

# THE CARLIN'S CAIRN AND POLMADDY MILL.

A TALE OF THE DAYS OF BRUCE.

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“ Ye heathery hill of Galloway,  
Ye woods of oak and pine,  
Ye wildly foaming cataracts,  
Ye all are friends of mine.”

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MCKERLIE in “Galloway, Ancient and Modern,” remarks:—  
“There is no district in Scotland that surpasses Galloway in historical interest, and this extends from the earliest traceable times.” The appearance of the country, with its wild and picturesque scenery, adds charm to the subject. Galloway has sometimes been styled the Southern Highlands; and much of the scenery frequently reminds one of different parts of the Highlands of Scotland, and it contains combinations of loch and hill and stream and wooded glen, that will compare favourably with the most admired districts of the North.

Galloway also possesses many objects of antiquarian interest, and is especially notable for its numerous cairns. Those of the Druids were usually surrounded with circles of stones, a large flat one being on the top, where the sacrifices were made. It is doubtful if there are any of this class in Galloway. They are quite distinct from the cairns raised over the dead. As *cārn*, or *cairn*, in Gaelic, is for a heap of stones, so *carnach* or *cairnach* is a Druid, a priest. Colonel Forbes-Leslie mentions in “Early Races of Scotland,” that cairns have been known from the time of Jacob, when he raised one at Mizpah and set up a pillar. Darius, on certain occasions, caused each of his soldiers to throw a stone thereon, and thus these immense piles were raised. Some of these cairns, of course, were records of dark and infamous deeds; and others again are honourable memorials. Forbes-Leslie also states that in Ceylon, in Palestine, in Syria, and in various countries of Europe to the extreme North of Scotland, it was the custom of every one who passed to add a stone. The “Carlin’s Cairn” may

have been either increased or diminished since its original formation, but the main portion of it was erected all at once, in commemoration of the success of Bruce in achieving the freedom of Scotland, and ascending the throne of his ancestors.

The burn of Polmaddy takes its rise in the Kells Rhyngs (a range of hills in the North of Kirkcudbrightshire) between the farms of Bush and Castlemaddie, and forms the boundary between the parishes of Carsphairn and Kells up to its confluence with the river Deuch, a tributary of the Ken. Polmaddy bridge spans the burn about six miles above Dalry, on the way to Carsphairn, which is about ten miles distant from Dalry village, or what was a village until a few years ago; but it is now so large, and contains so many handsome buildings, and such excellent accommodation for tourists, who flock to it from all quarters, that it deserves the name of a town. It is situated in the midst of the most beautiful scenery in the South of Scotland, and is fast becoming a popular health resort. There are many remains which testify that this whole district has been much more densely peopled in former times than it is at the present day. Indeed, the same thing has happened here as in the Highlands. The many crofts, into which the land was divided, are but memories of the past, and their names are only to be recovered from tradition, or the memories of the oldest inhabitants. Many vestiges of these homesteads are to be found all over the country, and on the north bank of Polmaddy burn, about a mile above the bridge, may still be seen the ruins of a whole village, named Largurie, which was built around what is still known as Polmaddy Mill, though the mill has long since shared the fate of the village. The weir across the burn, and the form of the mill-race, may still be traced, and tradition adds that it is not a great length of time since some of the houses were inhabited, but no person now living seems to remember such a thing.

The Mill at Polmaddy was, no doubt, intended to grind meal to supply the village and the neighbouring crofts, or small farms round about. Now there is not a foot of cultivated land to be seen, and probably not an acre of ploughed land within a mile. But 600 years ago, as I have already indicated, there seems to have been a considerable population all around living on small farms. This population found subsistence by cultivating limited portions of land after a rude fashion, and by keeping cattle—there were few sheep kept in those days. Nor was there any imported

grain and supplies of provisions from a distance, such as we have nowadays, so that the inhabitants were often on the verge of starvation if their own crops failed.

