

MEETING OF GENERAL DALZIEL AND CAPTAIN JOHN PATON OF MEADOWHEAD.

CAPTAIN JOHN PATON, of Meadowhead, Ayrshire, holds an honourable place in Covenanting history. Trained in his youth to the profession of arms, he held a military command both at the Pentlands and at Bothwell Brig. He ardently upheld the cause of the Covenant, and distinguished himself by his consistent Christian character, and excellent soldierly qualities. He was apprehended in April, 1684, and executed for high treason the 9th of May following. He confessed at his trial the charges brought against him, but held that he was justified in bearing arms against a government which had forfeited all claim to the allegiance of the

Scottish people. He died with great fortitude, forgiving all his enemies, and committing his wife and six children to "the husband of the widow, and the father of the fatherless."

His meeting with General Dalziel, in the circumstances described in the poem, was a touching incident that shed a beam of light on the darkness of an evil time. The feeling of old comradeship displayed by Dalziel on the occasion is creditable to a man who has few other claims to the respect of his countrymen. Thomas Dalziel, of Binns, Linlithgowshire, was a cavalier officer of the Claverhouse stamp, rough, unscrupulous, and ready to do the work demanded of him by a tyrannical government. It was he who defeated the Covenanters at the Pentlands; and for a considerable time he was commander of the Royal forces in Scotland. He died in his house at Binns, at Michaelmas, 1685, not much more than a year after the execution of his old comrade Paton.

MEETING OF GENERAL DALZIEL AND CAPTAIN
JOHN PATON OF MEADOWHEAD,

WHEN THE LATTER WAS BROUGHT PRISONER TO EDINBURGH, AUGUST, 1684.

HATH his good sword her temper lost,
Or her master now forsaken ?
Or why, such wars and dangers passed,
Is he a captive taken ?
Nay, nay ! his arm is powerful yet,
His sword as keen as ever ;
But he is life-worn, and would fain
That God should him deliver.

The same that won his maiden scars
At Lutzen, famed in story ;
And since, in every hard campaign,
Hath shared the toil and glory.
But chiefly to his native land
His heart and sword were given ;
That she might keep her ancient rights
And her covenant with heaven.

And still his frame is knit like brass,
Age passes gently o'er it,
As loath to touch the stately pile :
Alas ! who shall restore it ?
And still his adamantine step
Sounds like the charger prancing :
The troopers shrink as he looks round,
With eyes like an eagle's glancing.
Oh, had he roused his ancient strength,
He'd given these kites to slaughter,
Until the swamps about Lochgoin
Had run with blood like water !

But death, familiar to his thoughts,
With no dark shadow haunts him ;
And, strong and valiant in his mind,
No earthly suffering daunts him.
Nor his the merely brutal strength,
That like the whirlwind sweepeth,
But when his work and warfare end,
Calm as a dove he sleepeth.
And he surrenders patiently
To those who come to snare him :
When, fast as horses feet can tramp,
To Edinburgh town they bear him.

And now they skirt Corstorphine Hill,
With August blossoms merry :
When by the way Dalziel rides forth,
To see what spoils they carry.

His grizzled beard falls down his breast,
Like a knot of scorpions twisted ;
His flinty brow with harshness scowls,
And violence unresisted.

Like fire from the blacksmith's forge, his eye
Glares forth with lawless fury :
Woe worth the land, where such a man
Is general, judge, and jury !

Yet, albeit bred in savage deeds,
His heart's blood all congealing,
One touch of kindness lingers there :
The true old soldier's feeling.
When he beheld amid his band,
Old Paton wearily wending,
Unwonted pity lit his face,
A glow to his grey cheek lending.

Down from his coal-black steed he leaps,
The aged prisoner meeting,
And takes him kindly in his arms :
A right old veteran's greeting.

“ O John ! had we but sooner met,
These pinions had not bound thee :
But I shall sue, and 'twill go hard
If pardon be not found thee.”

“ Thy suit will be in vain : my life
Though scanty worth the taking,
Must go to feed an ancient feud,
Long years of vengeance slaking.
Thou, General, hast the soldier's touch,
The soldier's mind and mettle ;
But I am in the bishop's clutch,
Not on the field of battle.”

“ What, sayst thou so ? I'll save thy life :
Or, if they dare refuse it,
I'll fling my sword down in the mire,
For slaves that like to use it.”

’Twas then a vile, obsequious groom
Came up his zeal to blazon :
“ Ha, Paton ! art thou caught at last,
Thou spawn of Whiggish treason ? ”
“ Friend, stint thy speech ! I've served the king,
More true and tried than thou art :
Time was my sword and life were pawns
For the royal House of Stuart.”

“ True, my old comrade ! thou wert first
Wherever duty called thee :
At Wor’ster, where the game was lost,
No dangers e’er appalled thee.
There for the king thy blood was shed,
Thy sword was fell and ready ;
And in all changes thou hast been
A soldier tried and steady.
Let house-dogs whine and gnaw their bone,
Snug-kennelled from the weather ;
Our jaws were set where the war-dogs met,
And we lapped red blood together.
Since then in hostile camps we’ve fought,
Each would have slain the other ;
Yet now in thee I only see
A soldier and a brother ! ”

Then round he turned, all black in the face,
His beard as stiff as brambles,
And his staff came whack ! on the varlet’s back,
Till he rolled like an ox in the shambles.
“ Lie there, false loon ! and cool thy tongue,
This noble foe decrying :
One whiff of his sword would send ten like thee
As summer-gnats a-flying ! ”

They parted, these two hoary chiefs :

Dalziel's request was granted,
But treacherous fingers came between,
And the act of grace prevented.

Old Paton dies with a soldier's heart,

With a martyr's high devotion ;
Rests from his labours and his woes,
From war and wild commotion.

Dalziel lives on : this one bright act

His dark career to chequer,
As the stormy sky one ray darts forth,
Then thicker glooms and thicker.

Guilt sears his conscience : festering lust

His dotard heart debases :
Till, at the sumptuous banquet set,
While splendour round him blazes,
In a moment dead he falls like lead,
As the wine to his lip he raises !

