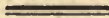


LILIAS GRIEVE.



THERE was fear and melancholy in all the glens and valleys that lay stretching around, or down upon St Mary's Loch, for it was the time of religious persecution. Many a sweet cottage stood untenanted on the hill side and in the hollow ; some had felt the fire and been consumed, and violent hands had torn off the turf-roof from the green shealing of the shepherd. In the wide and deep silence and solitariness of the mountains it seemed as if human life were nearly extinct. Caverns and clefts in which the fox had kenneled were now the shelter of Christian souls—and when a lonely figure crept stealthily from one hiding-place to another, on a visit of love to some hunted brother in faith, the crows would hover over him, and the hawk shriek at human steps now rare in the desert. When the babe was born there might be none near to baptize it, or the minister, driven from his kirk, perhaps poured the sacramental water upon its face from some pool in the glen whose rocks guarded the persecuted family from the oppressor. Bridals now were unfre-

quent, and in the solemn sadness of love. Many died before their time of minds sunken and of broken hearts. White hair was on heads long before they were old ; and the silver locks of ancient men were often ruefully soiled in the dust and stained with their martyred blood.

But this is the dark side of the picture. For, even in their caves were these people happy. Their children were with them, even like the wild-flowers that blossomed all about the entrances of their dens. And when the voice of psalms rose up from the profound silence of the solitary place of rocks, the ear of God was open, and they knew that their prayers and praises were heard in Heaven. If a child was born, it belonged unto the faithful ; if an old man died, it was in the religion of his forefathers. The hidden powers of their souls were brought forth into the light, and they knew the strength that was in them for these days of trial. The thoughtless became sedate—the wild were tamed—the unfeeling made compassionate—hard hearts were softened, and the wicked saw the error of their ways. All deep passion purifies and strengthens the soul, and so was it now. Now was shown and put to the proof, the stern, austere, impenetrable strength of men, that would neither bend nor break—the calm, serene determination of matrons, who, with meek eyes, and unblanched cheeks, met the scowl of the murderer—the silent beauty of maidens, who, with smiles received their death—and the mysterious courage of

children, who, in the inspiration of innocent and spotless nature, kneeled down among the dew-drops on the green sward, and died fearlessly by their parents' sides. Arrested were they at their work, or in their play, and with no other bandage over their eyes, but haply some clustering ringlet of their sunny hair, did many a sweet creature of twelve summers ask just to be allowed to say her prayers, and then go unappalled from her cottage-door to the breast of her Redeemer.

In those days had old Samuel Grieve and his spouse suffered sorely for their faith. But they left not their own house, willing to die there, or to be slaughtered, whenever God should so appoint. They were now childless; but a little grand-daughter, about ten years old, lived with them, and she was an orphan. The thought of death was so familiar to her, that although sometimes it gave a slight quaking throb to her heart in its glee, yet it scarcely impaired the natural joyfulness of her girlhood, and often unconsciously, after the gravest or the saddest talk with her old parents, would she glide off with a lightsome step, a blythe face, and a voice humming sweetly some cheerful tune. The old people looked often upon her in her happiness, till their dim eyes filled with tears; while the grandmother said, "If this nest were to be destroyed at last, and our heads in the mould, who would feed this young bird in the wild, and where would she find shelter in which to fauld her bonnie wings?"

Lilias Grieve was the Shepherdess of a small flock,

among the green pasturage at the head of St Mary's Loch, and up the hill side, and over into some of the little neighbouring glens. Sometimes she sat in that beautiful church-yard, with her sheep lying scattered around her upon the quiet graves, where, on still sunny days, she could see their shadows in the water of the Loch, and herself sitting close to the low walls of the House of God. She had no one to speak to, but her Bible to read; and day after day the rising sun beheld her in growing beauty, and innocence that could not fade, happy and silent as a Fairy upon the knowe, with the blue heavens over her head, and the blue lake smiling at her feet.