About the year 1300 the mill was erected, and it must have been one of the very first in the district, because we find mention in history about this period of several kilns and mills being set up in different places, particularly on lands belonging to the king, the clergy, and some of the nobles. An old road, said to be Roman (it has, at least, some characteristics of a Roman road), passed near the mill, and would, doubtless, prove a useful means of communication in days when roads were neither many nor good. The very fact of the mill being built in the neighbourhood of the King's Forest of Buchan, and the important Castle of Dundee, proves this to have then been a place of some importance, and a centre of activity.

The miller was a *douce*, canny, industrious man, and was called the *carle*, and his wife the *carlin*. She was a woman of character and decision, and exercised considerable influence over her husband. Some little time previous to the opening of our story—about the year 1306—Edward I. of England had made his memorable campaign into Galloway, completely subduing its inhabitants, and placing garrisons in every fortress and stronghold to overawe them.

After Robert Bruce had killed the Comyn in the Church of the Grayfriars at Dumfries, he renounced his allegiance to Edward. As he had no hope that his offence would be forgiven, he at once threw down the gauntlet, and set Edward's power and authority at defiance; so that his only safety now lay in the boldness of his measures, and the energy with which he executed them. His following was small at first, consisting only of his brother, Edward Bruce, and his vassals; but he soon began to make vigorous preparations for war with the English. While maturing his plans and wandering in disguise among the hills of Kells, Carsphairn, and Minnigaff, marking the state of the country, and noting the feelings of its inhabitants, Bruce, one wet evening, in the autumn, called at Polmaddy Mill, and asked shelter for the night, as he was too wet, weary, and hungry to proceed further. Next day found him still resting at the Mill when four English soldiers from the small garrison at Craigenallie came in search of the Bruce; for informers had given notice of his whereabouts, and it was generally known that he was wandering among the Galloway hills.

The miller was about to tell them of the stranger who had sought shelter on the previous night, but his wife quickly and adroitly cut short all explanation by declaring loudly that no one of the name of Bruce had ever come there, and that they would be much more likely to find him in his Castle of Lochmaben than in any such humble domicile as Polmaddy Mill. The suspicions of the soldiers were allayed by the frankness of the good wife, so they departed.

The miller's wife, however, suspected that her guest might either be Bruce himself, or one of his followers, and, as she was afraid her injudicious husband might be talking about the stranger to some of the Dundee garrison, she ordered the miller to go to his work, and went and told her guest that English soldiers had been there enquiring for Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick.

Bruce, in order to feel his way, asked her what reward she would give him if he told her where the Earl of Carrick was hiding. She replied, in a spirited manner, that she would neither give nor take a reward in such a matter. On the contrary, she would conceal him if he were on her premises; for she held him to be her rightful sovereign, and her heart must be black and treacherous indeed if she would ever prove false to her rightful king. Bruce reminded her that, perhaps, her husband was not of her way of thinking. "My gudeman," she said, "is no that ill a body, but he's ane o' the kind o' men it aye likes to stan' weel wi' the poers that be, and maybe he's a wee faint-hearted, and thinks it's a hopeless task to oppose the English the noo; but I'll tak' care, I'se warrant ye, that he'll keep a calm sough gin either the king or ony o' his men come to this hoose; but," after a pause, she resumed, "I'm thinking ye're aiblins juist Robert Bruce, Earl o' Carrick, yersel'." He confessed that he was, and asked her to give him shelter a few days longer, until he got intelligence from his friends, who were collecting an army to enable him to prosecute the war against the English. He begged her not to betray a helpless wayfarer in any case. "Betray my sovereign," she burst out, "No, never!"—and sinking on her knees before him, she made a profound obeisance to him whom she considered her rightful lord and king. "Rise, my good woman," he said, "I shall not forget the miller's wife of Polmaddy—you must, however, keep an eye on your husband and see that he holds his peace."

