

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

A TRUE TALE OF HALLOWE'EN.
BY GEORGINA C. MUNRO.

"Dear aunt, teach us a spell to learn our destiny!" cried a sunny-haired girl, seating herself on a low cushion at the feet of a faded, yet still handsome woman of middle age; you know that it is All-Hallowe'en, and you are far too Scottish, in heart as well as birth, not to furnish us maidens with some spell for this witching night which shall obtain us a glimpse of our partners in the dance of life.

"And does my Mary indeed marvel who shall be her partner?" asked the aunt with a smile, as she stroked the golden ringlets which fell over her knee; "has he not been already chosen—what then would you more?"

"To know, aunt, whether he shall in truth be mine; or rather, it may be, to test the truth of the superstition," replied the laughing girl, bending lower her blushing face.

"And I have yet my partner to discover?" gaily added the younger niece, who leant on the back of her aunt's chair. "I would learn if I shall find one. So come, dear aunt, and teach us some spell for the even."

"How impatient is youth ever!" said the aunt affectionately, yet sadly; "how eager to press forward to the doubtful future, instead of enjoying gratefully the sunshine of the present. But there is time enough to spare for learning twenty spells, if you will have them. Let me rather tell you first a tale of one by whom a spell was tried many, many years ago, long before your laughing eyes first opened on this world."

"Surely, surely, dear aunt!" cried the delighted girls in a breath; "the story first and then the spell."

The aunt sat silent for some minutes. How many thoughts, how many recollections of far distant scenes and vanished hours crowded into her mind as she looked back upon the past! How the feelings, and hopes, and dreams of youth came rushing over her, vivid and life-like, as though they had not long since sunk dead and cold beneath the footsteps of intervening years. Now rose before her the flashing torrents and wild cliffs of her native land, and flitted around her many a

"Scot with her deep blue eye.

Like the far off lochs, 'neath the hill-prot sky."

But with the images thus conjured up were blent the words, the deeds, the actors of the tale she had to tell; and her expectant listener had not long to wait for its commencement.

"It is not the first time you will have heard me say that in all Scotland there is no lovelier valley than Glenfinglass," began the aunt; "nor does its beauty exist merely in my love for the home of my childhood. You should see it in its summer hues—the wide and fertile plain covered with rich meadows and fields of golden corn waving in the sunshine, and surrounded by lofty mountains verdant to their summits, with countless streamlets glittering along their grassy sides. And well did those green mountains seem to shut out from that secluded spot the stir, turmoil and ambition of the world. With rare exceptions all the hopes and fears and interests of its inhabitants were centered in the peaceful valley where their ancestors had dwelt for centuries. From father to son, for many generations, the same farms had steadily descended, and their homes were doubly endeared to the simple minded people by the remembrance that beneath those same roofs their forefathers had dwelt, and sat beside the same hearths in their hours of sorrow and joy.

Here my childhood passed away like a sunny dream, and I grew up with the same band of merry companions that had sported in life's dawning hours on the green banks of the Finglass. Stewarts we were all in name—there was not another in all the glen—and frequent intermarriages had deepened the bond of clan-ship into that of kindred throughout the little community, and scarcely could the voice of gladness be raised in one dwelling without reverberating through every other in the hamlet. Even the score or so of Christian names had each so many claimants that the only made of distinction was by some personal beauty, defect, or other attribute, whether flattering or not being a matter of perfect indifference to the arbitrary power which always chose the readiest. But Helen the bright eyed had no reason to quarrel with her name, nor with the public voice which declared her the loveliest daughter of Glenfinglass; and a merrier happier maiden never plucked the barebell from her native hills. Her heart was as light as the thistle down dancing on the breeze, and yet it held a secret which often cast a pensiveness over her most buoyant spirits. But Helen's love had grown up with her from childhood; and there mingled with it no doubt, no fear, for many and many a time had Evan's glance told his feelings, although in words they were unspoken.

It was a strange moment that first heard those words. One bright morning in early summer, Helen, with a number of her young companions, resolved to make her birthday, a long glad holiday, left their homes in the tranquil valley, and followed the course of the Finglass down the narrow ravine through which the mountain stream has forced its passage to Loch Achray the lovely, as Scott has fitly termed it. On emerging from the dark ravine the lake burst in full beauty on their sight.

