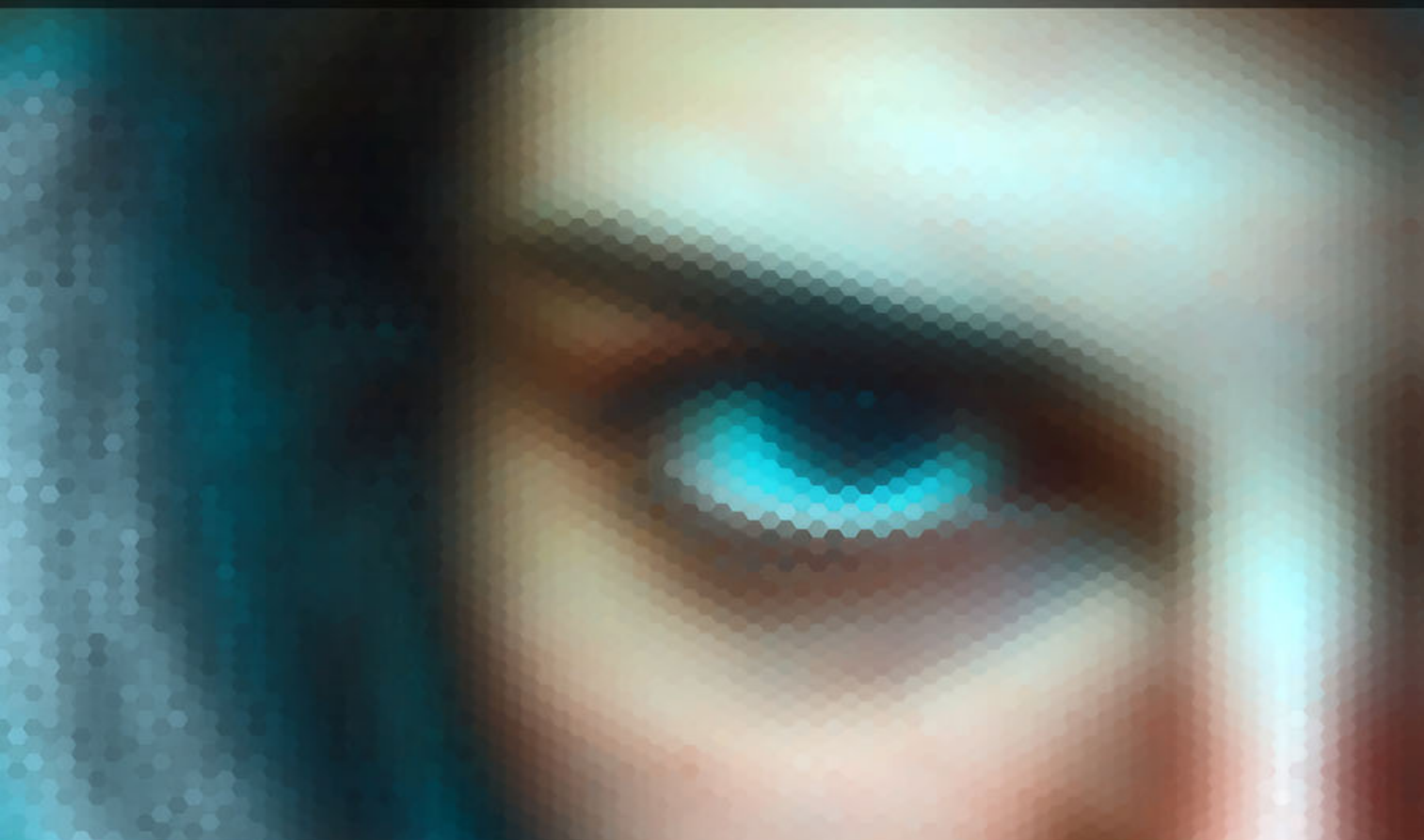
JAMES HOGG

THE THREE PERILS OF MAN



WAR, WOMEN, AND WITCHCRAFT

James Hogg

The Three Perils of Man: War, Women, and Witchcraft

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CHAPTER I.

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There was a king, and a courteous king,
And he had a daughter sae bonnie;
And he lo'ed that maiden aboon a' thing
I' the bonnie, bonnie halls o' Binnorie.

* * * * * *

But wae be to thee, thou warlock wight,
My malison come o'er thee,
For thou hast undone the bravest knight,
That ever brak bread i' Binnorie!

Old Song.

