

The Hermit of Powis

A Ballad Romance of the Olden Times

BY

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ABERDEEN: WILLIAM SMITH & SONS
THE BON-ACCORD PRESS

1920



The Hermitage.
Old Aberdeen.

TO THE READER

[*Note to Original Edition, 1862*]

Any attempt to identify the hero of this ballad with any member of the Leslie family that ever actually existed must necessarily fail; as not only the hero, but every character and event in the piece owe their origin solely to the imagination of the Author, who trusts that they are in no way incompatible with the remote and lawless time in which the Hermit is supposed to have lived. All that the Author really knows with regard to the Hermitage of Powis is, that the small tower of recent erection is seen from the North of Scotland Railway, standing on the top of a knoll in the grounds of Powis House, near Old Aberdeen, and is supposed to be on or near the site of a more ancient building, which is popularly believed to have been the abode of a hermit of the Leslie family.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The Publishers are indebted to the Author's family for liberty to publish this new edition of "The Hermit of Powis." Their thanks are also due to the Aberdeen Daily Journal Company for use of the illustration of the Hermitage, and to Messrs. D. Wyllie & Son for use of the woodcut of the Firhill Well.



The Hermit of Powis

THE Hermit of Powis lived in his cell,
And shunned the converse of man;
His food was the coarsest, his drink was the brook
That near to the Hermitage ran.

He mumbled his prayers, and counted his beads,
And scourged his flesh wi' twine,
In the hope to atone for the sins of the soul
By the body's dool and pine.

And who was the Hermit, and what were his sins,
That merited penance so drear?—
List ye to the tale of a soothfast bard,
And both shall quickly appear :

The Hermit had stood a noble Earl
In the presence of his King—
Had gaily hunted the boar and the stag,
And fought in the field and the ring.

The Hermit now so withered and grim,
Was an Earl so fair to see,
That there was no' a lady in a' the land
But had sighed at the blink o' his e'e.

But the Earl gave his heart to the fairest maid
In the bounds of Scotland wide—
To the sweet Mary Hay, the flower o' the Don,
And her father's hope and pride.

But her father was no' a belted knight,
But a man of low degree,
And it grieved his heart his daughter's love
For a noble Earl to see.

“There never cam' good o' a lordling's love
For a maid so lowly born ;
He'll win your heart, and break your heart,
And leave you the scathe and the scorn.”

“O little d'ye ken, my father dear,
This leal Lord's love for me ;
He's won my heart, and he's sought my hand,
And his bride I have sworn to be.”

And the Earl so loved this lowly maid,
That he gave her his lordly hand,
And made her mistress of all his castles,
And the lady of all his land.

And time ran on till a year had gone,
But never, by night or day,
Was the gallant Leslie absent from
The side of his Mary Hay.

The noblemen round might look askance,
Their ladies might scoff and sneer ;
His Mary was all the world to him,
And he to her was as dear.

Till town and country, high and low,
The truth must needs declare,
That never in palace, castle, or cot,
Had been witnessed a happier pair.

But it fell on a day, a sweet summer's day,
That there came, with white foam o'er,
A steed with a royal messenger,
And this was the message he bore :

“ Boot ye ! Spur ye ! noble Earl—
Go saddle your steed and ride !
For the English loons, with fire and sword,
Have crossed the Border side.

“ And need have we of our bravest knights,
And need of their stoutest men,
And stouter or braver than you, Lord Earl,
There's none in our royal ken.”

When Mary heard this message read,
Her cheeks grew pale and wan,
But when she saw her Leslie's steed
The tears in torrents ran.

“O, let me gang, my Leslie dear,
Your perils all to share !
I'll run a foot-page by your side,
The battle field I'll dare.

When dangers flash around your head,
I'll cry to heaven to save ;
And if you're wounded in the fight,
My care will cheat the grave.”

“That never could be, my darling wife—
But I'll no' tarry long,
For numerous are our Scottish bands,
Their hearts are brave and strong.

And soon we'll drive the English loons
Across the Border side,
And I'll bring fouth of Southern spoil
To deck my lovely bride.”

“I care no' for pearls, jewels, nor gold,
Nor robes of silken sheen ;
I'd rather have you, my Leslie, safe,
Than the splendours of a queen.”

Lord Leslie kissed her lips and cheeks,
As pale as the lily flower ;
Then bade her maidens bear her in,
And tend her well in her bower.

But when he rode from his castle door
At the head of his warlike band,
His Mary Hay was the saddest wife
In all the Scottish land.

Our Scottish king his warlike bands
Led forth in gallant order,
And drove the Southern loons, like sheep,
Over the English Border.

Then boldly marched on Southern soil
To pay them ill for ill,
And drove the beeves from off their fields,
And the sheep from off the hill.

And when he'd paid the knavish loons
A penny for their plack,
He led his troops with little loss
And mickle plunder back.

And feasted at the Scottish court
For thirty days and three,
The noble lords who in the war
Had born him company.

And foremost in the field of fight,
And foremost in the sport,
The brave Earl Leslie born the palm
O'er all the Scottish court.

The Lady Arabella Stewart,
The daughter of a king,
Tho' her mother did not share a throne
Nor wear a wedding-ring,

Cast eyes on this same noble lord
In her royal brother's hall,
And saw him, in face and courtly grace,
The fairest of them all.

