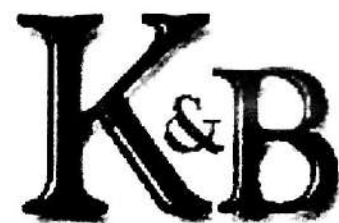


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THE MYSTERIOUS BRIDE
BY THE ETTRICK SHEPHERD¹

A GREAT number of people now-a-days are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal sight. Even Sir Walter Scott is turned renegade, and, with his stories made up of half-and-half, like Nathaniel Gow's toddy,² is trying to throw cold water on the most certain, though most impalpable, phenomena of human nature. The bodies are daft. Heaven mend their wits! Before they had ventured to assert such things, I wish they had been where I have often been; or, in particular, where the Laird of Birkendelly was on St Lawrence's Eve,³ in the year 1777, and sundry times subsequent to that.

Be it known, then, to every reader of this relation of facts that happened in my own remembrance, that the road from Birkendelly to the great muckle village of Balmawhapple, (commonly called the muckle town, in opposition to the little town that stood on the other side of the burn,)—that road, I say, lay between two thorn hedges, so well kept by the Laird's hedger, so close, and so high, that a rabbit could not have escaped from the highway into any of the adjoining fields. Along this road was the Laird riding on the Eve of St Lawrence, in a careless, indifferent manner, with his hat to one side, and his cane dancing a hornpipe on the curtch of the saddle before him.⁴ He was, moreover, chanting a song to himself, and I have heard people tell what song it was too. There was once a certain, or rather uncertain, bard, ycleped⁵ Robert Burns, who made a number of good songs; but this that the Laird sung was an amorous song of great antiquity, which like all the said bard's best songs, was sung one hundred and fifty years before he was born. It began thus:

"I am the Laird of Windy-wa's
I cam nae here without a cause,
An' I hae gotten forty fa's
In coming o'er the knowe, joe!

The night it is baith wind an weet;
The morn it will be snaw and sleet;
My shoon are frozen to my feet;
O, rise an' let me in, joe!
Let me in this ae night," &c. &c.

This song was the Laird singing, while, at the same time, he was smudging and laughing at the catastrophe, when, ere ever aware, he beheld, a short way before him, an uncommonly elegant and beautiful girl walking in the same direction with him. "Aye," said the Laird to himself, "here is something very attractive indeed! Where the deuce can she have sprung from? She must have risen out of the earth, for I never saw her till this breath. Well, I declare I have not seen such a female figure—I wish I had such an assignation with her as the Laird of Windy-wa's had with his sweetheart."

1 From *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* XXVIII (Dec. 1830): 943–50.

2 Nathaniel Gow (1766–1831) was a celebrated fiddler, band-leader, composer and music publisher, but this is the only evidence we have of his sensible drinking-habits.

3 As the story goes on to tell us, this is 9th August.

4 A curch is usually a woman's headscarf: Hogg may mean no more than the covering of the saddle.

5 Ycleped: called. A Spenserian archaism.

As the Laird was half-thinking, half-speaking this to himself, the enchanting creature looked back at him with a motion of intelligence that she knew what he was half-saying, half-thinking, and then vanished over the summit of the rising ground before him, called the Birky Brow. "Aye, go your ways!" said the Laird; "I see by you, you'll not be very hard to overtake. You cannot get off the road, and I'll have a chat with you before you make the Deer's Den."

The Laird jogged on. He did not sing "The Laird of Windy-wa's" any more, for he felt a sort of stifling about his heart; but he often repeated to himself, "She's a very fine woman! — A very fine woman indeed — and to be walking here by herself! I cannot comprehend it."

When he reached the summit of the Birky Brow he did not see her, although he had a longer view of the road than before. He thought this very singular, and began to suspect that she wanted to escape him, although apparently rather lingering on him before. "I shall have another look at her, however," thought the Laird; and off he set at a flying trot. No. He came to one turn, then another. There was nothing of the young lady to be seen. "Unless she take wings and fly away, I shall be up with her," quoth the Laird; and off he set at the full gallop.

