

## V.

## THE WIFE OF THE RED COMYN.

## MY GRANDFATHER'S STORY.

THE old gentleman had served in the 42nd Highlanders, or old Black Watch, in early life, and could spin to us endless yarns of the bloody affair of Ticonderoga, where the regiment had no less than six hundred and forty-seven officers and soldiers killed or wounded; the expedition to the Lakes; the surrender of Montreal; the siege of the Moro, and the scalping, flaying alive, the tomahawking, and other little pleasantries incidental to the relief of Fort Pitt in 1763; and of that devilish business with the Red Indians amid the swamps and rocks at Bushy Run, all of which were "familiar in our mouths as household words;" while, to the venerable narrator, the smell of gunpowder, the flavour of Ferintosh, or the skirl of a bagpipe were like the *elixir vitæ* of the ancients, and seemed to renew his youth, strength, and spirit for a time; and thus the fire of other years would flash up within him, like the last gleam of a sinking lamp, as we sat by our bogwood fire in the long winter nights of the North.

In the year 1768, his regiment was cantoned in Galway, where it was reviewed by Major-General Armiger, and the old gentleman was wont to boast, that except two Lowland Scots, every soldier in its ranks was from the clans that dwell northward of the

Tay, "and happily for the corps," he used to add, "these two were knocked on the head during the onfall at Long Island." The regiment, then for the *third* time in Ireland, remained there for seven years. During 1772, it was employed in suppressing tumults occasioned by the complicating interests and adverse views of the Catholic and Protestant landlords and tenants in Antrim and elsewhere; and in this delicate service their Highlanders were found particularly useful, from the knowledge of the language and their gentle bearing towards the people, whom by old tradition they believed to be sprung from the same stock as themselves. Though some of the Highland tribes have a proverb which says, *cha b'ionann O'Brién is na Gaël*—that O'Brien and the Gael are *not* alike, yet they found many sympathies in common—to wit, a love of fun and breaking heads; a jealousy of the English; an aversion to still-hunting, and a just, laudable, and commendable antipathy to all gaugers and tax-gatherers.

For the ticklish service of settling disputes in the neighbourhood of Antrim, it pleased his Majesty George III. to order that an additional company of the Black Watch should be raised among the Breadalbane Campbells; and it was soon seen, that though the slaughter of Ticonderoga had carried woe and desolation to many a lonely hearth and loving heart in the country of the clans, so far from extinguishing the military ardour of the Highland youth, it made them more than ever anxious to enrol themselves in the ranks of the *Reicudan Dhu*, for so was the regiment named, from the dark colours of its plumes and tartans, in contradistinction to the troops of the line, who wore scarlet coats, white waistcoats, pipeplayed breeches and flour-powdered wigs, with queues, poma-

tuned curls, and looped-up hats, having the true Blenheim cock and the star of Brunswick—*i.e.* the black leather cockade of the Protestant succession, which still survives on the chapeaux of the penny postman.

My grandfather was popular among the Breadalbane men, to please whom he had, at various times, hanged sundry MacNabs and MacAlpines, whose ideas of the eighth commandment were somewhat vague; thus on being sent into "the marquis's country" to recruit, he raised the required company in three days, and marched down from the hills of Glen Urchai with pipes playing, across the dreary Braes of Rannoch, and down by the Brig of Tay with a hundred of the handsomest men that ever became food for gunpowder, all clad in their native tartans, and well armed, each with his own sword, dirk and pistols, to which the Government added the usual arms and accoutrements of the line. From Perth, the captain was ordered to march his company to Glasgow, there to embark for Ireland; and proceeding *en route*, after leaving Falkirk and traversing the remains of the Torwood, he found himself, with his little command, approaching the burgh of Kircintulloch one dreary November evening, just as the dusk was closing in, while the rain fell in torrents, and the wind swept in gusts through the pastoral hollows and hurled the wet and withered leaves furiously before it. There he was compelled to halt, and oblige the authorities to procure immediate quarters for a hundred Highlanders—a race of whom the westland Whigs had harboured a holy aversion and wholesome terror, since the epoch of the Great Montrose and his daredevil Cavaliers, one hundred and twenty years before.

"But what has all this to do with the Wife of the



Red Comyn?" the reader may ask. I answer, everything—for had not my grandfather halted on that wet November night in the ancient burgh of Kirkintulloch, that good lady—though she made some noise in her time—had never been introduced to the reader's notice. So patience yet awhile.

The soldiers were soon distributed among the people by the town constable, and in a few minutes after seeing the last man off to his billet, my grandfather found himself standing before the gate of the Castle of Kirkintulloch drenched through plaid and philabeg, while the rain dripped gracefully from his long feathers into the nape of his neck, and the water spouted from his scabbard as from a syringe when he sheathed his claymore. Draggled and weary, he knocked furiously against the gate of the huge mansion, on which, as being the most important in the town, he was billeted as commander of the forces. Being a Celt, and not blessed with overmuch patience, he thrust his billet-order almost into the mouth of the servant who opened the door, and then swaggered in with all the air of a man who had heard the forty days' cannonade at the Moro; but a couple of good drams from a jolly magnum bonum of Ferintosh, which were given to him without delay, at once restored his equanimity, and, chucking the plump housekeeper under the chin, my grandfather—or, as I shall call him in future, the captain—proceeded upstairs.

This ancient Castle of Kirkintulloch, which had been stormed by Edward I. of England, but re-taken by the Scots, was a good specimen of the gloomy mansions of the Middle Ages, when every Scotsman was forced to keep watch and ward against his neighbour, and, more than all, against Southern invasion;

for it was built by the Comyns, who flourished in the days of Malcolm III., and were Lords of Linton Roderick and of Badenoch, and who made a great figure during the reigns of the three Alexanders and Robert I.

