious peace and quiet, and the man who "kept up his end" in their neighbourhood could be no weakling.

Whether the Blenkinsopps were strong enough permanently to hold their property intact among such neighbours one does not know, but at any rate, in 1488 John de Blenkinsopp and his son Gerrard committed the castle to the custody of Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, Warden of the East and Middle Marches. Percy's care of the building, however, does not seem to have been particularly zealous, or else "the false Scottes" had again, as was their wont, proved themselves to be unpleasant neighbours, for in 1542 the place is described as "decayed in the Roof, and not in good reparation."

Before this date, however, there had been at least one of the Blenkinsopp family on whose reputation for daring and strength no man might cast doubt. Far and wide, Bryan de Blenkinsopp was known for his deeds in war; he was counted gallant and brave even amongst the bravest and most gallant, and his place in battle was ever where blows fell thickest. But it is said that he had one failing, which eventually wrecked his life – he was grasping as any Shylock. Love of money was his undoing.

In spite of many chances to do so, in spite of the admiration in which he was universally held, Bryan de Blenkinsopp had never married. He was greatly admired, and yet, for a certain roughness and brutality in him, greatly feared, by many women, and he had been heard many a time scoffingly to say that only would he bring home a wife when he had found a woman possessed of gold sufficient to fill a chest so large that ten of his men might not be able to carry it into his castle. Brides of this calibre did not then grow in profusion on either side of the Border, and had he continued to live uninterruptedly in his own country, no doubt Bryan de Blenkinsopp might have remained to the end unmarried. But: "When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I was married." In that, Bryan might have anticipated *Benedick*, as well as in the resolution. "Rich she shall be, that's certain." He went abroad to the wars. Perhaps he was with Henry V at Agincourt, and thenceforward,

till the king's death in 1422, saw more of France than of England. In any case, to the unbounded wonder of the countryside, when at length he did return, Bryan brought back with him a foreign bride to Blenkinsopp. And what added to the wonder, the bride brought with her a chest of treasure so heavy that twelve of Bryan's retainers could with difficulty bear it into the castle.

Naturally, all this gave rise to endless talk; what prattling little busybody but would relish so succulent a morsel! Ere long the local gossip-mongers revelled in a perfect feast of petty scandal. Stories in minute detail spread quickly from mouth to mouth. The eccentricities and shortcomings of the foreign bride were a priceless boon to the scanty population of the district; in castle and in peel tower little else for a time was talked of. To begin with, the mere fact that she was a foreigner, and that neither she nor any of her immediate followers could speak English, told heavily against the lady in the estimation of the countryside. Then, hardly anyone ever saw her (which in itself was an offence, and the cause of still further tattle). She was very little, folk said who professed to be well informed, and her face and hands showed strangely brown against the white robes that she habitually wore; her eyes were like stars; her temper quick to blaze up without due cause. Backstairs gossip, no doubt; but there were even pious souls who, in strictest confidence, went so far as to hazard the opinion that the lady was not quite "canny"; she might, they thought, quite possibly turn out to be an imp of the Evil One sent with her gold to wile Bryan's soul to perdition. The belief was not more fantastic than many another that prevailed at that day, and later; and the fact that she was never known to go to mass, nor had been seen to cross the threshold of a sacred building, lent some weight to it. This was the kind of "clash" that floated about the countryside.

But assuredly there was this much foundation for talk: Bryan and his foreign bride were far from happy together. As time went on, their quarrels, indeed, became notorious. It was whispered that the fount from which flowed all the trouble was nothing more nor less than that chest of gold which the bride had brought for dowry. The lady, folk said, would not surrender it to her husband; no matter how he stormed. *She* was not of the kind that tamely submits, or cringes before a bully; on the contrary, she ever gave back as good as she received. Finally, things came at length to such a pitch, that the lady and her foreign servants, it was said, at dead of night had secretly dug a great hole somewhere in the huge vaulted dungeons of the castle, and had there buried her gold and the rich jewels which now she hated as the cause of her troubles.

Then, a little later, followed the climax – after violent scenes, Bryan himself disappeared, as if to show that, the treasure being somewhere beyond his ken, or out of his reach, he had no further use for the wife. He might, no doubt, have resorted to poison, or to the knife, in order to revenge himself; or he might have so made life a burden to her – as is done sometimes, one is told, even by modern husbands – that she would have been glad to lick his hand like a whipped spaniel, and to have owned up, perhaps, to the place where she had hid the gold. But if he killed her, her secret might die with her, or the servants who were in her confidence might themselves secure the treasure. Again, she had plenty of spirit, and, indeed, rather seemed to enjoy a fight, and it was possible that bullying might not cause her to try to conciliate him by revealing the whereabouts of the hidden treasure. So Bryan took the course that he judged would make things the most unpleasant for his wife, and which would at the same time rid him of her. He simply disappeared.

And now the poor little lady, fierce enough in quarrel, and bitter enough in tongue, was inconsolable. In spite of all – it is one of the most inscrutable of the many inscrutable points in the nature of some women – in spite of all, she had loved her great, strong, brutal, bullying husband, and probably was only jealous of the gold because he had showed too plainly that in his estimation it, and not she, came first. Her days, unhappy enough before, were now spent in fruitless misery, waiting for him who returned never again. A year and a day passed, and still no tidings came to her of Bryan de Blenkinsopp. The deserted wife could bear no longer her life in this alien country, and she, too, with all her servants, went away. Folk, especially those who had always in their hearts suspected her of being an imp of Satan, said that no man saw them go. Probably she went in search of her husband;

but whether or not she ever found him, or whether she made her way back to the land from which she had come, none can say, for from that day to this all trace is lost of husband and of wife. Only the tale remained in the country people's minds; and probably it lost nothing in the telling as the years rolled on.

The story of the White Lady of Blenkinsopp became one to which the dwellers by Tyneside loved to listen of a winter's evening round the fire, and it even began to be whispered that she "walked." More than one dweller in the castle claimed to have seen her white-robed figure wandering forlorn through the rooms in which she had spent her short, unhappy wedded life. Perhaps it may have been due to her influence that by 1542 the roof and interior had been neglected and allowed to fall into decay.

Yet though shorn of all its former grandeur, for some centuries the castle continued to be partly occupied, and as late as the first quarter of last century, in spite of the dread in which the White Lady had come to be held, there were families occasionally living in the less ruined parts of the building.

About the year 1820 two of the more habitable rooms were occupied by a labouring man with his wife and their two children, the youngest a boy of eight. They had gone there, the parents at least well knowing the reputation of the place; but weeks had passed, their rest had never in any way been disturbed, and they had ceased to think of what they now considered to be merely a silly old story. All too soon, however, there came a night when shriek upon shriek of ghastly terror rang in the ears of the sleeping husband and wife, and brought them, with sick dread in their hearts, hurrying to the room where their children lay.

"Mither! mither! oh mither! A lady! a lady!" gasped the sobbing youngest boy, clinging convulsively to his mother.

"What is't, my bairn? There's never a lady here, my bonny boy. There's nobody will harm ye."

But the terrified child would not be comforted. He had seen a lady, "a braw lady, a' in white," who had come to his bedside and, sitting down, had bent and kissed him; she "cried sore," the child said, and wrung her hands, and told him that if he would but come with her she would make him a rich man, she would show him where gold was buried in the castle; and when the boy answered that he dare not go with her, she had stooped to lift and carry him. Then he had cried out, and she had slipped from the room just as his father and mother hurried in.

"Ye were dreamin', my bonny lamb," cried the mother; and the parents, after a time, succeeded in calming the child and in getting him again to fall asleep. Night after night, however, as long as the boy remained in that room, this scene was re-enacted; the same terror-stricken screams, the same hurried rush of the parents, the same frightened tale from the quivering lips of the child. Dreams, no doubt, induced by some childish malady; a common enough form of nightmare, suggested by previous knowledge of a story likely to impress children. But to the day of his death – and he died an old man, a successful colonist, prosperous and respected, a man in no way prone to superstitious weakness – the dreamer ever maintained that it was something more than a dream that had come to him those nights in Blenkinsopp Castle. He could feel yet, he said, and shuddered to feel, the clasp of her arms and the kiss on his cheek from the cold lips of the White Lady; and the dream, if dream it were, was not due to suggestion, for he was conscious of no previous knowledge of the legend.

The White Lady of Blenkinsopp has fled now, scared from her haunt by the black smoke of tall chimneys and the deep – throated blare of steam hooters; coal dust might well lay a more formidable spectre than that of a Lady in White. But no man has ever yet discovered the whereabouts of her hidden treasure, though many have sought.

Seventy or eighty years ago, there came to the inn of a neighbouring village a lady, who confided to the hostess of the inn that in a dream she had seen herself find, under a certain stone, deep in the dungeon of a ruined castle, a chest of gold; and Blenkinsopp, she said, answered in every detail to the castle of her dream. Assuredly, she thought, to her now was to be revealed the long-sought burial-place of the White Lady's treasure. But patiently though the dreamer waited on and importuned the

castle's owner, permission to make a systematic search among the ruins was too hard to obtain, and the disheartened seer of visions departed, and returned no more. And so the hidden treasure to this day remains hidden; no prospector has yet lit on that rich "claim," no "dowser" has poised his magic hazel twig above its bed, nor has clairvoyant revealed its whereabouts.

But rumour had it once that the long-sought hiding-place was found. Orders had been given that the vaults of the castle should be cleared of rubbish, and fitted up as winter quarters for cattle, and as the workmen proceeded with their task they came on a low doorway, hitherto unknown, on a level with the bottom of the keep. This doorway gave on a narrow passage, leading no man knew whither. The report flew abroad that here at last was the Lady's vault, and people flocked to see what might be seen. None dared venture far along this passage, till one, bolder than the rest, taking his courage in both hands, went gingerly down the way so long untrod by human foot. The passage was narrow and low, too low for a man to walk in erect; after a few yards it descended a short flight of steps, and then again went straight forward to a door so decayed that only a rusted bolt, and one rust-eaten hinge, held it in place. Beyond this door, an abrupt turn in the passage, and then a flight of steps so precipitous that the feeble beam of his lantern could give the explorer no help in fathoming their depth; and when this lantern was lowered as far as it was in his power to do so, the flame burned blue and went out, killed by the noxious gases that stagnant centuries had breathed. Dizzy and frightened, the explorer with difficulty groped his way back to the fresher air of the vault, and no persuasion could induce him, or any of his fellows, to venture again so far as to that long flight of steps. The employer of those labourers was a man entirely devoid of curiosity or of imagination, possessed of no interest whatsoever in archaeology; so it fell out that the passage was closed, without any further effort being made to discover to what mysteries it might lead.

About the year 1845, one who then wrote about the castle visited the place, and found that boys had broken a small hole in the wall where the passage had been built up. Through this hole they were wont to amuse themselves by chucking stones, listening, fascinated, to the strange sounds that went echoing, echoing through the mysterious depths far below. Here, say some, lies the buried treasure of the White Lady of Blenkinsopp. But there are not wanting unsympathetic souls, who pride themselves on being nothing if not practical, who pretend to think that this hidden depth is nothing more mysterious than the old draw-well of the castle.

This story of the White Lady is not the only legend of the supernatural with which the old family of Blenkinsopp is connected.

Where Tipalt Burn falls into Tyne, stand on the opposite bank the ruins of Bellister Castle. There, many hundred years ago, dwelt a branch of the Blenkinsopps. To Bellister there came one night at the gloaming a wandering harper, begging for shelter from the bitter northerly blast that gripped his rheumatic old joints, and sported with his failing strength. He was a man past middle age, with hair thin and grey, and a face worn and lined; his tattered clothes gave scant protection from inclement weather. As was the custom in those times, the minstrel's welcome was hearty. Food and drink, and a seat near the fire, were his, and soon his blood thawed, the bent form of the man seemed to straighten, and his eye kindled as, later in the evening, "high placed in hall, a welcome guest," he touched his harp and sang to the company. You could scarcely now recognise the weary, bent, old scarecrow that but two hours back had trailed, footsore and tired, across the castle drawbridge. The change was astonishing, and many jested with the harper on the subject.

