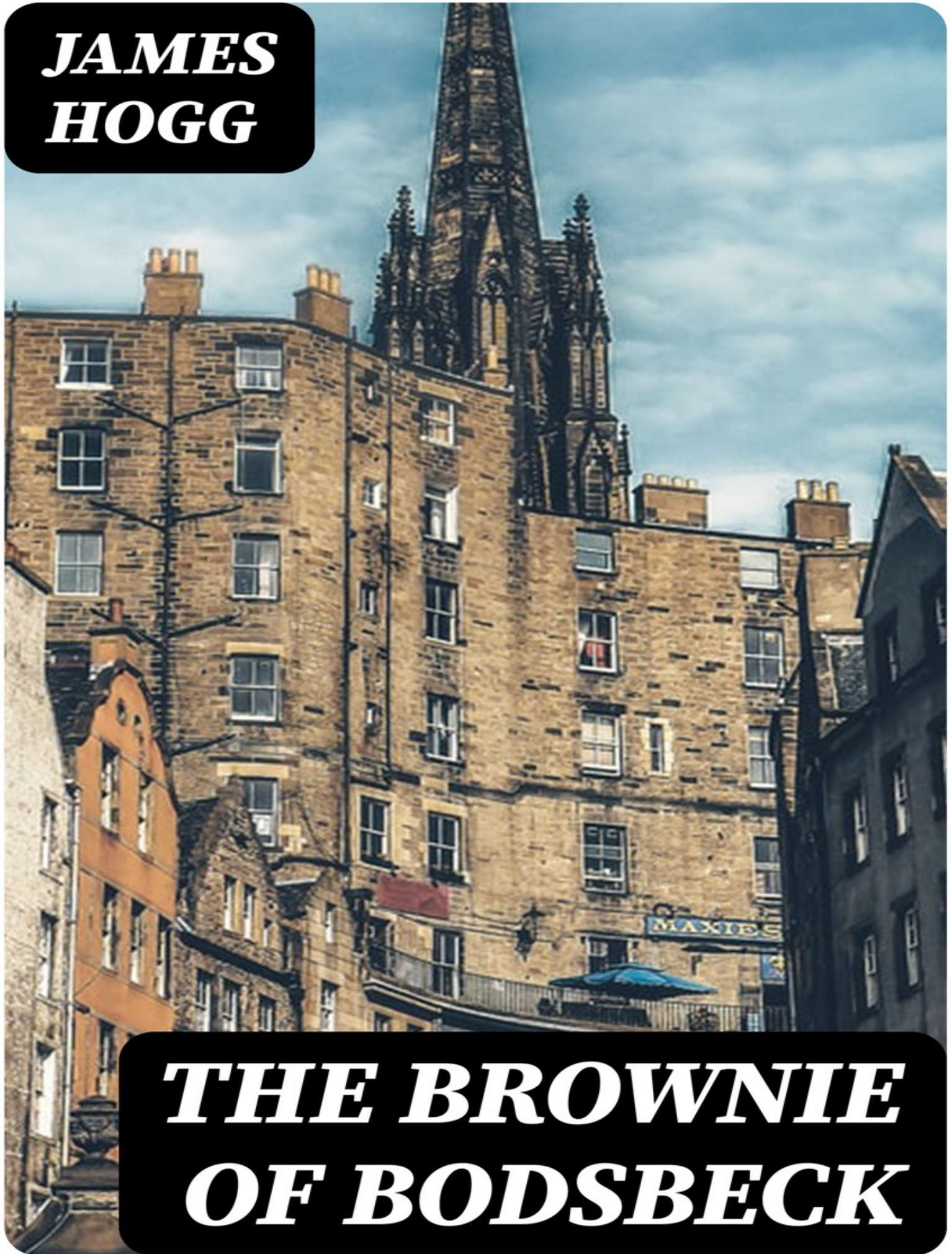


***JAMES
HOGG***



***THE BROWNIE
OF BODSBECK***

James Hogg

The Brownie of Bodsbeck

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To HER, whose bounty oft hath shed
Joy round the peasant's lowly bed,
When trouble press'd and friends were few,
And God and Angels only knew—
To HER, who loves the board to cheer,
And hearth of simple Cottager;
Who loves the tale of rural kind,
And wayward visions of his mind,
I dedicate, with high delight,
The themes of many a winter night.

