

LADY GRISELL BAILLIE.

1665—1746

THE bravest of all Scotch heroines is Lady Grisell Baillie; and the simplest and sweetest of stories is her memoir, written by her elder daughter, Lady Murray of Stanhope, the friend of Molly Lepel, Lady Hervey.

Lady Grisell was born on Christmas Day, 1665, at Redbraes Castle, in the Merse, which is famous in old Scotch tradition for the beauty of its women and the gallantry of its men. As a rule, the Merse shares with the "fat Lothians" a certain tameness of landscape, but there are exceptions on both sides—the long grey ridges of the Lammermoors, and the broken crests of the Cheviots. Grisell was the eldest of the eighteen children of Sir Patrick Home, afterwards Earl of Marchmont. She had an ailing

mother, and a father absorbed in the heat of desperate political troubles.

The cares of life came betimes to the sensible, active girl, who, like a little old woman, in her tippet and mob-cap, ran about in the drugget-hung rooms and among the wand chairs, the aumries, and the spinning-wheels. She learned the trick of serving her kindred so early and so well, that she could not give it up when she was a fine old lady. Till her eighty-first year, she rose the earliest of her family, and managed the most difficult of their affairs.

When barely beyond childhood she was chosen to go on an innocent political message to an unfortunate gentleman lying in prison. Most likely she rode behind a trusty servant on one of her father's horses. She must have entered Edinburgh by one of its bristling ports, and "grued" at the skulls whitening on its pikes, before she passed the many steep gables and outside stairs, the yawning close mouths and towering houses, and stared with round eyes of wonder at the Nor' Loch and the Castle, at the grand mansions with their bonnie gardens, and

the throng of passengers between the Canon-gate and the High Street.

The gentleman whom Grisell went to visit was Mr. George Baillie of Jerviswoode, in whom she was fated to have a nearer interest than that arising from her father's complicity in his offence. Her mission was executed with such discretion that she was called upon to undertake another before Mr. Baillie suffered for treason. In the course of these resorts to the grim quarters of the Tolbooth, she met and became acquainted with young George Baillie. At the time of his father's execution he was only a lad of nineteen, and she a lass of eighteen. Every night at this period she walked alone over a dark country road and through an eerie kirk-yard to carry food to her father, who was in hiding in the family vault at Polwarth. Sir Patrick lay on his mattress among the mouldering bones of his fathers, with his good Kilmarnock cowl drawn well over his brow defying the cold, as he whiled away the time profitably in repeating George Buchanan's Latin psalms. Along with household news and irrepressible quavers of girlish laughter, his

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young daughter brought him his rations; and among them, on one occasion, was the famous sheep's head, the disappearance of which from the family dinner-table had nearly betrayed them both to the troopers who were in possession at Redbraes.

Even after Sir Patrick's escape beyond the seas, and after the most of his family had joined him, Grisell had a heavy end of the string to bear. She undertook and accomplished, all by herself, two voyages from Holland to Scotland and back again, in order to bring over her sister Julian to join the rest of the family. When the girls had made the passage and landed at Brill, they set out, the same night, to walk to Rotterdam, under the escort of a gentleman. To be sure, the feat proved too much for one of the girls, and, to be sure also, Julian lost her shoes in the mud, and Grisell had to take her on her back and carry her the rest of the way, the gentleman being loaded with the luggage.

Grisell's family settled at Utrecht, where they lived till the Revolution—an interval of three years and a half. To these three years and a

half of exile, poverty, and toil, Grisell was wont to refer as having been the happiest years of her life. Work was nothing to her at that time, when life and love were young. She did the greater part of the household work for the large struggling family. Grisell seemed to have taken kindly to the land of canals, mighty poplars, and iris-painted houses, with whose natives, in their thrift, industry, love of learning, and zeal for religious freedom, the Scotch have so many points of union, besides those confirmed by the Synod of Dort.