“My Fairy,” was the name she bore by the cottage fire, where the old people were gladdened by her glee, and turned away from all melancholy thoughts. And it was a name that suited sweet Liliās well; for she was clothed in a garb of green, and often, in her joy, the green graceful plants that grow among the hills were wreathed round her hair. So was she drest one Sabbath-day, watching her flock at a considerable distance from home, and singing to herself a Psalm in the solitary moor—when in a moment a party of soldiers were upon a mount on the opposite side of a narrow dell. Liliās was invisible as a green linnet upon the grass, but her sweet voice had betrayed her, and then one of the soldiers caught the wild gleam of her eyes, and as she sprung frightened to her feet, he called out “A roe—a roe—see how she bounds along

the bent," and the ruffian took aim at the child with his musquet, half in sport, half in ferocity. Lilius kept appearing and disappearing, while she flew as on wings across a piece of black heathery moss full of pits and hollows—and still the soldier kept his musquet at its aim. His comrades called to him to hold his hand, and not shoot a poor little innocent child, but he at length fired, and the bullet was heard to whiz past her fern-crowned head, and to strike a bank which she was about to ascend. The child paused for a moment, and looked back, and then bounded away over the smooth turf; till like a cushat, she dropt into a little birchen glen, and disappeared. Not a sound of her feet was heard—she seemed to have sunk into the ground—and the soldier stood, without any effort to follow her, gazing through the smoke towards the spot where she had vanished.

A sudden superstition assailed the hearts of the party, as they sat down together upon a ledge of stone. "Saw you her face, Riddle, as my ball went whizzing past her ear—curse me, if she be not one of those hill Fairies, else she had been dead as a herring—but I believe the bullet glanced off her yellow hair as against a buckler." "By St George, it was the act of a gallovs-rogue to fire upon the creature, Fairy or not Fairy, and you deserve the weight of this hand, the hand of an Englishman, you brute—for your cruelty"—and up rose the speaker to put his threat into execution, when the other retreated some distance, and

began to load his musquet—but the Englishman ran upon him, and, with a Cumberland gripe and trip, laid him upon the hard ground with a force that drove the breath out of his body, and left him stunned and almost insensible. “That serves him right, Allan Sleigh—shiver my timbers, if I would fire upon a petticoat. As to Fairies, why, look ye, ’tis a likely place enow for such creatures—if this be one, it is the first I ever saw—but as to your mermaids, I have seen a score of them, at different times, when I was at sea. As to shooting at them—no—no—we never tried that, or the ship would have gone to the bottom. There have I seen them sitting on a rock, with a looking-glass, combing their hair, that wrapped round them like a net, and then down into a coral cave in a jiffey to their mermans—for mermaid, fairy, or mere flesh and blood woman, they are all the same in that respect—take my word for it.”

The fallen ruffian now rose somewhat humbled, and sullenly sat down among the rest. “Why,” quoth Allan Sleigh, “I wager you a week’s pay you don’t venture fifty yards, without your musket, down yonder shingle where the fairy disappeared;”—and the wager being accepted, the half-drunken fellow rushed on towards the head of the glen, and was heard crashing away through the shrubs. In a few minutes he returned—declaring with an oath that he had seen her at the mouth of a cave where no human foot could reach, standing with her hair all on fire, and an angry

countenance, and that he had tumbled backwards into the burn and been nearly drowned.—“Drowned!” cried Allan Sleigh. “Aye drowned—why not? a hundred yards down that bit glen the pools are as black as pitch and as deep as hell, and the water roars like thunder—drowned—why not, you English son of a deer-stealer?” “Why not—because who was ever drowned that was born to be hanged?” And that jest caused universal laughter—as it is always sure to do, often as it may be repeated, in a company of ruffians, such is felt to be its perfect truth and unanswerable simplicity.

After an hour’s quarrelling, and gibing, and mutiny, this disorderly band of soldiers proceeded on their way down into the head of Yarrow, and there saw in the solitude the house of Samuel Grieve. Thither they proceeded to get some refreshment, and ripe for any outrage that any occasion might suggest. The old man and his wife hearing a tumult of many voices and many feet came out, and were immediately saluted with many opprobrious epithets. The hut was soon rifled of any small articles of wearing apparel, and Samuel, without emotion, set before them whatever provisions he had, butter, cheese, bread, and milk—and hoped they would not be too hard upon old people, who were desirous of dying, as they had lived, in peace. Thankful were they both in their parental hearts that their little Liliās was among the hills; and the Old Man trusted, that if she returned before the soldiers

were gone, she would see from some distance their muskets on the green before the door, and hide herself among the brakens.