The days of the Stuarts, kings of Scotland, were the days of chivalry and romance. The long and bloody contest that the nation maintained against the whole power of England, for the recovery of its independence—of those rights which had been most unwarrantably wrested from our fathers by the greatest and most treacherous sovereign of that age, with the successful and glorious issue of the war, laid the foundation for this spirit of heroism, which appears to have been at its zenith about the time that the Stuarts first acquired the sovereignty of the realm. The deeds of the Douglasses, the Randolphs, and other border barons of that day, are not to be equalled by any recorded in our annals; while the reprisals that they made upon the English, in retaliation for former injuries, enriched both them and their followers, and rendered their appearance splendid and imposing to a degree that would scarcely now gain credit. It

was no uncommon thing for a Scottish earl then to visit the Court at the head of a thousand horsemen, all splendidly mounted in their military accoutrements; and many of these gentlemen of rank and family. In court and camp, feats of arms were the topic of conversation, and the only die that stamped the character of a man of renown, either with the fair, the monarch, or the chiefs of the land. No gentleman of noble blood would pay his addresses to his mistress, until he had broken a spear with the knights of the rival nation, surprised a strong-hold, or driven a prey from the kinsmen of the Piercies, the Musgraves, or the Howards. As in all other things that run to a fashionable extremity, the fair sex took the lead in encouraging these deeds of chivalry, till it came to have the appearance of a national mania. There were tournaments at the castle of every feudal baron and knight. The ploughmen and drivers were often discovered, on returning from the fields, hotly engaged in a tilting bout with their goads and plough-staves; and even the little boys and maidens on the village green, each well mounted on a crooked stick, were daily engaged in the combat, and riding rank and file against each other, breaking their tiny weapons in the furious onset, while the mimic fire flashed from their eyes. Then was the play of *Scots and English* begun, a favourite one on the school green to this day. Such was the spirit of the age, not only in Scotland, but over all the countries of southern Europe, when the romantic incidents occurred on which the following tale is founded. It was taken down from the manuscript of an old Curate, who had spent the latter part of his life in the village of Mireton, and was given to the present Editor by one of those tenants who now till the valley where stood the richest city of this realm.

There were once a noble king and queen of Scotland, as many in that land have been.—In this notable tell-tale manner, does old Isaac, the curate, begin his narrative. It

will be seen in the sequel, that this king and queen were Robert the Second and his consort.—They were beloved by all their subjects, (continues he,) and loved and favoured them in return; and the country enjoyed happiness and peace, all save a part adjoining to the borders of England. The strong castle of Roxburgh, which was the key of that country, had been five times taken by the English, and three times by the Scots, in less than seventeen months, and was then held by the gallant Lord Musgrave for Richard king of England.

Our worthy king had one daughter, of exquisite beauty and accomplishments; the flower of all Scotland, and her name was Margaret. This princess was courted by many of the principal nobility of the land, who all eagerly sought an alliance with the royal family, not only for the additional honour and power which it conferred on them and their posterity, but for the personal charms of the lady, which were of that high eminence, that no man could look on her without admiration. This emulation of the lords kept the court of King Robert full of bustle, homage, and splendour. All were anxious to frustrate the designs of their opponents, and to forward their own; so that high jealousies were often apparent in the sharp retorts, stern looks, and nodding plumes of the rival wooers; and as the princess had never disclosed her partiality for one above another, it was judged that Robert scarcely dared openly to give the preference to any of them. A circumstance, however, soon occurred, which brought the matter fairly to the test.

It happened on a lovely summer day, at the end of July, that three and twenty noble rivals for the hand of the beauteous princess were all assembled at the palace of Linlithgow; but the usual gaiety, mirth, and repartee did not prevail; for the king had received bad tidings that day, and he sat gloomy and sad.

Musgrave had issued from the castle of Roxburgh, had surprised the castle of Jedburgh, and taken prisoner William, brother to the lord of Galloway; slain many loyal Scottish subjects, and wasted Teviotdale with fire and sword. The conversation turned wholly on the state of affairs on the border, and the misery to which that country was exposed by the castle of Roxburgh remaining in the hands of the English; and at length the king enquired impatiently, how it came that Sir Philip Musgrave had surprised the castle this last time, when his subjects were so well aware of their danger.

The earl of Hume made answer, that it was wholly an affair of chivalry, and one of the bravest and noblest acts that ever was performed. Musgrave's mistress, the lady Jane Howard, of the blood royal, and the greatest heiress of the north of England, had refused to see him, unless he gained back his honour by the retaking of that perilous castle, and keeping it against all force, intercession, or guile, till the end of the Christmas holidays. That he had accomplished the former in the most gallant stile; and, from the measures that he had adopted, and the additional fortifications that he had raised, there was every possibility that he would achieve the latter.

"What," said the king, "must the spirit of chivalry then be confined to the country of our enemies? Have our noble dames of Scotland less heroism in their constitutions than those of the south? Have they fewer of the charms of beauty, or have their lovers less spirit to fulfil their commands? By this sceptre in my right hand, I will give my daughter, the princess Margaret, to the knight who shall take that castle of Roxburgh out of the hands of the English before the expiry of the Christmas holidays."

