

Literature, &c.

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THE PERSECUTOR'S DAUGHTER.

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THE Brae was an antique, and partially dilapidated residence, at present inhabited by an aunt of Helen, and a daughter about the age of Miss Græme. At all times it wore a sombre, deserted look, but on this morning it seemed peculiarly desolate, for the whole front of the house was closed, and all the outhouses shut up. A strange fear came over the father, as he beheld the absence of these signs of life, and he hastily ordered one of the dragoons to dismount and knock at the door. The man obeyed but for a time knocked in vain. The sound of the hilt of his heavy sword, echoed through the long hall of the house; but no signs of life were visible within. The usual frown on the face of Sir Roland grew darker, and he cried angrily—

'Blow off the lock with a pistol, and search the house!'

At this instant, however, and just as the trooper was proceeding to execute this order, the face of an old woman was protruded from one of the upper windows, while she demanded who was below.

'Sir Roland Græme,' replied the leader; 'where are the family? where is Miss Græme? Is any one sick?'

'They are all well, but out,' briefly said the woman.

'Out—out?' exclaimed the persecutor, 'and on Sunday, when there is no church within miles. By G—,' he continued, striving to drown his fears in rage, 'is this a time to be out? Where have they gone? Answer truly, on your life!'

'May it please your honor,' said one of the dragoons, touching his cap, 'may they not have gone to this conventicle, and taken your daughter with them?'

Quick as lightning, Sir Roland wheeled round on the unthinking speaker, and while the indentation on his brow became deeper than ever, and his eye flashed with rage, he said—

'My daughter consorting with traitors and schismatics! Breathe but the word again, and by the God of heaven I will cleave you to the chine!' and his fingers played nervously with the hilt of his sword; but, seeing the deprecating look of the trooper, he recovered himself and added, 'tush! man, you are innocent, but take care how even innocently you rouse the tiger.'

'Tiger,' shrieked the old woman, who had known Sir Roland in former days, and who now seemed impelled by some sudden gust of passion to speak out, 'it is well said; ay, one whose fangs have been in the hearts of the persecuted remnant—but God will avenge his people. Know, false persecutor, that your daughter has gone forth to day, to become one of the chosen few against whom, oh! man of sin, you have so often ridden with steel and war horse, holding the commission of your master, the Evil One. Go to, Rowland Græme, I mind ye when ye were a boy, and little did I think ye would ever be the Judas you are now.'

It is probable that if her hearer had comprehended the whole of this harangue, a bullet would have been the speaker's reward; but the first words of the old woman when taken in connection with the desertion of the house, and his own misgivings from Helen's late letter, assured him that his daughter had indeed attended the conventicle. The conviction fell to his heart with agonizing force. Remembering the injunctions of indiscriminate butchery he had laid on his subordinate, and well knowing that the command would be fulfilled to the very letter, he staggered back in his saddle, with a face whiter than ashes, and was fain to grasp the pommel for support, while he exclaimed in tones wrung from him by the keenest anguish—

'My child!—my child!—I have murdered my child.'

'What is that ye say?' screamed the old hag, leaning eagerly forward; 'have ye sent out your reiving dragoons against the Lord's anointed? and ye fear that they will slay your ain bairn. Oh man of blood, the judgment of God has come upon ye—the judgment has come upon ye.'

But to the voice of the speaker, as well as to the astonished looks of the dragoons, the father was insensible. He still remained clutching the saddle, every feature of his face working with

intense agony, and his eyes glaring vacantly on the air. Those who looked on him shrank back against the horror of his aspect, which fearful as it was, only faintly shadowed forth the torture of the soul within. The peril of his only child stupified him for a time. Then a succession of wild images rose up to his mind. He saw his daughter flying before the ruthless dragoons—he heard her cries for mercy, and the bitter sneer of disbelief on the part of her pursuers—he beheld her lying a corpse on the bare heath, her bosom gashed with brutal wounds, and her long fair hair dabbled with blood. In that moment the memory of every one whom he had slain came up before him—the mothers who had clung to his knees, the babes who had looked innocently in his face as they died, the daughters whose aged parents they had slain before their eyes. He thought of the aged patriarch whom he had shot for refusing the test, and the prophetic warning of the victim, that he, even he, the proud persecutor, should curse the day he ever drew his sword against the saints, came up to his memory. He groaned in anguish. For a time none dared intrude on his misery. One of his men, a trusty body adherent, at length ventured to speak, by asking him if they had not better ride with all haste after Lennox, in the hope that they might yet come up in time. Starting, as if a shot had struck him, the father plunged his horse into the side of his steed, until the blood gushed forth, and wheeling his horse sharp around, looked back sternly on his followers, as he led the way at a fearful pace up the hill. Well did he know the country around, and necessary indeed, was that knowledge, for his frantic gallop required the most intimate acquaintance with every turn and inequality of the road. Over hill and dale, through glen and moor he dashed, reckless of danger, for how could he think of aught but his daughter? Oh! what would he not have given to be assured that he should once more look into her soft blue eyes, that he should again press her to his bosom. What now to him was rank or wealth? Perhaps he thought that Helen would be able to reveal her name ere she fell a victim—but no, for even if she spoke, would his subordinate believe her story? Once, the very suspicion that she favored the Covenanters, would have enraged him, but now he would forgive everything to be assured of her safety. The contending emotions—hope and fear, love and anger, suspense and despair—that agitated his bosom, made that hour's ride an hour of agony, such as he had never before thought a human being could endure, and live. He felt that the curse of God was on him—that all the agonies he had inflicted on others were now concentrated on himself—that he was bound to the wheel of fire. His punishment had already begun. He had rushed against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler and found, like him of old, that man could not contend against the Most High.