The tightly-pinched household of Dr. Wallace, as Sir Patrick called himself, was the hospitable point of union for poor Scotch ladies and gentlemen, far and near. So little was this Presbyterian household disfigured by the asceticism which was an ugly excrescence of later Presbyterianism, as of later Puritanism, that the head of the house, in writing home before Lady Home and the family joined him, expressly desires, with a father's heart for his children, that "care may be taken to keep them hearty and merry, laughing, dancing, and singing" If he were among

them he would help their mirth by a tune on the flute, which he was learning. And again, he urges that "they ought not with right to pass a week-day without dancing; for lost estates can be recovered again, but health once lost by a habit of melancholy can never be recovered." These Homes and their guests drank small beer instead of Bourdeaux, ate porridge and milk in place of curious pasties, and wore threadbare plaidens and faded linen for brocade and velvet. They had no money to spend on such Dutch porcelain mugs, cups, and pots with flower roots in them, as other banished English and Scotch ladies improved their banishment by collecting. The Home's whole company, on one occasion, could only furnish a single coin to street beggars; but this was little matter to the family whom the burly clothworkers and the lean scholars of Utrecht alike respected and loved.

Sir Patrick taught Dutch, English, &c., to his young people, and to Grisell among the rest, when she could spare time for a lesson. Her younger sister Christina was the great singer of the family; but Grisell, in the midst of her

multifarious engagements, left a MS. volume of written and half-written songs of which she was the author.

In addition to other members of the household and to visitors, there were two likely young men going and coming to lighten the work to the girls—Grisell's favourite brother, Patrick, and his comrade, George Baillie of Jerviswoode. The young men rode in the Prince of Orange's Guards, stood sentry at his gate, had the treat of seeing him eat his dinner in public, and, when they were in mind for a frolic, set their halberts across the door and would not let a pretty girl pass till she gave them a kiss. Grisell had their honour so much at heart that she would sit up of nights, losing the sleep of which she had much need,—and it is written of her that she was always a good sleeper,—that she might wash, starch, and darn her brother's lace cravat and ruffles. Doubtless she did not withhold the same kind, womanly office from her brother's gallant friend, who was living from hand to mouth on what was left of the rents of his confiscated estates, and on money lent to him by

his compassionate Dutch hosts. When Grisell went a-marketing, or to the mill for the family allowance of flour, George Baillie was trusted to attend her if her brothers chanced to be out of the way. The love between them was an understood thing; only he did not have two pennies to rub upon each other. As for her, she had no means of proving how truly she returned his tender affection, except by steadily refusing the flattering offers of marriage which her anxious father and mother were tempted to press upon her, and by vowing, in her youthful enthusiasm, to live and die a maid for his sake.

At that time, according to her daughter's description, Grisell Home, under her high crowned hat and hood, was a very handsome girl, with a light, lithe figure, delicate features, chesnut hair, and a complexion that rivalled the most dazzling red and white of the Dutch women.

There is another account of Grisell, given by an old servant, who remembered her as "a little woman marked by small-pox;" but

whether young or old, blooming or withered, she was one and the same unapproachable Grisell.

At last the Prince of Orange was called to England, and the redemption of his friends drew near. But the epoch of consolation and triumph so long looked forward to, was heavily dashed with disappointment and sorrow to the Homes. The fleet in which the prince and his friends had embarked was reported to have been lost in the storm that had arisen. The family, in the greatest distress, travelled to Helvoetsluys to get reliable tidings. They found a throng before them on the same errand, but though they soon received word of their friends' safety, the news was "no more to Grisell than an occurrence in which she had not the least concern," for that very day her sister Christina died of sore-throat, through the exposure and overcrowding in the small seaport. Grisell's indefatigable spirit was always terribly baffled by death.

After declining to be made one of the maids of honour to Queen Mary, Grisell Home was married to George Baillie at Redbraes Castle, on the 17th September, 1692 — four years sub-

sequent to the révolution which restored to him his estate—when he was in his twenty-ninth and she in her twenty-eighth year. The union, for which there had been so good a preparation, lasted for forty-eight years—years of love and trust. In that long period (according to Grisell's own declaration) there never was the shadow of a quarrel between husband and wife. Grisell's daughter by a single touch preserves the wife's faithful worship and fondness. "He never went abroad but she went to the window to look after him (so she did that very day he fell ill—the last time he was abroad), never taking her eyes from him so long as he was in sight." There are other little touches almost equal to this, telling of the husband and father's devotion. He never came back from London, where he sat in Parliament, without bringing to each of his family something which he thought they would like. "He would have his trunk opened to give us them before he took time to rest himself." When he took his wife and daughters to London with him, and the girls were of an age to relish diversions—"such as balls, masquerades, parties

by water, and music"—the father and the mother were always in the parties, and the busy much-occupied statesman was the merriest of all.

