

Richard Cameron :

A DREAM OF THE COVENANTERS.

IT was night—the gates of even had shut, the amusive songsters of the glade had ceased their plaintive melodies, the voice of nature everywhere was hushed and calm, and with sleep sitting dewy-laden on my wearied eyelids I laid me down in peace to rest. And as I slept, I dreamed that by my dark bedside stood Dame Remembrance with the curtains drawn silently aside. She took me gently by the hand and led me through trackless wastes, and I followed unquestioningly. Under

Heaven's ebon vault,
Studded with stars unutterably bright,

we sped, my companion and I, past towering hills and darksome rocky steeps, through forest depths, and over stormy seas and fiercely foaming torrents, until we arrived at a valley of loveliest beauty. The orb of heaven was shining gloriously, the meadow-streams murmured their soft lullabies, and winged songsters poured out their mellifluous trills from brake and grove : Nature indeed was gay.

As we paused contemplatively upon the scene, my guide touched me upon the arm and bade me follow her. At the far-away corner of the beautiful vale which we were traversing lay a town, cradled in the shadow of a high hill, which with difficulty we began to ascend. On reaching the summit Remembrance handed me a perspective glass, commanding me

to focus it upon the scene that stretched beneath, and tell her what my eyes beheld.

In answer I replied, "I see mighty throngs of people passing and repassing like the triumphs of the Roman emperors. There is nothing but happiness there: knightly lords are bowing in homage to queenly beauty, and amid the multitude rides one whose sunlike appearance seems to be the lodestone that sways the merry crowd. Pray tell me, Spirit, what place this is—it looks indeed strangely familiar to me—that glorious pile, that proud fortalice, I surely know it!" "No doubt," she said. "The majestic-looking person you see is Charles II., monarch of Britain; the town is Falkland—a town whose very streets reflect the lives of kings and queens, and that lordly edifice is the Palace. But look again—seest thou nothing on the outskirts of the vast multitude, nothing which seems discordant with such festivity?"

Once more my eyes swept the seething crowd. "I see a young man being railed at and cruelly hustled about by a few bullying spirits," and I inquired who the unfortunate man might be.

"Listen," said my conductor. "The youth who is being so ruthlessly reproached by his fellow-townsmen is one of God's noblest works—an honest man; one of the world's monuments—a virtuous, Christ-like man who has conquered the world and the devil, and now holds aloof from the vile contamination which luxury ever brings in its train. Remember he was not always what he is now. Richie Cameron, as his friends call him, is a victor. Down there where he was born, he has taught his village school, and acted as precentor to the curate of the Episcopal Church, in which faith he had been cradled in his infancy, and nursed and trained in his boyhood."

"How came about this change," I ventured to ask, "this disciplining of the heart to humility, this exilement from all the pomp and method and art to which the pride of religion is so subservient?"

Motioning me to follow, she led the way over the Lomond hill-top and down the western slopes and showed me "a green and silent spot amid the hills." By this the sun had gone down in the golden west, and a deep mist overhung the vale, shrouding the mountain summit. Yet amid the gloom and solitude of the valley we could distinguish the forms of men and women moving silently and eagerly to that lonely spot on the hillside. And as we listened, methought the heavens opened and I heard the celestial hosts pouring forth their angelic songs of praise, while the green vales and wooded heights echoed back the ecstatic melody. I stood entranced, enraptured, forgetful of everything but the music of the angels.

Eft-soons the mists were dispelled, and as the moon rode resplendently across the starry vault of the firmament, Dame Remembrance directed my attention to the end of the vale. Obeying the guiding ray, I looked and beheld whither the multitude we saw in the mist-laden gloaming had gone—some I noticed, too, had swords, and all of them Bibles. Involuntarily I turned to my guiding spirit, and she apparently comprehended the movement, for she said impressively :—

"Heaven's gates are not so highly arched
As princes' palaces ; they that enter there
Must go upon their knees."

"These men," the Spirit continued, "are holding a conventicle or field-meeting. Many of them, had they chosen, might have been the monitors of princes and knights, or the parasites of a court ; but they scorned the sycophantship of fickle monarchs who forbade liberty of worship, and now they are leading a life of religious outlawry, living in caves and rocks, or lurking on the hillsides, not daring

In face of day
To worship God, or even at the dead
Of night, save where the wintry storm raved fierce,
And thunder-peals compelled the men of blood

To crouch within their dens ; then dauntlessly
 The scattered few would meet in some deep dell
 By rocks o'ercanopied, to hear the voice—
 Their faithful pastor's voice.

