

LITERATURE, &c.

FROM FRASER'S MAGAZINE.

THE WHITE LADY:

A TALE OF THE HIGHLANDS.

(Concluded.)

For a moment he gazed upon the apparition, looked to her slender figure, and stood confounded at the resemblance of shape and stature, which had enabled her so well to personate her mistress. But suddenly seizing the wrist of the trembling maiden, he drew her forward after Mac Naughton. "Alan Mac Alan!" cried he, fiercely, "here is a damnable treason! and if with your knowledge, by St. Moray I will give light to your masking shall make the fire of Mac Colla like the Friar Rush!"

Alan Dubh turned back, confounded at this address; but when he saw the face of Margaret under the plaid of his daughter, he uttered a shout of malediction which was heard in the gate. Immediately he called for the warder, the irons, and his daughter, in one breath; and the terrified maidens hiding their faces behind each other, he ran from plaid to plaid, till, discovering the entire absence of Beatrice, and the presence but of one bridemaid, the whole plot burst upon the confounded father and bridegroom. For several moments Mac Alan stood without speaking; but suddenly, "Malice!" said he, in a calm voice, "bring my hauberk, and let every man get on his arms."

"Of what use are arms?" cried Ardeconnell, contemptuously. "How shall we follow, who know not the road? and besides, she is doubtless fled to yonder sons of Satan, who are setting the fire of hell to your corns and crofts on the Loch side."

"I care not for the road," replied Alan; "wherever it is, it is with Randal of Kinloch; and where should his road lie, but to his own fortalice? If they have taken the south side of the lake, they must make the round of the Mealach, or Glen Lochie, and we shall cut them off by the Glens, before they have crossed the Black Mount. If they are gone straight for Glen Co, we shall be but half an hour behind them; and it shall be hard but the deer's chowrant shall overtake the silk slipper on Beann-Ani."

Ardeconnell gave a sullen acquiescence, but the whole tower was instantly filled with the clatter of mail and spear-staves; and in less than half an hour the long black line of barges, filled with glaives, hauberks, and steel bonnets, swept glittering through the moonlight water.

The bell of Caolchairn struck midnight as they passed under the castle, and disembarked upon the level meadows of the Coish. The party was not fifty paces below the path from the Lettir-Beann, and the moon shone so bright that they could have seen the white figure of Beatrice at a bow-shot distant. For a moment the chiefs paused upon the brae, and gazed towards the wood; but immediately the long clinking line of hauberks and glaives filed into the narrow path, and marched rapidly towards Glenurcha.

The had almost reached the ford where the road parts for Clachan Disart and Glen Strae, when they met a herdsman, who, from the general alarm of the inroad, was driving his cattle to join his friends, who had collected their herds under the walls of Castle Caolchairn. He had come by the very path which is the shortest track for Glen Co, and upon being interrogated if he had seen any who bore the description of Beatrice, immediately declared, that, not half an hour before, he had passed a lady, mounted on a black garron, and attended by six armed men, in whose bonnets he distinguished the badge of the Mac Donnels. Supposing them to be a party belonging to Alaister Mac Colla, he had driven his cattle among the bushes at their approach; but had lain concealed so near the path, that he overheard one of the men speak of passing into Glen Co's country, by Glen Etive and Dalness.

At this intelligence Alan Dubh hurried forward the pursuit, and immediately ascending from the glen followed the path which leads over the range of mountains that separate Glen Strae from Glen Kinglass. As they ascended, the pursuers glanced to each grey stone or white birch that caught the pale moonshine, and more than once deceived them from the glitter of mail and slender shape of a maiden figure. By degrees, however, the moon became obscured by shifting clouds, and a deep, black, sullen bank rose in the north, and gradually drew over the whole sky. The last light faded from the rocks as the pursuers passed the summit of Larich-Ouran: and as they descended into Glen Kinglass the darkness became so great, that each CARNACH could scarce discern the man by whom he was preceded.

† The ancient Highland brogue.