In those turbulent times every Scotsman was a soldier, and a brave one, too; every house was a fortress, every fortress a citadel, and its inmates were a garrison, while the urgent necessity for security caused the Scottish baron literally to found his dwelling on a rock.

A site alike remote and inaccessible was usually selected, on the isle of some deep lake, or the brow of a sequestered hill, and there the Scottish feudatory raised the mansion in which his race were to dwell, to be married and given in marriage, to be born and to die, "while grass grew and water ran"—the strong square peel-house, with its corbelled battlements, through the openings of which missiles could be shot securely; its stone-flagged roof; its irregular slits or windows, all strongly grated, though ninety or a hundred feet from the base, and girdled by a barbican, having an arched gate and flanking towers. Such was unvaryingly the external aspect of the dwelling of a Scottish baron, and such was the Castle of Kirkintulloch.

Above the gate, which bristled with loopholes for musketry, were the armorial bearings of Robert Comyn, who was slain at the battle of Alnwick, and the monogram of his descendant, the black Lord of Badenoch, who married the Princess Marjorie, daughter of King John Baliol, and whose son was the last of his race.

After taking a draught from the cup of ale which was filled for him, as for all other visitors, from a barrel



which stood in a recess of the entrance lobby, the captain ascended the hollow-stepped stair to the common hall of the venerable tower.

Internally the accommodation and construction were of the plainest description. A narrow turn-pike stair gave access to the various floors of the keep. The first of these being the levelled rock on which the edifice was founded, was vaulted, and contained the pit or dungeon, with cellars for the stores necessary to a crowded household during the long northern winter, and there was also a deep draw-well hewn through the living rock. The next contained the arched hall into which our wet and weary captain was ushered with much formality. Its floor was paved; the fireplace was of stone, and had ingle-seats within its arch. The windows were deeply embayed, and were secured by shutters within and iron bars without. The sun, when it shone through the half-darkened halls of those days, must have imparted to the dwelling of the Scottish baron the aspect of a prison; thus their prisons became dungeons, for the good folks of the olden time knew no medium in anything.

A gigantic fire blazed redly on the hearth, and by its light the captain could discern a number of those unfortunate wights who, as casual guests, trenchermen, or boys-of-the-belt, in that year, 1772, shared the old-fashioned hospitality of the Flemings of Kirkintulloch; but not being of sufficient consequence to have separate apartments, lay rolled up in their plaids on the benches, or among the stag-hounds that nestled together on the warm hearth-stone.

The reader may deem my description somewhat minute, but the events which occurred to my vene-

rable kinsman in the old stronghold of the Comyns, and a tale which he heard there, served to impress every feature of it on his memory, and thus it bore a prominent place in his narrative.

As he entered the hall, a stout and jolly-looking old man, who sat with his sturdy legs stretched out before the fire, one hand supporting a long pipe in his mouth, the other resting on a silver tankard of mulled claret, rose up at his approach and bade him welcome. The fashion of this person's dress was old—for still the Scots are always a year or two behind every innovation; his red vest was deeply flapped, his coat of brown broadcloth was square-tailed, with enormous cuffs and silver buttons; he wore a brown bob periwig with a single row of curls round the bottom thereof; square buckles on his square-toed shoes, and a hat cocked with great exactness in the form of an equilateral triangle, completed the costume of the old chamberlain or castle bailie of the Laird of Kirkintulloch.

"A cold night, bailie," said the captain; "I am sorely chilled, having marched from the Torwood amid this tempest of wind and rain."

"The more are you welcome, sir, to the Castle of Kirkintulloch," replied the bailie, placing a chair; "and if a draught from this tankard of hot mulled claret will comfort you, take it and welcome, while something better is preparing."

"A thousand thanks, good bailie," replied the captain, as he drained the silver pot which came seething from the glowing hob.

Being thoroughly drenched, he begged the bailie would have him shown to an apartment where he might change certain portions of his attire. A boy in the livery of the Flemings, with their goat-head



worked on his sleeves, appeared to conduct him, and, taking a candle, the lad, who was evidently displeased at being summoned from the warm fire of the kitchen, which in the Scoto-French fashion adjoined the hall, hurried up the staircase before the captain, leaving him to follow as he pleased.

I have already hinted that my grandfather was somewhat short-tempered, so he swore one of those hearty oaths which our army picked up so glibly in Flanders, adding, "Hollo! you young devil—do you mean to leave me here in the dark?"

Without heeding him, the lad sprang to the top of the stairs, and hastened across the landing-place into an apartment, leaving the captain to ascend by no other light than the feeble rays that fell from a candle in a tin sconce, which hung on the wall in the first turn of the spiral stair. Looking angrily up in search of his guide, the captain saw—or thought he saw—a lady cross the landing-place.

She was tall, and her white profile was stern and grave, and she was attended by the most diminutive black dwarf in the world—a little creature who appeared absolutely to perspire under the weight of her enormous train, which was of some dark rich stuff, but brilliantly brocaded with white stars. The captain paused and bowed very low, lifting up the end of his long claymore, believing that this stately dame might wish to descend; but when he raised his head again she was gone! Her disappearance was so sudden that he was confounded, and rubbed his eyes.

"Can the long march against a chill November wind have affected my vision?" thought he; "or has that brimming tankard of hot claret affected my nerves? Impossible! Tush—the dame has been scared by my draggled appearance, and has hastened

into one of these apartments;" so the old gentleman swore another Flemish oath, and reached the top of the stairs.

