

LITERATURE, &c.

FROM FRASER'S MAGAZINE.

THE WHITE LADY:

A TALE OF THE HIGHLANDS.

Whoever has passed the old military road from the Black Mount to Fort William, will remember the deep secret corraie which opens from the extremity of Kinloch-Leven. Surrounded by lofty precipices, it lies like a vast cauldron in the bosom of the hill, and it is only for two or three hours after noon that the sun ever shines upon the little stream which murmurs along its bottom. Before the last century its gloom was deepened by the forest of birch and pine trees which overhung the crags; but, partially covered with short tuft and deer's grass, it affords excellent pasture in the summer months. For this and its profound solitude it was formerly the favourite haunt of the great stags at that season, when they retire from the herds into the recesses of the mountains. Their passes were well known to the hunters of Lochabry, and, at the twilight or full moon, the dark figure of a deer-stalker might sometimes be seen watching behind the great stone of Cean-glass, or stealing down the great hollow of Sloch-dubh.

It was on a bright still morning in February that such a figure appeared, following the bank of the stream which descends from the corraie. Though the sun had risen, the shade was still so deep under the mountain that the green tartans of the Highlander were scarcely visible as they moved through the blue tint of the dewy heath, and at times he could only be distinguished by the motion of his long white purse and the little snowy speck of the cockade in his bonnet. At length his dark figure reached the gorge of the corraie; and as it passed into the sunshine, the light flashed brightly upon the long Spanish matlock which he carried on his shoulder, and the dirk, pistols, and broadsword, which kept a continual glitter as he moved. The light now discovered the shaggy limbs of a large deer-greyhound which followed at his foot, and sometimes stopped to stretch his nose to the wind; or prick his ear at the forked thorns which showed their grey half-withered points among the carns.

They had entered the parks which lie along the side of the lake, and were approaching the little peel-tower which then occupied the site of the present house of Kinloch, when suddenly the dog put his nose to the ground, and, raising his ears, tracked the path with increasing speed, till at once he bounded forward and disappeared in the winding of the ground. The hunter hastily unslung his matlock, and, springing forward, glanced his keen eye to every bush and hollow from which the game might start. Without, however, seeing any object, he came to the deep chasm where the stream falls over a lofty crag into a deep black pool overhung by birch trees and aspens; but as he turned the rock which shuts in the ravine, he at once discovered the object which the dog had tracked.

By the edge of the pool stood a tall dark young man, wrapped in his plaid, and leaning on his deer-gun; his mantle was of the coarse thick tartan worn by a simple deer-stalker; but the broad eagle's wing and tuft of heath in his bonnet were distinctions which could be worn by none but a DUINE-DASAL of the clan Donnel. As he stood musing on the foaming water, he was roused by the dog, which bounded up the path, and, leaping on his breast, whined, howled, and saluted his cheek with his rough dewy nose.

The young man received him with the caresses of an old friend, but, immediately looking round, hastened towards his master with the extended hand, and the exclamation, "Welcome, my foster-brother!"

The hunter returned his salutation with that mixture of affection and respect with which the inferior foster-brother regarded the superior. After the first words,— "I fear, Kinloch, that I keep late tryst; since you are thus early abroad to meet me," said the hunter.

"No, Angus," replied the young laird, "you are before time; but it is I that am impatient to see you, upon an enterprise which will take all our space to concert. I returned last night from Loch Awe—"

"Loch Awe!" exclaimed the hunter, "and did you see the young lady of Fraoch-Elan?"

"No," replied Mac Donnel; "I had enough to escape the Campbells and dubh-gaul, without crossing the laird of Mac Naughton, whose right hand is left unchristened to revenge his father's blood on me and mine. I saw red Duncan, however, who has not forgotten that I spared his life at Inverloch: from him I learned that Beatrice is confined to the island, and that Alan Dubh Mac Alan has sworn by the holy rood that his daughter shall never cross the shore till she submits to give her hand to the Black Knight of Ardcannel. Mac Lauchlin is unremitting in his endeavours to obtain her favor, but, during his visits to the island, she never leaves her room; at other times she often walks alone

upon the narrow beach, and her white figure is seen standing on the little green rock above the water after the twilight has fallen."