They reached the narrow strath, forded the water, and followed the glen, without meeting any trace of their pursuit, till they came out beneath the deep woods of Glen Etive. The night was profoundly still and close; not a breath of wind ruffled the broad lake, but a deep continual roar came from the mountain; and as they reached the bank of Ait-Chapel the black water was running over the largest stones with impetuous fury. The men made a sudden stand upon the brink, but all at once the sound of distant voices came through the thunder of the torrent. "Forward! forward! they are before us!" cried Alan Dubh; and, rushing into the water, the dark line of men locked their arms together, and after a moment's desperate struggle gained the opposite bank.

The voices were now lost; but the pursuers hurried on with unabated speed, though scarcely able to distinguish the shadow of the scattered trees, when suddenly a flash of lightning showed the distant summits of the mountains, and gave a momentary glimmer to their path. It discovered, however, no object but the grey rocks and doddered oaks; and the sound of their step was lost in the distant but heavy peal of the thunder which rolled down the glen. The rising storm seemed to give new energy to Alan Dubh. "Press on!" said he, "they will shelter from the tempest; or if not, there is no maiden may ride the Etive."

For several hours they continued their march with unabated speed and constant vigilance. All night the thunder rolled before them, and the unceasing lightning played and glimmered about the black ridges of Glen Co, as if the spirits of the storm were engaged in battle on their summits. All at once a terrific explosion of light blazed in the north, and for an instant the whole mountain of Dalness seemed on fire with the white forked lightning, which ran like serpents upon the air. For several moments a deep dark pause succeeded, but suddenly an awful peal of thunder burst in the wind, and the earth and air seemed to tremble beneath the reverberation, which rolled over the mountains, and rebellowed from hill to hill, till it died away in the south.

Alan Mac Alan watched the tempest in silence, but his countenance betrayed no doubt nor fear for the fragile maiden, who was then exposed, unsheltered, to its fury; but after that terrific peal the lightning and thunder continued to decrease, and the storm could be distinguished receding gradually into the west. As it passed away, a few large heavy drops of rain fell in Glen Etive, but the close air remained still and breathless, as if it listened to the passing tempest.

The morning began to break as the pursuers approached the water of Etive; but as soon as they came in sight of the stream they made a sudden halt. No mortal nor horse could ford the swollen flood; and doubtful of Beatrice and her conductors could have passed before the rising of the water, Alan Dubh and the Black Knight debated whether to cross the river or search the neighbouring wood. At length they decided to leave a party of their followers behind the stream, and with the rest to hasten forward and gain the passes of Glen Co.

Having made the necessary division, the pursuers defiled over the tottering bridge, formed of the trunks of two trees, thrown from bank to bank; and having passed the narrow strath beyond, began to climb the steep chain of mountains which closes the extremity of Glen Etive, and bounds the royal deer-forest of Dalness. The gushing streams and rain-worn rocks now gave evidence that they had reached the tract over which the storm had passed; and as the light advanced and they ascended on the hill, they discovered the grey trunks of the scattered pine trees, blown over from the crags, and the slopes of the hill torn into deep gulches by the rain. The stream by which they ascended had brought down vast fragments of its rock, and upon one of the heaps of shingle, now deserted by the abating water, lay a little doe, which had been surprised and washed away by the sudden rise of the torrent.

The sun was about to appear as they ascended out of the deep black pass which leads towards Glen Co, and came upon the high naked DRIM, or back, which lies between Beann-Dubh and Scur-na-Bhouic. It is a wild, unsheltered, lofty ridge, so high above the natural region of vegetation, that it affords no plant but a short cold moss, which barely covers the black spongy soil. No trees have cast a seed so high, and, devoid of any pasture for the deer, it is frequented only by the solitary eagle, or a lonely fox crossing from the cairns. At intervals, a little black heap directs the track of the shepherds from glen to glen; and formerly, on the highest spot, the hunters had built a small hut, for shelter against the storms by which they were sometimes overtaken in passing from the forest.

As they approached this spot, "It should not be unlikely they might rest in the BOTHY," said an old Highlander, who followed Mac Alan. "There could be no better shelter, and they should never think to be follow-

ed into Glen Co's country, and Alaister Mac Colla in Glenurcha."