In the middle of his career he met with Mr McMurdie of Aulton, who hailed him with, "Hilloa! Birkendelly! where the deuce are you flying at that rate?"

"I was riding after a woman," said the Laird, with great simplicity, reining in his steed.

"Then I am sure no woman on earth can long escape you, unless she be in an air balloon."⁶

"I don't know that. Is she far gone?"

"In which way do you mean?"

"In this."

"Aha-ha-ha! Hee-hee-hee!" nichered McMurdie, misconstruing the Laird's meaning.

"What do you laugh at, my dear sir? Do you know her, then?"

"Ho-ho-ho! Hee-hee-hee! How should I, or how can I, know her, Birkendelly, unless you inform me who she is?"

"Why, that is the very thing I want to know of you. I mean the young lady whom you met just now."

"You are raving, Birkendelly. I met no young lady, nor is there a single person on the road I have come by, while you know, that for a mile and a half forward your way, she could not get out of it."

"I know that," said the Laird, biting his lip, and looking greatly puzzled; "but confound me if I understand this; for I was within speech of her just now on the top of the Birky Brow there; and, when I think of it, she could not have been even thus far as yet. She had on a pure white gauze frock, a small green bonnet and feathers, and a green veil, which, flung back over her left shoulder, hung below her waist; and was altogether such an engaging figure, that no man could have passed her on the road without taking some note of her. — Are you not making game of me? Did you really not meet with her?"

"On my word of truth and honour, I did not. Come, ride back with me, and we shall meet her still, depend on it. She has given you the go-by on the road. Let us go; I am only going to call at the mill about some barley for the distillery, and will return with

6 Either Mr McMurdie is very well informed about the experiments of the Montgolfier brothers in France, or Hogg has forgotten that their first public balloon-flight was not until six years later in 1783.

you to the big town."

Birkendelly returned with his friend. The sun was not yet set, yet MCMurdie could not help observing that the Laird looked thoughtful and confused, and not a word could he speak about anything save this lonely apparition with the white frock and the green veil; and lo, when they reached the top of the Birky Brow, there was the maiden again before them, and exactly at the same spot where the Laird first saw her before, only walking in the contrary direction.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing that I ever knew!" exclaimed the Laird.

"What is it, sir?" said MCMurdie.

"How that young lady could have eluded me," returned the Laird; "see, here she is still."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I don't see her. Where is she?"

"There, on the other side of the angle; but you are short-sighted. See, there she is ascending the other eminence in her white frock and green veil, as I told you — What a lovely creature!"

"Well, well, we have her fairly before us now, and shall see what she is like at all events," said MCMurdie.

Between the Birky Brow and this other slight eminence, there is an obtuse angle of the road at the part where it is lowest, and in passing this, the two friends necessarily lost sight of the object of their curiosity. They pushed on at a quick pace — cleared the low angle — the maiden was not there! They rode full speed to the top of the eminence from whence a long extent of road was visible before them — there was no human creature in view! MCMurdie laughed aloud; but the Laird turned pale as death, and bit his lip. His friend asked at him, good-humouredly, why he was so much affected. He said, because he could not comprehend the meaning of this singular apparition or illusion, and it troubled him the more, as he now remembered a dream of the same nature which he had had, and which terminated in a dreadful manner.

"Why, man, you are dreaming still," said MCMurdie; "But never mind. It is quite common for men of your complexion to dream of beautiful maidens, with white frocks and green veils, bonnets, feathers, and slender waists. It is a lovely image, the creation of your own sanguine imagination, and you may worship it without any blame. Were her shoes black or green? — and her stockings, did you note them? The symmetry of the limbs, I am sure you did! Good-bye; I see you are not disposed to leave the spot. Perhaps she will appear to you again."

So saying, MCMurdie rode on towards the mill, and Birkendelly, after musing for some time, turned his beast's head slowly round, and began again to move towards the great muckle village.

The Laird's feelings were now in terrible commotion. He was taken beyond measure with the beauty and elegance of the figure he had seen; but he remembered, with a mixture of admiration and horror, that a dream of the same enchanting object had haunted his slumbers all the days of his life; yet how singular that he should never have recollected the circumstance till now! But farther, with the dream there were connected some painful circumstances, which though terrible in their issue, he could not recollect, so as to form them into any degree of arrangement.