But one there was who noticed, and who did not jest. They were increasingly uneasy looks that the lord of the castle from time to time threw towards the minstrel. What, he pondered unquietly, caused this amazing change in the appearance of one who so lately had seemed to be almost on the verge of the grave? Was he in truth the frail old man he had pretended to be, or had he overacted his part, and was he no minstrel, but an enemy in disguise? The lord's looks grew blacker and more black, and ever more uneasy as the evening proceeded; and the more he suspected, the more he drank to drown the disquiet of his mind. At length his unease became so marked that unavoidably

it communicated itself to the rest of the company. Even the rough men-at-arms desisted from their boisterous jests, and spoke beneath their breath. The harper glancing around as the silence grew, and finding the lord's black looks ever upon him, trailed off at last in his song and sat mute, with uncertain fingers plucking at the strings of his instrument. The company broke up, glad to escape from the gloom of their lord's glances, and somebody showed the old man to a rude chamber, where a bundle of pease straw was to serve him for bed.

But the lord of Bellister sat on, "glooming" morbidly to himself. Bitter feud existed between him and a neighbouring baron. Had he not cause to distrust that baron, and to believe that means neither fair nor honourable might be employed by his enemy to wipe out the feud? What if this self-styled harper should turn out to be no minstrel after all, but a hired assassin, a follower of that base churl, his hated foe! To suspect was to believe. In his excited, drink-clouded brain wrath sprang up, fully armed. He would speedily put an end to that treacherous scheme; his enemies should learn that if one can plot, another may have cunning to bring to naught such treachery. And little mercy should be shown to the base tool of a baser employer.

"Bring hither quickly to me that minstrel," he called. "And it will be the better for some of you that there be no delay," he muttered beneath his breath, with a threatening blow of his fist on the table.

Of old his servants and dependants had learned the lesson that it was well not to linger over the carrying out of their passionate lord's orders. But in this instance, speed was of no avail; they were obliged to return, to report to a wrathful master that the bird had flown; the place was empty, the old man gone. Threatening glances and black looks had scared him; without waiting for rest, he had fled while yet there was time, less afraid of exposure to a wild and stormy night than to find himself in the clutches of a petty tyrant.

That the man had fled was to Blenkinsopp quite convincing proof that his suspicions were justified. Immediate pursuit was ordered. "Lay the sleuth hounds on his trail without an instant's delay. Let *them* deal with him!"

* * * * *

Less than a mile away, by some willows that once marked a ford in the river, men hurrying after the baying hounds came up too late. Echoing across the heath, an agonised shriek rang on their ears, drowned by the snarling as of wild beasts. Lying on its back on the river bank, head and shoulders in the shallow stream, the man-hunters found but a frail, mutilated body that had once been the wandering old minstrel.

This was what gave rise to the legend of the Grey Man of Bellister. Ever since that hideous night, at intervals the "Grey Man" has been wont to appear to belated travellers along that road. Near the clump of willows he might first be seen, hurrying, hurrying, his long grey cloak flying in the wind. And woe to him on whom he chanced to turn and look; his wild eye and torn face, his blood-clotted beard, would freeze with horror those who gazed, and disaster or death followed hard on the track of the vision.

It is a hundred years now, and more, since last the "Grey Man" was seen. Perhaps his penance for sins committed on earth is ended; or perhaps it is that against railways, and drainage, and modern scoffings, he and his like cannot stand. He is gone; but even yet, about the scene where once as a man the old minstrel fled for dear life, there hangs at the dead time of night a sense of mystery and awe. As the chilly wind comes wailing across the everlasting hills, blending its voice with the melancholy dirge of the river, one may almost believe that through the gloom there passes swiftly a bent, hurrying figure. Perhaps it is but the swaying of a branch near by, that so startlingly suggests the waving in the wind of a threadbare cloak.

DICKY OF KINGSWOOD

Your Border ruffian of the good old days was not often a humorist. Life to him was a serious business. When he was not reiving other people's kye, other people were probably reiving his; and as a general rule one is driven to conclude that he was not unlike that famous Scotch terrier whose master attributed the dog's persistently staid and even melancholy disposition to the fact that he "jist couldna get enough o' fechting."

In olden times, "fechting" was the Border man's strong point; but in later, and perhaps less robust, days there were to be found some who took a degenerate pride in getting by craft what their fathers would have taken by force. Of such, in the early days of the eighteenth century, was Dicky of Kingswood. Had he lived a hundred or a hundred and fifty years earlier, Dicky would no doubt have been a first-class reiver, one of the "tail" of some noted Border chieftain, for he lacked neither pluck nor strength. But in his own day he preferred the *suaviter in modo* to the *fortiter in re*; his cunning, indeed, was not unworthy of the hero of that ancient Norse tale, "The Master Thief," and in his misdeeds there was not seldom to be found a spice of humour so disarming that at times his victims were compelled to laugh, and in laughter to forget their just resentment; and with the perishing of resentment, to forego their manifest duty and that satisfaction which virtue should ever feel in the discomfiture of vice. Compounding a felony, we should call it now. And no doubt it was. But in those days, when the King's writ ran with but halting foot through the wild Border hills, perhaps least said was soonest mended.

Kingswood lies just across the river from Staward Peel, but Dicky dwelt generally at the latter place – in former days an almost unassailable stronghold, standing on a bold eminence overlooking Allen Water, some miles to the east of Haltwhistle. Here of old, when beacon-fires blazed on the hill-tops, "each with warlike tidings fraught," flashing their warning of coming trouble from "the false Scottes," the people of these regions were wont to hurry for safety, breathlessly bearing with them whatsoever valuables they prized and had time to save. Many a treasure is said to lie here, buried, and never again dug up, because those who alone knew where to look had perished in defence of the Peel. Truly, if the troubled spirits of those slain ones yet wander, brooding over hidden chattels and lost penates, they are not greatly to be pitied, for a spot more beautiful, one less to be shunned if our spirits *must* wander, it would be hard to find in all Northumberland or in all England. Not distant would they be, too, from good company, for away to the north across the Tyne, in a mighty cavern in the rock – below what once was the castle of Sewing Shields – does not local tradition tell that Arthur and his knights lie asleep, waiting the inevitable day when England's dire need shall bring them again to life, to strike a blow for the land they loved. And along that noble line of wall which spanned England from sea to sea, might they not perchance foregather – some dark and stormy night, when snow drives down before a north-east wind – with the dim forms of armoured men, wraiths of the Roman legions, patrolling once more the line that they died to defend?

Dicky of Kingswood was making for home one day in early spring. He was outside the radius of his usual field of operations, far to the east of Kingswood and Staward, plodding along with the westering sun in his eyes, and thinking ruefully that he had come a long way for nothing. Sometimes it is convenient for gentlemen of Dicky's habits to visit foreign parts, or parts, at least, where their appearance may not attract undue notice – for such as he are often of modest and retiring disposition. On this occasion he had so far done no business of profit, and Dicky was depressed. He would fain turn a more or less honest penny ere he reached home, if it might but be done quietly.

Late in the day came his chance. Grazing in a neighbouring lush pasture were two fine fat bullocks. Dicky paused to look, and the more he looked, the more he admired; the more he admired, the more he coveted. They were magnificent beasts, seldom had he seen finer; nothing could better suit his purpose. Such beasts would fetch a high price anywhere – they *must* be his. So, with what

patience he could command, till darkness should come to his aid, Dicky discreetly retired to a neighbouring copse, where, himself unseen, he might feast his eyes on the fat cattle, and at the same time make sure that if they did happen to be removed from that particular pasture, at least he would not be ignorant of their whereabouts. But the bullocks fed on undisturbed. No one came to remove them; only their owner stood regarding them for a while. Darkness fell, and the call of an owl that hooted eerily, or the distant wail of a curlew, alone broke the stillness. Then up came Dicky's best friend, a moon but little past the full. Everything was in his favour, not a hitch of any kind occurred; quietly and without any fuss the great fat beasts began to make their slow way west across the hills for Cumberland.

Morning came, bringing with it a great hue and cry on that farm bereft of its fat cattle, and things might chance to have fared ill with Dicky had he not adroitly contrived to lay a false trail, that headed the furious owner in hasty pursuit north, towards Tweed and Scotland. Meanwhile, in due time – not for worlds would Dicky have overdriven them – the bullocks and their driver found themselves in Cumberland, near by Lanercost. There, as they picked their leisurely way along, they encountered an old farmer riding a bay mare, the like of which for quality Dicky had never seen. His mouth watered.

"Where be'st gangin' wi' the nowt?" asked the farmer.

"Oh, to Carlisle," said Dicky.

"Wad ye sell?"

"Oh aye!" answered Dicky. "For a price. But the beasts are good."

"Yes, they were good," admitted the farmer. And Dicky must come in, and have a drink, and they'd talk about the oxen. So in they went to the farmer's house, and long they talked, and the more they talked the more the farmer wanted those bullocks; but the more he wanted them the more he tried to beat Dicky down. But Dicky was in no haste to sell; he could do better at Carlisle, said he; and the upshot, of course, was that he got the price he asked. And then said Dicky, when the money was paid, and they had had another drink or two, and a mighty supper:

"That was a bonnie mare ye were riding."

"Aye," said the farmer. "An' she's as good as she's bonnie. There's no her like in a' Cumberland."

"Wad ye sell?"

"Sell!" cried the farmer. "No for the value o' the hale countryside. Her like canna be found. Sell! Never i' this world."

"Well, well," said Dicky, "I canna blame ye. She's a graund mare. But they're kittle times, thir; I wad keep her close, or it micht happen your stable micht be empty some morning."

"Stable!" roared the fanner boisterously. "Hey! man, ah pit her in no stable. She sleeps wi' me, man, in my ain room. Ah'm a bachelor, ah am, an' there's non' to interfere wi' me, and ivvery nicht she's tied to my ain bed-post. Man, it's music to my ear to hear her champin' her corn a' the nicht. Na, na! Ah trust her in no stable; an' ah'd like to see the thief could steal her awa' oot o' my room withoot wakenin' me."

"Well, maybe ye're right," said Dicky. "But mind, there's some cunnin' anes aboot. Ye'll hae a good lock on your door, nae doot?"

"Aye, I *have* a good lock, as ye shall see," cried the farmer, caution swamped in brandy and good fellowship. "What think ye o' that for a lock?"

"Uhm – m!" murmured Dicky reflectively, carefully scrutinising lock and key – and he was not unskilled in locks. "Aye, a good lock; a very good lock. Yes, yes! Just what you want; the very thing. They'll no pick that."

"No! They'll never pick *that*. Ho! Ho!" laughed the complacent farmer.

Then Dicky said he "maun be steppin'. It was gettin' late." And so, after one more drink, and another "to the King, God bless him," and yet one more to "themselves," and a fourth, just to see that the others went the right way and behaved themselves, the two parted, the best and dearest of friends.