The dame then set some *greddan* (meal and water stirred together) before the king, and went to look for her husband, and

give him instructions regarding their guest. She told him the wanderer was a relative of the Bruce, and that he himself might soon be there with a band of armed followers. She also directed her husband that, if any one came there seeking Bruce, he was to hide the stranger behind the hopper, and cover him over with sacks, or else conceal him, somehow, amongst the wheels, where the soldiers would be little likely to look for him.

A few days after this, a party came from Craigencallie saying that Bruce had been seen at Polmaddy or in the immediate neighbourhood, and that they were commissioned to search the miller's house for him. The miller overheard the soldiers, and beckoned to Bruce to follow him out at a back door. He hastened to follow his host, and was soon hidden among sacks at the back of the hopper. The men searched the premises, but failed to find Bruce, who, however, had a very narrow escape on this occasion. One of the soldiers, on leaving the Mill, struck the sack covering Bruce's head, with the flat of his sword, so heavy a blow that the dust which arose from the sack completely blinded the Englishman—an accident that, perhaps, saved the fugitive's life.

A happier destiny was reserved for the Bruce than to perish by the sword of a trooper in Polmaddy Mill, and soon brighter days dawned upon him. Not long after this narrow escape, a messenger brought word that his brother, Edward, and the good Sir James Douglas, who was one of the first to acknowledge the claim of Bruce to the throne of Scotland, after the death of the Red Comyn at Dumfries, had collected an army at the head of Loch Truil, and only waited for him to join them, in order to proceed to action.

Loch Truil or Trool, the scene of this gathering, is remarkable for the wild grandeur of its scenery. Thomas Grierson, writing in 1846, calls it one of the most romantic spots in the South of Scotland, and it will be familiar to all readers of "The Raiders." From the shores of Loch Trool you see the Merrick, "the highest hill that rises o'er the source of Dee," towering away into the clouds. Merrick is said to be nearly 3000 feet in height, and is decidedly the loftiest mountain in Galloway. The view from its summit is of the most commanding description. The whole Firth of Clyde lies, as it were, mapped out before you towards the west, and the whole of Arran, with its fantastic peaks, the Mull of Cantyre, 100 miles of the coast of Ireland—from the Giant's

Causeway to the mountains of Morne—Mull of Galloway, Benghairn, Criffell, the Moffat Hills, &c., &c., and under favourable circumstances, one may also see therefrom the Isle of Man and the Cumberland Mountains, with many of those of the West Highlands, and even some of the Hebrides. The Islands of Ailsa and Knockdolian are particularly conspicuous, with the whole coast of Ayrshire, from Largs to Lochryan.

Amid the romantic and picturesque surroundings of Loch Trool, in the Highlands of Galloway, did Bruce rejoin his trusty brother Edward and the good Sir James, with such men as they had been able to raise; and every reader knows how, after varying fortune, and many skirmishes and battles with the English, the MacDoualls and others who were opposed to them, ending sometimes in defeat, and sometimes in victory, he, at length, achieved the freedom of Scotland, and secured the crown for himself by the decisive and culminating victory over the whole English army, under Edward II., on the famous field of Bannockburn (1314).

After he was crowned under the title of Robert I., the miller's wife of Polmaddy gathered together all her relatives and friends within reach, and proceeded to the top of Castlemaddy hill, on which they built a cairn of big stones to commemorate the success of Bruce in freeing Scotland from the English yoke. This cairn stands there till this hour, and still goes by the name of the "Carlin's Cairn." Nor did King Robert, now that fortune had smiled upon him, forget his friends at Polmaddy Mill. He sent for the Dame of Polmaddy and her husband, and gave them a grant of land in the neighbourhood of their homestead, and entailed a vote on the clapper of Polmaddy Mill, and a power of freehold on the mill's possessor so long as a mill should be there upheld.

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NOTE.—Maddy or Maddie signifies a dog or wolf, and the place derived its name from the king's hounds which were kept there for hunting in the Forest of Buchan.