As he was considering deeply of these things, and riding slowly down the declivity, neither dancing his cane, nor singing the "Laird of Windywa's," he lifted up his eyes, and there was the girl on the same spot where he saw her first, walking deliberately up the Birky Brow. The sun was down; but it was the month of August, and a fine evening, and the Laird, seized with an unconquerable desire to see and speak with

that incomparable creature, could restrain himself no longer, but shouted out to her to stop till he came up. She beckoned acquiescence, and slackened her pace into a slow movement. The Laird turned the corner quickly, but when he had rounded it, the maiden was still there, though on the very summit of the Brow. She turned round, and, with an ineffable smile and curtsy, saluted him, and again moved slowly on. She vanished gradually beyond the summit, and while the green feathers were still nodding in view and so nigh, that the Laird could have touched them with a fishing rod, he reached the top of the Brow himself. There was no living soul there, nor onward, as far as his view reached. He now trembled every limb, and, without knowing what he did, rode straight on to the big town, not daring well to return and see what he had seen for three several times; and, certain that he would see it again when the shades of evening were deepening, he deemed it proper and prudent to decline the pursuit of such a phantom any further.

He alighted at the Queen's Head, called for some brandy and water, quite forgot what was his errand to the great muckle town that afternoon, there being nothing visible to his mental sight but lovely fairy images, with white gauze frocks and green veils. His friend, Mr McMurdie, joined him; they drank deep, bantered, reasoned, got angry, reasoned themselves calm again, and still all would not do. The Laird was conscious that he had seen the beautiful apparition, and, moreover, that she was the very maiden, or the resemblance of her, who, in the irrevocable decrees of Providence, was destined to be his. It was in vain that McMurdie reasoned of impressions on the imagination, and

"Of fancy moulding on the mind
Light visions on the passing wind."⁷

Vain also was a story that he told him of a relation of his own, who was greatly harrassed by the apparition of an officer in a red uniform, that haunted him day and night, and had very nigh put him quite distracted several times; till at length his physician found out the nature of this illusion so well, that he knew, from the state of his pulse, to an hour when the ghost of the officer would appear, and by bleeding, low diet, and emollients, contrived to keep the apparition away altogether.

The Laird admitted the singularity of this incident, but not that it was one in point; for the one, he said, was imaginary, and the other real; and that no conclusions could convince him in opposition to the authority of his own senses. He accepted of an invitation to spend a few days with McMurdie and his family; but they all acknowledged afterwards that the Laird was very much like one bewitched.

As soon as he reached home he went straight to the Birky-Brow, certain of seeing once more the angelic phantom; but she was not there. He took each of his former positions again and again, but the desired vision would in nowise make its appearance. He tried every day, and every hour of the day, all with the same effect, till he grew absolutely desperate, and had the audacity to kneel on the spot, and entreat of Heaven to see her. Yes, he called on Heaven to see her once more, whatever she was, whether a being of earth, heaven, or hell!

He was now in such a state of excitement that he could not exist; he grew listless, impatient, and sickly; took to his bed, and sent for McMurdie and the doctor; and the issue of the consultation was, that Birkendelly consented to leave the country for a

7 Hogg is quoting from his own poem, *The Queen's Wake* (1813), the work that established his fame as a poet.

season, on a visit to his only sister in Ireland, whither we must now accompany him for a short space.