It might have been the outcome of a good conscience, or perhaps it was the soothing thought that he had made a good bargain, and had got those bullocks at a figure lower than he had been prepared to pay; or, possibly, it may only have been the outcome of that extra last glass or two that he had had with Dicky. But whatever it was, the fact remained that the farmer's slumbers that night were very profound, his snoring heavier than common. Towards morning, but whilst yet the night was dark, dreaming that he and the mare were swimming a deep and icy river, he woke with a start. Everything was strangely still; even the mare made no sound. And – surely it must be freezing! He was chilled to the bone. And then, on a brain where yet sang the fumes of brandy, it dawned that he had absolutely no covering on him. Sleepily he felt with his hands this way and that, up and down. To no purpose. His blankets must certainly have fallen on the floor, but try as he might, no hand could he lay on them. Slipping out of bed to grope for flint and steel wherewith to strike a light, with soul-rending shock he ran his forehead full butt against the open door of his room.

"De'il tak' it! What's this?" he bellowed. It was inconceivable that he had forgotten to close and lock that door before getting into bed, however much brandy he might have drunk overnight. What was the meaning of it? At last a light, got from the smouldering kitchen fire, revealed the hideous truth – his room was empty, the cherished mare gone! The door (as he had found to his cost) stood wide open; along the floor were carefully spread his blankets, and over them no doubt the mare had been led out without making noise sufficient to awaken even a light sleeper, let alone one whose potations had been deep as the farmer's.

Lights now flashed and twinkled from room to room, from house to stable and byre, and back again, as the frenzied, cursing farmer and his servants tumbled over each other in their haste to find the lost animal. It is even said that one servant lass, in her ardour of search, was found looking under the bed in an upstairs room – scarcely a likely grazing ground for any four-footed animal (unless perhaps it might be a night-mare). But whether she expected to find there the lost quadruped, or the man guilty of its abduction, tradition says not. At any rate, all that any of the searchers found – and that not till broad daylight – was the print of the good mare's hoofs in some soft ground over which she had been ridden fast. And no one had heard even so much as the smallest sound.

The day was yet young, and the breeze played gratefully cool on Dicky's brow, as, fearless of pursuit, he rode contentedly along towards home a few hours later. Skirting by Naworth, thence up by Tindale Tarn and down the burn to South Tyne, he had now come to the Fells a little to the south and east of Haltwhistle. To him came a man on foot; and, said he:

"Have ye seen onny stray cattle i' your travels? I've lost a yoke o' fat bullocks."

"What micht they be like?" asked Dicky innocently; for he had no difficulty in recognising the farmer from whom he had stolen the beasts, though the latter, having never set eyes on Dicky, had no idea of whom he was talking to.

"Oh," said the man, "they were fine, muckle, fat beasts, red, baith o' them, ane wi' a bally face, an' the tither wi' its near horn sair turned in." And some other notable peculiarities the farmer mentioned, such as might strike a man skilled in cattle.

"We-el," answered Dicky thoughtfully, "now that ye mention it, I believe I did see sic a pair, or twa very like them, no later agone than yesterday afternoon. If I'm no mista'en, they're rinnin' on Maister – 's farm, no far frae Lanercost."

"Man, ah'm that obleeged to ye. But ah'm that deid tired wi' walkin', seekin' them, ah canna gang that far," said the farmer. "That's a gey guid mare ye're ridin'. Ye wadna be for sellin' her, likely?"

"Oh aye, I'll sell. But she's a braw mare; there's no her like i' the countryside, or in a' Northumberland. I'll be wantin' a braw price." Dicky was always ready for a deal, and in this instance of course it suited him very well to get rid of his steed.

So, after some chaffering, Dicky was promised his "braw price," and he accompanied the farmer home to get the money. A long way it was. The farmer perforce walked, but Dicky, with native caution, rode, for, said he, in excuse to his companion:

"I'm loth to part wi' my good auld mare, for I've never owned her like.

Sae I'll jist tak' a last bit journey on her."

In due course Dicky got his money, and food and drink, as much as he could swallow, into the bargain. Then the farmer rode away for Lanercost; and Dicky, of course, remembered that he had business in a different part of the country.

Sure enough, when the farmer reached Lanercost there were his bullocks contentedly grazing in a field, while contemplatively gazing at them stood an elderly man, with damaged face.

Up rode the farmer on the mare.

"Here!" shouted he angrily, "what the de'il are ye doin' wi' my bullocks?"

"Wh-a-at?" bellowed the other with equal fury. "*Your* bullocks! And be d – d to ye! If it comes to that, what the de'il are *ye* doin' ridin' my mare? I'll hae the law o' ye for stealin' her, ye scoondrel! Come *doon* oot o' my saiddle afore ah pu' ye doon." And the two elderly men, each red in the face as a "bubbly jock," both spluttering and almost speechless with rage, glared at each other, murder in their eyes.

Then came question and answer, and mutual explanation, and gradually the comic side of the affair struck them; each saw how the other had been done, and they burst into roar after roar of such laughter as left them weak and helpless. They had been properly fooled. But the fat bullocks were recovered, and the well-loved mare, even if the money paid for each was gone. And after all, he laughs best who laughs last. But they saw no more of Dicky of Kingswood.

STORM AND TEMPEST

When we think of "the Border," the picture that rises to mind is usually one of hill and dale, of peat-hag and heathery knoll, of brimming burns that tumble headlong to meet the embrace of rivers hurrying to their rest in the great ocean. One sees in imagination the solemn, round-shouldered hills standing out grim in the thin spring sunshine, their black sides slashed and lined with snow; later, one pictures these hills decked with heartsease and blue-bells a-swing in the summer breeze, or rich with the purple bloom of heather; and, again, one imagines them clothed in November mists, or white and ghost-like, shrouded in swirling clouds of snow.

But there is another part of the Border which the inland dweller is apt to forget – that which, in sweep upon sweep of bay, or unbroken line of cliff, extends up the coasts of Northumberland and Berwickshire. That is a part of the Border which those who are not native to it know only in the months of summer, when the sea is sapphire-blue, when surf creams softly round the feet of limpet-covered rocks, and the little wavelets laugh and sparkle as they slide over the shining sands. It is another matter when Winter with his tempests comes roaring from the North. Where are then the laughing waters and the smiling sunlit sands? Swallowed up by wild seas with storm-tossed crests, that race madly landward to dash themselves in blind fury on shoreless cliffs, or sweep resistless over a shingly beach.

It is a cruel coast in the winter time, and its children had need be strong men and fearless, for they who make their living on the face of its waters surely inherit a share greater than is their due of toil and danger; they, verily, more than others "see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep." From earliest times when men first sailed the seas this coast has taken heavy toll of ships and of human lives, and in the race that it has bred, necessarily there has been little room for weaklings; their men are even to this day of the type of the old Vikings – from whom perhaps they descend – fair-bearded and strong, blue-eyed and open of countenance. And their women – well, there are many who might worthily stand alongside their countrywoman, Grace Darling, many who at a pinch would do what she did, and "blush to find it fame."

Yet one must admit that, as a whole, this community was not always keen to save ship and crew from the breakers, nor prone to warn vessels off from dangerous reef or sunken rock. In days long gone by, if all tales are true, the people of these coasts had no good reputation among sailors, and their habits and customs were wont to give rise to much friction and ill-will betwixt England and Scotland. It is certain that in 1472 they plundered the great foreign-going barge built by Bishop Kennedy of St. Andrews – the greatest ship ever seen in those days – when she drove ashore one stormy night off Bamborough. And of her passengers, one, the Abbot of St. Colomb, was long held to ransom by James Carr, a deed the consequences of which, in those days of an all-powerful Church, might be dreadful to contemplate. Pitscottie says the "Bishop's Barge" cost her owner something like £10,000 sterling. Perhaps the harvest reaped by Bamborough when she came ashore may have encouraged Northumbrians to adopt this line of business in earnest, for by 1559 we read that "wreckers" were common down all that coast; and their prayer: "Let us pray for a good harvest this winter," contained no allusion to the fruits of the field.

In 1643 there was a Scottish priest, Gilbert Blakhal, confessor in Paris to the Lady Isabelle Hay, Lord Errol's daughter, who in the course of a journey to his native land visited Holy Island, and in the account of his travels he makes mention of the ways of the island's inhabitants, and of their prayer when a vessel was seen to be in danger. "They al sit downe upon their knees and hold up their handes, and say very devotely, 'Lord, send her to us. God, send her to us.' You, seeing them upon their knees, and their handes joyned, do think that they are praying for your sauvetie; but their myndes are far from that. They pray, not God to sauve you, or send you to the porte, but to send you to them by ship-wrack, that they may gette the spoile of her. And to showe that this is their meaning, if the ship come wel to the porte, or eschew naufrage (shipwreck), they gette up in anger, crying:

'The Devil stick her; she is away from us.'" Father Blakhal does not pretend that with his own ears he heard the Holy Islanders so pray. It was told to him by the Governor of the island. But, then, this Governor, Robin Rugg by name, was "a notable good fellow, as his great read nose, full of pimples, did give testimony." Perhaps he exaggerated, or it was but one of his "merry discourses." Yet I think he told the truth in this instance. To "wreck" was the habit of the day, and by all coastal peoples the spoil of wrecks was regarded as not less their just due than was the actual food obtained by them from the sea. On our own coasts and in our islands until quite recent times such was undoubtedly the case, just as in savage lands it continues to be the case to this day; and the distinction is a fine-drawn one between doing nothing to prevent a vessel from running into danger which would result in profit to the spectators, and the doing of a something, greater or less – say the showing of a light, or the burning of a beacon – which may make it certain that the same vessel shall go where she may be of "the greatest good to the greatest number" – the "greatest number" in such instances being always, of course, the wreckers. A wrecked vessel was their legitimate prey, and the inhabitants of many coastal parts are known to have deeply resented the building of lighthouses where wrecks were frequent. In his notes to *The Pirate*, Sir Walter Scott mentions that the rent of several of the islands in Shetland had greatly fallen since the Commissioners of Lighthouses ordered lights to be established on the Isle of Sanda and the Pentland Skerries. And he tells of the reflection cast upon Providence by a certain pious island farmer, the sails of whose boat were frail from age and greatly patched: "Had it been *His* will that a light hadna been placed yonder," said he, with pious fervour, "I wad have had enough of new sails last winter."

Then as to the saving of life – in those days, and well on into the eighteenth century, it was believed to be a most unlucky thing to save a drowning person; he was sure eventually to do his rescuer some deadly injury. A similar belief, as regards the ill luck, prevails in China to this day; nothing will induce a Chinaman to help a drowning man from the water. In our own case, probably this superstition as to ill luck originated in the obvious fact that if there were no survivor from a wreck, there could be no one to interfere with the claim made by the finders to what they considered their lawful due. If a vessel drove ashore on their coast, that surely was the act and the will of God, and it was not for them to question His decrees or to thwart His intentions.

Many, since the days of the wreckers, have been the ships cast away along that rugged coast-line which starts southward from the grim promontory of St. Abb's Head, and runs, cruelly rock-girt or stretched in open bay of yellow sand, away past Berwick and down by Holy Island. Many have been the disasters, pitiful on occasion the loss of life. But never, since history began, has disaster come upon the coast like to that which befell the little town of Eyemouth in the early autumn of 1881, never has loss of life so heartrending overwhelmed a small community. Once the headquarters of smuggling on our eastern coast, and built – as it is well known was also built a certain street of small houses in Spittal – with countless facilities for promoting the operations of "Free Trade," and with "bolt-holes" innumerable for the smugglers when close pressed by gangers, Eyemouth is still a quaint little town, huddling its strangely squeezed-up houses in narrow lanes and wynds betwixt river and bay. There, too, as at a northern town better known to fame than Eyemouth,

"The grey North Ocean girds it round,
And o'er the rocks, and up the bay,
The long sea-rollers surge and sound,
And still the thin and biting spray
Drives down the melancholy street."