What other name on Yarrow's vale
Can Shepherd choose to grace his tale?
There other living name is none
Heard with one feeling,—one alone.
Some heavenly charm must name endear
That all men love, and all revere!
Even the rude boy of rustic form,
And robes all fluttering to the storm,
Whose roguish lip and graceless eye
Inclines to mock the passer by,
Walks by the Maid with softer tread,
And lowly bends his burly head,
Following with eye of milder ray
The gentle form that glides away.
The little school-nymph, drawing near,
Says, with a sly and courteous leer,
As plain as eye and manner can,
"Thou lov'st me—bless thee, Lady Anne!"
Even babes catch the beloved theme,
And learn to lisp their Lady's name.

The orphan's blessing rests on thee;
Happy thou art, and long shalt be!
'Tis not in sorrow, nor distress,
Nor Fortune's power, to make thee less.

The heart, unaltered in its mood,
That joys alone in doing good,
And follows in the heavenly road,
And steps where once an Angel trode,—
The joys within such heart that burn,
No loss can quench, nor time o’erturn!
The stars may from their orbits bend,
The mountains rock, the heavens rend,—
The sun’s last ember cool and quiver,
But these shall glow, and glow for ever!

Then thou, who lov’st the shepherd’s home,
And cherishest his lowly dome,
O list the mystic lore sublime,
Of fairy tales of ancient time.
I learned them in the lonely glen,
The last abodes of living men;
Where never stranger came our way
By summer night, or winter day;
Where neighbouring hind or cot was none,
Our converse was with Heaven alone,
With voices through the cloud that sung,
And brooding storms that round us hung.

O Lady, judge, if judge you may,
How stern and ample was the sway
Of themes like these, when darkness fell,
And gray-hair’d sires the tales would tell!
When doors were barr’d, and eldron dame
Plied at her task beside the flame,
That through the smoke and gloom alone
On dim and umber’d faces shone—
The bleat of mountain goat on high,
That from the cliff came quavering by;
The echoing rock, the rushing flood,
The cataract’s swell, the moaning wood,
That undefined and mingled hum—

Voice of the desert, never dumb!—
All these have left within this heart
A feeling tongue can ne'er impart;
A wilder'd and unearthly flame,
A something that's without a name.

And, Lady, thou wilt never deem
Religious tale offensive theme;
Our creeds may differ in degree,
But small that difference sure can be!
As flowers which vary in their dyes,
We all shall bloom in Paradise.
As sire who loves his children well,
The loveliest face he cannot tell,—
So 'tis with us. We are the same,
One faith, one Father, and one aim.

And had'st thou lived where I was bred,
Amid the scenes where martyrs bled,
Their sufferings all to thee endear'd
By those most honour'd and revered;
And where the wild dark streamlet raves,
Had'st wept above their lonely graves,
Thou would'st have felt, I know it true,
As I have done, and aye must do.
And for the same exalted cause,
For mankind's right, and nature's laws,
The cause of liberty divine,
Thy fathers bled as well as mine.

Then be it thine, O noble Maid,
On some still eve these tales to read;
And thou wilt read, I know full well,
For still thou lovest the haunted dell;
To linger by the sainted spring,
And trace the ancient fairy ring
Where moonlight revels long were held

In many a lone sequester'd field,
By Yarrow dens and Ettrick shaw,
And the green mounds of Carterhaugh.