Every lord and knight was instantly on his feet to accept the proposal, and every one had his hand stretched towards

the royal chair for audience, when Margaret arose herself, from the king's left hand, where she was seated, and flinging her left arm backward, on which swung a scarf of gold, and stretching her right, that gleamed with bracelets of rubies and diamonds, along the festive board, "Hold, my noble lords," said she; "I am too deeply interested here not to have a word to say. The grandchild of the great Bruce must not be given away to every adventurer without her own approval. Who among you will venture his honour and his life for me?" Every knight waved his right hand aloft and dashed it on the hilt of his sword, eyeing the graceful attitude and dignified form of the princess with raptures of delight. "It is well," continued she, "the spirit of chivalry *has not* deserted the Scottish nation—hear me then: My father's vow shall stand; I will give my hand in marriage to the knight who shall take that castle for the king, my father, before the expiry of the Christmas holidays, and rid our border of that nest of reavers; but with this proviso only, that, in case of his attempting and failing in the undertaking, he shall forfeit all his lands, castles, towns, and towers to me, which shall form a part of my marriage-portion to his rival. Is it fit that the daughter of a king should be given up or won as circumstances may suit, or that the risk should all be on one side? Who would be so unreasonable as expect it? This, then, with the concurrence of my lord and father, is my determination, and by it will I stand."

The conditions were grievously hard, and had a damping and dismal effect on the courtly circle. The light of every eye deadened into a dim and sullen scowl. It was a deed that promised glory and renown to adventure their blood for such a dame—to win such a lady as the Princess of Scotland: But, to give up their broad lands and castles to enrich a hated rival, was an obnoxious consideration, and what in all likelihood was to be the issue. When all the

forces of the land had been unable to take the castle by storm, where was the probability that any of them was now to succeed? None accepted the conditions. Some remained silent; some shook their heads, and muttered incoherent mumblings; others strode about the room, as if in private consultation.

"My honoured liege," said Lady Margaret, "none of the lords or knights of your court have the spirit to accept of my conditions. Be pleased then to grant me a sufficient force. I shall choose the officers for them myself, and I engage to take the castle of Roxburgh before Christmas. I will disappoint the bloody Musgrave of his bride; and the world shall see whether the charms of Lady Jane Howard or those of Margaret Stuart shall rouse their admirers to deeds of the most desperate valour. Before the Christmas bells have tolled, that shall be tried on the rocks, in the rivers, in the air, and the bowels of the earth. In the event of my enterprise proving succesful, all the guerdon that I ask is, the full and free liberty of giving my hand to whom I will. It shall be to no one that is here." And so saying she struck it upon the table, and again took her seat at the king's left hand.

Every foot rung on the floor with a furious tramp, in unison with that stroke of the princess's hand. The taunt was not to be brooked. Nor was it. The haughty blood of the Douglasses could bear it no longer. James, the gallant earl of Douglas and Mar, stepped forward from the circle. "My honoured liege, and master," said he, "I have not declined the princess's offer—beshrew my heart if ever it embraced such a purpose. But the stake is deep, and a moment's consideration excusable. I have considered, and likewise decided. I accept the lady's proposals. With my own vassals alone, and at my own sole charge, will I rescue the castle from the hands of our enemies, or perish in the attempt.

The odds are high against me. But it is now a Douglas or a Musgrave: God prosper the bravest!"

"Spoken like yourself, noble Douglas," said the king, "The higher the stake the greater the honour. The task be yours, and may the issue add another laurel to the heroic name."

"James of Douglas," said Lady Margaret, "dost thou indeed accept of these hard conditions for my sake? Then the hand of thy royal mistress shall buckle on the armour in which thou goest to the field, but never shall unloose it, unless from a victor or a corse!" And with that she stretched forth her hand, which Douglas, as he kneeled with one knee on the ground, took and pressed to his lips.

Every one of the nobles shook Douglas by the hand, and wished him success. Does any man believe that there was one among them that indeed wished it? No, there was not a chief present that would not have rejoiced to have seen him led to the gallows. His power was too high already, and they dreaded that now it might be higher than ever; and, moreover, they saw themselves outdone by him in heroism, and felt degraded by the contract thus concluded.

The standard of the Douglas was reared, and the bloody heart flew far over many a lowland dale. The subordinate gentlemen rose with their vassals, and followed the banner of their chief; but the more powerful kept aloof, or sent ambiguous answers. They deemed the service undertaken little better than the frenzy of a madman.

There was at that time a powerful border baron, nicknamed Sir Ringan Redhough, by which name alone he was distinguished all the rest of his life. He was warden of the middle marches, and head of the most warlike and adventurous sept in all that country. The answer which this hero gave to his own cousin, Thomas Middlemas, who came to expostulate with him from Douglas, is still preserved

verbatim: "What, man, are a' my brave lads to lie in bloody claes that the Douglas may lie i' snaw-white sheets wi' a bonny bedfellow? Will that keep the braid border for the king, my master? Tell him to keep their hands fu', an' their haunches toom, an' they'll soon be blythe to leave the lass an' loup at the ladle; an' the fient ae cloot shall cross the border to gar their pots play brown atween Dirdan-head and Cocket-fell. Tell him this, an' tell him that Redhough said it. If he dinna work by wiles he'll never pouch the profit. But if he canna do it, an' owns that he canna do it, let him send word to me, an' I'll tak' it for him."

