

## THE COVENANTER'S MARRIAGE-DAY.

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THE Marriage Party were to meet in a little lonesome dell, well known to all the dwellers round St Mary's Loch. A range of bright green hills goes southward from its shores, and between them and the high heathery mountains lies a shapeless scene of cliffs, moss, and pasture, partaking both of the beauty and the grandeur between which it so wildly lies. All these cliffs are covered with native birch-trees, except a few of the loftiest that shoot up their bare points in many fantastic forms; that moss, full of what the shepherds call "hags," or hollows worn by the weather, or dug out for fuel, waves, when the wind goes by, its high rich-blossomed and fragrant heath; and that pasturage, here and there in circular spots of emerald verdure, affords the sweetest sustenance to the sheep to be found among all that mountainous region. It was in one of these circles of beautiful herbage, called by the Shepherds "The Queen-Fairy's Parlour," that Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay, who had been long betrothed, were now to be made man and

wife. It was nearly surrounded by large masses, or ledges of loose rocks, piled to a considerable height upon each other by some strong convulsion, and all adorned with the budding and sweet breathing birches, while the circle was completed by one overshadowing cliff that sheltered it from the north blast, and on whose airy summit the young hawks were shrilly and wildly crying in their nest.

The bridegroom was sitting there with his bride, and her bridesmaid; and by and by, one friend after another appeared below the natural arch that, all dropping with wild flowers, formed the only entrance into this lonely Tabernacle. At last they all stood up in a circle together—shepherds decently apparelled,—shepherdesses all dressed in raiment bleached whiter than the snow in the waters of the mountain-spring, and the grey-headed Minister of God, who, driven from his kirk by blood-thirsty persecution, prayed and preached in the wilderness, baptized infants with the water of the running brook, and joined in wedlock the hands of those whose hearts longed to be united in those dark and deadly times. Few words were uttered by the gracious old man; but these few were solemn and full of cheer, impressed upon the hearts of the wedded pair, by the tremulous tones of a voice that was not long for this world, by the sanctity of his long white locks unmoved by a breath of air, and by the fatherly and apostolical motion of his uplifted hand, that seemed to conduct down upon them who

stood in awe before him the blessing of that God who delighteth in a humble heart. The short ceremony was now closed,—and Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay were united, till death should sunder them on earth to reunite them in heaven.

Greetings were interchanged,—and smiles went round, with rosy blushes, and murmuring and whispering voices of irreproachable mirth. What though the days were dark, and the oppressor strong? Here was a place unknown to his feet; and now was a time to let the clear sparkling fountain of nature's joy well up in all hearts. Sadness and sorrow overshadowed the land; but human life was not yet wholly a waste; and the sweet sunshine that now fell down through a screen of fleecy clouds upon the Queen-Fairy's Parlour, was it not to enliven and rejoice all their souls? Was it not to make the fair bride fairer in her husband's eyes—her smile brighter, and the ringlets more yellow as they hung over a forehead that wore its silken snood no longer, but in its changed covering gracefully showed that Marion Lindsay was now a wife? The tabor and the pipe were heard; and footsteps, that left no print on the hard smooth verdant floor, kept time to the merry measures. Perhaps the old man would have frowned on such pastime—perhaps Covenanters ought not to have indulged in promiscuous dancing—perhaps it may be said to be false that they did so;—but the Minister had gone now to his own hiding-place. These Covenanters were

young, and this occasion was a happy one ; and dance they did, most assuredly, wicked as it may have been, and improper as it may be to record such wickedness. The young hawks were not a little alarmed ; and an old ram, who happened to put in his twisted horns below the arch, got a fright, that made him bound backwards out of the enchanted circle. The hill black-bird wondered ; but he himself joined the dance upon the birchen spray—and although no great songster, he did his best, and chirped cheerfully his mellow notes in the din of the general happiness.

But as the evening hours were advancing, the Party kept dropping away one by one, or in pairs, just as it had gathered ; and the Fairy Queen had her Parlour all to herself undisturbed, if she chose at night to hold a court beneath the lamp of the Moon.

Where had the young married pair their bridal chamber ? Mark Kerr had a shealing on the mountain-side, from which was just visible one bay of St Mary's Loch. The walls were built of turf, and the roof of heather—and surrounded as it was on all sides by large stones, wooded cliffs, knowes, and uneven eminences, it was almost as likely to escape notice as the nest of a bird, or the lair of a roe. Thither he took his bride. Her little bridesmaid had a small covert of her own, distant only a few roods, and the friends could see each other standing at the door of each shealing, through the intercepting foliage of the

waving birches that hung down their thin and ineffectual veil till it swept the blooming heather.