O for one kindred heart that thought
As minstrel must, and lady ought,
That loves like thee the whispering wood,
And range of mountain solitude!
Think how more wild the greenwood scene,
If times were still as they have been;
If fairies, at the fall of even,
Down from the eye-brow of the heaven,
Or some aërial land afar,
Came on the beam of rising star;
Their lightsome gambols to renew,
From the green leaf to quaff the dew,
Or dance with such a graceful tread,
As scarce to bend the gowan's head!

Think if thou wert, some evening still,
Within thy wood of green Bowhill—
Thy native wood!—the forest's pride!
Lover or sister by thy side;
In converse sweet the hour to improve
Of things below and things above,
Of an existence scarce begun,
And note the stars rise one by one.
Just then, the moon and daylight blending,
To see the fairy bands descending,
Wheeling and shivering as they came,
Like glimmering shreds of human frame;
Or sailing, 'mid the golden air,
In skiffs of yielding gossamer.

O, I would wander forth alone
Where human eye hath never shone,
Away o'er continents and isles

A thousand and a thousand miles,
For one such eve to sit with thee,
Their strains to hear and forms to see!
Absent the while all fears of harm,
Secure in Heaven's protecting arm;
To list the songs such beings sung,
And hear them speak in human tongue;
To see in beauty, perfect, pure,
Of human face the miniature,
And smile of being free from sin,
That had not death impress'd within.
Oh, can it ever be forgot
What Scotland had, and now has not!

Such scenes, dear Lady, now no more
Are given, or fitted as before,
To eye or ear of guilty dust;
But when it comes, as come it must,
The time when I, from earth set free,
Shall turn the spark I fain would be;
If there's a land, as grandsires tell,
Where Brownies, Elves, and Fairies dwell,
There my first visit shall be sped—
Journeyer of earth, go hide thy head!
Of all thy travelling splendour shorn,
Though in thy golden chariot borne!
Yon little cloud of many a hue
That wanders o'er the solar blue,
That curls, and rolls, and fleets away
Beyond the very springs of day,—
That do I challenge and engage
To be my travelling equipage,
Then onward, onward, far to steer,
The breeze of Heaven my charioteer;
The soul's own energy my guide,
Eternal hope my all beside.

At such a shrine who would not bow!
Traveller of earth, where art thou now?

Then let me for these legends claim,
My young, my honour'd Lady's name;
That honour is reward complete,
Yet I must crave, if not unmeet,
One little boon—delightful task
For maid to grant, or minstrel ask!

One day, thou may'st remember well,
For short the time since it befel,
When o'er thy forest-bowers of oak,
The eddying storm in darkness broke;
Loud sung the blast adown the dell,
And Yarrow lent her treble swell;
The mountain's form grew more sublime,
Wrapt in its wreaths of rolling rime;
And Newark Cairn, in hoary shroud,
Appear'd like giant o'er the cloud:
The eve fell dark, and grimly scowl'd,
Loud and more loud the tempest howl'd;
Without was turmoil, waste, and din,
The kelpie's cry was in the linn,
But all was love and peace within!
And aye, between, the melting strain
Pour'd from thy woodland harp amain,
Which, mixing with the storm around,
Gave a wild cadence to the sound.

That mingled scene, in every part,
Hath so impressed thy shepherd's heart,
With glowing feelings, kindling bright
Some filial visions of delight,
That almost border upon pain,
And he would hear those strains again.
They brought delusions not to last,

Blending the future with the past;
Dreams of fair stems, in foliage new,
Of flowers that spring where others grew
Of beauty ne'er to be outdone,
And stars that rise when sets the sun;
The patriarchal days of yore,
The mountain music heard no more,
With all the scene before his eyes,
A family's and a nation's ties—
Bonds which the Heavens alone can rend,
With Chief, with Father, and with Friend.
No wonder that such scene refin'd
Should dwell on rude enthusiast's mind!
Strange his reverse!—He little wist—
Poor inmate of the cloud and mist!
That ever he, as friend, should claim
The proudest Caledonian name.