The guide now reappeared, and he would certainly have had his ears pulled, but the captain's mind was strangely agitated by thoughts of the lady, whose tall aristocratic figure, and pure, cold, and almost sublime profile seemed to be still before him in the dusk.

He was shown into a handsome bed-chamber, which was lighted by four candles in brass-mounted holders of carved oak. The walls were hung with antique leather, of a pale yellow colour, embossed with red flowers; the bed was very ancient, and resembled the canopied tombs one occasionally sees in old churches. Over the mantelpiece was a Latin legend, informing the visitor that in this chamber the wife of the Red Comyn had died a prisoner in the year of our redemption 1310.

"Four hundred and sixty-two years ago," quoth the captain, after airing his subtraction a little; "ugh! how gloomy the place looks, compared to the cheerful hall—so gloomy, indeed, that I shall be here as little as possible before marching to-morrow."

He flung off his belted plaid, badgerskin sporan, and sword-belt, wrung the water from his kilt and from the curls of his periwig, smoothed his queue, donned a pair of dry hose, and, after giving a casual glance to the primings and charges of his pistols, which were a pair of true steel-butted Doune pops, from the armoury of old Thomas Caddel, he turned to leave the chamber, from the ceiling of which a dried kingfisher hung by a thread; for it is an old superstition that the bird will turn his bill to *that* point from which the wind blows.

Taking one of the candles, the captain left the

chamber, and was about to descend, when by some "glamour" he mistook the way; for being supperless, I am convinced that the hot wine had affected his head; he stumbled against a door; it flew open, and he found himself in the dressing apartment of a lady, whose face was turned towards him, and by the lights on a side-table he perceived at a glance that she was the same queenly dame who had recently crossed the landing-place. She gazed fixedly at the amazed intruder, as she stood before a mirror, with her round polished shoulders turned towards him, and her jet black hair gathered up in heavy masses on her slender fingers, for she seemed in the act of dressing it. From a faultless bust, her dark dress, brocaded with stars, hung in magnificent folds to her feet, where, crouching like a marmoset, the hideous little dwarf was sitting. Her figure was beautiful, but so motionless and still, as she gazed with eyes full of indignation and inquiry, that the words of apology hung half arrested on the lips of the bowing intruder, who, in another moment, discovered that he had before him a—picture—only a picture; but one painted in the first style of antique art.

Nothing artistic could be more beautifully executed than the upturned and polished arms, from which the lace that foreign looms must have woven, hung in loops upheld by diamonds. A necklace of precious stones encircled her neck, and a large band of the same formed a coronet round her head, and gave an imperial grace to her lofty beauty of feature and of form.

The captain gazed on it till the figure appeared to come forward and the canvas to recede, till the eyes seemed to fill with light and the proud lips to curl with a scornful smile; and then he turned away, for

the strange picture had a mysterious effect upon him, and hastily he sought the hall, where a hot and savoury supper smoked on the centre table, and where the bailie or castellan of the absent proprietor impatiently awaited him.

"Come awa, sir—come awa; I thought you meant to bide up-stairs a' night. Here are hot collops, devilled turkey, stewed kidneys, mulled claret, port, sherry, and whisky toddy—draw in a chair, sir, and make yourself at home."

"I have a hawk's appetite, bailie," said my kinsman, applying himself assiduously to the devil and the sherry.

"And I ditto, double—for I have ridden in from Stirling market to-day; try the cold gibelotte pie."

"Thank you; I'll rather stick to my old friend—a devilled bone smacks of the bivouac. Pass the sherry, bailie. Thank you."

"Try the kidneys; they would serve a king."

"Thanks. By the bye, who is that noble lady now residing here?"

"Noble lady?" reiterated the bailie, looking up with his mouth full, and surprise in his flushed face.

"Yes; she whom I passed, or rather who passed me, on the staircase to-night." The bailie pushed back his chair and plate.

"A lady, sir!" he stammered, while his eyes opened wider.

"She in the black dress brocaded with white stars."

"Gude hae mercy on us!—and a dwarf holding up her tail?"

"The same."



"The Lord take us a' into his holy keeping! Ye have seen *her*?"

"Seen who? What the devil do you mean?"

"*The wife of the Red Comyn!*"

"Come, that is good; but I am too old a soldier, bailie, to believe all this."

"Keep us frae harm!" continued the old man, as his rubicund visage grew pale, and he glanced stealthily over his shoulder while lowering his voice; "she hasna' been seen for these ten years past; heaven send it portends nae evil to our family!"

"Our family," meant the house; so completely were the old Scottish domestics identified with those they served.

"Lord help you, sir," he continued, draining a hot jug of toddy almost at a draught; "you have seen a wandering spirit."

"It may have been fancy, bailie; but I certainly saw her picture, and that is tangible enough."

"That picture was painted two hundred years and mair after her death; and there is a devilish story connected with it too."

"'Pon my honour, bailie, you quite interest me," said the captain, brewing a jug of smoking toddy, and drawing a chair nearer to the fire; "the atmosphere of this place becomes full of diablerie. Painted two hundred years *after* her death! I hope the likeness is good; but tell me all about it."