With these words he turned his back, and abruptly left his cousin, who returned to Douglas, ill satisfied with the success of his message, but, nevertheless, delivered it faithfully. "That curst carle," said the Douglas, "is a thorn in my thigh, as well as a buckler on my arm. He's as cunning as a fox, as stubborn as an oak, and as fierce as a lion. I must temporize for the present, as I cannot do without his support, but the time may come that he may be humbled, and made to know his betters; since one endeavour has failed, we must try another, and, if that do not succeed, another still."

The day after that, as Sir Ringan was walking out at his own gate, an old man, with a cowl, and a long grey beard, accosted him. "May the great spirit of the elements shield thee, and be thy protector, knight," said he.

"An' wha may he be, carle, an it be your will?" said Ringan; "An' wha may ye be that gie me sic a sachless benediction? As to my shield and protection, look ye here!" and with that he touched his two-handed sword, and a sheaf of arrows that was swung at his shoulder; "an' what are all your saints and lang nebbit spirits to me?"

"It was a random salutation, knight," said the old man, seeing his mood and temper; "I am not a priest but a

prophet. I come not to load you with blessings, curses, nor homilies, all equally unavailing, but to tell you what shall be in the times that are to come. I have had visions of futurity that have torn up the tendrils of my spirit by the roots. Would you like to know what is to befal you and your house in the times that are to come?"

"I never believe a word that you warlocks say," replied the knight; "but I like aye to hear what you *will* say about matters; though it is merely to laugh at ye, for I dinna gie credit to ane o' your predictions. Sin' the Rhymer's days, the spirit o' true warlockry is gane. He foretauld muckle that has turned out true; an' something that I hope *will* turn out true: But ye're a' bairns to him."

"Knight," said the stranger, "I can tell you more than ever the Rhymer conceived, or thought upon; and, moreover, I can explain the words of True Thomas, which neither you nor those to whom they relate in the smallest degree comprehend. Knowest thou the prophecy of the Hart and the Deer, as it is called?

'Quhere the hearte heavit in het blude over hill and
howe,
There shall the dinke deire droule for the dowe:
Two fleite footyde maydenis shall tredde the
greine,
And the mone and the starre shall flashe betweine.
Quhere the proude hiche halde and heveye hande
beire
Ane frenauch shall feide on ane faderis frene feire,
In dinging at the starris the D shall doupe down,
But the S shall be S quhane the heide S is gone.'"

"I hae heard the reide often and often," said the knight, "but the man's unborn that can understand that. Though the prophecies and the legends of the Rhymer take the lead i'

my lear, I hae always been obliged to make that a passover."

"There is not one of all his sayings that relates as much to you and your house, knight. It foretels that the arms of your family shall supersede those of Douglas, which you know are the bloody heart; and that in endeavouring to exalt himself to the stars, the D, that is the Douglas, shall fall, but that your house and name shall remain when the Stuarts are no more."

"By the horned beasts of Old England, my father's portion, and my son's undiminished hope," exclaimed the knight —"Thou art a cunning man! I now see the bearing o' the prophecy as plainly as I see the hill of Mountcomyn before my e'e; and, as I know Thomas never is wrong, I believe it. Now is the time, auld warlock—now is the time; he's ettling at a king's daughter, but his neck lies in wad, and the forfeit will be his undoing."

"The time is not yet come, valiant knight; nevertheless the prophecy is true. Has thy horse's hoof ever trode, or thine eye journeyed, over the Nine Glens of Niddisdale?"

"I hae whiles gotten a glisk o' them."

"They are extensive, rich, and beautiful."

"They're nae less, auld carle; they're nae less. They can send nine thousand leel men an' stout to the field in a pinch."

"It is recorded in the book of fate—it is written there—"

"The devil it is, auld carle; that's mair than I thought o'."

"Hold thy peace: lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and be silent till I explain: I say I have seen it in the visions of the night—I have seen it in the stars of heaven"—

"What? the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale amang the starns o' heaven! by hoof and horn, it was rarely seen, warlock."

"I say that I have seen it—they are all to belong to thy house."

"Niddisdale a' to pertain to my house!"

"All."