And she has gotten her to the king,
Fallen low down on her knee—
“O royal Lord, O brother dear,
An asking grant to me!”

“Rise up! Rise up! Our sister dear,
Your asking you shall have,
Be it gold or gear, or house or land,
Or title, that ye crave.”

“I crave nor title, house, nor land,
I crave nor gold, nor gear,
But it's all for a lord at your royal court
That I plead in your royal ear.

Lord Leslie he has ensnared my heart,
By arts that I cannot divine ;
And I crave your aid, my sovereign liege,
This witchery to untwine."

"And if Lord Leslie has stolen your heart,
This choice to him I'll gie,
Either to offer you marriage to-morrow,
Or else to be hanged on a tree."

Lord Leslie sat and laughed and joked,
In the midst of a merry ring,
When word was brought him to repair
To audience with the King.

"There's a nobleman at our court, Lord Earl,
Partaking our royal cheer,
Who by wicked art has trepanned the heart
Of a lady that we hold dear.

The Lady Arabella Stewart,
The fairest of our fair,
Has lost her heart, and to you, Lord Earl,
Deny it if you dare.

But you are a true and a warlike lord,
And this is the choice we'll gie—
Either to marry the lady we've named,
Or swing like a rogue on a tree."

“My Liege ! my Sire ! my Sovereign Lord !
I’ve used no wizardrie,
And if I have won the heart of this maid,
The prize was unsought by me.

And if my choice be to wed or to hang,
My sire, I must lose my life,
For how can I wed Lady Arabel Stewart,
And leave a better-loved wife ?”

“And who may be this wife, Lord Earl,
That you hold so wondrous dear ;
And how does it chance that the lady’s name
Should never have reached our ear ?”

“My wife is not sprung from noble sires—
Her kin are of low degree,
But dear as a queen to her royal spouse
Is the choice of my heart to me.”

“A peasant can be but a leman, my Lord,
To one that is nobly born,
And, the word of a King, you’ll marry our ward,
Or swing ere a second grey morn !”

The brave Lord Leslie left the King,
A doleful man I ween ;
But a change took place in his comely face
That day ere the fall of e’en.

That day was holden a tournament,
The Queen was taken ill—
And who but the Lady Arabel Stewart
Was chosen her place to fill.

Right well she played her queenly part,
And charmed the hearts of a' ;
But for every smile she gave the rest
She gave Lord Leslie twa.

When days had come and days had passed,
Lord Leslie had no' swung,
But for him and the Lady Arabel Stewart
The wedding-bells were rung.

And he has gotten a trusty page
His messages all to bear,
And sent him on to Mary Hay
To break the tidings with care.

To offer her gold, to offer her gear,
To offer her houses or land—
To tell her that she was free to love
And marry a lowlier man.

The news were said, the offers were made,
And the salt tears did no' come ;
But she sat like a statue, or corpse of the dead,
As motionless, paly, and dumb.

She never cast blame on her faithless Lord,
Nor uttered one word to displease,
But she drooped her head like a frost-nipt rose,
And faded by slow degrees.

And day by day she withered away,
Till the fell destroyer Death
Laid his skeleton hand on her marble lips,
And checked their quivering breath.

Now word's gone on to Edinburgh town,
And reached Lord Leslie's ear,
That the cold earth lay on the Mary Hay
Whom he once had valued so dear.

“O woe's me now !” Lord Leslie cried,
As he tore his raven hair,
“I've killed the fairest, dearest wife,
That ever breathed Northern air.

Love me, Lady Arabel Stewart !
Well may ye love me noo,
For I've blighted the fairest flower of the North,
And all for the sake of you !

Well may ye sigh, Lady Arabel Stewart,
And well may your tears be shed ;
But ye canna' bring peace to this perjured heart,
Unless ye bring back the dead !”

Lord Leslie fled away from his home,
And none knew whither he went ;
His lands fell in to his next of kin,
And his gold by his lady was spent.

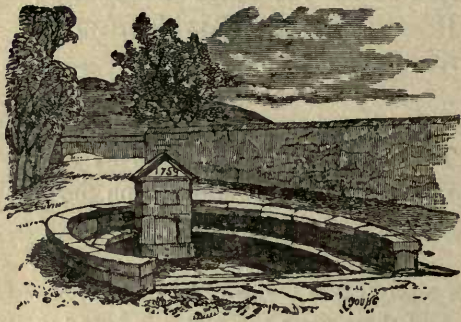
But when years had sped, and his lady was dead,
And his name forgotten 'mongst men,
A Hermit appeared in Powis's grounds,
And made him sort of a den.

He prayed, and starved, and scourged himself,
Till his lean frame leaner grew ;
But at last the curtain dropped on the scene,
And then the truth we knew.

For a scroll was found by the side of the corpse,
And these were the words it bore :
" This is the clay of Leslie the Earl,
Who sinned and suffered so sore."

I've told this tale of the days of old
In a simple, homely strain,
But if it create one thought like this,
It has not been told in vain :

*An honest, truthful, rightful course
Is the best for death or time,
For present anguish and future woe
Are the offspring of vice and crime.*



THE FIRHILL WELL,
OLD ABERDEEN