The soldiers devoured their repast with many oaths, and much hideous and obscene language, which it was sore against the Old Man's soul to hear in his own hut; but he said nothing, for that would have been wilfully to sacrifice his life. At last one of the party ordered him to return thanks in words impious and full of blasphemy, which Samuel calmly refused to do, beseeching them, at the same time, for the sake of their own souls, not so to offend their great and bountiful Preserver. "Confound the old canting Covenanter, I will prick him with my bayonet if he won't say grace;" and the blood trickled down the Old Man's cheek, from a slight wound on his forehead. The sight of it seemed to awaken the dormant blood-thirstiness in the tiger-heart of the soldier, who now swore, if the Old Man did not instantly repeat the words after him, he would shoot him dead. And, as if cruelty were contagious, almost the whole party agreed that the demand was but reasonable, and that the old hypocritical knave must preach or perish. "Damn him," cried one of them in a fury, "here is the Word of God, a great musty Bible, stinking of greasy black leather, worse than a whole tanyard. If he won't speak, I will gag him with a vengeance. Here, old Mr Peden the prophet, let me cram a few chapters of St Luke down your maw. St

Luke was a physician, I believe. Well, here is a dose of him. Open your jaws." And with these words he tore a handful of leaves out of the Bible, and advanced towards the Old Man, from whose face his terrified wife was now wiping off the blood.

Samuel Grieve was nearly fourscore ; but his sinews were not yet relaxed, and in his younger days he had been a man of great strength. When, therefore, the soldier grasped him by the neck, the sense of receiving an indignity from such a slave made his blood boil, and, as if his youth had been renewed, the grey-headed man, with one blow, felled the ruffian to the floor.

That blow sealed his doom. There was a fierce tumult and yelling of wrathful voices, and Samuel Grieve was led out to die. He had witnessed such butchery of others—and felt that the hour of his martyrdom was come. "As thou didst reprove Simon Peter in the garden, when he smote the High Priest's servant, and saidst, 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?'—So now, O my Redeemer, do thou pardon me, thy frail and erring follower, and enable me to drink this cup!" With these words the Old Man knelt down unbidden ; and, after one solemn look to Heaven, closed his eyes, and folded his hands across his breast.

His wife now came forward, and knelt down beside the Old Man. "Let us die together, Samuel ; but oh ! what will become of our dear Liliass?" "God tem-

pers the wind to the shorn lamb," said her husband, opening not his eyes, but taking her hand into his, "Sarah—be not afraid." Oh! Samuel, I remember, at this moment, these words of Jesus, which you this morning read. "Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do!"—"We are all sinners together," said Samuel, with a loud voice—"we two old grey-headed people on our knees, and about to die, both forgive you all as we hope ourselves to be forgiven. We are ready—be merciful, and do not mangle us. Sarah, be not afraid."

It seemed that an angel was sent down from Heaven to save the lives of these two old grey-headed folk. With hair floating in sunny light, and seemingly wreathed with flowers of heavenly azure, with eyes beaming lustre, and yet streaming tears, with white arms extended in their beauty, and motion gentle and gliding as the sunshine when a cloud is rolled away, came on over the meadow before the hut the same green-robed Creature that had startled the soldiers with her singing in the moor, and crying loudly, but still sweetly, "God sent me hither to save their lives." She fell down beside them as they knelt together; and then, lifting up her head from the turf, fixed her beautiful face, instinct with fear, love, hope, and the spirit of prayer, upon the eyes of the men about to shed that innocent blood.

They all stood heart-stricken; and the executioners flung down their muskets upon the green-sward.

“ God bless you, kind good soldiers, for this,” exclaimed the child, now weeping and sobbing with joy, “ Aye—aye—you will be all happy to-night, when you lie down to sleep. If you have any little daughters or sisters like me, God will love them for your mercy to us, and nothing, till you return home, will hurt a hair of their heads. Oh ! I see now that soldiers are not so cruel as we say !” “ Liliās, your grandfather speaks unto you ;—his last words are—leave us—leave us—for they are going to put us to death. Soldiers, kill not this little child, or the waters of the loch will rise up and drown the sons of perdition. Liliās, give us each a kiss—and then go into the house.”

The soldiers conversed together for a few minutes, and seemed now like men themselves condemned to die. Shame and remorse for their coward cruelty smote them to the core—and they bade them that were still kneeling to rise up and go their ways,—then, forming themselves into regular order, one gave the word of command, and, marching off, they soon disappeared. The Old Man, his Wife, and little Liliās, continued for some time on their knees in prayer, and then they all three went into their hut—the child between them,—and a withered hand of each laid upon its beautiful and its fearless head.