"And is there never a bird on the lake would fly over the waves, and whistle a true song from the blue stone?" said Angus.

"I have a 'grey goshawk' would fly with 'Lord William's!'" replied Kinloch. "Argyll is panic-struck by his defeat at Inverloch, and, expecting nothing less than to see Montrose at Inverara, has summoned all the chieftains who owe him service to bring their vassals to the castle on St. Valent's day. By the help of Duncan I have concerted a tryst with Beatrice; and on the evening after her father leaves the island, she will wait on the little cladh under the east rock. We must be on the lake an hour after sunset. Duncan will provide the boat, and I trust to you and your brothers to be in my aid."

"We are as the sword in your belt and the gun on your shoulder," answered Angus.

As Kinloch was about to reply, his attention was drawn by the low restless growl of the dog, and, glancing down the ravine, he saw one of his men ascending the path with great haste. In a few minutes he reached the fall, and, without replying to the question of his master, delivered a small billet into his hand. As Kinloch glanced on the seal, his cheek became red as the collar of his crimson doublet, and, tearing open the paper, his eyes ran eagerly over the writing; but all at once his face changed deadly pale, and, turning suddenly to the attendant,— "Cross the larch with all your speed," said he; "warn Eachain Mor, and Donald Ladir and his brothers, to meet at the ferry of Glen Co an hour before sunset; bid them bring their mail-shirts and two-handed swords, and put balls in their pouches;—I shall wait you at Invercoe."

Angus stood in silent amazement while Kinloch gave some further brief instructions to his vassal; but as soon as he had left them, Mac Donnel put the letter in the hand of his foster-brother. "Alan Mac Alan has discovered the tryst," said he; "Ardrannel is at Fraoch-Elan, and the bridal is fixed for to-morrow before vespers, in the convent church of Inishail."

The clansman ran quickly over the fair but trembling lines, which had been traced by the unsteady hand of Beatrice. "What will you do?" exclaimed he.

"That I know not yet," replied Kinloch, "but there is not a moment to lose. Alan Dubh has not discovered the assistance of Duncan; and while we wait your brothers, we will take farther counsel with the black clerk of Kilmoray, whose silk gown and grey beard are often better than coat of mail and steel wineyard."

Angus threw his matlock over his shoulder, and his brother leading the way, they bounded into the ravine, and fording the brook, were lost under the copse-wood which descended the tower.

The day began to close within the cloister of Inishail. The stained light faded in the narrow casements, and faintly touched the tall pillars and white figures of the tombs around the chancel. One by one the lamps appeared like twinkling stars through the dim and solitary aisle, and the black figures of the monks glided like shadows across the choir, and vanished at their stalls; but not a sound disturbed the profound stillness, except the faint hum of the water and the slow toll of the vesper-bell, scarce audible within the building.

At length the bell ceased, the light was illuminated about the altar, the dark cowl of the monks appeared motionless in their stalls, and in a few moments the white figure of the abbot, followed by the procession of friars, entered the aisle and passed towards the choir. The priests were scarce seated when the faint sound of pipes pealed through the cloisters, and, as they gradually advanced, continued moving round the church with the wild thrilling clamour of a war-march.

The music stopped all at once, and in the succeeding pause the heavy measured tramp of feet approached through the cloister, and suddenly the black shadows of an armed crowd entered the aisle. As they passed forward, the flutter of female drapery appeared beyond the dark tartans and blue mail; and the veiled figure of Beatrice, attended by a white train of bride-maidens, moved slowly towards the altar. Supported by their arms, the bride advanced like an inanimate shadow through the crowd of gazing monks and warriors. Her face was wholly covered by the veil of her white plaid, but, as she passed, the quick palpitation of her breath was visible on the mantle, and the hand which held it had the cold lifeless whiteness of death. Except from her place in the procession, she had not been distinguished among the rest of the female figures; for her dress had no other ornament than the simplest of her attendants, and the plaids drawn over their heads discovered only the features of a few.