"She was the wife of the last Comyn to whom this castle belonged, and she was a woman possessing alike the pride and temper of Lucifer; but they cost her dear, for she suffered a sore penance in the yellow bed-chamber up-stairs, and there 'tis said her spirit walks to this hour. Now it chanced that in the days of King James IV., his Master Painter, the famous Sir

Thomas Galbraith, the pupil of Quentin Matsys, of Antwerp, and the friend of Leonardo da Vinci and of Titian Vecelli, came here during the lifetime of John Lord Fleming—the same who was so barbarously assassinated by the cursed Laird o' Drummelzier, wi whose folk we have a feud outstanding yet, like an auld debt—well, the King's painter slept, or rather, perhaps, passed the night in the yellow room, and from that time he was a changed man; from being rosy-faced, he became pale and wan, hollow-eyed and ghastly; from being as full of fun and frolic as the King himself, he became sad, woful and thoughtful, and he shut himself up in the haunted-room, where he worked day and night for a whole week, without eating, drinking, or sleeping, as folks aver, until *that* awful picture was finished; and whether it was done from the memory of *one* vision of the spirit, or whether the wife of the Red Comyn came to him nightly from hell, and sat for her portrait, I cannot say; but when finished by Sir Thomas Galbraith, it was the last work he did on earth, for he was found dead, seated before it, one morning, with a pallet on his left thumb and a brush in his right hand. Terror was on his dead face, and the marks of strangulation were round his throat; so the Flemings buried him in the auld Kirk of St. Ninian, at the Ofgang, where his grave is yet to be seen. I would fain have the picture burned, but the family set a high value upon it; yet I verily believe, if a puir presumptuous auld carle like me dare judge o' sic things, that its presence here may keep the spirit o' that awfu' woman hovering about the walls o' the auld castle she rendered accursed by her crimes!"

"Well, bailie, tell me the story and——"

"Mak' another browst o' toddy while the water is hot, sir," replied the castellan, as he stirred up the fire



with an enormous poker, and as the flames roared in the tunnel-like chimney, the red sparks flew up in pyramids.

"I am charged to the brim," said the captain; "so fire away, my friend, I am all impatience."

After a few preliminary hems, coughs, and flourishes, with sips of toddy between, the bailie told the captain the following strange story, which I give in my own words, being vain enough to prefer them to his.

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In the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Castle of Kirkintulloch was the principal residence of John Comyn Lord of Badenoch, who, as nephew of King John Baliol, was a competitor with Bruce for the crown of Scotland, and he was called the *Red* Comyn to distinguish him from his father, the *Black* Comyn, who was so named from his swarthy complexion.

In those days the country around this castle was covered by forests of oak and pine, through the secluded hollows of which the Kelvin and the Logie crept with that slow and sluggish current which gives them more the aspect of Flemish canals than streams that roll from Scottish mountains. The rising burgh was then roofed with stone, or thatched; the Roman fort on the Barhill was nearly entire, as when a thousand years before the soldiers of the Cæsars had relinquished it before the furious Scots; and the now ruined tower of Sir Robert Boyd, Baron of Kilmarnock, Hartshaw, Ardneil and Dalry, was still the stronghold of his family, who were the sworn enemies of the Baliols and all their adherents. So deep, indeed, was their hatred, that they would not bury

their dead in the same church; thus, while the Boyds were laid in the Chapel of St. Mary (which is now the parish kirk), the Comyns were interred in the Church of St. Ninian.

The Red Comyn was powerful, cunning, and dissembling; being ambitious, and though he fought under Wallace at Falkirk, intensely selfish, he feared to lose his estates after that disastrous battle was lost; and as usual with Scottish nobles, considering his own interest before the common weal or the national honour, he joined the English ranks, and fought against his own country in the army of the traitor-king, John Baliol.

He was a woful tyrant to the burgh of Kirkintulloch; for, in defiance of the old laws of the land, he enforced the bludewit, the stingisdynt, the marchet, the herezeld, and other exactions now unknown within the ports of a Scottish town; and as all pleas between burgesses and travelling merchants must be settled before the third flowing and ebbing of the tide, he usually decided them by whipping the burgess and confiscating the goods of the stranger. Moreover, although it had been ordained by the kings of old, that on any burgess departing on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land or other sacred place, his goods and family should be protected "vntill God brought him hame againe," the wives of the absent were often seized by Comyn, and their goods by his lady.

At his mills he exacted exorbitant mulctures, and he hung all who dared to complain; if any ventured to grind wheat, mashloch, or rye with hand querns, they were also hanged; and though it was statute and ordained that he who stole a halfpenny-worth of bread should be scourged, that he who stole a pair of



shoes should be pilloried, or eightpence worth should have *one leg* cut off, the tyrant hanged them all. Thus his Dule-tree was never without a man hanging from it, with the black gleds flying round him; for Comyn ground alike to the dust the burgesses within the walls and the gudemen of the Newland Mailings without; so that it was generally said in Dumbartonshire, that the devil himself would be a gentler overlord than he; and he was so hated that men remembered the dreadful fate of his father in Badenoch, and it came to be whispered about that there was a prophecy made by a weird woman, that he too should *die a violent death!*

His wife, Lady Gwendoleyne, was esteemed one of the most beautiful women in Scotland, and none had outshone her at the Court of Queen Yolande, the consort of Alexander III. Lovely beyond all comparison, tall, stately and magnificent in form, with pale commanding features and dark eyes, indicative rather of pride of birth and loftiness of mind than of gentleness, she made the people—even those whom her beauty dazzled, and her slightest smile would have won for ever—shrink and quail before her, as beneath the eye of some mysterious spirit; for the keen black eye of that imperious lady is said to have been as dangerous in its beauty as it was terrible in its expression.