"Carle, I gie nae credit to sic forbodings; but I have heard something like this afore. Will ye stay till I bring my son Robin, the young Master of Mountcomyn, and let him hear it? For aince a man takes a mark on his way, I wadna hae him to tine sight o't. Mony a time has the tail o' the king's elwand pointed me the way to Cumberland; an' as often has the ee o' the Charlie-wain blinkit me hame again. A man's nae the waur o' a bit beacon o' some kind—a bit hope set afore him, auld carle; an' the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale are nae Willie-an-the-Wisp in a lad's ee."

"From Roxburgh castle to the tower of Sark,"—

"What's the auld-warld birkie saying?"

"From the Deadwater-fell to the Linns of Cannoby—from the Linns of Cannoby to the heights of Manor and the Deuchar-swire—shall thy son, and the representatives of thy house, ride on their own lands."

"May ane look at your foot, carle? Take off that huge wooden sandal, an it be your will."

"Wherefore should I, knight?"

"Because I dread ye are either the devil or Master Michael Scott."

"Whoever I am, I am a friend to you and to yours, and have told you the words of truth. I have but one word more to say:—Act always in concert with the Douglasses, while they act in concert with the king your master—not a day,

nor an hour, nor a moment longer. It is thus, and thus alone, that you must rise and the Douglas fall. Remember the words of True Thomas—

'Quhane the wingit hors at his maistere sal wince,
'Let wyse men cheat the chevysance.'"

"There is something mair about you than other folk, auld man. If ye be my kinsman, Michael Scott the warlock, I crave your pardon, Master; but if you are that dreadfu' carle—I mean that learned and wonderfu' man, why you are welcome to my castle. But you are not to turn my auld wife into a hare, Master, an' hunt her up an' down the hills wi' my ain grews; nor my callants into naigs to scamper about on i' the night-time when they hae ither occupations to mind. There is naething i' my tower that isna at your command; for, troth, I wad rather brow a' the Ha's and the Howard's afore I beardit you."

"I set no foot in your halls, knight. This night is a night among many to me; and wo would be to me if any thing canopied my head save the cope of heaven. There are horoscopes to be read this night for a thousand years to come. One cake of your bread and one cup of your wine is all that the old wizard requests of you, and that he must have."

The knight turned back and led the seer into the inner-court, and fed him with bread and wine, and every good thing; but well he noted that he asked no holy benediction on them like the palmers and priors that wandered about the country; and, therefore, he had some lurking dread of the old man. He did not thank the knight for his courtesy, but, wiping his snowy beard, he turned abruptly away, and strode out at the gate of the castle. Sir Ringan kept an eye on him privately till he saw him reach the top of Blake Law, a small dark hill immediately above the castle. There he stopped and looked around him, and taking two green sods,

he placed the one above the other, and laid himself down on his back, resting his head upon the two sods—his body half raised, and his eyes fixed on heaven. The knight was almost frightened to look at him; but sliding into the cleuch, he ran secretly down to the tower to bring his lady to see this wonderful old warlock. When they came back he was gone, and no trace of him to be seen, nor saw they him any more at that time.

CHAPTER II.

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This man's the devil's fellow commoner,
A verie cloake-bag of iniquitie.
His butteries and his craboun he deschargeth
Flasche, not by airt or reule. Is it meet
A Ploydenist should be a *cedant arma togae*,
Mounted on a trapt palfrey; with a dishe
Of velvatte on his heide, to keepe the brothe
Of his wit warm? The devil, my maisteris,
There is no dame in Venice shall indure itt.

Old Play.

Whilst the knight and his lady were looking about in amazement for their mysterious guest, the tower-warder sounded the great bugle, a tremendous horn that lay on a shelf in the balcony where he kept watch. "One—two—three," said the knight, counting the three distinct notes—a signal of which he well knew the language—"What can that mean? I am wanted, it would appear: another messenger from the Douglas, I warrant."

"Sir Ringan, keep by that is your own," said the lady—"I say, mind your own concerns, and let the Douglas mind his."

"Dame," said the chief, "I hae gotten some mair insight into that affair than you; an' we maun talk about it by an' by. In the meantime let us haste home, and see who is arrived."

As they descended from the hill hand in hand, (for none walked arm in arm in those days,) they saw Richard Dodds, a landward laird, coming to meet them. "Oh," said Sir

Ringan, "this is my officious cousin, Dickie o' Dryhope; what business can he be come upon? It will be something that he deems of great importance."

"I hate that old fawning, flattering sycophant," said the lady; "and cannot divine what is the cause of your partiality for him."

"It is his attachment to our house that I admire, and his perfect devotion to my service and interests," said the knight.

"Mere sound," exclaimed the lady bitterly: "Mere waste of superfluous breath! I tell you, Sir Ringan, that, for all your bravery, candour, and kindness, you are a mere novice in the affairs of life, and know less of men and of things than ever knight did."

"It is a great fault in women," said the knight, making his observation general, "that they will aye be meddling wi' things they ken nought about. They think they ken every thing, an' wad gar ane trow that they can see an inch into a fir deal.—Gude help them! It is just as unfeasible to hear a lady discussing the merits of warriors an' yeomen, as it wad be to see me sitting nursing a wench-bairn."