J. H.

ELTRIVE LAKE, *April 1st, 1818.*

Chapter I

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“It will be a bloody night in Gemsop this,” said Walter of Chapelhope, as he sat one evening by the side of his little parlour fire, and wrung the rim of his wet bonnet into the grate. His wife sat by his side, airing a pair of clean hosen for her husband, to replace his wet ones. She looked stedfastly in his face, but uttered not a word;—it was one of those looks that cannot be described, but it bespoke the height of curiosity, mingled with a kind of indefinite terror. She loved and respected her husband, and sometimes was wont to tease or cajole him from his purpose; but one glance of his eye, or scowl of his eyebrow, was a sufficient admonition to her when she ventured to use such freedom.

The anxious stare that she bent on his face at this time was enquiry enough, what he meant by the short and mysterious sentence he had just uttered; but from the fulness of his heart he had said that which he could not recal, and had no mind to commit himself farther. His eldest son, John, was in the room too, which he had not remarked before he spoke, and therefore he took the first opportunity to change the subject. “Gudewife,” said he, tartly, “what are ye sittin glowrin like a bendit wulcat there for? Gae away and get me something to eat; I’m like to fa’ atwae wi’ sheer hunger.”

“Hunger, father!” said the lad; “I’m sure I saw ye take as much meat to the hill with you as might have served six.”

Walter looked first over the one shoulder at him, and then over the other, but, repressing his wrath, he sat silent about the space of two minutes, as if he had not heard what the youth said. "Callant," then said he, with the greatest seeming composure, "rin away to the hill, an' see after the eild nowt; ca' them up by the Quare Burn, an' bide wi' them till they lie down, gin that sudna be till twal o'clock at night—Gae away when I bid ye—What are ye mumgin at?" And saying so, he gave him such a thwack on the neck and shoulders with the wet bonnet as made him make the best of his way to the door. Whether he drove the young cattle as far as the Quare Burn, or whether he looked after them that night or not, Walter made no farther enquiry.

He sat still by his fire wrapt in deep thought, which seemed to increase his uneasy and fretful mood. Maron Linton, (for that was the goodwife of Chapelhope's name) observing the bad humour of her husband, and knowing for certain that something disagreeable had befallen him, wisely forbore all intermeddling or teasing questions respecting the cause. Long experience had taught her the danger of these. She bustled about, and set him down the best fare that the house afforded; then, taking up her tobacco pipe, she meditated an escape into the kitchen. She judged that a good hearty meal by himself might somewhat abate his chagrin; and, besides, the ominous words were still ringing in her ears—"It will be a bloody night in Gemsop this"—and she longed to sound the shepherds that were assembled around the kitchen fire, in order to find out their import. Walter, however, perceiving her drift, stopped her short with—"Gudewife, whar are ye

gaun sae fast—Come back an' sit down here, I want to speak t'ye."

Maron trembled at the tone in which these words were spoken, but nevertheless did as she was desired, and sat down again by the fire. "Weel, Watie, what is't?" said she, in a low and humble tone.

Walter plied his spoon for some time without deigning any reply; then turning full upon her, "Has Kate been in her bed every night this week?" asked he seriously.

"Dear gudeman, whaten a question's that to speer at me—What can hae put sic a norie i' your head as that?"

"That's no answerin my question, Maron, but speerin ither twa instead o't—I axt ye gin Kate hadna been out o' her bed for some nights bygane."

"How sude I ken ony thing about that, gudeman?—ye may gang an' speer at her—Out o' her bed, quotha!—Na—there'll nae young skempy amang them wile her out o' her bed i'the night-time.—Dear gudeman, what has put it i'your head that our bairn stravaigs i'the night-time?"

"Na, na, Maron, there's nae mortal soul will ever gar ye answer to the point."

"Dear gudeman, wha heard ever tell o' a *mortal* soul?—the soul's no mortal at a'—Didna ye hear our ain worthy curate-clerk say"—

"O, Maron! Maron! ye'll aye be the auld woman, if the warld sude turn upside-down!—Canna ye answer my question simply, ay or no, as far as ye ken, whether our daughter has been out o' her bed at midnight for some nights bygane or no?—If ye ken that she has, canna ye tell

me sae at aince, without ganging about the bush? it's a thing that deeply concerns us baith."