Its waveless bosom, flashing like a sapphire in the sunshine, its quiet bays and graceful capes, with their bold rocks clinging low into the slumbering loch, which reflected back every knarled trunk and trembling spray in the beathery mounds sloping gently down towards the water's edge; and beyond the stern lofty mountains frowning darkly upon the fairy scene. And well did the youthful forms scattered along the eastern shore accord with all around, as the maidens with their bright snooded hair, and dark plaids flung gracefully round them, rested in gay groups on the greensward, and the bonneted and plaided youths leaned at their feet, relating the traditions of the bridge of Turk which spans the Finglass; of the great boar hunt, which called together the noblest and bravest sons of Perthshire to destroy there the gaunt and grisly foe, and of, perchance, the boldest, but the most merciless heroine of Scottish story, a dweller once beside the bridge, who, in Cromwell's time, on the shores of Ellen's Isle, in the neighborhood of Loch Katrine, struck the fatal blow which suggested to Scott the deed—on the same spot and under the same circumstances—of "Dunraggan's widowed dame," in the Lady of the Lake.

But apart sat Evan Dhu, or Black Evan, at Helen's feet, telling a gentler and yet sadder tale of blighted love, whose memory lingered in a stern wild glen which gloomed on the opposite shore. The tale was ended, yet his dark eye was raised to hers, and his deep voice wore its softest tone; already the tale of love he hoped more prosperous was trembling on his lips. But it was not there, in the glad sunlight, amid the gleaming wildflowers, that it was fated to be told. There was a movement among their companions, and eager voices called aloud on Evan Dhu. He sprang to his feet; a light breeze was now curling the bright surface of the Lake, and all were impatient to launch the boats which lay in waiting on the strand. It was quickly done, and with light feet and joyous hearts, youth and maiden stepped in, and gaily the three boats were pushed from the shore and the snowy sails spread to woo the rising gale. Now they floated over the blue loch like white clouds across the summer sky; and now, as the breeze freshened, the light boats pressed onwards in a trial of speed, bounding along the lake as though eager to catch the fleeting shadows they cast before them on the glittering waters. Meanwhile the voice of song and laughter was caught up in glad echoes from rock to rock, until it died away amid

"The pine trees blue

On the bold cliffs of Ben Venue."

At length, as if weary of their pastime, the boats divided; and, wandering hither and thither over the lake, pursued what course they would. They were far severed, and that which bore Helen floated like a slumbering seabird in the centre of the loch. Laughter and song had sunk by degrees, as giddy merriment, by long indulgence, lost its zest, until pleasure was now sought in the thrilling interest of tales which struck the deepest chords of the listener's bosoms; and cheeks flushed at the chronicle of wrong or the narrative of noble deeds, and tears flowed at the tale of woe, as though they were events of yesterday. It was now Evan Dhu's turn to contribute his share to the records of the past; and silence grew hushed as death as he told a wild legend of olden time, when their fathers followed the Moray's "silver star" to foray and to fray. There was no lip more eloquent than Evan's, no imagination more vivid in its portraiture of scenes of peril and of love; and, while hanging in wrapt and breathless attention on every word, his listeners marked not that the clouds which an hour before coroneted the bold brows of Ben-An and Ben-Venue now half shrouded their sides in gloom, and that a cloud bank was rising, black as the night, over the northern hills. The breeze had slackened into that calm which so frequently precedes a tempest; but prudence slumbered in the fearless bark, which idly loitered on its way, while its companions, heedful of the warning signs, made preparations to meet, or perhaps escape the coming storm.

Suddenly it burst upon them. The boat was opposite the mouth of a long deep glen, and wildy the first fierce gust of the tempest came rushing down it on the lake, and on the little fragile bark which trembled like a living fearful thing, as its white sail was struck almost to the water. But Evan's ear was the first to catch and comprehend the wild moaning which, by scarcely an instant preceded the ferocious blast; and just as the boat was bending beneath the violence of the blow, he cast loose the rope which held the sail, which blew straight out like a flag—while, relieved from its fatal pressure, the boat righted immediately. But danger was only begun. The loosened sail struggled like a mighty bird to free itself, and the balyard having become entangled above, they could not lower it, and it flapped and dashed against the mast with a violence that threatened destruction to the fragile bark, which fled wildly as a maddened horse before the increasing gale—now rising its prow as though it would spring high into the air, now plunging into the curling waves, as if resolved to bury its living freight beneath them in the water-kelpie's home.

For some moments all sat silent and helpless. The young men looked at each other through the gathering gloom, which was closing like twilight around them, rendering more vivid the lightning flashes which at intervals poured over them an unearthly brightness. Then Evan Dhu rose from his seat by Helen's side, and began to cut away the ropes which

attached the sail to the trembling mast; but scarcely had he severed the first, when the corner of the flapping canvas struck him overboard. A cry of horror from the shuddering girls mingled with the loud voice of the thunder, which roared above them. Among the young men there was a movement to save their friend; at the same instant a fiercer gust dashed the struggling sail into the foaming lake, and a second cry of agony arose as the boat overturned, casting all on board into the waters.