"Foh, what an uncourtly term!" said the lady; "What would King Robert think if he heard you speaking in that uncouth stile?"

"I speak muckle better than him, wi' his short clippit Highland tongue," said the chief: "But hush, here comes the redoubted Dickie o' Dryhope."

No sooner were the knight and his lady's eyes turned so as to meet Dickie's, than he whipped off his bonnet with a graceful swing, and made a low bow, his thin gray locks waving as he bowed. Dickie was a tall, lean, toothless, old bachelor, whose whole soul and body were devoted to the fair sex and the house of his chief. These two mighty

concerns divided his attention, and often mingled with one another; his enthusiasm for the one, by any sudden change of subjects or concatenation of ideas, being frequently transferred to the other. Dickie approached with his bonnet in his hand, bowing every time the knight and lady lifted their eyes. When they met, Sir Ringan shook him heartily by the hand, and welcomed him to the castle of Mountcomyn.

"Oh, you are so good and so kind, Sir Ringan, bless you, bless you, bless you, noble sir; how do you thrive, Sir Ringan? bless you, bless you. And my excellent and noble lady Mountcomyn, how is my noble dame?"

"Thank you," said the lady coldly.

Dickie looked as if he would have shaken hands with her, or embraced her, as the custom then was, but she made no proffer of either the one or the other, and he was obliged to keep his distance; but this had no effect in checking his adulations. "I am so glad that my excellent lady is well, and the young squires and maidens all brisk and whole I hope?"

"All well, cousin," said the chief.

"Eh! all well?" reiterated Dickie, "Oh the dear, delightful, darling souls, O bless them! If they be but as well as I wish them, and as good as I wish—If the squires be but half so brave as their father, and the noble young sweet dames half so beautiful as their lady mother—oh bless them, bless them." "And half so independent and honest as their cousin," said the lady, with a rebuking sneer.

"Very pleasant! very pleasant, indeed!" simpered Dickie, without daring to take his lips far asunder, lest his toothless gums should be seen.

"Such babyish flummery!" rejoined the lady with great emphasis. Dickie was somewhat abashed. His eyes, that were kindled with a glow of filial rapture, appeared as with flattened pupils; nevertheless the benignant smile did not

altogether desert his features. The knight gave a short look off at one side to his lady. "It is a great fault in ladies, cousin," said he, "that they will always be breaking their jokes on those that they like best, and always pretending to keep at a distance from them. My lady thinks to blind my een, as many a dame has done to her husband afore this time; but I ken, an' some mae ken too, that if there's ane o' a' my kin that I durstna trust my lady wi' when my back's turned, that ane's Dickie o' Dryhope."

"H'm, h'm, h'm," neighed Dickie, laughing with his lips shut; "My lady's so pleasant, and so kind, but—Oh—no, no—you wrong her, knight; h'm, h'm, h'm! But, all joking and gibing aside—my lady's very pleasant. I came express to inform you, Sir Ringan, that the Douglasses are up."

"I knew it."

"And the Maxwells—and the Gordons—and the hurkle-backed Hendersons."

"Well."

"And Sir Christopher Seton is up—and the Elliots and the Laird of Tibbers is up."

"Well, well."

"I came expressly to inform you—"

"Came with piper's news," said the lady, "which the fiddler has told before you."

"That *is very* good," said Dickie; "My lady is so delightfully pleasant—I thought Sir Ringan would be going to rise with the rest, and came for directions as to raising my men."

"How many men can the powerful Laird of Dryhope muster in support of the warden?" said Lady Mountcomyn.

"Mine are all at his command; my worthy lady knows that," said Dickie, bowing: "Every one at his command."

"I think," said she, "that at the battle of Blakehope you furnished only two, who were so famished with hunger that they could not bear arms, far less fight."

"Very pleasant, in sooth; h'm, h'm! I declare I am delighted with my lady's good humour."

"You may, however, keep your couple of scare-crows at home for the present, and give them something to eat," continued she; "the warden has other matters to mind than wasting his vassals that the Douglas may wive."

"Very true, and excellent good sense," said Dickie.

"We'll talk of that anon," said Sir Ringan. And with that they went into the castle, and sat down to dinner. There were twelve gentlemen and nine maidens present, exclusive of the knight's own family, and they took their places on each side as the lady named them. When Sir Ringan lifted up his eyes and saw the station that Dickie occupied, he was dissatisfied, but instantly found a remedy. "Davie's Pate," said he to the lad that waited behind him, "mak that bowiefu' o' cauld plovers change places wi' yon saut-faut instantly, before meat be put to mouth." The order was no sooner given than obeyed, and the new arrangement placed Dickie fairly above the salt.