* * * * *

Truly, in Eyemouth it is not alone spray that drives. So close a neighbour is the protecting sea-wall to some of the houses that turn weather-beaten backs on the bay, that at high tide during a north-easterly gale the giant seas, breaking against the wall, burst also clear over the houses, hurling themselves in torrents of icy water into the street beyond. And up the width of one little street that runs to the bay, and past its barricaded doors, you may see sometimes billows that have overleapt the wall come charging, to ebb with angry swish and long-drawn clatter of shingle as the waves suck back. It is a strange sight, and it causes one to wonder what manner of men they are who dwell here, who draw their living from the bosom of a sea that thus harshly treats its children. Yet it is a sea that can be kindly enough; and in the long, golden summer evenings, when the brown-sailed fishing-boats in endless procession draw out from the "haven under the hill," to vanish seaward in the deepening twilight, you would scarce believe that a thing so gentle could be guilty of treachery, or ever could arise in sudden mad frenzy to slay those who had trusted it.

Yet that was what happened that terrible Friday, the 14th of October 1881. No summer's morning could have dawned more peaceful and fair. And here we were but in mid-October, when the woods are in their glory and Scotland looks still for the settled weather of her "Indian summer"; there should yet be ample measure of quiet days and nights ere winter gales rumble in the chimneys and wail through the rigging of boats lying weather-bound in harbour.

A cloudless day, sea of deepest blue, without even the faintest cat's-paw to wrinkle its shining face; a morning warm, genial, windless, reminiscent of fairest summer, such a day as landsmen rejoice in, feeling that it is good to be alive. But the glass came tumbling down, the sea heaved sullenly in the oily calm, seething around the bared fangs of jagged rocks, drawing back with threatening snarl or snatching irritably at the trailing sea-weed; and high aloft the gulls wheeled, clamouring. Old men amongst the fishers looked askance. Why did they not take warning? Alas! The year had been a lean year; the weather latterly had been bad, and for near on a week the boats had been unable to go out. The fish were there for the taking. Prices now were good. And "men must work" even if "women must weep." So it befell that boat after boat put out from harbour and headed over the windless sea, dragged, galley-like, by the clumsy sweeps, till, clear of the land, the fanning of a light air from the south-west gave her gentle steerage way. Soon not a boat was left in port; even those whose weather-wise "skeely" old skippers had counselled caution, at length, against their will and better judgment, were shamed into starting. After all, it was no great distance they were going; with ordinary luck they might be back before much wind came. And if the worst came to the worst and they were caught out at sea, why, the boats were weatherly craft, manned by the best of seamen, and an hour or two at the most would see them fight their way back to port. It was all in the day's work. Nothing venture, nothing win. If one may take a risk, so may another. It does not do to stand idle in the background whilst one's neighbour by superior daring secures the prize we also sorely need.

So by 9 A.M. the last boat of the five and forty had got to sea. Before midday all had made an offing of eight or ten miles, and had started to shoot their lines. Folk who had watched them creep out of the harbour now gave no further heed, save perhaps that wives may chance to have cast anxious looks seaward now and again. But none dreamt of evil.

Then of a sudden, as the morning passed, some on shore became aware of a strange, death-like stillness that had fallen over all things, a feeling of gloom and oppression in the air. The sun indeed still shone unclouded over the land, but away out at sea to the north-east there was a horrible canker of blackness that was eating up the sky, and that already had hid from sight, as by a wall, those boats that lay farthest from the land, whilst those still visible could be seen hurriedly letting everything go by the run. Then the blackness shut down over all, and men could but guess what was going on behind that terrible veil. Over the town, as people deserted their houses and hurried to cliff

or sea wall, or wherever there seemed possibility of gaining sight or knowledge of the fleet, the same horror of darkness came rushing; wind raved and screamed, and already a sea, indescribable in its appalling fury, was raging into the bay, the crests, cut off as with a knife, flying through the air like densest smoke. Rain scourged and blinded, the driving spray lashed beyond bearing the faces of those who, dread in their souls, peered through their sheltering hands, trying vainly to penetrate the smother to windward. A few hundred yards of raging water, a blurred vision of rushing, tumbling seas; tumultuous, deafening roar of surf, the tortured scream of wind; and that was all. It was as if one might try to gaze into the mouth of hell.

Then through this Hades of waters, rolling, tumbling, pitching, buried almost in the breaking seas, into the bay came rushing three yawls, manned by crab-fishers from St. Abb's, past the Hurcar Rock, and round safely into the harbour; then a large Eyemouth fishing-boat, and another, and another, and then a pause of sickening suspense, and two more large boats from St. Abb's fought their way to safety. Men began faintly to pluck up heart. If these had come out of the jaws of death, why not the others? But now again they hoped with ever sinking hearts, for minutes passed and there came no more. Then, even as they strained their eyes despairingly, there came one into the bay that failed to get far enough to windward. Down on the rock behind the breakwater she drove, helpless, and went to pieces. Another took the same road, and smashed to atoms almost at the pierhead, so near, and yet so far from human aid, that the voices of both crews could be heard by the helpless, distracted spectators – white-lipped men, wailing women, who clustered there by the rocks in impotent agony. One struggling drowning man fought hard – it is said that the outermost of a chain of rescuers once even touched his hand. But no help was possible, no human power could have drawn those helpless men from that raging cauldron; against such wind no rocket could fly, near these rocks no lifeboat could live. Even if she could have lived, there was no crew to man her; all were away with the fleet.

It was near low water now, and into the bay came driving a big boat that rushed on the rocks at Fort Point, pounded there a brief second, and was hurled by the following sea on to the beach, so nearly high and dry that her crew, by the aid of lines, were readily saved. And then into view through the welter came staggering a new boat, one whose first trip it was, sore battered, but battling gallantly for life, and making wonderful weather of it. Yet, even as hope told the flattering tale of her certain safety, there came racing up astern a sea, gigantic even in that giant sea, raced her, caught her, and, as it passed ahead, so tilted her bows that the ballast slid aft, and down she sank by the stern, so near to safety that betwixt ship and shore wife might recognise husband and husband wife.

As at Eyemouth, so it was all down the coast. At Burnmouth, at Berwick (though no boat belonging to Berwick that day was out), at Goswick Bay, and elsewhere, boat after boat, driven before the fury of the gale, was forced over by wind and sea, and sunk with all her crew, or was dashed to pieces on the shore.

Night fell on Eyemouth; and, God, what a night! "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

By little and little, by ones and twos, boats, battered and with sails torn to ribbons, with crews exhausted and distraught, kept arriving during the Saturday and Sunday, bringing men, as it were, back from the dead. One or two, under bare poles, had ridden the gale out at sea, lying up into the wind as near as might be, threshing through those awful seas hour after hour, buried almost, sometimes, in the seething cauldron, or struck by tons of solid water when some huge mountain of a wave, toppling to its fall, rushed at her out of the blackness. From minute to minute the men never knew but that the next roaring billow would engulf them also, as already they had seen it roll over and swallow up their neighbours.

It was the skipper of the *White Star* that told afterwards how, before the tornado burst – as some said, "like a clap of thunder" – the first thing to take his attention from the shooting of his lines was boats on the weather side of him hurriedly shortening sail, or letting all run. To the nor'ard,

from horizon almost to zenith, already the sky was black as ink, the sea beneath white with flying spume. Then like magic the sea got up, and the *White Star* turned to run for Eyemouth, with the *Myrtle* in company. But darkness and the fierce turmoil of waters forced them to lay to in order to make certain of their position. As they lay, pitching fearfully and many times almost on their beam ends from the violence of the wind, a foaming mountain of water came thundering down on the *White Star*, so that for a brief moment all thought that she was gone; and almost as she shook herself free, just such another tremendous wave struck the *Myrtle*, and rolled her over like a walnut-shell skiff, a child's plaything. As the *White Star* rose on successive waves, her crew twice afterwards saw the *Myrtle* heave up her side for a second ere she went to the bottom, but of her seven hands no man was ever seen again. Head-reaching into the wind, the *White Star* gradually made her perilous way, presently passing yet another boat floating bottom up, her rigging trailing in the water around her, but no bodies visible anywhere. Of the rest of the fleet, no sign. Four and forty hours later the *White Star* reached safety at North Shields. Other boats that also headed for the open sea were even longer in coming to port, but all, as they drew farther and farther from land, found weather less terrible, a sea less dangerous, than that from which by the skin of their teeth they had escaped. Some of the smitten craft drove far to the south before the wind, and after escapes many and incredible, reached a haven of safety, with men worn and dazed, but not all with crews complete; too many paid toll to the sea with one or more lives. For as long as a day and a half, there were skippers who sat, unrelieved, at the tiller of their boat, an awful weight of responsibility on their shoulders, human lives depending on their nerve and skill. Some of these men had to be carried ashore, when at length they reached safety; the legs of one were found to be so twisted and wedged in beneath his seat, that it was only with the greatest difficulty and pain that he was got out of the boat.

There was one boat that found refuge at Shields on the Sunday. She arrived too late to permit of a telegram being sent announcing her safety, but in time to allow her crew – or what was left of it – to catch a late train to the north, and the solemn, echoing tramp of their heavy feet at midnight in the silent street of Eyemouth brought the stricken people from their beds with a start, and with vague apprehension of fresh disaster. But their dread was turned to rejoicing, except for the family of that man who came home never again. In all, on that Sunday night it was known that sixty-four of the men of Eyemouth had perished, and seventy-one were still missing. Of these but a handful ever returned. Eyemouth alone lost one hundred and twenty-nine – the men of whole families, almost of clans, swept away. Truly to her that day was as of old had been Flodden Field to Scotland. The total number of men who perished along this coast in that hurricane was one hundred and eighty-nine.

Will the terror of that time ever be forgotten, or its horror wiped out from the town of Eyemouth? In the face of disaster such as that, smaller happenings appear for the time almost insignificant. Yet it was but the other year that another great gale on that coast brought disaster most pitiful. A Danish steamer, feeling her way to the Firth of Forth in weather thick with fog and with a great gale blowing, mistaking her position, came creeping in the darkness close in to the little village of St. Abb's. Nearer and nearer to the people, snug in their warm, well-lit houses, came the roar of her fog-horn. And then, from the neighbourhood of a treacherous rock – awash at low water – and little more than a stone's throw from the village houses, there rushed up a rocket, and a flare was seen dimly burning. In the heavy sea, the steamer had brought her bows with a mighty crash on to that sunken rock, and there she lay, the great seas sweeping her from stem to stern. Rockets from the cliff that overlooked the wreck could not reach her in that fierce wind; the life-boat, when it arrived from Berwick, could not live in the broken water near to her. All was done that man could do to rescue the perishing men in that hapless vessel; but that "all" in the end amounted to just nothing. Helpless, the watchers listened with sick hearts to the cries of her doomed crew and to the deep baying of a great hound that was on board the doomed ship; helpless, they gazed in impotent agony at the despairing signals made. In the morning she was still there, but the cries were fainter, the faces seen fewer, the vessel more often buried under breaking seas. Then the cries ceased. And when daylight came a

second time, where the hull had been there was now but white, raging water, and seas that spouted high in air from a black rock that showed its cruel head at intervals. And of the crew there was found no sign. Only to and fro on the shore there ran a great white dog, that would let no man approach it, that would take no food from strange hands. Day and night, like a lost spirit, to and fro between Eyemouth and St. Abb's Head trotted the great white hound, never resting. And ever when a sail hove in sight, or a steamship passed near in, he would run hurriedly to the farthest projecting point, and throwing back his head, wail piteously for the drowned sailors, his friends.

GRISELL HOME, A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HEROINE

The Merse has given many a gallant man to the mother-country, oftentimes a fighter, now and again a martyr, but no fairer flower has ever blossomed in that stretch of land that has the North Sea for one of its boundaries, and looks across fertile plains to the long, blue line of Cheviots in the south, than one whose name must ever find a sure place in the hearts of those whom courage and fortitude, sweetness and merry humour, exquisite unselfishness, and gay uncomplainingness in the face of dire emergency are things to be honoured and held dear.