We remember when a boy, waking from a dream of horror, to find our mother smiling over our sleep. Oh! never shall we forget the heavenly radiance of that loved face, for radiant with heaven it seemed to us, after the terrors of that midnight vision. Even so we feel when turning from contemplating the tortures of the persecutor, to gaze on his sainted child. The hour was now approaching noon, and Helen, in the presence of the silent flock, had taken upon her these vows she could never put off. Tears fell from many an eye as the worshippers beheld her thus in their midst; and the old pastor was so affected that he could scarcely speak.

'God will reward you, my daughter, and give you strength,' he said; 'I bless His holy name that thou art delivered from the dominion of Baal. It is hard, I know, to disobey a parent but saith not the Scripture, that we must leave father and mother, if required, and take up our cross and follow Christ? Only persevere, and God will make your way plain to you, guiding you, even as he led the children of Israel, with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Trials, and sore ones we must all have in this world—and I boast not, but only speak to cheer you, when I say that mine have been many and hard, but God has given me grace to endure all, even as he will give it unto you. But my race is nearly run; the golden urn will soon be broken at the fountain. I only pray to die like the martyrs of old, with my armor on, and my sword girt on my thigh. Come oh! Lord, most mighty,' he continued, raising his hands and eyes rapturously

above, 'come oh! Lord most gracious, and come quickly!'

A deep silence followed the conclusion of this prayer, while the tears of many fell fast and thick. Every eye was fixed on the holy man, or turned to Helen, for the countenances of both already seemed to glow as those of angels. None dared to draw a breath, lest they should dispel the hushed stillness that so well accorded with the solemnity of the moment. But suddenly a cry was heard, clear, loud and startling—'The dragoons—the dragoons are here!' and had a voice came from the dead, it would not have produced a more sudden change in the hearers. Every one started up, and all eyes were turned toward the point whence the cry had proceeded. There, on a gentle eminence, stood a shepherd waving his plaid, and making gestures for the congregation to fly up the glen. In an instant all was confusion. Mothers clasped their infants to their bosoms, and looked up tremblingly, with faces whiter than ashes—maidens clung to their lovers, and gazed around with dilated eyes and looks of terror—and fathers and brothers, gathering around these dear ones, hurried them on foot and horseback, in the direction indicated by the sentinel. The escort of Helen and her aunt had several armed retainers, and these now rallied to the side of their mistress and the pastor, prepared to make good their retreat, or defend themselves to the last. Hoping to escape the notice of the pursuers, they dashed off in a different direction from that pursued by the others of the congregation; but just as they turned the angle of the hill, the pions of the troopers came into sight, and by the immediate diversion of a party in pursuit of them, the fugitives knew they were detected. Pricking their horses they now hurried rapidly onward, and for several hundred yards lost sight of their pursuers. At length, the little party reached the brow of a slight acclivity.

'Faster—faster,' said one who had looked back, 'they gain on us—press on.'

Every eye was turned in the direction of the pursuers, and there not half the distance they had been before, were the dragoons, thundering along with fiery haste. The sight gave new energy to the fugitives, who urged on their steeds with redoubled vigor. For a while now the result seemed doubtful. During this interval of suspense the feelings of the fugitives were of the most conflicting character—the instinctive love of life alternating with a holy resignation to whatever fate might be assigned them. The old pastor, with eyes uplifted, seemed rapturously awaiting martyrdom—the aunt and cousin of Helen were pale and red by turns as their fear or faith rose triumphant, while the serving men frowned darkly as they looked behind, and appeared to wish for a chance to exchange passes with their steel-clad oppressors. But the feelings of Helen were most difficult to analyze, though perhaps they had less of earth in them than those of any except the pastor. Subdued by the day's sacrifice of herself and all glowing with divine faith and energy, what had she to fear from death? Yet even with this perfect resignation, she could not avoid looking back on their pursuers, while her heart beat quicker as the distance increased between the troopers and themselves.