The dining apparatus at the castle of Mountcomyn was homely, but the fare was abundant. A dozen yeomen stood behind with long knives, and slashed down the beef and venison into small pieces, which they placed before the guests in wooden plates, so that there was no knife used at the dining board. All ate heartily, but none with more industry than Dickie, who took not even time all the while to make the complaisant observation, that "my lady was so pleasant."

Dinner being over, the younger branches of the family retired, and all the kinsmen not of the first rank, pretending

some business that called them away, likewise disappeared; so that none were left with the knight and his lady save six. The lady tried the effect of several broad hints on Dickie, but he took them all in good part, and declared that he never saw his lady so pleasant in his life. And now a serious consultation ensued, on the propriety of lending assistance to the Douglas. Sir Ringan first put the question to his friends, without any observation. The lady took up the argument, and reasoned strongly against the measure. Dickie was in raptures with his lady's good sense, and declared her arguments unanswerable. Most of the gentlemen seemed to acquiesce in the same measure, on the ground that, as matters stood, they could not rise at the Douglas' call on that occasion, without being considered as a subordinate family, which neither the king nor the Douglas had any right to suppose them; and so strongly and warmly ran the argument on that side, that it was likely to be decided on, without the chief having said a word on the subject. Simon of Gemelscleuch alone ventured to dissent; "I have only to remark, my gallant kinsmen," said he, "that our decision in this matter is likely to prove highly eventful. Without our aid the force of the Douglas is incompetent to the task, and the castle will then remain in the hands of the English, than which nothing can be more grievously against our interest. If he be defeated, and forfeit his lands, the power of the Border will then remain with us; but should he succeed without our assistance, and become the king's son-in-law, it will be a hard game with us to keep the footing that we have. I conceive, therefore, that in withdrawing our support we risk every thing—in lending it, we risk nothing but blows." All the kinsmen were silent. Dickie looked at my Lady Mountcomyn.

"It is well known that there is an old prophecy existing," said she, "that a Scot shall sit in the Douglas' chair, and be lord of all his domains. Well would it be for the country if

that were so. But to support the overgrown power of that house is not the way to accomplish so desirable an object."

"That is true," said Dickie; "I'll defy any man to go beyond what my lady says, or indeed whatever she says."

"Have we not had instances of their jealousy already?" continued she.

"We have had instances of their jealousy already," said Dickie, interrupting her.

"And should we raise him to be the king's son-in-law, he would kick us for our pains," rejoined she.

"Ay, he would kick us for our pains," said Dickie; "think of that."

"Either please to drop your responses, Sir," said she, sternly, "or leave the hall. I would rather hear a raven croak on my turret in the day of battle, than the tongue of a flatterer or sycophant."

"That is very good indeed," said Dickie; "My lady is so pleasant; h'm, h'm, h'm! Excellent! h'm, h'm, h'm!"

Sir Ringan saw his lady drawing herself up in high indignation; and dreading that his poor kinsman would bring on himself such a rebuke as would banish him the hall for ever, he interposed. "Cousin," said he, "it's a great fault in women that they canna bide interruption, an' the mair they stand in need o't they take it the waur. But I have not told you all yet: a very singular circumstance has happened to me this day. Who do you think I found waylaying me at my gate, but our kinsman, the powerful old warlock, Master Michael Scott."

"Master Michael Scott!" exclaimed the whole circle, every one holding up his hands, "has he ventured to be seen by man once more? Then there is something uncommon to befal, or, perhaps, the world is coming to an end."

"God forbid!" said Redhough: "It is true that, for seven years, he has been pent up in his enchanted tower at Aikwood, without speaking to any one save his spirits; but though I do not know him, this must have been he, for he has told me such things as will astonish you; and, moreover, when he left me, he laid himself down on the top of the Little Law on his back, and the devils carried him away bodily through the air, or down through the earth, and I saw no more of him."

All agreed that it had been the great magician Master Michael Scott. Sir Ringan then rehearsed the conversation that had passed between the wizard and himself. All the circle heard this with astonishment; some with suspense, and others with conviction, but Dickie with raptures of delight. "He assured me," said Redhough, "that my son should ride on his own land from Roxburgh to the Deadwater-fell."

"From Roxburgh to the Deadwater-fell!" cried Dickie, "think of that! all the links of the bonny Teviot and Slitterick, ha, ha, lads, think of that!" and he clapped his hands aloud without daring to turn his eyes to the head of the table.

"And from the Deadwater-fell to the tower o' Sark," rejoined the knight.

"To the tower of Sark!" exclaimed Dickie. "H—have a care of us! think of that! All the dales of Liddel, and Ewes, and the fertile fields of Cannobie! Who will be king of the Border, then, my lads? who will be king of the Border then? ha, ha, ha!"

"And from the fords of Sark to the Deuchar-swire," added Sir Ringan.