Mac Naughton made no reply, but his eye glanced eagerly for the hut, and he advanced up the steep with increasing speed. They had nearly reached the summit, when one of the Highlanders observed a bright object glittering on the moss; and as he came to the spot, discovered it to be a fragment of a double mail. On lifting it, he immediately recognised the gusset of a hauberk; but several of the links were torn and twisted in an extraordinary manner, and some marked as if partly fused. His companions examined it with surprise; but as they proceeded they picked up the lock of a pistol, the hilt of a dirk, and several small fragments of dress and arms, till as they came to the summit of the hill, they beheld a sight which froze them with horror.

Scattered over the moss and rocks lay the remnants of arms and garments, blackened, and singed, and torn to shreds. The tatters of acrons and plaids were whirled high upon the precipices, and hung fluttering from the points of inaccessible rocks; and below lay a two-handed sword, split and shivered like a lathe, and near it the barrel of a match lock, twisted and writhed like a hazel withe. No living being, nor any remains of a human body were visible: but the prints of recent steps were deeply tracked in the moss, and it was easy to trace the short tread of a small horse, and the stride of several men, who appeared to have passed during the storm.

After the first pause of astonishment, the Highlanders looked round for the hut; but it was gone, and nothing appeared against the sky except the smooth naked line of the moss where it had stood. Alan Dubh hastened forward to the spot. The earth was raised, and swept to the bare rock; and in the scattered drift was marked a faint circular trace, like the vortex of a whirlwind. At a considerable distance, rafters and stones were scattered along the hill, and upon one of the beams hung the tatters of a white plaid and a broad fragment of yellow silk, resembling the embroidered breast of an acron.*

Mac Alan snatched the fluttering tartan from the tree, and spreading the folds, beheld with horror the peculiar pattern of the white plaid, worn by the women of Glenurcha. For a long while he stood motionless and speechless, the torn plaid fast clenched in his hands, and his eyes fixed upon the sullied colors. At length he was aroused by the reiterated voice of Ardeconnell, who hastily called his attention to the indistinct figure of a man, seated on a large stone in the glen below. They called, but he did not answer nor turn his head; and the whole company hastily descended the hill towards the spot.

As they approached, they discovered a grey old man sitting on the stone; his bow lay on the grass beside him, and between his feet a large deer-lurcher, apparently dead, and his long hair scorched and stained with blood. Regardless of the clank of the armed steps which advanced towards him, the hunter continued leaning his face on his hand, his eyes fixed on the dog, and his grey head moving with a slow abstracted motion. There was a wild, fearful vacancy in his look; and as the Highlanders stopped and spoke to him, he returned no answer or notice, and continued with his gaze fixed upon the greyhound, till a beam of the rising sun flashed on his face from the corslet of Alan Dubh, he suddenly lifted his head. At the sight of the clear light, he started up, and breaking into a laugh of fearful exultation, waved his hand to the red sunshine. "The fire! the fire of heaven!" he exclaimed; "the battle of the spirits amidst the clouds!" and tossing his arms, he broke into a wild Ossianic song:

They came in the fire of the sky,
Like the terrible spirit of Itha,
When he rides in the roar of a thousand storms,
And scatters battle from his eyes.

He stopped suddenly, and pointing to the hill, leaned forward and muttered, in a low voice, "The fire ran upon the ground! the rocks were lifted in the wind!—Bran! Bran! Bran!—Where is my dog?"

He looked wildly round, but instead sitting down, wept over the Greyhound, and a momentary gleam of reason seeming to come to his mind, "Mo chu fein!" he whispered; "Bran of the winged foot! The fire and the wind came from the cairn—he was fleet as the great stag of the desert, but he could not fly from them!"

Again he relapsed into silence, while Alan Dubh strove in vain to rouse his abstraction, by inquiry to ascertain if he had seen his daughter; but length as

* A destruction by lightning, exactly similar to its circumstances to that above described, took place at the close of the last century in Blue Mar: a party of eight or ten men disappeared, without any other traces of their arms (save than the remnants of arms and dress scattered on the hill where they were last seen).