"Troth, gudeman, gin she hae been out o' her bed, mony a honest man's bairn has been out o' her bed at midnight afore her, an' nae ill in her mind nouthier—the thing's as common as the rising o' the se'en sterns."

Walter turned round towards his meal, after casting a look of pity and despair upon his yokefellow, who went on at great length defending the equivocal practice of young women who might deem it meet and convenient to leave their beds occasionally by night; for that, without some mode of private wooing, it was well known that no man in the country could possibly procure a wife, for that darkness rendered a promise serious, which passed in open day for a mere joke, or words of course; and at length Maron Linton, with more sagacity than usual, concluded her arguments with the following home remark:—"Ye ken fu' weel, gudeman, ye courtit me i'the howe o' the night yoursel; an' Him that kens the heart kens weel that I hae never had cause to rue our bits o' trysts i'the dark—Na, na! mony's the time an' aft that I hae blest them, an' thought o' them wi' pleasure! We had ae kind o' happiness then, Watie, we hae another now, an' we'll hae another yet."

There was something in this appeal that it would have been unnatural to have resisted. There is a tenderness in the recollection of early scenes of mutual joy and love, that invariably softens the asperity of our nature, and draws the heart by an invisible bond toward the sharer of these; but when they are at one view connected with the present and the future, the delight receives a tinge of sublimity. In short, the appeal was one of the most happy that ever

fell from the lips of a simple and ignorant, though a well-meaning woman. It was not lost upon Walter; who, though of a rough exterior and impatient humour, was a good man. He took his wife's hand and squeezed it, while the pupil of his eye expanded like that of a huge mountain ram, when he turns it away from the last ray of the setting sun.

"My gude auld wife," said he, "God bless ye!—Ye hae bits o' queer gates whiles, but I wadna part wi' ye, or see ane o' yer grey hairs wranged, for a' the ewes on the Hermon Law."—Maron gave two or three sobs, and put the corner of her check-apron upon the eye that was next Walter.—"Fair fa' your heart, Maron," said he, "we'll say nae mair about it; but, my woman, we maun crack about our bits o' hame affairs, an' I had the strongest reasons for coming to the truth o' yon; however, I'll try ither means.—But, Maron Linton, there's anither thing, that in spite o' my heart is like to breed me muckle grief, an' trouble, an' shame.—Maron, has the Brownie o' Bodsbeck been ony mair seen about the town?"

"Troth, gudeman, ye're aye sae hard i' the belief—wi' a' your kindness to me and mine, ye hae a dour, stiff, unbowsome kind o' nature in ye—it'll hardly souple whan steepit i' yer ain e'esight—but I can tell ye for news, ye'll no hae a servant about yer house, man, woman, nor boy, in less than a fortnight, if this wicked and malevolent spirit canna be put away—an' I may say i' the language o' Scripture, 'My name is Legion, for we are many.' It's no ae Brownie, nor twa, nor half-a-score, that's about the house, but a great hantle—they say they're ha'f deils ha'f fock—a thing that I dinna weel understand. But how many bannocks think ye I hae baken in our house these eight

days, an' no a crust o' them to the fore but that wee bit on your trencher?"

"I little wot, gudewife; maybe half-a-dizen o' dizens."

"Half-a-dizen o' dizens, gudeman!—aye sax dizen o' dizens!—a' the meal girnels i' the country wadna stand it, let abee the wee bit meal ark o' Chapelhope."

"Gudewife, I'm perfectly stoundit. I dinna ken what to say, or what to think, or what to do; an' the mair sae o' what I have heard sin' I gaed to the hill—Auld John o' the Muir, our herd, wha I ken wadna tell a lee for the Laird o' Drumelzier's estate, saw an unco sight the night afore last."