Then came a lull, transient but deep; the lightning blazed, the thunder pealed, but the fury of the gale slumbered for awhile; and the other boats, which had not been regardless of their companion's distress, bound forward like deer from the quiet nooks where they had found shelter. It was bravely done; but there were brothers and sisters, and friends well nigh as dear, in peril, and danger weighed not in the balance. Some had clung to oars, some to the boat itself, others kept afloat by their own exertions, or by the support of those who loved them best. However, within a few minutes, all save one were lifted into the succoring boats. But of that one there were no traces, and for that one the lives of all must not be sacrificed. Sadly the gallant rescuers turned from the spot, and swiftly, side by side the boats sped once more to the strand. Evan Dhu was among those saved; but, stunned by the blow which struck him overboard, it was some moments before he could acquire consciousness of what had happened. But then the shock at once restored his energies. His keen eye, glanced quickly on every face, and "where is Helen?" he demanded. None answered, and he started to his feet and loudly, nay, sternly, asked the same question of those in the other boat.

"We have lost her," was the mournful reply of one who loved her well.

"Then we will die together!" cried Evan, impetuously. But a dozen hands grasped him as he spoke, and voices were raised in warning and entreaty not to throw away his life so lately spared. But in vain they urged the wisdom and uselessness of his rash purpose amid the raging of the tempest, whose re-awakening fury was now roaring round them. In vain they thought to prevent by force where arguments failed. "Loosen your grasp," he exclaimed, with an eye which seemed to have caught the lightning's flash; "loosen your grasp or the guilt of my madness will be upon you." Instinctively each hand relaxed its hold, and ere it could be renewed, Evan Dhu had sprung into the lake. There was a wild cry of regret from those he left, but every effort was demanded to secure their own safe passage to the shore.

Meanwhile, Evan Dhu boldly buffeted the waves; and, unbewildered by the battling of the elements, swam direct towards the boat. The mast had soon become detached, and was gliding down more swiftly to Loch Venachoir; and the boat floated keel upwards on the water it so lately bounded over. Even dived under, and beneath it he found Helen, whose dress had become entangled in the thwart of the boat, and so sustained her, though she was powerless, and nearly insensible from the want of air. Quick as thought he bore her through the water; and though encompassed by the beating waves and dashing spray, she once more breathed the free air of heaven. But, oh, how fearful was that hour! and yet how sweet! Evan's failing strength forbade the hope to reach the shore with Helen, and he could only strive to support her on the boat to which he clung. Her own hands were benumbed by the chill of the water, and she was helpless, and utterly dependent on him. But when she saw his face grow paler and paler, and his strength exhausted by his exertions, Helen besought him to release her, and devote his efforts to his own preservation, instead of wasting his energies in the vain hope of saving both—"I must perish in either case," she said. "Then let there be one victim instead of two."

"If you perish we die together," was Evan's reply. "I had hoped to call you mine in life—but, Helen, in life or death be still my own."

And Helen looked in his face, and saw that it would indeed be worse than death to loose her. So there, clinging to the boat, tossed hither and thither by the waves, with the wind howling round them, like a wild beast defrauded of his prey—with now the vivid flash of the lightning shedding a ghastly brilliancy on hill and loch; and now the black thunder cloud looking as though it would close over them like a pall—there, in that hour, and that scene their troth was plighted. Say, should such trothplight ever have been broken?

The tempest passed at length, and they were rescued.—And soon throughout Glenfinglass their betrothal was well known. And all said they were well mated—the fairest maiden and the handsomest youth—and they might have added the most generous and the bravest also. How happy was Helen!—and Evan was the sun-ray which shed unvarying brightness on her heart. But there was one cloud in her lot—so trivial, so insignificant as scarcely to seem worthy of mention; and yet, like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand which rose out of the sea, capable of growing in importance until it changed the whole face of the heavens. Helen's nurse was one of the most superstitious women in Glenfinglass, and that is a bold assertion. By her own account she possessed the gift of second sight, and owned such a treasury of charms and spells for all occasions, that none who ever sought her assistance could find themselves at any loss except from the multi-

plicity of choice. Helen laughed at these superstitions; and yet old Madge's constant chattering had some effect on the mind of her foster child, who heard so much of the strange events which had been foreshadowed, and had so many temptations to pry into futurity thrown in her way, that her very happiness, by its tranquility, seemed to awaken a feeling of insecurity; and at last there grew up in her mind a vague desire to know whether indeed she was to be blessed as she believed—whether the love whose stream was so untroubled, would flow on as smoothly to the end, or whether she was trusting in a vision too beautiful, too brilliant for reality.