She had been wedded early to the Red Lord of Badenoch; they had three daughters, the youngest of whom (according to Andrew Wyntoun) was married to the traitorous MacDougal of Lorn. They had also one son, who at the time this history opens, A.D. 1306, was in his eighteenth year, and was said to be a handsome, gallant, and high-spirited youth; but, unfortunately, devoted to the false Baliol, at

whose mock Court in the Castle of Perth he resided, and there he had been educated.

Notwithstanding her own unparalleled beauty, her husband's rank, power, and overweening authority, Lady Gwendoleyne was far from being happy! A thorn sharper than a poisoned arrow rankled in her heart, in the form of a restless jealousy of her husband, to whom she was passionately devoted, and whom she loved with all the ardour of her impulsive nature. And though he seemed to be, in manner, all that befitted a faithful and attached spouse, he was yet an object of suspicion to Gwendoleyne; for some artful minion had skilfully sown the seeds of mistrust between them, and several of Comyn's unguarded actions and interferences with the wives of pilgrim-burgesses had given her every reason to deem her fears were just and true; hence her fiery heart became a prey to furious passions and to bitter thoughts, and she looked about her, longing for some fitting object on which to vent her wrath.

Her husband's kinsman and her own dear friend, old Sir Alexander Baliol of Cavers, Great Chamberlain of Scotland, to whom she often hinted her complaints against Comyn and her suspicions of his infidelity, endeavoured to laugh away her fears.

"Madam," said he, on one occasion, "jealousy is the soul of a love which will brook no rival even for a moment. I mean not to hint that you love Red Comyn too much, but without this jealousy your love for him perhaps would die."

"You are too subtle a casuist for a woman, Sir Alexander of Cavers," replied the lady, cresting up her beautiful head; "but you must be aware that the disposition and manners of Comyn, your kinsman, are at least but too well calculated to excite my suspicion



and distrust. To wit: his passionate and unconcealed admiration for female beauty; this is known over the whole country, and thrice, on vague suspicion, I have had to discard certain ladies of my household, and thus make their families deadly enemies of ours. And say, my good Lord Chamberlain, are these wandering sallies not shameful, when perpetrated by one who has a son now in his eighteenth year, and tall and handsome as himself?"

Sir Alexander thought of Comyn's gigantic red beard, and smiled when remembering the handsome youth, who had all his mother's beauty, without his father's ferocity of aspect and bearing.

"You smile, Sir Alexander!" said the fiery dame. "You smile—'tis very well, sir! You know more of the Red Comyn and his secrets than you care to tell me, and that courtier's smile assures me that I am an injured wife——"

"I beg to assure you, Lady of Badenoch——"

"Assure me of nothing, Lord of Cavers, if you cannot assure me of your kinsman's faith and purity."

"Madam," said the old Lord Chamberlain, testily, "there are two kinds of jealousy—a pure fear by which the young and restless lover is animated—and a grovelling suspicion, which is jealousy in the worst sense of the term. Your suspicion wounds your self-esteem—it piques your honour—and is but a new phase of selfishness, for you suspect yourself an injured woman."

"And justly too, for Comyn's coldness to me during the last month cannot be accounted for but by some new fancy."

"Your husband is never jealous of *you*, madam."

"That only proves his indifference. 'Tis shamel, false, and unknighly; and I only trust that the pre-

sence of our boy, the young Sir John, whom the King has just knighted, will in some degree recal my wandering husband to a sense of his own honour and the honour of his wife and daughters."

"Madam, how often shall I assure you that the husband of one so beautiful as you could never prove false—I am an old man, your father's friend, and may well say this."

"True, you are an old man, and were my father's friend," resumed the lady, whose black eyes flashed with dusky fire through their tears; "thus it is the more culpable in you to be in my husband's wicked secrets, and endeavouring thus to blind and to deceive a loving and devoted wife. But woe to Comyn and to you in that hour when I prove the falsehood of you both!"

And gathering up her long silk kirtle, which was worn without sleeves, but was so long in the skirt as constantly to require upholding by one hand, she swept away with the air of an offended queen, and with her long and magnificent hair floating over her shoulders from under a band of burnished gold.

"Alas!" thought the old chamberlain, shrugging his shoulders, "how true it is, that love being jealous, maketh a good eye look askint."

In those days maidens of good family were received into the houses of ladies of high rank to be delicately nurtured and well educated; for which, strange as it may now seem, a befitting fee or pension was paid. Now, among the ladies of the *tabourette*, or *dames d'honneur* of the Lady of Badenoch, were the daughters of many noble houses of the Baliol faction, and who were consequently false to their country. Thus she had Margaret, daughter of that Lord Abernethy who basely accepted from the English King a com-



mission as Captain-General of the Scottish rebels; Muriel, daughter of Sir Gilbert de Umphreville, the forfeited Earl of Angus; Isabel, daughter of David Lord Brechin, who was accused of a design to betray Berwick to the English; Rosamond and Alice, the daughters of John Comyn, Earl of Buchan, and Lord High Constable of Scotland, another prime traitor of the Baliol faction; and Yolande, daughter of William de Gifford, Lord of Yester, in East Lothian. All these were beautiful girls, and, save the last, were proud, haughty, and reserved; for their manners and bearing were all modelled exactly after those of Lady Comyn. Yolande de Gifford, whose father, though a lord, had, strange to say, been true to Scotland, was an orphan, and had been taken into the Castle of Kirkintulloch at the request of Bernard, Abbot of Arbroath, the Lord Chancellor, and almost in pity, as all her father's lands in the shire of Haddington had been seized by John Baliol. She was the most beautiful of Gwendoleyne's attendants, and perhaps the most reserved and gentle, for she felt herself friendless and alone among the selfish courtiers of the Scottish King. Blue eyed, golden haired, and softly skinned, Yolande, who had been so named after her godmother, the late queen (Yolande, Countess de Dreux), was, indeed, the most gentle and loveable of all gentle creatures, and she shrank under the bold black eyes of Lady Gwendoleyne, as a sensitive plant might shrink beneath a hot sun, or before the keen north wind.

