

pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired flashed across his mind, even in the midst of his fury, and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon upon the upturned face that almost touched his own. She staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead, but raising herself with difficulty on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief.

"Rose Maylie's own"—and holding it up in her folded hands as high towards heaven as her feeble strength would let her, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon: the murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

CHARLES DICKENS.

From "Oliver Twist."

THROUGH DEATH'S DARK VALE

THERE is a place, Shieldhill by name, that sits blithely on the braeface at the entering in of Annandale, where the country is not very wild, and there are many cottar houses dotted among the knowes. But at the time of our story the heavy hand of persecution was upon the country, and the poor folk were being driven from hearth and homestead to wander on the bleak and barren hillsides. For some time the troops of dragoons who were scouring the country had had but scant success, for they were ill-accustomed to this mossy and boggy land. At length, however, the commander of the main body, James Johnstone of Westerha', hit upon a plan for enclosing the whole

with a ring of his men and coming upon the party of Covenanters, as he thought, unawares, for he said the place was like a conventicle and rife with psalm-singers. But he was a wild man when he found the men and women all fled, and only the bairns, feared mostly out of their lives, sitting cowering by the ingle, or hiding about the byres.

"I'll fear them waur, or my name is no' James Johnstone!"

So what did this ill-set Johnstone do but gather them all up into a knot by a great thorn tree that grows on the slope. The children stood together, huddled in a crowd, too frightened to speak or even to cry aloud; and one thing I noticed, that the lassie bairns sat stiller and grat not so much as the boys, all save one who was a laddie of about ten years. He stood with his hands behind his back, and his face was very white; but he threw back his head and looked the dragoons fair in the face as one that has conquered fear. Then Westerha' rode forward almost to the midst of the bairns, glowering and roaring at the bit things to frighten them, as was his custom with such.

They were mostly from six to ten years of age, and when I saw them thus with their feared white faces, I wished that I had been six foot high, and with twenty good men of the Glen at my back. But I minded that I was but a boy, "Stay-at-home John," as Sandy called me, and could do nothing with my hands; so I could only fret and be silent.

So Westerha' rode nearer to them, shouting to them like a shepherd crying down the wind tempestuously when his dogs are working sourly.

"Hark ye," he cried, "ill bairns that ye are! Ye are a' tae dee, an' that quickly, unless ye shall answer me what I shall ask of ye."

A party of soldiers was now drawn out before them, and the young things were bid look into the black

muzzles of the muskets. They were, indeed, only loaded with powder, but the children did not know that.

"Tell me who comes to your houses at nights, and who goes away early in the mornings." The children crept closer to one another, but none answered, whereupon Westerha' indicated one with his finger. the lad who stood up so straightly and held his head back. "You, young cock-o'-the-heather! what might your black Whig's name be?"

"Juist the same as yer Honour's, James Johnstone," replied the boy in no way abashed. Methought there ran a titter of laughter among the soldiers, for Westerha' was nowadays so well liked as Graham of Claverhouse or even roaring Grier of Lag.

"And what is your father's name?" continued Westerha', bending a black look on the lad.

"James Johnstone," replied the boy. Back in the ranks some one laughed. Westerha' flung an oath over his shoulder.

"Who was the man who laughed? Who was the man who laughed? I shall teach you to laugh at the Johnstone in his own country."

"It was Jeems Johnstone o' Wamphray that laughed, your Honour," replied the calm voice of a troop-sergeant. Then Westerha' set himself to the work of examination, which suited him well.

"Ye will not answer, young rebels!" he cried. "Ken ye what they get that will not speak when the King bids them?"

"Are you the King?" said the lad of ten, who was called James Johnstone. At this Westerha' waxed perfectly furious, with a pale and shaky fury that I liked not to see; but indeed the whole affair was so distasteful to me that I could but turn my head away.

"Now, ill bairns," said Westerha', "and you, my young rebel namesake, hearken ye! The King's command is not to be made light of, and I tell you

plainly, that as ye will not answer, I am resolved that ye shall all be shot dead on the spot."

With that he sent men to set them out in rows and make them kneel down with kerchiefs over their eyes. Now when the soldiers came near to the cluster of huddled bairns, that same heart-broken, little bleating which I have heard lambs make, broke again from them. It made my heart bleed and the nerves tingle in my palms; and this was King Charles Stuart making war; it had not been his father's way. But the soldiers—although some few were smiling a little as at an excellent play—were mostly black ashamed. Nevertheless, they made the bairns kneel, for that was the order, and without mutiny they could not better it.

"Soger man, wull ye let me tak' ma wee brither by the han', I think he wud thole it better," said a little maid of eight, and the soldier let go a great oath and looked at Westerha' as though he could have slain him.

"Bonny wark," he cried. "Deil burn me gin I listit for this."

But the little maid had already taken her brother by the hand. "Bend doon, Alec, ma man, doon on yer knees."

The boy glanced up at her. "Wull it be sair, think ye, Maggie? I hope it'll no' be awfu' sair."

"Na, na, Alec," his sister made answer. "It'll no' be either lang or sair?"

But James Johnstone neither bent nor knelt. "I hae dune nae wrang," he said. "I'll juist dee this way." And he stood up like one that straightens himself at drill.

Then Westerha' bid fire over the bairns' heads, which was cruel, cruel work, and only some of the soldiers did it; but even a few pieces that did go off made a great noise in that lonely place. At the sound of the muskets some of the bairns fell forward

on their faces as if they had really been shot ; some leapt in the air, but the most part knelt quietly and composedly. Little Alec, whose sister had his hand in hers, made as if to rise.

"Bide ye doon, Alec, ma wee mannie," she said, very quietly, "It's no' oor turn yet."

Then the heart within me gave way, and I roared out in my helpless pain a perfect gowl of anger and grief.

"Bonny Whigs ye are," cried Westerha', "tae dee withoot even a prayer ! Put up a prayer this minute, for ye shall a' dee, every one o' ye."

Then the boy, James Johnstone, made answer to him. "Sir, we canna pray, for we be too young to pray."

"Ye are not too young to rebel nor yet to die for it," was the brute-beast's answer. With that the little girl held up a hand as if she was answering a dominie in class.

"An' it please ye, sir," she said, "me an' Alec canna' pray, but we can sing 'The Lord's my Shepherd,' gin that wull do ; my mither learnt us it afore she gaed awa'." And before any one could stop her, she stood up like one that leads the singin' in a kirk. "Stan' up, Alec, ma mannie," she said.

Then all the bairns stood up, and from the lips of the babes arose the quavering strains, "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want." . . . As they sang, I began to grasp hold of my pistols and to sort and prime them, hardly knowing what I did, for I was resolved to make a break for it, and at least to blow a hole in James Johnstone of Westerha' that would mar him for life, before I suffered any more of it ; but even as they sang I saw trooper after trooper turn away his head, for being Scots bairns themselves they had all learnt that psalm. The ranks shook, man after man fell out, and I saw the tears happin'

down their cheeks. But it was Douglas of Morton, that stark persecutor, who first broke down.

“Curse it, Westerha’,” he cried, “I canna’ thole this langer; I’ll war wi’ bairns na mair fur a’ the earldoms i’ the north.” And at last even Westerha’ turned his bridle and rode away from Shieldhill, for the victory was to the bairns. I wonder what his thoughts were, for he, too, had learnt that psalm at his mother’s knee, and as the troopers rode loosely up hill and down brae, broken and ashamed, the sound of these bairns’ singing followed them, and across the fells came the words:—

“Yea though I walk through death’s dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.”

S. R. CROCKETT.

From “The Men of the Moss-haggs.”