On a small seat, framed of the roots of decayed trees, Mark Kerr was now sitting with his own sweet Christian; when he gently raised her head from his bosom, and told her to go into the shealing, for he saw people on the hillside, whose appearance, even at that distance, he did not like. Before a quarter of an hour had elapsed a party of soldiers were at hand. Mark knew that he had been observed for some time; and to attempt escape with his bride was impossible. So he rose up at their approach, and met them with a steady countenance, although there were both fear and sorrow in his heart. Marion had obeyed him, and the shealing was silent.

“Is your name Mark Kerr?” “Yes—that is my name.” “Were you at Yarrow-Ford when a prisoner was rescued and a soldier murdered?” “I was—but did all I could to save that soldier’s life.” “You wolf, you mangled his throat with your own bloody fangs—but we have traced you to your den, and the ghost of Hugh Gemmel, who was as pleasant either with lad or lass as any boy that ever emptied a cup or had a fall upon heather, will shake hands with you by moonlight by and by. You may meet either in the church-yard, down by the Loch, where your canting Covenanters will bury you, or down at Yarrow-Kirk, where Hugh was put to bed with the worms, in his red coat, like a soldier as he was. By the Holy God of Israel—(is not

that a lump of your own slang?)—this bayonet shall drink a stoup of your heart's blood.”

Mark Kerr knew, in a moment, that there was no hope of life. He had confessed being present on the occasion charged against him ; and a sentence of death, which an angel's intercession could not have got reversed, was glaring in the eyes of all the soldiers. Each man seemed to kindle into fiercer fury as he caught the fiery eyes around him. Their oaths and execrations exasperated them all into frenzy ; and a wild and perturbed sense of justice demanding expiation of their murdered comrade's blood, made them deaf and blind to every thing but the suggestions of their own irritated and inflamed hearts. A horrid sympathy possessed them all ; and they were as implacable as a herd of wolves famished and in sight of their prey. There was no mercy in any one face there, else Mark Kerr would have appealed to that man, for his life was now sweet and precious, and it was a hard thing to die. “ I know his face. He is the very man that stabbed Hugh when he was down with his own bayonet. How do you like that, sirrah ?” —and one of the soldiers thrust his long bayonet through Mark's shoulder, till the point was seen at his back, and then drew it out smeared with blood, and returned it to its sheath, with a grin of half-glutted vengeance. The wounded man staggered at the blow and sat down, nearly fainting, upon the seat where a few minutes before his bride had leant her head upon his bosom. But he

uttered not a word, and kept his eyes fixed, not reproachfully, but somewhat sadly and with a faint expression of hope, on the men who seemed determined to be his executioners. The pain, the sickness, the sudden blasting of all his hopes, almost unmanned his resolute heart; and Mark Kerr would have now done much to save his life,—and something, perhaps, even at the expence of Conscience and Faith. But that weak mood was of short duration,—and the good and brave man braced up his heart to receive the doom of death.

Meanwhile one of the soldiers had entered the shealing, and brought out Marion in his grasp. A loud shout of laughter and scornful exultation followed. “Ho—ho—my Heath-Cock, you have got your bonny hen!—Catch a Covenanter without his comfort.—Is your name Grace, my bonny bairn?” Marion looked around, and saw Mark sitting pale and speechless, with his breast covered with clotted blood. She made no outcry, for grief, and pity, and consternation, struck her dumb. She could not move, for the soldier held her in his arms. But she looked in the ruffian’s face with such an imploring countenance, that unconsciously he let her go, and then she went up tottering to poor Mark, and with her white bridal gown wiped off the gore from his breast, and kissed his clayey and quivering lips. She then ran to the spring that lay sparkling among its cresses, within a few yards of the shealing, and brought a handful of cold water,

which she sprinkled tenderly over his face. The human soul is a wild and terrible thing when inflamed with cruelty and revenge. The soldiers saw little more in all this than a subject for loathsome scurrility and ferocious merriment; and as Christian looked wildly round upon them, one asked, "Are you his sister—his cousin—or his drab?" "Oh! soldiers—soldiers—I am his wife—this blessed day was I married to him. If any of you are married men, think of your wives now at home—remember the day they were brides, and do not murder us quite—if, indeed, my Mark is not already murdered." "Come, come, Mrs Sweetlips, no more whining—you shall not want a husband. I will marry you myself, and so I daresay will the serjeant there, and also the corporal. Now you have had indulgence enough—so stand back a bit; and do you, good Master Paleface, come forward, and down upon your marrow bones." Mark, with great difficulty, rose up, and knelt down as he was ordered.