Yolande, when the tresses of her rich hair were gathered in the golden crespinette then worn by ladies of the Scottish Court, to show the contour of the neck and shoulders; when her blue kirtle, with its tight sleeves, displayed her beautiful form, over which

floated her surquayne or velvet mantle, tied with tassels at each shoulder, looked only second in beauty to Lady Comyn herself, for they were nearly of a height; and her pretty white fingers were the most expert of all the ladies there at the weaving of those endless waves of tapestry at which all noble demoiselles then worked daily for the comfort and decoration of their dwellings and churches. Such was then the industrious custom; and we are told that Matilda, Queen of William the Conqueror of England, sewed with her own fair hands sixty-seven yards representing the history of the Conquest of South Britain, beginning with Harold's embassy to the Norman Court, and ending with his death at Hastings.

After a long absence at King Edward's Court in London, Red Comyn returned to Scotland, which was then groaning under the yoke of the infamous King John Baliol, the tool of the English, and a faction of traitorous Scottish nobles. On arriving at his home, he gave presents to all the ladies of his household—to one a necklace, to another a bracelet, a crespinette, a brooch, and so forth; but to Yolande de Gifford he gave a golden ring.

*A ring!*

The restless suspicions of his lady had now discovered a clue to something real and tangible; and now she had an object on which her vague jealousies could settle with security. Yolande de Gifford, the playmate of her absent son—the viper whom she had taken into her bosom at the entreaty of the cunning Abbot Bernard, was doubtless involved with her husband in one of those intrigues which had embittered her whole life, although she had never been able to detect them or discover solid proofs.

“Let me be wary and watch well,” said she to



herself; "should it be so, by the cross that stood on Calvary, my Lord of Badenoch shall pay dear for his fair-haired toy!"

Iago's words have been quoted a thousand times, and none are more true; for

"Trifles light as air

Are to the jealous, confirmation strong

As proofs of holy writ . . . . .

Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,

Which, at the first, are scarce found to distaste,

But, with a little act upon the blood,

Burn like the mines of sulphur."

Lady Comyn suddenly discovered that the timid Yolande had been abstracted and thoughtful, neglectful of her apportioned duties, and inattentive alike to the conversation of her companions and the commands of her mistress. Was not this a sign of love and of secret thoughts? She frequently and bitterly reprimanded her, till even the gentle Yolande could not forget that she was the Lord Yester's only daughter, and replied with honest pride and proper spirit, asserting her own position and rank.

"This insolence and hauteur are alike unbecoming," said Lady Gwendoleyne; "and you shall be banished, minion, from my hall and bower, though the poorest convent in Scotland be your portionless home!"

And assuredly this harsh threat would have been put in execution, but for the determined intervention of the Red Comyn, whose kindness to the orphan increased with his haughty wife's displeasure; and so she set her little black dwarf, who was dumb, to watch Yolande constantly. This dwarf was a present from Sir Thomas of Charteris, the famous Red Rover and pirate, who afterwards became Lord of Kinfouns, and

was conquered on the high seas by William Wallace.

About the time that great preparations were making for the return of her son, the young Sir John Comyn, whom—whether the youth was so disposed or not—she meant to wed to his cousin, Alicia Comyn, daughter of the Lord High Constable, she was again imparting her griefs to Sir Alexander of Cavers.

"Comyn goeth from bad to worse; he braves me now, and dares to keep his minion here, whether I will it or no. By God's teeth, sir, could I but discover aught to prove my suspicions right, I'd slay that pale-faced Yolande with Red Comyn's own dagger!"

"I beseech you, lady, to compose yourself, and to be assured that your suspicions are alike unjust and cruel; for they malign your husband and crush this friendless maiden to the dust."

"I tell you that I hate her!" responded the imperious dame, grinding her beautiful teeth, while her magnificent eyes flashed fire.

"Then get her married," said the Chamberlain of Scotland, pithily.

"Who in these selfish times will be mad enough to wed the penniless daughter of a forfeited house? Who would ask her love?"

"I for one, were I young as herself; but let her seek a husband according to the ancient law."

"Sir Alexander, you mock me again."

"Heaven forbid, fair kinswoman; I do but remind you of an Act of Parliament passed in the reign of the late Queen Margaret."

"Pshaw—the Maid of Norway—well?"

"Anent spinsters, like this Yolande."



"Well—well," continued Gwendoleyne, stamping her pretty foot.

"In 1288, it was statute and ordained, 'that during the reign of her Most Blessed Majesty, *ilk maiden ladye of baith high and lowe estate shall have libertie to bespeak ye man she likes*: albeit, if he refuses to take her to be his wyf, he shall be mulctit of ye sum of one hundred pounds or less, as his estate may be, except and alwais, if he can make it appear that he is betrothit to ane ither woman, when he shall be free."

"Yolande is proud as myself, for she comes of a race that would not stoop their crests to kings; and this is but mockery, my Lord Chamberlain, so—what is this now?"

At that moment the little black dwarf crept close to her side, pulled her skirt, and pointed towards the chamber of Yolande Gifford. The yellow glossy eyes of the stunted negro gleamed with malevolent light, as, snatching up her train, the lady swept out of the hall; and the Chamberlain shrugged his shoulders and blessed his stars that he was still a bachelor, while he whistled merrily, and resumed his employment of teaching a hawk to shake its little bells and coquette with its wings.