"Mercy on us, gudeman! what mair has been seen about the town?"

"I'll tell ye, gudewife—on Monanday night he cam yont to stop the ewes aff the hogg-fence, the wind being eissel—it was a wee after midnight, an' the moon wasna just gane down—he was sittin i' the scug o' a bit cleuch-brae, when, or ever he wist, his dog Keilder fell a gurrin' an' gurrin', as he had seen something that he was terrified for—John took him aneath his plaid, an' held him, thinkin it was some sheep-stealers; but or it was lang he saw a white thing an' a black thing comin' up the Houm close thegither; they cam by within three catlouns o' him—he grippit his cudgel firm, an' was aince gaun to gie them strength o' arm, but his power failed him, an' a' his sinnens grew like dockans; there was a kind o' glamour cam o'er his een too, for a' the hope an' the heaven grew as derk as tar an' pitch—but the settin moon shone even in their faces, and he saw them as weel as it had been fore-day. The tane was a wee bit

hurklin crile of an unearthly thing, as shrinkit an' wan as he had lien seven years i' the grave; the tither was like a young woman—an' what d'ye think? he says he'll gang to death wi't that it was outhier our dochter or her wraith."

Maron lifted up her eyes and her clasped hands toward the ceiling, and broke out with the utmost vehemence into the following raving ejaculation:—"O mercy, mercy! Watie Laidlaw!—O, may Him that dwalls atween the Sherubeams be wi' us, and preserve us and guide us, for we are undone creatures!—O, Watie Laidlaw, Watie Laidlaw! there's the wheel within the wheel, the mystery o' Babylon, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth——"

"Maron Linton!—What are ye sayin?—Haud yer tongue, Maron Linton."

"O gudeman, I thought it was the young fallows ye jaloosed her wi'—I wish it had. I wad rather hae seen her i'the black stool, in the place where repentance is to be hoped for; but now she's i'the deil's ain hands. I jaloosed it, Watie—I kend it—I was sure o't lang syne—our bairn's changed—she's transplanted—she's no Keaty Laidlaw now, but an unearthly creature—we might weel hae kend that flesh an' blude cude never be sae bonny—Goodman, I hae an awsome tale to tell ye—Wha think ye was it that killed Clavers' Highlanders?"

"That, I suppose, will remain a mystery till the day when a' secrets will be cleared up, an' a' the deeds o' darkness brought to light."

"Sae may it be, Watie! Sae may it be! But it was neither ane nor other but our ain only dochter Kate."

“Ye’re ravin, Maron—troth, ye’re gaun daft—a bit sklendry lassie o’ aughteen kill sae mony armed Highlanders?—Hout fye! keep within bounds, Maron.”

“I heard her wi’ thir lugs it’s i’ my head—Stannin on that very room floor, I heard her gie the orders to her Brownie. She was greetin whan I cam in—I listened and heard her saying, while her heart was like to loup, ‘Wae’s me! O wae’s me! or mid-day their blood will be rinning like water!—The auld an’ the young, the bonny an’ the gude, the sick an’ the woundit—That blude may cry to Heaven, but the cauld earth will drink it up; days may be better, but waur they canna be! Down wi’ the clans, Brownie, and spare nae ane.’ In less than ten minutes after that, the men were found dead. Now, Watie, this is a plain an’ positive truth.”

Walter’s blood curdled within him at this relation. He was superstitious, but he always affected to disbelieve the existence of the Brownie, though the evidences were so strong as not to admit of any doubt; but this double assurance, that his only daughter, whom he loved above all the world besides, was leagued with evil spirits, utterly confounded him. He charged his wife, in the most solemn manner, never more, during her life, to mention the mysterious circumstance relating to the death of the Highland soldiers. It is not easy to conceive a pair in more consummate astonishment than Walter and his spouse were by the time the conversation had reached this point. The one knew not what to think, to reject, or believe—the other believed all, without comprehending a single iota of that she did believe; her mind endeavoured to grasp a dreadful imaginary form, but the dimensions were too ample for its

reasoning powers; they were soon dilated, burst, and were blown about, as it were, in a world of vision and terror.