Grisell Home was the eldest of eighteen children, two of whom died in infancy. She was born at Redbraes Castle – now Marchmont – on December 25, 1665. There is a belief that Christmas babies always have an extra large share of the nature of Him who was born on Christmas Day; and truly Grisell Home was one of those who never seemed to know the meaning of Self. Her father, Sir Patrick Home, a man of strong character and large fortune, was known to be a rigid Presbyterian, no friend to the house of Stuart, and he was regarded by the Government of his day as "a factious person." His great friendship with his neighbour, Robert Baillie of Jerviswoode, in no way increased the favour with which either of those good men was regarded in high places. Jerviswoode and Home were "suspects," and being known as close allies, where one was supposed to be plotting, the other was always expected to be at his back.

To be the eldest of so large a brood must have been a sobering thing for any little girl, but Grisell shouldered her responsibilities with a happy heart, and united with that happy, child-like heart the wisdom and discretion of a woman. She was only twelve when she was chosen as messenger from her father to his friend Mr. Baillie, who was then in prison in Edinburgh. Over lonely Soutra Hill (where highway robbery and murder were things not unknown), it was no easy or pleasant ride from Marchmont to the Port of Edinburgh; and here the bleaching skulls of martyred covenanters gave to those who entered the town grim warning of the risks of nonconformity. Doubtless little Grisell had been provided by her parents with a suitable escort, but, even so, her heart must have beat faster as she went up the High Street to where the "Heart of Midlothian" then stood, and asked to see Mr. Robert Baillie, her father's friend. The bright-eyed, slim little maid, with her chestnut hair and exquisite complexion, must have been as unexpected a sight in that gloomy place as a wild rose in a desert. None could suspect her of meddling with affairs of State, or of tampering with the prisoners of his gracious Majesty. Thus Grisell Home was able successfully to carry a letter of advice and information, and to bring back to her father in the Merse tidings of a blameless martyr.

With his father in prison that day was Baillie's son, George, a boy one year older than Grisell. He had been, as were many of the well-born lads of his time, at his studies in Holland, reading law, when his father was put in prison, but hastened home on hearing the news. Boys wore swords, and not Eton jackets, in George Baillie's day. He had, as his daughter afterwards wrote of him, "a rough, manly countenance"; and from that day until the day of her death that face, which she knew first as a boy's, was more beautiful to Grisell Home than any other face on earth. Several times afterwards was Grisell sent as bearer of important letters from her father to him whose son, in days still long to come, was to be her husband, and never once was the douce little messenger suspected.

Not many months later her own father was a prisoner in Dumbarton Castle, and during the fifteen months in which he lay there, Grisell was still the messenger, not only to him, but to his friends in various parts. Her early childhood may have been unharassed, but Grisell Home's girlhood was a careful and anxious one. On the discovery of the Rye House Plot, Baillie of Jerviswoode and Home of Polwarth, innocent men both, were denounced as traitors to their King. Baillie was taken, and after several months of imprisonment in London, so heavily loaded with chains that his health

completely broke down, he was brought by sea to Edinburgh in stormy November weather which kept the ship a fortnight on its way. A dying man when he was put in the Tolbooth, he yet had to undergo many exhausting examinations and a farcical trial, with "Bluidy Mackenzie" for chief inquisitor, and on Christmas Eve, 1684, he gallantly and cheerfully met a martyr's death at the Market Cross of Edinburgh.

Sir Patrick Home's denunciation was longer in coming than that of his friend, and not until November 1684 was the warrant for his apprehension issued. He, good man, had no desire for martyrdom; moreover, at that time he already possessed ten children, whose future as orphans was likely to be wretched, and so Sir Patrick sought concealment from the hounds of the law. Foiled in laying hold of him, the law seized his eldest son, Patrick, and cast him into prison. Two days after Jerviswoode's death, the lad petitioned the Privy Council for release. He was but "a poor afflicted young boy," he said, loyal to his principles and with a hatred of plots, and only craved liberty that he might "see to some livelihood for himself" and "be in some condition" to help and serve his disconsolate mother and the rest of his father's ten starving children. Most grudgingly was the boon bestowed, and not until the boy had obtained security for his good behaviour to the extent of two thousand pounds sterling was he allowed to return to the Merse.

Meantime Redbraes Castle was constantly kept under supervision. Scarcely a week passed without a party of redcoats clattering up the drive, interrogating the servants, tramping through all the rooms, hunting round the policies, and doing everything in their power to make things unpleasant for the wife and children of this attainted rebel. To only two people in the house, and to one out of it, was the secret of Sir Patrick Home's hiding-place known. With the help of a faithful friend and retainer, Jamie Winter, the carpenter, Lady Home and her daughter Grisell had one dark night carried bed and bedclothes to the burying-place of the Homes, a vault under Polwarth Church, a mile from Redbraes. A black walnut folding-bed, exactly underneath the pulpit from which the minister of Polwarth preached every Sunday, was the fugitive's resting-place at night, while for a month he saw no more daylight than was able to reach him from a slit at one end of the vault. The ashes of his ancestors were scarcely lively company, but Sir Patrick found "great comfort and constant entertainment" by repeating to himself Buchanan's Latin Version of the Psalms. Each night, too, the prisoner was cheered by a visit from his daughter Grisell. Through an open glen by the Swindon Burn, down what is called The Lady's Walk, Grisell nightly came to the vault with her little store of provisions. She was an imaginative, poetic little maid, and the whisper of the wind in the lime trees that grew on either hand would make her shiver, and yet more loudly would her heart thump when in the darkness she stumbled over the graves in the kirkyard, and remembered all the tales she had ever heard of bogles and of ghosts. That lonely walk in the night must always have been full of terrors, yet Grisell's love for her father was so great that she steadfastly braved them all. One fear only she had – that of the soldiers. The wind moaning through the trees or rustling the long grass, the sound of a rabbit or some other wild thing in the bracken, the sudden bark of a dog, – all these made her sure that some spy had found out her secret, and sent her running as fast as her little legs could carry her to try to save her father from his captors. The first night she went was the worst, for the minister kept dogs, and the manse was near the church, and even her light footfall was sufficient to set every one of them a-barking. But Lady Home sent for the minister next day, and upon the pretence of one of them being mad, persuaded their owner to hang them all. Grisell and her father had the same sunny nature, and both dearly loved a joke, and each amusing little incident of the day was saved up by the former to be told while the prisoner made a meal on the food which she brought with her. Many a hearty laugh they had together in that dark, dismal place, and often Grisell stayed so late that she had to run up the glen, so as to get home before day dawned. The difficulties she encountered in securing food enough for her father without arousing the suspicion of the servants was always a subject for jest, for, more often than not, the only possible means of getting the food was by surreptitiously conveying it, during a meal, from her own plate into her lap. Her amazing appetite was bound to be commented

upon, but never did she surprise her brothers and sisters more than on a day when the chief dish at dinner was her father's favourite one – sheep's head. While the younger members of the family were very busy over their broth, Grisell conveyed to her lap the greater part of the head. Her brother Sandy, afterwards Lord Marchmont, dispatched his plateful first, looked up, and gave a shout of amazement.

"Mother!" he cried, "will ye look at Grisell! while we have been eating our broth, she has eaten up the whole sheep's heid!"

"Sandy must have an extra share of the next sheep's heid," said the laughing father when he heard the tale.

During the month that Sir Patrick Home lay hid in the vault, it was not only by collecting food for him by day, and by taking it to him by night, that his young daughter gave proof of her devotion. In a room of which Grisell kept the key, on the ground floor at Redbraes Castle, she and Jamie Winter worked in the small hours, making a hiding-place for the fugitive. Underneath a bed which drew out they lifted up the boards, and with their hands, scraped and burrowed in the earth to make a hole large enough for a man to lie in. To prevent making a noise they used no tools, and as they dug out the earth it was packed in a sheet, put on Jamie's back, and carried, Grisell helping, out at the window into the garden. Not a nail was left upon her fingers when the task was completed, and a sorely unslept little maid she must have looked at the end of a month's foraging by day and hard work by night, with that nerve-tearing walk as a beginning to her nightly labours. The hole being ready, Jamie Winter conveyed to it a large deep wooden box which he had made at home, with air-holes in the lid, and furnished with mattress and bedding, and this was fitted into the place made for it. It was then Grisell's duty to examine it daily, and to keep the air-holes clean picked, and when it had for some weeks stood trial of no water coming into it from its being sunk so low in the ground, Sir Patrick one night came home. For a couple of weeks only was Redbraes his sanctuary, for, on Christmas Day, upon Grisell lifting the boards as usual to see that all was well with the lair that her father was to retire to in case of a sudden surprise, the mattress bounced to the top, the box being full of water. The poor child nearly fainted from horror, but Sir Patrick remained quite calm.

"Obviously," he said to his wife and daughter, "we must tempt Providence no longer. It is now fit and necessary for me to go off and leave you." Later in the day, news brought by the carrier confirmed him in his resolution. Baillie of Jerviswoode had been hanged in Edinburgh on the previous day, and his head now adorned a spike on the Nether Bow. The death of his best friend was a great shock to Sir Patrick, perhaps an even greater one to Lady Home, and to little Grisell, for could not their imagination readily paint a picture of *their* dear "traitor" hanging where his friend had hung. No time was to be lost, and Grisell at once began work on her father's wardrobe, and in the coming days and nights, with anxious fingers, made such alterations in his clothing as seemed necessary for a disguise.

Meantime a friend and neighbour of Sir Patrick's, John Home of Halyburton, had "jaloused" that his namesake was not hidden so far afield as some imagined, and when, one cold January afternoon, he heard the clatter of hoofs on the high-road and saw the red coats of the dragoons, he had a stab at his heart at the thought of another good son of the Merse going to martyrdom.

"Where do you ride to-day?" he asked, when the party came up.

"To take Polwarth at Redbraes," they said.

"Is it so?" said Home. "Then I'll go with you myself and be your guide. But come your ways into the house and rest you a little, till I get ready for the road."

Nothing loth, the troopers followed him, and were still contentedly testing the quality of the contents of his big case-bottles when a groom galloped off to Redbraes. Halyburton's message to Lady Home of Polwarth was a brief one, for when she opened his envelope there was nothing there to read – only a little feather fluttered out, giving as plainly the advice to instant flight as pages of words might have done.

There was nothing for it but to take another into their secret. John Allen, the grieve, was sent for, and fainted dead away when he heard that his master was in the house instead of being in safety

in foreign lands, and that the dragoons were even then on his tracks. He, too, had visions of a figure dangling from a gibbet, and of a head on the Nether Bow – and small blame to him, worthy man.

It was then the darkening, and Allen's instructions were at once to tell his fellow-servants that he had received orders to sell three horses at Morpeth Fair, and to be off on the road without further delay.

Sir Patrick took farewell of his wife and of Grisell, climbed out of a window, met the grieve near the stables, and was off in the darkness, with as little noise as might be. It was a sorrowful parting, but when, not long after he was gone, the dragoons rode up to Redbraes, Lady Home and her daughter were glad indeed that he was away.

Somewhat regretting their prolonged enjoyment of the hospitality of Home of Halyburton, the search-party thoroughly ransacked every hole and corner of Redbraes Castle. Inside they could find no trace nor pick up one crumb of information, but from an outside servant they heard of John Allen's departure, Morpeth way, with three horses.