With all her pride and spirit, her furious will and temper, so completely had the demon of jealousy taken possession of her soul, that Gwendoleyne stooped to the humility of eavesdropping; and on hearing the murmur of voices whispering in the chamber of Yolande, she crept close to the thick arras that covered the door, and listened with all her soul in her ears.

"Go, I implore you," she heard Yolande say, in a stifled voice; "alas! if you are discovered here, what will my tyrannical mistress say?"

"Just what she pleases," replied a voice, and then there was a sound—a *kiss*—which set the listener's blood on fire.

"I am watched by that hateful imp her dwarf, and live in daily terror of her discovering all," continued the sobbing Yolande; "and you know what her views are concerning yourself. Go—go—John Comyn, for the love of God and Saint Mary, go!"

"*John Comyn!*" muttered Lady Gwendoleyne; "oh, wretch! that I had a dagger here to avenge this double perfidy!"

A pause ensued.

"To-morrow evening be it, then—at the Roman Peel," said a low voice.

"When the moon is over Campsie Fells."

"You will not forget, beloved Yolande."

"Oh, no—no; and let that meeting be our last, for another day will change the face of everything," wept Yolande.

Unable longer to restrain her fury, the white hand of Lady Comyn tore aside the arras, and she rushed into the apartment with all the aspect of an enraged Pythoness, while at the same moment the figure of a man vanished from the open window, and his steps were heard crashing through the bushes and trees without, as he retired hastily and in the dusk; but Gwendoleyne saw—or thought she saw—enough to be convinced that the fugitive was no other than her husband!

"Alas! madam," cried Yolande, sinking on her knees in an agony of terror, "you have discovered us."

"At last—yes, at last!" exclaimed the fierce, exulting woman, in hoarse accents, as she savagely wreathed her slender fingers, which rage had endued



by some blocks of grey stone, which to this day are named Comyn's Craigie, and there his bones were found after his hounds had gnawed and torn them asunder.

"So, for God's love, dear lady," resumed the Lord of Cavers with a shudder, "refer no more to these dark and terrible predictions."

The white lips of the haughty lady smiled, but a wild expression of rage and sorrow filled her eyes, and the glance she gave her kinsman was to him inexplicable, as she had not a doubt that this sudden journey was all a device of her husband to meet, or perhaps to elope, with Yolande. Dark and terrible were the silent thoughts of Gwendoleyne as the evening drew on. The old prophecy that like the Black Comyn, the Red one would *die by a violent death*, seemed ever before her in letters of fire; and she thought that now the time had come.

"How was I ever weak enough to expect that a fair-haired man could be true to me?" she muttered; "in all old Scripture tapestries are not Cain and Judas represented with large yellow beards, or red ones, like that of my husband Comyn! Oh, woe is me! and cursed be the hour I forsook Sir John the Grahame to become the wife of his home and the mother of his children!"

All that day she kept Yolande carefully under lock and key, and without food or drink, while the black dwarf watched the window and the corridor. The sunset faded on the green ridges of the Campsie Fells, evening darkened into sombre night, and the pale light of the moon, long before her rising, was spread across the blue and starry sky behind the hills of Lanarkshire. The woolly-leaved birches that fringed the banks of the Logie and Kelvin, diffused a rich

fragrance as the dew of eve fell on them; and the lonely heron sent up its mournful cry at times, as it waded in the pools that gleamed below the castle walls.

Attired as Yolande, in a dress of *dark velvet starred with silver*, with her black locks gathered in a golden crespinnette, a veil spread over her head and shoulders, and with her little white hand grasping the hilt of a jewelled dagger that was concealed in her bosom, the wife of the Red Comyn left the Castle of Kirkintulloch unseen by all, and by a little postern on the south, and, skirting the houses of the town, reached the trysting-place, the Caer-pen-tulloch, or old Roman fort at the west end of the hill. The fallen ramparts of the tower were eighty feet square, and the yellow broom, the green whin, the purple foxglove, and the sweet wallflower, all flourished together on the masses of fallen masonry which were covered by long grass that waved mournfully to and fro between the pale Gwendoleyne and the white starlight. The place seemed very silent, lonely, and desolate. All was intensely still, save the fierce beating of her heart, which teemed with passion, as her eyes did with tears she scorned to weep. Time stole away. The moments seemed like hours.

No one came! Could she have mistaken the place—the time?

Now the yellow moon began to peep above the distant hills, and its lustre glinted on the green mounds and shattered masonry of the ancient peel.

Up, up it came, and now its whole disc was gleaming above the dark mountain-ridge, and tipping each rock and peak with fire.

Gwendoleyne prayed in her heart that no one might



come—that she might have been deceived—that Comyn, the father of her four children—but, hark! the hoofs of a horse rang hollowly on the green turf, and through the archway of the ruined enclosure rode an armed man, who sang merrily the same march to which, eight years after, Bruce marched his victorious host to Bannockburn.

“Hark to the tramp, from yonder camp,  
Whence the Scottish spearmen come!  
When they hear the bagpipe sounding,  
*Tuttie tattie* to the drum!”

“’Tis the Red Comyn’s favourite song!” said she, shrinking aside; “now mayest thou be accursed from the bearing cloth in which thou wert baptized to that shroud of blood in which thou shalt lie! Now by the soul of him who loved me well, the Grahame who fell at Falkirk, and by the life of my son—my dearest hope—I shall have a terrible vengeance!”