He had no words to say to his bride; nor almost did he look at her—so full was his soul of her image, and of holy grief for the desolation in which she would be left by his death. The dewy breath of her gentle and pure kisses was yet in his heart; and the happy sighs of maidenly tenderness were now to be changed into groans of incurable despair. Therefore it was, that he said nothing as he knelt down, but his pallid



lips moved in prayer, and she heard her name indistinctly uttered between those of God and Christ.

Christian Lindsay had been betrothed to him for several years, and nothing but the fear of some terrible evil like this had kept them so long separate. Dreadful, therefore, as this hour was, their souls were not wholly unprepared for it, although there is always a miserable difference between reality and mere imagination. She now recalled to her mind, in one comprehensive thought, their years of innocent and youthful affection; and then the holy words so lately uttered by the Old Man in that retired place, alas! called by too vain a name, "The Queen-Fairy's Parlour!" The tears began now to flow—they both wept—for this night was Mark Kerr's head to lie, not on her bosom, but in the grave, or unburied on the ground. In that agony, what signified to her all the insulting, hideous, and inhuman language of these licentious murderers? They fell off her soul, without a stain, like polluted water off the plumage of some fair seabird. And as she looked on her husband upon his knees, awaiting his doom, him the temperate, the merciful, the gentle, and the just, and then upon those wrathful, raging, fiery-eyed, and bloody-minded men, are they, thought her fainting heart, of the same kind? are they framed by one God? and hath Christ alike died for them all?

She lifted up her eyes, full of prayers, for one moment to heaven, and then, with a cold shudder of de-

sertion, turned them upon her husband, kneeling with a white fixed countenance, and half dead already with the loss of blood. A dreadful silence had succeeded to that tumult; and she dimly saw a number of men drawn up together without moving, and their determined eyes held fast upon their victim. "Think, my lads, that it is Hugh Gemmel's Ghost that commands you now," said a deep hoarse voice—"no mercy did the holy men of the mountains show to him when they smashed his skull with large stones from the channel of the Yarrow. Now for revenge."

The soldiers presented their muskets—the word was given—and they fired. At that moment Christian Lindsay had rushed forward and flung herself down on her knees beside her husband, and they both fell, and stretched themselves out mortally wounded upon the grass.

During all this scene, Marion Scott, the bridesmaid, a girl of fifteen, had been lying affrighted among the brackens within a hundred yards of the murder. The agony of grief now got the better of the agony of fear, and, leaping up from her concealment, she rushed into the midst of the soldiers, and, kneeling down beside her dear Christian Lindsay, lifted up her head, and shaded the hair from her forehead. "Oh! Christian, your eyes are opening—do you hear me—do you hear me speaking?" "Yes, I hear a voice—is it yours Mark?—speak again." "Oh! Christian, it is only my voice—poor Marion's." "Is Mark dead

—quite dead?" And there was no reply; but Christian must have heard the deep gasping sobs that were rending the child's heart. Her eyes, too, opened more widely, and misty as they were, they saw, indeed, close by her, the huddled up, mangled, and bloody body of her husband.

The soldiers stood, like so many beasts of prey, who had gorged their fill of blood; their rage was abated—and they offered no violence to the affectionate child, as she continued to sit before them, with the head of Christian Lindsay in her lap, watering it with tears, and moaning so as to touch, at last, some even of their hardened hearts. When blood is shed it soon begins to appear a fearful sight to the shedders—and the hand soon begins to tremble that has let out human life. Cruelty cannot sustain itself in presence of that rueful colour, and remorse sees it reddening into a more ghastly hue. Some of the soldiers turned away in silence, or with a half-suppressed oath—others strayed off among the trees, and sat down together; and none would now have touched the head of pretty little Marion. The man whom they had shot deserved death—so they said to one another—and he had got it; but the woman's death was accidental, and they were not to blame because she had run upon their fire. So, before the smell and the smoke of the gunpowder had been carried away by the passing breeze from that place of murder, all were silent, and could hardly bear to look one another in the face.

Their work had been lamentable indeed. For now they began to see that these murdered people were truly bridegroom and bride. She was lying there dressed with her modest white bridal garments and white ribbands, now streaked with many streams of blood from mortal wounds. So, too, was she who was supporting her head. It was plain that a bridal party had been this very day—and that their hands had prepared for a happy and affectionate newly wedded pair that bloody bed, and a sleep from which there was to be no awaking at the voice of morn. They stood looking appalled on the bodies, while, on the wild flowers around them, which the stain of blood had not yet reached, loudly and cheerfully were murmuring the mountain-bees.