"*Horses,* indeed! for Morpeth Fair?" the dragoon officer hooted at the thought. "Boot and saddle, lads!" he called to his men; "we'll run the traitorous fox to earth long before he gets to Berwick!" At a canter they were off down the drive, the contents of Halyburton's case-bottles still warming their hearts and giving extra zest to their enterprise. It was a dark night, and they were thick black woods that they rode between, but they had not ridden very many miles when they were able to make out, some way in front of them, the outlines of two horses.

"We've got him, lads!" cried the officer; "run him down at last. Worry, worry, worry!"

But instead of the horses in front breaking into a gallop at the sound of pursuit, they were pulled up short by the roadside, and instead of there being two riders there was only one, leading an unsaddled horse. More exasperating than all to the ardour of the hunters was the fact that in place of the thin, clever face of Sir Patrick Home being the one to confront them, the round, scared face of a Berwickshire peasant stared at them in dismay. In vain did the officer question, bully, cross-examine. John Allen was unshakeable. He was gaun tae Morpeth Fair tae sell the horse. Na, he didnae ken where the maister was. Sure's daith he didnae ken. Aye, he left Redbraes mebbes twa hour sin', in the darkening. No amount of hectoring, no quantity of loudly – shouted oaths could move the grieve from his tale. "A wuss a *did* ken whaur he is," he said, "but *a* dinnae ken." Finally he had to be given up as hopeless, and the dragoons rode back, a little shamefacedly and cursing their luck. John Allen, his honest face still full of scared amazement, rode slowly on. Every now and again he would check his horse, look round and listen, mutter to himself bewilderedly, shake his head, and go on once more. The clatter of the dragoons had not long died away when, coming towards him from the other direction, he heard the regular beat of a horse's hoofs. It was no strange horse, he soon realised, nor was the rider a stranger. The gay smile that his face so often wore irradiated Home of Polwarth's when he heard his servant's greeting.

"Eh, losh me, Polwarth!" he said, "a never had sic a gliff in a' *ma* days! Here a' em, thinking aye that ye was riding no far ahint us, and when a hears a gallopin' an' turns roond, ye've santed, an' here's a pack o' thae bluidy dragoons that wad blast ye black in the face an' speir the inside oot o' a wheelbarra. Man, where were ye? It's naething short o' a meericle?"

Nor was it much short of a miracle, as Sir Patrick acknowledged. He had followed Allen at first as the grieve had thought, but his mind was full of the parting he had just gone through and of the misty future before him, and when his thoughts came back with a jerk to the actualities of the present, he heard the rush of a winter river and found that he was close by the side of the Tweed. It was some time before he could exactly find his bearings, but he did so at last, and, after some reconnoitring, found a place that could be safely forded. Once across the river, he rode quickly back towards Redbraes, hoping that by good fortune he might yet meet with Allen, and so neatly escaped the soldiers who pursued him. The high-road after this was no longer deemed safe, and the rest of his ride to London was done on bye-ways and across the moors. In two days honest John returned to

Redbraes and brought to the sad hearts of Lady Home and Grisell the joyful news that Sir Patrick had not fallen into the hands of the dragoons, as they had greatly feared, but was now safely on his way to England. As a travelling surgeon, calling himself Dr. Wallace, Sir Patrick Home worked his way south, bleeding patients when need be, prescribing homely remedies when called upon to do so. None ever penetrated his disguise, and he was able to cross from London to France and journey, on foot from France to Holland with complete success.

Years afterwards, when Sir Patrick was Earl of Marchmont, Chancellor of Scotland, and President of the Privy Council, it was his lot to have to try for his life a certain Captain Burd. And during the trial there came back to him like a flash the old days when, in company with another wayfarer, he tramped the long French roads, unwinding themselves like white ribbons before him, between the avenues of stiff, tall, silvery poplars on to the flat, windmill-dotted Dutch country, with the brown-sailed boats that seemed to sail along the fields. And here, in Captain Burd, he recognised the companion of those often weary, often hungry days, when pockets were empty, fortunes at dead-low tide, and Scotland and wife and children very far away. In public the Chancellor treated his old friend with severity, but arranged with his son, Sir Andrew Home, then a young lawyer, to see Captain Burd alone. Timidly and nervously, with downcast eyes, the poor man repeated the tale to which the Chancellor had already listened. In silence he heard it again, and then: "Do you not know me?" he asked, smiling.

"God's wounds! Dr. Wallace!" cried Captain Burd, and fell with tears of joy on the neck of the Chancellor, who was readily and gladly able to prove the innocence of his old companion.

No sooner had Sir Patrick Home left Scotland than his estates were forfeited and given to Lord Seaforth, and although Lady Home went by sea to London, and there for a long time did all possible to obtain from Government an adequate allowance for the support of her family of ten, £150 a year was all that she was able to secure. Of course Grisell was her companion there, and her companion also when she sailed to Holland to join Sir Patrick. Of the ten, a little girl, Julian by name, had to be left behind with friends as she was too ill to travel, and when Grisell had safely handed over her mother and brothers and sisters to her father's care, she returned to Scotland alone, to act as escort to the little sister, "to negotiate business, and to try if she could pick up any money of some that was owing to her father." The brave and capable little woman of business, having managed affairs to her satisfaction, secured, for the passage, a nurse for the sister, who was still a weakly invalid. Moreover, the voyage to Holland, being in those days more than just the affair of a night, a cabin-bed – the only one in the ship, apparently – was engaged for Julian, and a good store of provisions laid in. But when the ship had sailed, Grisell found that the cabin-bed had been separately engaged and paid for by four other ladies, and at once these four began a violent dispute as to which should have it. "Let them be doing," said a gentleman, who had to share the cabin with the rest, "you will see how it will end."

So the disappointed little maid had to arrange a bed on the floor as best she could for herself and her sister, with a bag of books that she was taking to her father for pillow, while two ladies shared the bed and the others lay down where they could find room. Any place where they could lie flat must have been welcome, for a storm was brewing, and as a cradle the North Sea usually leaves a good deal to be desired. As they all lay, in fairly sickening discomfort, in the cabin, lit only by an evil-smelling oil-lamp that swayed back and forwards with each roll, the heavy step of the captain was heard coming down the companion way. Grisell had expected honesty from her fellow-travellers, and her store of provisions was laid out in what she had considered a convenient place. It did not take the captain long to devour every scrap of what had been meant to last the girls and their maid for days. His gluttonous meal over, he tramped up to the bed.

"Turn out! turn out!" he said to the women who lay there, and having undressed himself lay down to snore in that five time's paid for sleeping-place. It must have been somewhat of a comfort – if, indeed, comfort was to be found in anything that night – that the captain did not long enjoy his slumbers. A fierce gale began to blow, and during the furious storm that never abated for many an

hour to come, the captain had to remain, drenched to the skin, on deck, working and directing with all his might, in order to save his ship. They never saw him again until they landed at the Brill. That night the two girls set out on foot to tramp the weary miles to Rotterdam, a gentleman refugee from Scotland, who had come over in the same boat, acting as their escort. The stormy weather of the North Sea had followed them to land. It was a cold, wet, dirty night, and Julian Home, still frail from illness, soon lost her shoes in the mud. There was but one solution to the difficulty. The gentleman shouldered their baggage along with his own; Grisell shouldered her sister, and carried her all the rest of those weary miles. At Rotterdam they found Sir Patrick Home and his eldest son awaiting them, to take them on to their new home in Utrecht, and wet and cold and tiredness were all forgotten at the sight of those dear faces, and Grisell "felt nothing but happiness and contentment."

For three years and a half they lived in Utrecht, and once again during that time Grisell voyaged to Scotland to see to her father's business affairs. It is difficult to discover what, during the rest of that time, she did not do for her parents and family. There were many Scottish refugees then in Holland, and the Homes kept open house, and spent nearly a fourth part of their income on a mansion sufficiently commodious to allow of their hospitalities. This made it impossible for them to keep any servant save a little girl who washed the dishes, and consequently Grisell acted as cook, housekeeper, housemaid, washerwoman, laundress, dressmaker, and tailoress. Twice a week she sat up at night to do the family accounts. Daily she rose before six, went to the market and to the mill to see their own corn ground, and – in the words of her daughter, who proudly tells the tale – "dressed the linen, cleaned the house, made ready the dinner, mended the children's stockings and other clothes, made what she could for them, and in short did everything." She was very musical and loved playing and singing, but when, for a small sum, a harpsichord was bought, it was her younger sister, Christian, who was the performer, and by it "diverted" her parents, and the girls had many a joke over their different occupations. Yet even with all her other work she found time to take an occasional lesson in French and Dutch from her father along with the younger ones, and even wrote a book of songs – many of them half written, broken off in the middle of a sentence as a pot boiled over or an iron grew hot enough to use. Some of them are dear to us still. Do we ever think of all the hardships that were nobly endured by a Scottish girl two hundred years ago when we quote the words of her exquisite song? —

"Were na my heart licht, I wad dee."

Of all her brothers and sisters, her eldest brother, Patrick, was her closest friend, and, when he became one of the Prince of Orange's Guards, Grisell had extra labours, for the Guards wore little point-lace cravats and cuffs, and many a night she sat up to have these in such perfect order that no dandy officer in the service could compete with the young Scottish soldier. An added happiness to those happy, busy days came to Grisell through her brother's fellow-guardsman and greatest friend, for George Baillie, the lad she first met in the Tolbooth, gave his heart to her that day within the gloomy prison walls, and they were lovers still when, after forty-eight years of married life, death came to part them.

With the accession of the Prince of Orange the merry, light-hearted days in Holland came to an end. There was probably no poorer Scottish family to be found in all Holland. There was certainly no happier one. When they came home they were prosperous once again, and honours were showered upon Sir Patrick Home. Grisell was asked to become a maid of honour to the Princess but she preferred to go back to the quiet country life at Redbraes. Already, during their least prosperous days, Grisell's beauty and charm had made at least two Berwickshire gentlemen "of fortune and character" beg for her hand, and it was to her parents' regret that she refused them both, because her heart was already in the keeping of a penniless guardsman in the Dutch service. Only poverty kept them apart, and when King William gave back to George Baillie his lands, there was no other obstacle in the way, and they were married forthwith. They were man and wife for forty-eight years, "in all of which time," writes their daughter, "I have often heard my mother declare that they never had the shadow of a quarrel, or misunderstanding, or dryness betwixt them – not for a moment"; and that, "to the

last of his life, she felt the same ardent and tender love and affection for him, and the same desire to please him in the smallest trifle that she had at their first acquaintance." To the day his last illness began, her husband never went out without her going to the window to watch him till he was out of sight of those kind, bright, beautiful eyes, through which shone as beautiful a soul as any that ever made the earth a better and a happier place for having been in it.

Grisell Home was Lady Grisell Baillie when, in 1703, her mother died.

"Where is Grisell," she asked, almost with her latest breath. And when Lady Grisell came and held her hand the old lady said, "My dear Grisell, blessed be you above all, for a helpful child you have been to me."

Lady Grisell Baillie lived through the '15 and the '45, and those who suffered in the first of those years had the kindest of friends and helpers in her large-minded husband and in herself. She was eighty at the time of the '45, but during that year and during the next, when her death took place, she helped by every means in her power those who had suffered from fighting for a cause that was dear to their hearts. She always remembered what she herself had gone through. "Full of years, and of good works," as her somewhat pompous epitaph has it, Lady Grisell Baillie died in December 1746, and was buried at Mellerstain on the day upon which she should have celebrated her eighty-second birthday. And surely the angels who, on that first Christmas Eve, long, long ago, sang of "Peace on earth – goodwill towards men," must have been very near when she, who was a Christmas baby, and whose whole long life had been one of love and of peace, of goodwill and of charity to others, was laid in the earth as the snowflakes fell, on Christmas Day, one hundred and sixty-eight years ago.