Over their souls

His accents soothing came, as to her young
 The heath-fowl's plumes, when at the close of eve
 She gathers in, mournful, her brood dispersed
 By murderous sport, and o'er the remnant spreads
 Fondly her wings ; close nestling 'neath her breast,
 They, cherished, cower amid the purple blooms.

They are determined men—Covenanters Scottish people call them, but known in heaven by the holy name of Saints—men filled to overflowing with enthusiasm and self-denial. Scotland at present is a deplorable place spiritually. Protestant ministers are being ousted from their churches, and the rulers of this realm are doltish enough to suppose that the influence of these despised spirits who have now taken to itinerant preaching, as you see, is more enervated than theirs. Richard Cameron is one of yonder conventiclers. Someone has been the means of bringing him to hear the Gospel preached in the fields, and he has entered on his anti-Episcopalian labours with all the enthusiasm of a proselyte, and now, after years of trials and persecutions, he is still as zealous, still as vehemently eloquent—you may recognise him yonder—still as unweariedly devoted to his work.”

I turned the glass to scrutinize the company, and in doing so I noticed individuals posted here and there, and asked the reason. “The Government has emissaries all over the country, and the outposts you see act as sentinels to warn the worshippers of the approach of the persecutors”; and even as she spoke there was a general stampede on the part of the “scattered few,” who seemed to melt away like snow from a mountain side. I was hurried away from the scene ; yet, ere I went, methought I caught a glimpse of cavalry entering the vale from the opposite side, and growling like the ferocious denizens of the forests.

to the market-cross, where they halted in a most determined attitude, and I listened to the bold, fearless words, the loud, angry protests they uttered against their earthly sovereign, the Second Charles, declaring him a traitor, a profligate, and a tyrant; and, after a space, the face of the courageous, defiant leader became wondrously familiar to me—it was in truth the countenance of that reverend saint, Richard Cameron. As I continued moralizing upon the peculiar scene that had just passed before my eyes, I beheld the band hurriedly disperse, and immediately after a troop of horsemen dashed into the town under the command of one who, I afterwards discovered, was named Bruce of Earlshall. For a while I lost sight of the brave Covenanters,

Those godly men, who rose
Against idolatry with warlike mind,
And shrunk from vain observances to lurk
In caves, and woods, and under dismal rocks.

But now and again there appeared a solitary wanderer upon the hillside, with a sword hanging by his side and a Bible in his hand, hunted, like a partridge among the mountains, by the minion dragoons who are striving hard to earn the five thousand merk reward which Government had offered for Cameron's head. Once more I see the gallant, resolute little company gather in a solitary morass known as Aird's Moss; I see them preparing to do battle with their pursuers. And there they stand, comrades in arms as also comrades in faith—a dauntless band.

The summer sun is shining brightly—I discovered on looking at my calendar that it was the 22nd of July 1680—as the royal troops assail them. "Come," I hear Richard Cameron exclaiming to his brother Michael; "Come, let us fight it out to the last, for this is the day that I have longed for, and the death that I have prayed for, to die fighting against our Lord's avowed enemies; and this is the day we will get the crown." I see the glittering steel—I hear the din of battle, the clang of blows, the rattle of musketry, the groans and wails of the wounded and

dying, and amid the wild clamour of the fight there rises piercingly upon the breeze the thrice-repeated prayer of brave Cameron—"Lord, spare the green and take the ripest,"—he rushes sword in hand upon the foe—next moment lies gasping on the turf. I hear the monster Bruce, robbed of his intent to bring the noble martyr to a grievous and tortured end, venting his spleen, and commanding his troopers to cut off Richard's head and hands,—he marches from the death-strewn field with his bloody trophies.

He hastens to Edinburgh with the grim mementoes of his infamous and heaven-provoking victory—to the Tolbooth, where Cameron's father lies a prisoner, and insultingly inquires if he recognises them. "I know, I know them," I hear the old man exclaim in a broken voice, as he fondly takes them in his hands and affectionately kisses them; "they are my son's, my dear son's. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days." Again I see the tyrants fixing the head upon one of the posts of the city, the hands close beside it, with the fingers uplifted as in the attitude of prayer,—I hear the persecutors cry, "There—there's the head and hands that lived praying and preaching, and died praying and fighting."