As the train approached the altar, the bride became visibly agitated, and once or twice her head moved as if her eyes glanced round for some object of hope or expectation: but there was none to meet them, except the

black fingers of the monks; and as she drew her plaid closer to her face, her slender figure trembled like a leaf.

At length the crowd gathered before the altar, and the Black Knight, who had closed the procession with his own followers, advanced to the rail; but the bride never lifted her eyes, nor offered any reply to a few eager words which he whispered at her cheek. The abbot stepped down to the rail and opened the missal; Alan Mac Alan fixed his stern eye upon the bride, and all at once the deep voices of the monks began the chorus of the service. The bridemaids fell on their knees before the rail, but the bride remained fixed and motionless, till Alan Dubh, taking her hand, signed to her to kneel, and she sank slowly down with the empty passiveness of an infant. The service proceeded without interruption, the care cloath was spread over the kneeling couple, the ring was placed on the finger of the bride, and the abbot was about to speak the final benediction, when several armed men rushed into the church, and, regardless of the sacred service, cried the alarm-cry of the Mac Naughtons, and, forcing their way towards the chiefs,— "Alaister Mac Coll-cedach has come down Glen O, with all Montrose's Irish!" cried the foremost, "and is burning the lake-side down to the black wood of Ardtuile!"

As he spoke, a dusk-red glimmer shone through the east windows of the church, like the glow of the setting sun. The organ and the choir stopped at once, and the whole bridal company and many of the monks rushed towards the door. As soon as they passed the arch, they beheld the lights of burning houses, and pillars of glowing smoke glimmering through the distant darkness like a chain of watch fires. Some of the conflagrations appeared as near as the crofts of Auchlian, and through a dusky glimmer across the water, faintly touching the long black barges and confused figures of the armed men who were already hurrying into the boats or launching them from the shore.

Alan Mac Alan and the Black Knight never quitted the hands of the bride, while the vassals and monks hastened the female attendants on board the barges. In the darkness and confusion, one of the bridemaids was separated from her companions, and a group of monks who had been busy with their assistance suddenly hurried her into a small skiff which lay beyond the rest, and before any could follow, leaped into the boat and pulled off from the shore.

For some moments the shallop kept her course with the crowd of barges, but by degrees she edged away till their long black shadows disappeared one by one into the darkness. For a short time the plash of their oars could still be heard, but suddenly the boat changed her course, and, turning her head to the north, pulled straight across the lake. Not a word was spoken. Whether from alarm or ignorance of their direction, the lady made no observation or inquiry; and as the black figures of the monks pulled at their oars, not a sound passed but the short dash of the strokes and the quick gurgle of the gliding boat.

The night was so still that every star twinkled in the black water, but their light was scarce sufficient to distinguish the pale figure of the bride in the stern of the boat; and it was only by a momentary shadow that the eye could discern the dark outline of a monk who sat beside her and steered the skiff.

He kept the helm direct for the Lettir-beann, the wide birch wood which covers the lower half of Cruachan, and in less than an hour the broad red moon rose over Beann Luid, and showed the dark shadow of the forest and the tall silvery stems of the birch-trees above the shore. The boatmen redoubled their strokes at the sight, and at length the shallop grounded under the deep shadow of the wood. The monks leaped out on the beach, and the steersman, supporting the maiden from her seat, lifted her gently to the sand. As she descended, her plaid loosened from the broche, and, the breeze blowing back its hood, the faint moonlight glanced upon her face and illuminated the pale features of Beatrice of Fraoch-Elan. It was but a momentary blink, for a little white hand appeared from the fluttering mantle, and, drawing it close over her face, again confined it with the broche.

The monk who had acted as steersman now gave his arm to assist her from the shore; and as soon as the rest had drawn up the boat, they ascended the steep bank into the wood, and in a few paces reached the path which leads towards Glenurehy. They had not gone a bow-shot when one of the party gave a low whistle, and immediately a boy, mounted on a black Highland garran, rode out from among the bushes. The man who supported Beatrice asked a brief question, in a low voice; and at the reply the monks hastily unbraced their knotted cords, and, throwing off their gowns and hoods, discovered the armed figures of Rannald of Kinloch and his five foster-brothers.

Each had a quilted accion and steel cap, a dirk and