KINMONT WILLIE

A venerable and highly respected Scottish professor of literature was once asked what was his ruling passion – his heart's desire? If the secrets of his soul could be laid bare, what, above all, would be found to be his predominant wish? The question was an indiscreet one, but he was tolerant. He tightly compressed his gentle mouth, and firmly readjusted his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I *wish*" said he, "to be a corsair."

It would have been interesting to know how many of a following he would have had from sedate academic circles had he been given his heart's desire and had sailed down the Clyde with the raw head and bloody bones showing on the black flag that flew at his mast-head. How many of us are there with whom law-abiding habits, decorous respectability, form but a thin covering of ice over unplumbed depths of lawless desire? Not long since, when a wretched criminal case in which the disappearance of a pearl necklace was involved, was agitating every Scottish club and tea-table, a charming old Scottish lady, whose career from childhood up has been one of unblemished virtue, was heard to bemoan the manner of commission of the crime. "She did it *very* stupidly. Now, if *I* had been doing it I should" – And her astounded auditors listened to an able exposition of the way in which she would successfully have eluded justice. Is it the story of the villain who is successfully tracked to his doom that attracts us most? or that of the great Raffles and his kind whose villainies almost invariably escape detection, and who burgles with a light and easy touch and the grace and humour of a Claude Duval? Let us be honest with ourselves. How many of us really wish to be corsairs? Which of us would *not* have been a reiver in the old reiving days? Have we not noticed in ourselves and other Borderers an undeniable complacency, a boastful pride in a mask of apology that would not deceive an infant, when we say, "Oh yes; certainly a good many of my ancestors were hanged for lifting cattle." And, however "indifferent honest" we ourselves may be, which of us does not lay aside even that most futile mask and boast unashamedly when we can claim descent from one of those princes among reivers – Wat o' Harden, Johnnie Armstrong, or Kinmont Willie?

William Armstrong, better known as Kinmont Willie, lived in the palmiest days of the Border reivers. The times of purely Scottish and purely English kings were drawing to a close, and with one monarch to rule over Britain the raider could no longer plead that he was a patriot who fought for king and country when he made an incursion over the Cheviots, burned a few barns and dwelling-houses, lifted some "kye and oxen," horses, and goats, and what household gear and minted money he could lay hands on, slew a man or two, and joyously returned home.

But with Elizabeth still on the English throne, and with Queen Mary, and afterwards her son, reigning in Scotland, the dance could go merrily on, and when we look at those days in retrospect it seems to us that the last bars of the music, the last turns in the dance, went more rapidly than any that had gone before.

In Kinmont Willie's lifetime the Wardens of the Marches had but little leisure. It was necessary for them to be fighting men with a good head for figures, for on the days of truce when the Wardens of the Scottish and English Marches met to redd up accounts, not only had they to work out knotty arithmetical problems with regard to the value of every sort of live stock, of buildings, of "insight," and the payment of such bills, but they had to have expert knowledge in fair exchange of a Scottish for an English life, an English for a Scotch. Little wonder if their patience sometimes ran short, as did that of a Howard of Naworth upon one famous occasion. He was deeply engrossed in studies that had no bearing upon Border affairs when an officer came to announce the capture of some Scottish moss-troopers, and to ask for the Warden's commands with regard to them. The interruption was untimely, and Lord Howard was exasperated. "Hang them, in the devil's name!" he said angrily, and went on with his studies. A little later he felt he could better give his mind to the consideration of the case, and sent for his officer. "Touching the prisoners," said he, "what have you done with them?"

Proud of being one of those who did not let the grass grow beneath their feet, the officer beamingly responded: "Everyone o' them's hangit, my lord!"

It was a March day in 1596, when a Wardens' meeting took place at Dayholm, near Kershopefoot. The snow was still lying in the hollows of the Cheviots, the trees were bare, the Liddel and the Esk swollen by thaws and winter rains; but weather was a thing that came but little into the reckoning of the men of the Marches unless some foray was afoot. They got through the business more or less satisfactorily, and proceeded to ride home before the day of truce should be ended. From sunrise on the one day until sunset on the next, so the Border law ordained, all Scots and Englishmen who were present at the Wardens' meeting should be free of scathe. Now the Warden of Liddesdale at that time was Sir Walter Scott of Branxholme, laird of Buccleuch. He was one of the greatest men of his century; a "fyrebrande," according to Queen Elizabeth, and a fierce enemy according to those who incurred his enmity; but, according to all others, a man of perfect courage, stainless loyalty and honour, charming wit, and great culture. He never spared an enemy nor turned his back on a friend, and he was a born winner of hearts and leader of men. Amongst his retainers was Kinmont Willie, and as Willie rode from the Wardens' meeting, along the banks of the Liddel, in company with only three or four men, a body of two hundred English horsemen, commanded by Salkeld, Warden of the Eastern March, marked him from across the water. Truce or no truce, the chance seemed to them one that was too good to lose. Speedily some of them pushed on ahead, and an ambush was laid for Kinmont Willie. He and his friends were naturally totally unprepared for such a dastardly attack, but it took them but little time to gather their wits, and Willie gave them a good run for their money. For nearly four miles they chased him, but ran him down at length. After some hard giving and taking, he had to acknowledge his defeat, and, pinioned like a common malefactor – arms tied behind him, legs bound under his horse's belly – they rode with him into Carlisle town.

The news of the treacherous taking of his follower was not long in reaching Buccleuch, who at once raised an angry protest. Scrope, the English Warden, received this with an evasive and obviously trumped-up counter-charge of Kinmont Will having first broken truce. Moreover, he said, he was a notorious enemy to law and order, and must bear the penalty of his misdeeds. This was more than the bold Buccleuch could stomach.

"He has ta'en the table wi' his hand,
He garr'd the red wine spring on hie —
'Now Christ's curse on my head,' he said,
'But avenged of Lord Scrope I'll be!
O, is my basnet a widow's curch?
Or my lance a wand o' the willow-tree?
Or my arm a ladye's lilye hand,
That an English lord should lightly me?'"

No time was lost in making an appeal to King James, which resulted in an application to the English Government. But while the English authorities quibbled, paltered, and delayed – with a little evasion, a little extra red-tapism, a little judicious procrastination – the days of Kinmont Willie were being numbered by his captors. The triumph of putting an end to the daring deeds of so bold a Scottish reiver when they had him safely in chains in Carlisle Castle, was one that they were not likely lightly to forego. It would be indeed a merry crowd of English Borderers that flocked to Haribee Hill on the day that Will of Kinmont dangled from the gallows.

Buccleuch saw that he had no time to lose. He himself must strike at once, and strike with all his might.

The night of April 13, 1596, was dark and stormy. All the Border burns and rivers were in spate; the winds blew shrewd and chill through the glens of Liddesdale, and sleet drifted down in

the teeth of the gale. The trees that grew so thick round Woodhouselee bent and cracked, and sent extra drenching showers of rain down on the steel jacks of a band of horsemen who carefully picked their way underneath them, on to the south. Buccleuch was leader, and with him rode some forty picked men of his friends and kinsmen, to meet some hundred and fifty or so of other chosen men. Scotts, Elliots, Armstrongs, and Grahams were there, and although Buccleuch had requested that only younger sons were to risk their lives in the forlorn hope that night, Auld Wat o' Harden and many another landowner rode with their chief. "Valiant men, they would not bide," says Scott of Satchells, whose own father was one of the number. Kinmont Willie's own tower of Morton, on the water of Sark, about ten miles north of Carlisle, was their rallying point. Buccleuch had arranged every detail most carefully at a horse-race held at Langholm a few days before, and one of the Grahams, an Englishman whose countrymen were not yet aware that the Graham clan had allied themselves to that of the Scotts, had conveyed his ring to Kinmont Willie to show him that he was not forgotten by his feudal lord. One and all, the reivers were well armed, "with spur on heel, and splent on spauld," and with them they carried scaling ladders, picks, axes, and iron crowbars. The Esk and Eden were in furious flood, but no force of nature or of man could stay the reivers' horses that night.

"We go to catch a rank reiver
Has broken faith wi' the bauld Buccleuch."

That was the burden of their thoughts, and although they well knew that ere the dawning each one of them might be claiming the hospitality of six feet of English sod, their hearts were light. To them a message that the fray was up was like the sound of the huntsman's horn in the ears of a thoroughbred hunter.

"'Where are ye gaun, ye mason lads,
Wi' a' your ladders, lang and hie?'
'We gang to berry a corbie's nest,
That wons not far frae Woodhouselee.'"

No light matter was it to harry that corbie's nest. Carlisle Castle was a strong castle, strongly garrisoned, and to make a raid on an English town was a bold attempt indeed. But fear was a thing unknown to the Border reivers, and the flower of them rode with Buccleuch that night – close on his horse's heels Wat o' Harden, Walter Scott of Goldielands, and Kinmont's own four stalwart sons – Jock, Francie, Geordie, and Sandy. As the dark night hours wore on, sleet and wind were reinforced by a thunderstorm.

"And when we left the Staneshaw-bank,
The wind began full loud to blaw,
But 'twas wind and weet, and fire and sleet,
When we came beneath the castle wa'."

When the besiegers reached the castle they found some of the watch asleep, and the rest sheltering indoors from the storm. The outside of the castle was left to take care of itself. It was dismaying to find the scaling ladders too short to be of any use, but a small postern gate was speedily and quietly undermined. Drifting sleet, growling thunder, and the wails of the wind drowned all sounds of the assault, and soon there was no further need for concealment, for the lower court of the castle was theirs. The guard started up, to find sword-blades at their throats; two of them were left dead, and the rest were speedily overpowered. Buccleuch, the fifth man in, gave the command to proclaim aloud their triumph:

"'Now sound out trumpets!' quoth Buccleuch;
'Let's waken Lord Scroope right merrilie!'
Then loud the Warden's trumpet blew —
'O wha daur meddle wi' me?'"

While Buccleuch himself kept watch at the postern, two dozen stout moss-troopers now rushed to the castle gaol, a hundred yards from the postern gate, forced the door of Kinmont Willie's prison, and found him there chained to the wall, and carried him out, fetters and all, on the back of "the starkest man in Teviotdale."

"Stand to it!" cried Buccleuch – so says the traitor, a man from the English side, who afterwards acted as informer to the English Warden – "for I have vowed to God and my Prince that I would fetch out of England, Kinmont, dead or alive."

Shouts of victory in strident Scottish voices, the crash of picks on shattered doors and ruined mason-work, and that arrogant, insolent, oft-repeated blast from the trumpet of him whom Scrope described in his report to the Privy Council as "the capten of this proud attempt," were not reassuring sounds to the Warden of the English Marches, his deputy, and his garrison. Five hundred Scots at least – so did Scrope swear to himself and others – were certainly there, and there was no gainsaying the adage that "Discretion is the better part of valour." So, in the words of the historian, he and the others "did keip thamselffis close."

But no sooner had the rescue party reached the banks of the Eden than the bells of Carlisle clanged forth a wild alarm. Red-tongued flames from the beacon on the great tower did their best, in spite of storm and sleet, to warn all honest English folk that a huge army of Scots was on the war-path, and that the gallows on Haribee Hill had been insulted by the abduction of its lawful prey.

"We scarce had won the Staneshaw-bank,
When a' the Carlisle bells were rung,
And a thousand men on horse and foot,
Cam' wi' the keen Lord Scroope along.

Buccleuch has turn'd to Eden Water,
Even where it flow'd frae brim to brim,
And he has plunged in wi' a' his band,
And safely swam them through the stream.

He turned them on the other side,
And at Lord Scroope his glove flung he —
'If ye like na' my visit in merry England,
In fair Scotland come visit me!'