Chapter II

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Before proceeding with the incidents as they occurred, which is the common way of telling a story in the country, it will be necessary to explain some circumstances alluded to in the foregoing chapter.

Walter Laidlaw rented the extensive bounds of Chapelhope from the Laird of Drummelzier. He was a substantial, and even a wealthy man, as times went then, for he had a stock of 3000 sheep, cattle, and horses; and had, besides, saved considerable sums of money, which he had lent out to neighbouring farmers who were not in circumstances so independent as himself.

He had one only daughter, his darling, who was adorned with every accomplishment which the country could then afford, and with every grace and beauty that a country maiden may possess. He had likewise two sons, who were younger than she, and a number of shepherds and female servants.

The time on which the incidents here recorded took place, was, I believe, in the autumn of the year 1685, the most dismal and troublous time that these districts of the south and west of Scotland ever saw, or have since seen. The persecution for religion then raged in its wildest and most unbridled fury: the Covenanters, or the whigs, as they were then called, were proscribed, imprisoned, and at last hunted down like wild beasts. Graham, Viscount of Dundee,

better known by the detested name of Clavers, set loose his savage troopers upon those peaceful districts, with peremptory orders to plunder, waste, disperse, and destroy the conventiclers, wherever they might be found.

All the outer parts of the lands of Chapelhope are broken into thousands of deep black ruts, called by the country people *moss hags*. Each of the largest of these has a green stripe along its bottom; and in this place in particular they are so numerous, so intersected and complex in their lines, that, as a hiding-place, they are unequalled—men, foxes, and sheep, may all there find cover with equal safety from being discovered, and may hide for days and nights without being aware of one another. The neighbouring farms to the westward abound with inaccessible rocks, caverns, and ravines. To these mountains, therefore, the shattered remains of the fugitives from the field of Bothwell Bridge, as well as the broken and persecuted whigs from all the western and southern counties, fled as to their last refuge. Being unacquainted, however, with the inhabitants of the country in which they had taken shelter—with their religious principles, or the opinions which they held respecting the measures of government—they durst not trust them with the secret of their retreat. They had watches set, sounds for signals, and skulked away from one hiding-place to another at the approach of the armed troop, the careless fowler, or the solitary shepherd; yea, such precautions were they obliged to use, that they often fled from the face of one another.

From the midst of that inhospitable wilderness—from those dark mosses and unfrequented caverns—the prayers of the persecuted race nightly arose to the throne of the

Almighty—prayers, as all testified who heard them, fraught with the most simple pathos, as well as the most bold and vehement sublimity. In the solemn gloom of the evening, after the last rays of day had disappeared, and again in the morning before they began to streamer the east, the song of praise was sung to that Being, under whose fatherly chastisement they were patiently suffering. These psalms, always chaunted with ardour and wild melody, and borne on the light breezes of the twilight, were often heard at a great distance. The heart of the peasant grew chill, and his hairs stood all on end, as he hasted home to alarm the cottage circle with a tale of horror. Lights were seen moving by night in wilds and caverns where human thing never resided, and where the foot of man seldom had trode.

The shepherds knew, or thought they knew, that no human being frequented these places; and they believed, as well they might, that whole hordes of spirits had taken possession of their remote and solitary dells. They lived in terror and consternation. Those who had no tie in the country left it, and retreated into the vales, where the habitations of men are numerous, and where the fairy, the brownie, or the walking ghost, is rarely seen. Such as had friends whom they could not leave, or sheep and cattle upon the lands, as the farmers and shepherds had, were obliged to remain, but their astonishment and awe continued to increase. They knew there was but one Being to whom they could apply for protection against these unearthly visitants; family worship was begun both at evening and morning in the farmers' hall and the most remote hamlet; and that age introduced a spirit of devotion into those regions, which one hundred and thirty years