Dickie sprang to his feet, and seizing a huge timber trencher, he waved it round his head. The chief beckoned for silence; but Dickie's eyes were glistening with raprures,

and it was with great difficulty he repressed his vociferations.

"And over the Nine Glens of Niddisdale beside," said Sir Ringan.

Dickie could be restrained no longer. He brayed out, "Hurrah, hurrah!" and waved his trencher round his head.

"All the Esk, and the braid Forest, and the Nine Glens o' Niddisdale! Hurrah! Hurrah! Mountcomyn for ever! The warden for ever! hu, hu! hu!"

The knight and his friends were obliged to smile at Dickie's outrageous joy; but the lady rose and went out in high dudgeon. Dickie then gave full vent to his rapture without any mitigation of voice, adding, "My lady for ever!" to the former two; and so shouting, he danced around, waving his immense wooden plate.

The frolic did not take, and Sir Ringan was obliged to call him to order. "You do not consider, cousin," said the warden, "that what a woman accounts excellent sport at one time is at another high offence. See, now, you have driven my lady away from our consultation, on whose advice I have a strong reliance; and I am afraid we will scarcely prevail on her to come back."

"Oh! there's no fear of my lady and me," said Dickie; "we understand one another. My lady is a kind, generous, noble soul, and so pleasant!

"For as pleasant and kind as she is, I am deceived if she is easily reconciled to you. Ye dinna ken Kate Dunbar, cousin. —Boy, tell your lady that we lack her counsel, and expect that she will lend us it for a short space."

The boy did as he was ordered, but returned with an answer, that unless Dickie was dismissed she did not choose to be of the party.

"I am sorry for it," said Sir Ringan; "but you may tell her that she may then remain where she is, for I can't spare my cousin Dickie now, nor any day these five months." And with that he began and discussed the merits of the case *pro* and *con* with his kinsmen, as if nothing had happened; and in the end it was resolved, that, with a thousand horsemen, they would scour the east border to intercept all the supplies that should be sent out of England, and thus enrich themselves, while, at at the same time, they would appear to countenance the mad undertaking of Douglas.

CHAPTER III.

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"Come, come, my hearts of flint; modestly; decently; soberly; and handsomely.—No man afore his leader.—Ding down the enemy to-morrow—ye shall not come into the field like beggars.—Lord have mercy upon me, what a world this is!—Well, I'll give an hundred pence for as many good feathers, and a hundred more for as many scarts:—wounds, dogs, to set you out withal! Frost and snow, a man cannot fight till he be brave! I say down with the enemy to morrow!"

Sir John Oldcastle.

The castle of Roxburgh was beleaguered by seven thousand men in armour, but never before had it been so well manned, or rendered so formidable in its butresses; and to endeavour to scale it, appeared as vain an attempt as that of scaling the moon.

There was a great deal of parading, and noise went on, as that of beating drums, and sounding of trumpets and bugles, every day; and scarcely did there one pass on which there were not tilting bouts between the parties, and in these the English generally had the advantage. Never was there, perhaps, a more chivalrous host than that which Musgrave had under his command within the walls of Roxburgh; the enthusiasm, the gallantry, and the fire of the captain, were communicated to all the train.

Their horses were much superior to those of the Scots; and, in place of the latter being able to make any impression on the besieged, they could not, with all the vigilance they were able to use, prevent their posts from being surprised by the English, on which the most desperate encounters sometimes took place. At first the English

generally prevailed, but the Scots at length became inured to it, and stood the shocks of the cavalry more firmly. They took care always at the first onset to cut the bridle reins with their broad-swords, and by that means they disordered the ranks of their enemies, and often drove them in confusion back to their strong-hold.

Thus months flew on in this dashing sort of warfare, and no impression was made on the fortress, nor did any appear practicable; and every one at court began to calculate on the failure and utter ruin of the Douglas. Piercy of Northumberland proffered to raise the country, and lead an army to the relief of the castle; but this interference Musgrave would in nowise admit, it being an infringement of the task imposed on him by his mistress.

Moreover, he said, he cared not if all the men of Scotland lay around the castle, for he would defy them to win it. He farther bade the messenger charge Piercy and Howard to have an army ready at the expiry of the Christmas holidays, wherewith to relieve him, and clear the Border, but to take no care nor concern about him till then.

About this time an incident, right common in that day, brought a number of noble young adventurers to the camp of Douglas. It chanced, in an encounter between two small rival parties at the back of the convent of Maisondieu, which stood on the south side of the Teviot, that Sir Thomas de Somerville of Carnwath engaged hand to hand with an English knight, named Sir Comes de Moubray, who, after a desperate encounter, unhorsed and wounded him. The affair was seen from the walls of Roxburgh, as well as by a part of the Scottish army which was encamped on a rising ground to the south, that overlooked the plain; and, of course, like all other chivalrous feats, became the subject of general conversation. Somerville was greatly mortified; and, not finding any other way to recover his honour, he sent a