Christian Lindsay was not quite dead, and she at last lifted herself up a little way out of Marion's lap, and then falling down with her arms over her husband's neck, uttered a few indistinct words of prayer, and expired.

Marion Scott had never seen death before, and it was now presented to her in its most ghastly and fearful shape. Every horror she had ever heard talked of in the hiding places of her father and relations was now realized before her eyes, and for anything she knew, it was now her turn to die. Had she dreamed in her sleep of such a trial, her soul would have died within her,—and she would have convulsively shrieked aloud on her bed. But the pale, placid, happy-

looking face of dead Christian Lindsay, whom she had loved as an elder sister, and who had always been so good to her from the time she was a little child, inspired her now with an utter fearlessness—and she could have knelt down to be shot by the soldiers without one quickened pulsation at her heart. But now the soldiers were willing to leave the bloody green, and their leader told Marion she might go her ways and bring her friends to take care of the dead bodies. No one, he said, would hurt her. And soon after, the party disappeared.

Marion remained for a while beside the dead. Their wounds bled not now. But she brought water from the little spring and washed them all decently, and left not a single stain upon either of their faces. She disturbed, as little as possible, the position in which they lay ; nor removed Christian's arms from her husband's neck. She lifted one of the arms up for a moment to wipe away a spot of blood, but it fell down again of itself, and moved no more.

During all this time the setting sunlight was giving a deeper tinge to the purple heather, and as Marion lifted up her eyes to heaven she saw in the golden west the last relics of the day. All the wild was silent—not a sound was there but that of the night-hawk. And the darkening stillness touched Marion's young soul with a trembling superstition, as she looked at the dead bodies, then up to the uncertain sky and over the glimmering shades of the solitary glen. The poor

girl was half afraid of the deepening hush, and the gathering darkness. Yet the spirits of those she had so tenderly loved would not harm her ; they had gone to Heaven. Could she find heart to leave them thus lying together?—Yes—there was nothing, she thought, to molest the dead. No raven inhabited this glen ; nothing but the dews would touch them, till she went to the nearest hiding-place, and told her father or some other friends of the murder.

Before the Moon had risen, the same party that on the morning had been present at their marriage, had assembled on the hillside before the shealing where Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay were now lifted up together on a heather-couch, and lying cold and still as in the grave. The few maids and matrons who had been in that happy scene in the Queen-Fairy's Parlour had not yet laid aside their white dresses, and the little starry ribband-knots, or bride's favours, were yet upon their breasts. The old Minister had come from his cave, and not for many years had he wept till now ; but this was a case even for the tears of an old religious man of fourscore.

To watch by the dead all night, and to wait for some days till they could be coffined for burial, was not to be thought of in such times of peril. That would have been to sacrifice the living foolishly for the dead. The soldiers had gone. But they might—no doubt would return and scatter the funeral. Therefore it was no sooner proposed than agreed to in the afflicted

souls of them all, that the bridegroom and his bride should be buried even that very night in the clothes in which they had that morning been wedded. A bier was soon formed of the birch tree boughs; and with their faces meekly looking up to Heaven, now filled with moonlight, they were borne along in sobbing silence, up the hills and down along the glens, till the party stood together in the lone burial-ground, at the head of St Mary's Loch. A grave was dug for them there, but that was not their own burial-place. For Mark Kerr's father and mother lay in the church-yard of Melrose, and the parents of Christian Lindsay slept in that of Bothwell, near the flow of the beautiful Clyde. The grave was half filled with heather, and gently were they let down together, even as they were found lying on the green before their shealing, into that mournful bed. The Old Man afterwards said a prayer—not over them—but with the living. Then sitting down on the graves, and on the grave-stones, they spoke of the virtues of the dead. They had, it is true, been cut off in their youthful prime; but many happy days and years had been theirs—their affection for each other had been a pleasant solace to them in toil, poverty, and persecution. This would have been a perplexing day to those who had not faith in God's perfect holiness and mercy. But all who mourned now together were wholly resigned to his dispensations, and soon all eyes were dried. In solemn silence they all quitted the church-yard, and then the funeral

party, which a few hours ago had been a marriage one, dissolved among the hills and glens and rocks, and left Mark Kerr and Christian Lindsay to everlasting rest.