I felt sad and ill at ease: the ghastly spectacle had made me melancholy. Alas! thought I, surely "man was made to mourn," that his life is reckoned of so small account, that he is derided by his fellows, buffeted about the world and exiled, tormented in life, and harried even in death!

For some time I indulged myself in this vexing contemplation, till I beheld a party of men return with spades and shovels to the battlefield. They buried the headless corpse of their commander and his dead comrades along with him. "In death they are not divided." And while the misty moonbeams shone over the spot, and I lingered on the melancholy prospect—

There came a worn and weary man to Cameron's place of rest,
He cast him down upon the sod, and smote upon his breast;

He wept as only strong men weep when weep they must or die,
 And "O to be wi' thee, Richie," was still his bitter cry.

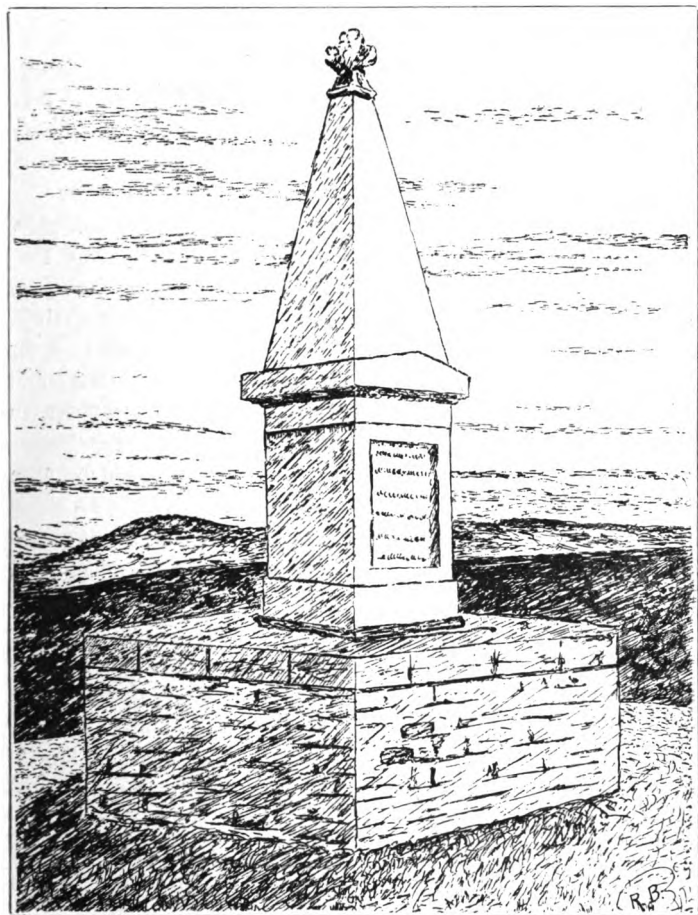
Upon the wild and lone Aird's Moss down sank the twilight grey,
 In storm and cloud the evening closed upon that cheerless day ;
 But Peden went his way refreshed, for peace and joy were given,
 And Cameron's grave had proved to him the very gate of heaven.

"Think not, O infinitesimal atom of the universe," said the Spirit, addressing me, "think not the life of such a man is in vain. Down there in the cold, damp sod lies the body of the greatest, the noblest of great men—a martyr in the cause of Truth. He went forth from his birth-place where happiness, wealth, and power were at his finger-tips, and where he might have been honoured among lords—went forth to do good. And much good, too, he accomplished—daring the most stupendous dangers without dreading them. An earnest, energetic, zealous man he was : self-sacrificing, most noble-minded, and high-souled : unfatiguedly vigorous and uncomplainingly cheerful : the idol of the common people, and the honoured one among the Fathers. Ponder well what has been revealed to thee, and when thou hast leisure, go visit

The moorlands of mist, where the martyrs lay ;
 Where Cameron's sword and his Bible may be seen,
 Engraved on the stone where the heather grows green."

"The voice in my dreaming ear melted away." I turned as if to address my nightly visitant, but she had gone. Next day I obeyed her request and visited Aird's Moss, where I saw a small monument with Cameron's name upon it, and his open Bible, as well as the following inscription :—

"Halt, curious passenger, come here and read,
 Our souls triumph, with Christ our glorious head,
 In self-defence we murdered here do lie,
 To witness 'gainst the nation's perjury."



THE GRAVE OF RICHARD CAMERON AT AIRD'S MOSS.