It would seem as if Grisell's great activity and management, with her little trick of spending herself in order to spare others, proved occasionally a trial to her family. Lady Murray recounts one instance of it with the most *naïf* humour. Lady Grisell, when on a visit to her aged father, had undertaken to examine his steward's accounts—a duty for which she was qualified by her husband's having entrusted to her the laying out of his income. She did this work at Kimmerghame for two months, toiling from five in the morning till twelve at night. "She half killed the whole family by attending her, though they kept not the hours that she did." Yet the wife and mother was so modest and so generous in her excess of virtue that her family might well excuse such excess in her.

One must sympathise with the narrative of Grisell and her husband going abroad, in middle life, with their family, to seek health for

their second son-in-law, Lord Binning. Grisell's pleasure in showing her children every corner of Utrecht is very characteristic. It touches one still to read that when—for fear of her dirtying it—she was denied admittance to the house where Sir Patrick Home and his ten children had found quarters, and where young George Baillie had come a-courting, she offered to put off her shoes if she would only be allowed to cross once again the familiar threshold. This was denied her, and she went away in great disappointment.

Perhaps the strongest tribute of affection that is offered to Grisell is that paid to her by her dying son-in-law. Missing her from his sick-bed,—when she was sick herself,—he vehemently protested, “If anything ails mamma I'll put my head under the clothes, and never look up again.” In her agony of grief at his death, Grisell protested “that she could have begged her bread with pleasure to save his life.”

But the end here below of all this true love came at last. George Baillie died on the 6th August, 1738, at Oxford, where he was residing

for the education of Lord Binning's sons. For a long time after Lady Grisell had returned to the Merse, she could do nothing save read his letters, shed floods of tears, and cry how could she live after such a man!

Eight years later, just at the close of the national distress which accompanied the year of the Rebellion, Grisell Baillie, lying ill in London, gave directions that her body should be conveyed to Mellerstain, and laid beside that of her husband in the family vault. But if the carrying out of this wish should be too much trouble, she left her children to do as they pleased. There was a black purse in her cabinet with money which she had kept for that last service, so that the family might not then be straitened.

She had taken much to heart some difference which had arisen between her and her nephews, and spoke strongly of their undutiful and unkind behaviour towards her. But when her daughter censured them, the old woman recalled her censure, and urged that they were the sons of her dear brother, Patrick.

She requested the last chapter of Proverbs to be read, with a view to her grandsons' choice of wives. Then she said that she could die in peace, that all she desired was to be with George Baillie—and so she died.

Of Grisell Baillie's well-known song, "Werena my heart licht I wad dee," Allan Cunningham says, that it is "very original, very characteristic, and very irregular." In its noble homeliness, it is in some respects a reflection of Grisell's life; a specimen of those quickly-scribbled, half-finished songs, to which Lady Murray refers—the song of an idle moment. It is written to give vent to the writer's feelings, and to create a little lively amusement in the family circle. It bears no mark of having been rewritten. Its phrases certainly show no sign of having been fastidiously culled. Comparing it with Lady Grisell's history, it seems to have slight personal references which might give it additional value in the eyes of its author and her friends.

The first verse has something of the old ballad quaintness:—

“There was ance a may and she loo’d na men :
She biggit her bonnie bower down i’ yon glen ;
But now she cries Dool ! and Well-a-day !
Come down the green gate, and come here away ”

Was the “may who loo’d na men” Grisell herself, as she walked “in maiden meditation fancy free,” when her devotion to her family and the labour which it involved prevented her from precociously anticipating her fate, and hankering lackadaisically after love and love’s bane ?