The knight, on whose head was a plumed chapel-de-fer, with a mail coif that concealed the lower part of his face, wore over his armour an embroidered cois-tise, with the cognisance of the Comyns, two ostriches, with the motto “Courage.” He dismounted, and after looking about him for a moment, discovered Gwendoleyne, to whom he hastened with an exclamation of joy, and she recognised on the breast of the surcoat some embroidery, on which she had but too surely and too lately seen the white hands of Yolande Gifford plying the needle! What other proof of perfidy was necessary?

An arm was thrown around her, and passionately and joyously she was pressed to the breast of the new comer. But while trembling with ungovernable fury to find herself exposed to embraces intended for

Yolande, she drove her poniard in the heart of the lover twice, exclaiming,

“Die, villain and deceiver—die in your adultery—die!”

“*Mother—oh, mother!*” cried a voice, which froze the marrow in her bones; and the frantic and wretched Gwendoleyne discovered that she had slain—not the Red Comyn—but their beloved and only son.

The plumed *chapel-de-fer* rang as the wearer sank to the earth.

A gurgling sound was all that followed; the ruined tower swam round that miserable woman, and, multiplied by a thousand times, the horse of the murdered knight seemed to career around her; till borne down by misery, by a revulsion of feeling, by over-tension of the heart, and by horror of what she had done, Gwendoleyne sank senseless on the body of her son.

The young Sir John Comyn had loved the orphan Yolande, and on his return had secretly wished to meet—perhaps, for all that we can learn now—to espouse her; but this terrible catastrophe ended his life and intentions together.

Meanwhile, like a true Scottish baron bent on selfish schemes of family ambition and degrading aggrandizement, Red Comyn had ridden fast to meet Robert Bruce, the younger, at Dumfries, and to concert with him a pretended plan to free Scotland from the English and from John Baliol; but of this scheme the red-headed traitor had duly informed King Edward from time to time. On Comyn’s arrival in Nithsdale, the gallant Robert, afterwards King of Scotland, had fled in safety northward, by reversing his horse’s hoofs, as the ground was covered with snow; and being furnished with clear proofs of his com-

patriot's villainy, he pursued him to the church of the Minorites at Dumfries, whither he had fled for sanctuary, being full of conscious guilt; but neither the house of God nor its high altar could protect this perfidious wretch, who was false to Scotland and her people; and the prophecy that "Red Comyn should die by a violent death" was terribly fulfilled; for there Bruce, Lindsay, and Kirkpatrick buried their daggers in his heart upon St. William's day, the 10th of February, 1306.

So perish all who are false to their country!

He was the last Comyn of the house of Badenoch, and was, moreover, the last of his race—a race which Scotland well could spare.

Lady Gwendoleyne never spoke after she was borne into the castle with the dead body of her son. She lived for five years a close captive in that yellow chamber, and during those terrible five years a word, even of prayer, never passed her lips; but a period was put to her sufferings, for this proud and resentful beauty died on the 10th day of February, 1310, at the hour of three in the afternoon, the anniversary of the very moment in which her husband died under the three daggers in the Minorite Church of Dumfries.

She was buried before the Shrine of St. Ninian, with all the grandeur of a princess and all the splendour of the Roman ritual; her son slept by her side, and Sir Alexander of Cavers reared a stately monument above them; but that fierce woman's restless spirit is still said to haunt the Castle of Kirkintulloch and the Roman ruins at the west end of the town; for it is supposed that she will never find repose or peace until the day of doom.

Such was the story told to the captain by the castellan of the old fortress of Kirkintulloch, scarcely one stone of which now stands upon another, as it was removed about the beginning of the present century.

"And Yolande Gifford—what of her?" asked the captain.

"She did not die of love or grief either, but lived to be a very old woman, and passed away in about her eightieth year, when Robert III. was King, a prioress of the Bernardine nuns of St. Mary—a convent of which you may still see the ruins on the north bank of the Avon, about a mile above Linlithgow Bridge."

"A melancholy story!" said the captain; "what a devil of a wife that Gwendoleyne must have been—but no better than such an infamous traitor as Comyn deserved!"

"Beware ye, sir," said the castle bailie, lowering his voice, and looking furtively round him; "she is said to walk about—ay, at this very hour, and may pay you a visit that you may never get the better of."

"I'll be hanged, bailie, if I go up-stairs to-night—or this morning, rather," said my grandfather, laughing; "I would rather face the Dons at the Moro again, than meet that dame in black velvet with her devil of a dwarf—so make a fresh browst and stir up the fire."

The clock struck four.

"Four!" said the soldier; "four already; and we march in an hour!"

The bailie, who was a jolly old fellow, brewed a fresh jorum of hot toddy—by this time they had under their girdles ten jugs each; and my grandfather now began to spin *his* yarns, and detailed the slaughter



of Ticonderoga, the scalping and flaying at Fort Pitt, the storming of the Moro, where British musket-butts and the pates of the Dons tested the hardness of each other; he proceeded on the expedition up the Lakes, and had just opened the trenches before Montreal, when he found himself at the bottom of his tenth jug, the fire out, the bailie asleep in his easy-chair, and heard the warning drum beaten in the streets of Kirkintulloch—the warning for the march, while the grey dawn stole through the ancient windows.

It was daylight now, and fearless alike of Dame Gwendoleyne and her dwarf, my grandfather sallied down-stairs, and propping himself between his claymore and the walls of the houses, or an occasional pump-well as he passed it, reached the muster-place, and holding himself very erect, gave, with great emphasis, the command to “march.” His detachment marched accordingly, and—here ends our story for the present.