Summer had glided by with its green boughs and rainbow flowers, and leafless trees trembled in the autumn blast that mourned for its departure. It was Hallowe'en, and beneath more than one roof there were merry gatherings of the youths and maidens of Glenfinglass. Yet they met more for mirth and sport than the performance of mystic rites. Not that there were, perhaps, any there who really contemplated their efficacy, or that many a spell was not woven ere the cock crew; and many a heart made light or heavy by the prophetic answers they elicited. But it was with more secrecy and mystery that they, who even bent seriously on knowing their fate, endeavoured to pierce the misty veil of the future. And the charms and spells wrought amid the laughing groups that bade Donald Ciar Stewart's walls resound with merriment, were, though here and there a heart fluttered, and a cheek flushed at the result—but the ore-blossoms on the surface which told of the deep vein of superstition which lay beneath.

Foremost in promoting every game was Evan Dhu, and his eye was the brightest, and his sally the wittiest of all the gay youths who made that meeting as perilous to maiden's hearts as their own. Never had Helen felt prouder of her choice; and, yet after, a while a feeling of discontent came over her that Evan did not seem so entirely her own as usual. In the village dance or the mountain ramb he was ever by her side, and she forgot that, leader as he was of the evening's sports and festivity, and busied in providing for her as well as the general amusement, he might think she confided in his love too fully to care that, in such an hour and scene he did not evince his customary devotion. Then, for five good minutes, she watched him whispering in the ear of Lane Mysie, wealthy Donald Ciar's only child. Mysie was a pretty, gentle, fair-haired girl, to whom an accident had affixed that name in early childhood; and though the lameness had long passed away, it still clung to her as a distinctive epithet. A deep flush crimsoned Mysie's brow—long years after, Helen found that Evan was but rallying the timid girl on a lover whom some charm had betrayed. But that whisper and blush of flattered vanity awoke the first sensation of jealousy, and Helen felt as though her dreams had been, indeed, to bright for truth. Yet, as a change came over her countenance, Evan was in an instant at her side, inquiring the cause.

"I am wearied and would go home, was the answer. And immediately with many whispered fears lest she were ill, Evan was wrapping her warm plaid closely round her, and in a few minutes she stood before her father's door. Then dismissing Evan, she passed at once into the kitchen, where old Madge sat dosing before the fire.

"What ails thee my bonnie bairn?" was her inquiry, as she marked the pale cheeks of her foster child. Helen controlled her feelings to answer calmly that she was resolved to learn her fate.

"Sets the wind that gait noo?" remarked the nurse. "Ech, but its sune done, lassie, by ane that kens the word's o' power and might to gar the varra elements to find tongues to answer!"

"A shudder came over Helen at these ill-aimed words; but unperceiving it, Madge went on to teach and imprint the spell upon her mind; and there was a fascination in the potent character assigned to it by the old woman, and an attraction in the thought that her doubts and fears might be set at rest forever. And yet it was with the expectation of obtaining assurance of Evan's faith and truth that she determined to put the spell in practice. Could she not have rested content with that dependence on his affection? Better to enjoy the sunshine while it lasts, though clouds may come with the future, than to darken existing bliss with the foreshadowing of unborn sorrow.

"Gie ye hae the heart o' yer forefathers, ye'll no be feared to try it, lassie," was the concluding comment of old Madge, with whom the indomitable courage of all the Stewarts was a never ending theme of praise and triumph. Helen did fear; but she feared almost equally the contempt and sarcasm of her foster mother, who, as brave as the bravest of her clan had never feared man or spirit. So, struggling against her natural sinking of heart, she declared her readiness to proceed. Within fifty yards of Helen's home was the trunk of an ancient oak, that, perchance, in early days, when Glenfinglass was a deer forest of the Scottish kings, had seen many a prince and noble pass beneath its giant branches, which, struck, long ago by lightning, had mouldered in decay. At its foot Helen seated herself, while old Madge cowered behind the stump of an old tree some distance away as a protection. Then repeating the words which Madge had taught her, Helen placed two rowan twigs on the ground in the form of a cross, to scare away all evil spirits. And now beside the cross lay a lock of Evan's hair, darker even than the midnight