All sore astonished stood Lord Scroope,
He stood as still as rock of stane;
He scarcely dare to trew his eyes,
When through the water they had gane.

'He is either himsel' a devil frae hell,
Or else his mother a witch maun be;
I wadna' have ridden that wan water
For a' the gowd in Christentie.'"

At a place called "Dick's Tree," not far from Longtown, there still stands the "smiddy" where lived the blacksmith who had the honour of knocking off Kinmont Willie's fetters. Sir Walter Scott has handed on the story of the smith's daughter who, as a little child, was roused at daybreak by a "sair clatter" of horses, and shouts for her father, followed, as the smith slept soundly, by a lance being thrust through the window. Looking out in the dim grey of the morning, the child saw "more gentlemen than she had ever seen before in one place, all on horseback, in armour, and dripping wet – and that Kinmont Willie, who sat woman-fashion behind one of them, was the biggest carle she ever saw – and there was much merriment in the party."

Furious was the hive of wasps that Buccleuch brought about his head by thus insultingly casting a stone into the English bike. The wrath of Queen Elizabeth was unappeasable. Scrope found it sounded better to multiply the number of the raiders by five, but Scottish tongues were not slow to tell the affronting truth, and the Englishmen of Carlisle had the extra bitterness of being butts for the none too subtle jests of every Scot on the Border. The success of so daring a venture made the Scottish reivers arrogant. Between June 19 and July 24 of that year, the spoils of the western Marches were a thousand and sixty-one cattle and ninety-eight horses, and some thirty steadings and other buildings, mostly in Gilsland, were burned. The angry English made reprisals. It was in one of them that the Scots who were taken were leashed "like doggis," and for this degradation Buccleuch and Ker of Cessford made the English pay most handsomely. Together those "twoo fyrebrandes of the Border" led an incursion into Tynedale, where, in broad daylight, they burned three hundred steadings and dwelling-houses, many stables, barns, and other outhouses, slew with the sword fourteen of those who had been in the Scottish raid, and brought back a handsome booty.

King Jamie was in a most uncomfortable position. Queen Elizabeth demanded Buccleuch's punishment, and he argued. She nagged, and he wriggled. Finally, after continual angry remonstrances from the insulted English monarch, he had to give in, and Buccleuch and Ker had both, at different periods, to suffer imprisonment for the sin, in the virgin Queen's eyes, of the rescue of Kinmont Willie, and of its bloody consequences. We realise what was the reputation of Buccleuch and of his followers when we see into what a state of panic the mere prospect of having the Border chieftain as prisoner at Berwick-on-Tweed threw Sir John Carey, the governor. To Lord Hunsdon he wrote: "I entreat your Lordship that I may not become the jailor of so dangerous a prisoner or, at least, that I may know whether I shall keep him like a prisoner or no? for there is not a worse or more dangerous place in England to keep him than this; it is so near his friends, and, besides, so many in this town willing to pleasure him, and his escape may be so easily made; and once out of this town he is past recovery. Wherefore I humbly beseech your honor, let him be removed from hence to a more secure place, for I protest to the Almightie God, before I will take the charge to kepe him here, I will desire to be put in prison myself, and to have a keeper of me. For what care soever be had of him here, he shall want no furtherance whatsoever wit of man can devise, if he himself list to make an escape. So I pray your Lordship, even for God's sake and for the love of a brother, to relieve me from this danger." But there was no attempt at a rescue of Buccleuch. He did not desire it. Not as a criminal, but as a state prisoner he gave himself up to the English governor, and, having given his parole, he kept it, like the gentleman of stainless honour that he was.

Two years after his imprisonment at Berwick-on-Tweed, Buccleuch, on his way with two hundred followers to serve with Prince Maurice of Nassau in the Low Countries – a raid from which many a Borderer never returned – was sufficiently received into favour to be permitted to go to London and kiss the hand of her most gracious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. The remembrance of Kinmont Willie still rankled in that most unforgiving of royal breasts.

"How dared you," she imperiously demanded, "undertake an enterprise so desperate and presumptuous?"

"Dared?" answered Buccleuch; "what is it that a man *dares* not do?"

Elizabeth turned impetuously to a lord-in-waiting. "With ten thousand such men," she said, "our brother of Scotland might shake the firmest throne in Europe."

That Kinmont Willie avenged himself not once, but many times, on those who had treacherously trapped him and done their best to make him meat for the greedy English gibbet, is not a matter of surmise, but one of history. His ride into Carlisle on that bleak March day, and the long days and dreary nights he spent in chains in the English gaol, were little likely to engender a gentle and forgiving spirit in the breast of one of the most fiery of the "minions of the moon." When, in 1600, he raided Scrope's tenants, they were given good cause to regret the happenings in which Scrope had taken so prominent a part.

We have no record of the end of Kinmont Willie, and can but hope, for his sake, that he died the death he would have died – a good horse under him almost to the end, a good sword in his hand, open sky above him, and round him the caller breeze that has blown across the Border hills. In a lonely little graveyard in the Debatable Land, close to the Water of Sark, and near the March dyke between the two countries, his body is said to rest. Does there never come a night, when the moon is hidden behind a dark scud of clouds, and the old reiver, growing restless in his grave, finds somewhere the shade of a horse that, in its day, could gallop with the best, and rides again across the Border, to meet once more his "auld enemies" of England, and, to the joyous accompaniment of the lowing of cattle and the jingle of spurs, returns to his lodging as the first cock crows, and grey morning breaks?

"O, they rade in the rain, in the days that are gane,
In the rain and the wind and the lave;
They shoutit in the ha' and they routit on the hill,
But they're a' quaitit noo in the grave."

IN THE DAYS OF THE '15

Close on two hundred years back from the present time there stood far up the South Tyne, beyond Haltwhistle, on the road – then little better than a bridle-track – running over the Cumberland border by Brampton, an inn which in those days was a house of no little importance in that wild and remote country.

If its old walls could speak, what, for instance, might they not have told of Jacobite plottings? Beneath its roof was held many a meeting of the supporters of the King "over the water," James the Eighth; and here, riding up from Dilston, not seldom came the unfortunate Earl of Derwentwater, to take part in the Jacobite deliberations. The young lord and the horse he usually rode were figures familiar and welcome to the country folk around, and at the inn they were as well known as was the landlord himself. It was not long after a secret meeting held here in the earlier half of the year 1715 that the warrants were issued which led to Derwentwater's flight from Dilston, and precipitated the Rising that within a few months rolled so many gallant heads in the dust of the scaffold.

It might perhaps have been better for Lord Derwentwater had he been less beloved in Northumberland, and had his devoted admirers been unable to send him notice of the coming of the warrant for his arrest. He might not then have had opportunity to commit himself so deeply; and there might have been a romantic and pathetic figure the less in the doleful history of that unhappy period. As it was, he had time to get clear away, and was able to lie securely hid, partly in farmhouses, partly near Shaftoe Crags, till the news reached him that Forster had raised the standard of rebellion. On 6th October 1715, at the head of a little company of gentlemen and armed servants, he joined Forster at Greenrig.

A poor affair at the best, this muster in Northumberland; and though the county was seething with excitement, and a few notable men went out with the Earl, his personal following did not exceed seventy in all. Then followed the march which ended so disastrously in pitiful surrender at Preston that fatal November day. However gallant personally, Forster was an incapable soldier, no leader of men, and General Wills had but to spread wide his net to sweep in the bulk of the insurgents – Forster, Derwentwater, Kenmure, Nithsdale, Carwath, Wintoun, and men less exalted in rank by the score and the hundred. The bag was a heavy one, that day of disaster to the Stuart cause; and alas, for many of those who filled it! Alas, too, for the wives and the mothers who sat at home, waiting! Not to everyone was given the opportunity to dare all for husband or son; to few came such chance as was seized by the Countess of Nithsdale, who so contrived that her husband escaped from the Tower disguised in woman's clothing. It was boldly schemed, and success followed her attempt. Others could but pray to God and petition the King. She not only prayed, but acted. Would that there might have been one so to act for Derwentwater! More happy had it been, perhaps, for his Countess had she never uttered the taunt that ended his hesitation to join in the Rebellion: "It is not fitting that the Earl of Derwentwater should continue to hide his head in hovels from the light of day, when the gentry are up in arms for their lawful sovereign." They say that her spirit mourns yet within the tower of Dilston.

Away up the valley of the Tyne, amongst the wild Northumberland hills, news went with lagging gait, those leisurely days of the eighteenth century; even news of battle or of disaster did not speed as it is the wont of ill news to do: "For evil news rides fast, while good news baits." Tidings, in those good old days, but trickled through from ear to ear, slowly, as water filters through sand. Little news, therefore, of Lord Derwentwater, or of the Rising, was heard in or around Haltwhistle after the insurgent force left Brampton; no man knew for a certainty what fortune, good or bad, had waited on the fortunes of his friends.

Night was closing down on the desolate Border hills on a drear November evening of 1715. Throughout a melancholy day, clinging mist had blurred the outline of even the nearest hills; distance was blotted out. Thin rain fell chillingly and persistently, drip, dripping with monotonous plash from

the old inn's thatched eaves; a light wind sobbed fitfully around the building, moaning at every chink and cranny of the ill-fitting window-frames. "A dismal night for any who must travel," thought the stableman of the inn, as he looked east and then west along the darkening road. No moving thing broke the monotony of the depressing outlook, and the groom turned to his work of bedding down for the night the few animals that happened to be in his charge. They were not many; most of those that so frequently of late had stood here were away with their owners, following the fortunes of the Earl of Derwentwater; business was dull at the inn. Well, let the weather be what it liked, at least the groom's work was over for the night, and he might go sit by the cheerful peat fire in the kitchen, and drink a health to the King – the rightful King, God bless him; and it was little harm, thought he, if he drank another to the Earl – whom might the Saints protect.

Even as he turned to go, in the dusk at the door, framed, as it were, in a picture, there appeared a horseman leading a tired horse, the reins loose over his arm. Though seen only in that half light, the outline of man and beast were familiar to the stableman. Both seemed far spent; the horse held low its head, and sweat stood caked and thick on neck and heaving flanks, and dripped off inside down by the hocks.

"Ye've ridden hard, sir," said the groom, bustling forward to take the horse.

The stranger said no word, but himself led the tired animal into an empty stall. Yet, as the groom remembered later, of the other horses in the stable, not one raised its head, or whinnied, or took any notice whatever as the new-comer entered.

The stableman turned to lift his lantern, and when, an instant later, he again faced about, he stared to find himself alone; the strange horseman was nowhere to be seen. And the horse in the stall? Him the groom knew well; there was no possibility of mistake; it was the well-known grey on which Lord Derwentwater had ridden away to cast in his lot with Forster.

"Mistress! Mistress!" he cried, hurrying into the house, "has his lordship come in? He's led his grey gelding into the stable the noo, and niver a word wad he say to me or he gaed oot. An' I'm feared a's no weel wi' him; he was lookin' sair fashed, an' kind o' white like."

"His lordship i' the inn? Guide us!" cried the landlady, snatching up a tallow dip and hurrying into the unlit guest-room.

"Ye hae gotten back, my lord? And is a' weel wi' your lordship? And – e-eh! what ails – ?" she gasped, as a tall figure, seated in the great oak chair by the smouldering fire, turned on her a face wan and drawn, disfigured by bloody streaks across the cheek. Slowly, like a man in pain, or one wearied to the extreme of exhaustion, the seated figure rose, stood for a moment gazing at her, and then, ere the landlady could collect her scattered wits, it had vanished. Vanished, too, was the grey horse that the groom had seen brought into the stable; and, what was more, the bedding in the stall where the animal had stood was entirely undisturbed, and showed no trace of any beast having been there.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.