The further incidents told in the song have, indeed, little correspondence with the facts of Grisell’s life, unless indeed that she may have learned, in those years of waiting at Utrecht, to have a special sympathy with that form of love’s malady which is “the sickness of hope deferred.”

Throughout the song, in spite of its hasty carelessness, there are abundant sparkles of picturesqueness and humour. Very expressive is the statement—

“His wee wilfu’ tittle she loo’d na me ”

And its boldness is increased by the explanatory note :—

“(I was taller and twice as bonnie as she) ”

Scornfully sad is the record of the mother's feigned illness, which was successful in extorting a hostile pledge from the weak, impetuous son :—

“ The day it was set for the bridal to be,
The wife took a dwam and lay down to dee;
She mained and she graned wi' fause dolour and pain,
Till he vow'd he never wad see me again ”

Matter of fact in the extreme, but not without genius in its realism, is the reflection—

“ His kindred socht ane o' higher degree,
Said, Would he wed ane was landless like me ?
Although I was honnie, I wasna for Johnnie.”

Could such a hero's name have been other than Johnnie ?

Comical indeed is the summing-up of the poor heroine's disqualifications as quoted by herself :—

“ They said I had neither coo nor cawf,
Nor *dribbles* o' drink coming through the draff,
Nor *pickles* o' meal rinnin' frae the mill-e'e ”

The breaking-up of the main thread of the song, that the singer may detail a cruel wrong done her by the spiteful sister, in league with her mortal enemy, the mother, is exceedingly natural :—

“ His tittie she was baith wylie and slee,
She spied me as I cam ower the lea ;
And then she ran in, and made a loud din ;
Believe your ain een an ye trow na me ”

What ! to grudge the lass that one meeting and parting on the lea !—to suspect that she would abuse it to seduce the faltering lover from his duty, and so deny her the “ae kiss” granted even to the hapless wife of auld Robin Gray !

The two verses which describe the despair of the bated bridegroom do not fail in truth and pathos. Even the changed set of the bonnet is remarked upon with womanly fineness of observation :—

“ His bonnet stood aye fu’ round on his brow ;
His auld ane look’d better than mony ane’s new ;
But now he lets ’t wear ony gait it will hing,
And casts himsel’ dowie upon the corn-bing ”

Above all, in the two lines of the next verse, this fineness of observation displays itself :—

“ And now he gaes daundrin’ about the dykes ”—

This is a deliberately uninteresting limning of an uninteresting locality sought only for its seclusion.

“ And a’ he dow do is to hound the tykes ”—

is a fitting occupation for a soured and exasperated man, and with a spice of vindictiveness in it.

The last verse has a good deal of the antique ring of the first, and there is some charm in it too, which corresponds with the refrain:—

“ Oh ! were we young now as we ance hae been,
We should hae been gallopin' down on yon green,
And linkin' it ower the lily-white lea ;
And werena my heart licht I wad dee.”

The song owes its vitality to this recurring burden. Its sudden inspiration has fused and cast into one perfect line the protest of thousands of stricken hearts in every generation. There is a subdued note of deep passion in the half-defiant repetition of the poor heart's failing refuge: it is the complement of that heroism which broke through and lit up with its glory each crisis of Grisell Baillie's life of usefulness and trial.

WERENA MY HEART LICHT.

THERE was ance a may and she loo'd na men :
She biggit her bonnie bower down i' yon glen ;

But now she cries Dool ! and Well-a-day !
Come down the green gate, and come here away
But now she cries, &c

When bonnie young Johnnie cam' ower the sea,
He said he saw naething sae lovely as me ;
He hecht me baith rings and monie braw things,
And werena my heart licht I wad dee.
He hecht me, &c.

His wee wilfu' tittie she loo'd na me,
(I was taller and twice as bonnie as she ;))
She raised sic a pother 'twixt him and his mother,
That werena my heart licht I wad dee
She raised, &c

The day it was set for the bridal to be,
The wife took a dwam and lay down to dee ;
She mained and she graned wi' fause dolour and pain,
Till he vow'd he never wad see me again.
She mained, &c.

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