'We gain—we gain—press on, we shall escape,' shouted the leader of the little party, 'the Lord will yet deliver us from our enemies.'

'Nay, nay,' said the pastor suddenly, 'the hour has come—see ye not that we are cut off in front! the horses and the men of war.'

A cry—almost a shriek—broke from Helen's two female companions as they looked ahead, and saw emerging from a narrow ravine, another party of dragoons, led by a tall dark man far in advance of the rest, and all riding with tumultuous haste. Helen spoke not, but only raised her eyes to heaven, for escape was now impossible. The ravine ahead was the only feasible outlet in that direction, from the glen up which the fugitives had fled, and to turn back would be to fall on the swords of their pursuers. The serving men looked agast, and drew in their reins which example the rest of the party immediately followed. For a minute there was a profound silence. At length the leader again spoke.

'Why stand we here? Escape is impossible, unless we can cut our way through. Let us change the party behind, for that is the smaller. Form a circle around the women—wheel—trot.'

There was no time for consultation, and the proposal seemed to point out the only feasible plan. With the words they

wheeled their horses, and dashed to the desperate attack. The dragoons seemed for an instant astonished by the movement but did not slacken their pace. Their leader waved his sword, and turning to his men, led the onset in person, shouting 'God save the king and bishops,' while the Covenanters, unsheathing their blades, raised the cry of 'The sword of the Lord and Gideon.' And thus borne in the midst of those armed men as in the embrace of a whirlwind, Helen was hurried toward the dragoons.

And as they galloped along, the heavenly girl, with heart uplifted, prayed, while her countenance shone with a glory as of the cherubim.

And who was it that dashed so frantically up the glen, as if fearful that he might not arrive to whet his blade to the blood of the fugitives? Who, but Sir Roland Græme, flying to save his daughter, and even now almost maddened with the thought that he had come too late, for the instant that he emerged from the ravine he knew his child, and now, when he saw her turned back to pursuers, and his practiced eye told him that he could not reach her until the two parties should be engaged in deadly combat, the same sickening sensation of horror which had attacked him at the Brae came over him again. With a sharp cry of agony he ploughed his spurs into the already bloody sides of his horse, and sprang forward at a pace even more frantic than that which he had before led; but swift as was his progress it seemed to him only that of a snail. On—on—he urged his gallant beast, and nearer and nearer the fugitives and their first pursuers drew to each other. What though he gained on the group,—he saw that the hostile parties would meet while he would yet be far away. Oh! what were his feelings as this conviction forced itself on him. If only another mile, in which to overtake them, had been given him, he might perhaps have succeeded; but now hope was in vain. Cold drops of sweat stood on his brow, while his heart throbbed almost to bursting against his corselet. Did none recognize him, and could they not understand his frantic signs? He shouted—again—again—again. The dead might as well be expected to hear.

He waved his plumed hat on high, but at that instant, with the shock of an earthquake, the opponent met. A dizziness came over his eyes, but with a mighty effort he rallied his reeling faculties, and looked at the fight. Was his child yet alive? He saw the gleam of the broadswords, the blaze of fire-arms, and all the tumult of the conflict, but his daughter was not visible. Suddenly a sharp, quick, female shriek, rising shrill over the uproar, met his ear. God of heaven, had his Helen fallen! Another leap of his frantic steed, and he was near enough to hear the shouts of the combatants and distinguish particular persons. He trembled with eagerness, but lo! his daughter was still unarmed, girt around as with a wall of steel, by the broadswords of her defenders. He rose in his stirrups at the sight, and waving his hat around his head, shouted with the voice of a Titan. Joy—joy! they recognise him, and his child extends her arms toward him. She is saved. But not for at this very instant, when at length they understood by their leader's gestures that they were to desist, one of the dragoons, availing himself of the confusion of the moment and thirsting for vengeance for a wound he had received, aimed a pistol at the pastor's bosom, and though a fellow soldier struck aside his arm, it was only to ring the deadly ball to another heart, even that of Helen, who all along had been nestled by the side of the holy man. She fell back into his arms, the blood gushing from her bosom, and for an instant they thought her gone. But when the pastor called on her name she faintly opened her eyes, pressed his hand, smiled sweetly, and murmuring of heaven, sank away apparently into a slumber.

One wild cry of horror had risen, at her fall, from those immediately around her, telling the tale of her murder; but the father needed not this confirmation of his worst fears, for he had seen the shot and beheld her fall. Galloping widely forward, with a few gigantic leaps he reached the offender, whom he smote to the earth with a single blow of his broadsword. The next instant he was by his daughter's side, the group opening awe-struck to let him pass. He spoke not, but oh! the terrible agony of his countenance. Putting them aside with arms extended, he approached and gazed down into the face of his child—gazed as Sapphira did when the apostle told her doom, and she saw the bearers returning from her husband's burial.