His sister was married to Captain Bryan, younger of Scoresby, and they two lived in a cottage on the estate, and the Captain's parents and sisters at Scoresby Hall. Great was the stir and preparation when the gallant young Laird of Birkendelly arrived at the cottage, it never being doubted that he had come to forward a second bond of connection with the family, which still contained seven dashing sisters, all unmarried, and all alike willing to change that solitary and helpless state for the envied one of matrimony—a state highly popular among the young women of Ireland. Some of the Misses Bryan had not reached the years of womanhood, several of them scarcely; but these small disqualifications made no difference in the estimation of the young ladies themselves; each and all of them brushed up for the competition, with high hopes and unflinching resolutions. True, the elder ones tried to check the younger in their good-natured, forthright, Irish way; but they retorted, and persisted in their superior pretensions. Then there was such shopping in the county-town! It was so boundless, that the credit of the Hall was finally exhausted, and the old squire was driven to remark, that "Och and to be sure it was a dreadful and tirrorabell concussion, to be put upon the equipment of seven daughters all at the same moment, as if the young gentleman could marry them all! Och, then, poor dear shoul, he would be after finding that one was sufficient, if not one too many. And, therefore, there was no occasion, none at all, at all, and that there was not, for any of them to rig out more than one."

It was hinted that the Laird had some reason for complaint at this time; but as the lady sided with her daughters, he had no chance. One of the items of his account was, thirty-seven buckling-combs, then greatly in vogue.⁸ There were black combs, pale combs, yellow combs, and gilt ones, all to suit or set off various complexions; and if other articles bore any proportion at all to these, it had been better for the Laird and all his family that Birkendelly had never set foot in Ireland.

The plan was all concocted. There was to be a grand dinner at the Hall, at which the damsels were to appear in all their finery. A ball was to follow, and note taken which of the young ladies was their guest's choice, and measures taken accordingly. The dinner and the ball took place, and what a pity I may not describe that entertainment, the dresses, and the dancers for they were all exquisite in their way, and *outré* beyond measure. But such details only serve to derange a winter's evening tale such as this.

Birkendelly having at this time but one model for his choice among womankind, all that ever he did while in the presence of ladies, was to look out for some resemblance to her, the angel of his fancy; and it so happened, that in one of old Bryan's daughters named Luna, or more familiarly, Loony, he perceived, or thought he perceived, some imaginary similarity in form and air to the lovely apparition. This was the sole reason why he was incapable of taking his eyes off from her the whole of that night; and this incident settled the point, not only with the old people, but even the young ladies were forced, after every exertion on their own parts, to "yild the pint to their sister Loony, who certainly was nit the mist ginteelest nor mist handsomest of that guid-lucking fimily."

The next day Lady Luna was dispatched off to the Cottage in grand style, there to live hand and glove with her supposed lover. There was no standing all this. There were the two parroked together,⁹ like a ewe and a lamb, early and late; and though the Laird really appeared to have, and probably had, some delight in her company, it was

⁸ Buckling-combs hold curled hair in place.

⁹ Parroked: enclosed in a paddock, often used to name the specific purpose alluded to here of familiarising a ewe with a strange lamb so she will suckle it.

only in contemplating that certain indefinable air of resemblance which she bore to the sole image impressed on his heart. He bought her a white gauze frock, a green bonnet and feathers, with a veil, which she was obliged to wear thrown over her left shoulder; and every day after, six times a-day, was she obliged to walk over a certain eminence at a certain distance before her lover. She was delighted to oblige him; but still when he came up, he looked disappointed and never said, "Luna, I love you; when are we to be married?" No, he never said any such thing, for all her looks and expressions of fondest love; for, alas, in all this dalliance, he was only feeding a mysterious flame, that preyed upon his vitals, and proved too severe for the powers either of reason or religion to extinguish. Still time flew lighter and lighter by, his health was restored, the bloom of his cheek returned, and the frank and simple confidence of Luna had a certain charm with it, that reconciled him to his sister's Irish economy.¹⁰ But a strange incident now happened to him which deranged all his immediate plans.

He was returning from angling one evening, a little before sunset, when he saw Lady Luna awaiting him on his way home. But instead of brushing up to meet him as usual, she turned, and walked up the rising ground before him. "Poor sweet girl! how condescending she is!" said he to himself, "and how like she is in reality to the angelic being whose form and features are so deeply impressed on my heart! I now see it is no fond or fancied resemblance. It is real! real! real! How I long to clasp her in my arms, and tell her how I love her; for, after all, that is the girl that is to be mine, and the former a vision to impress this the more on my heart."

He posted up the ascent to overtake her. When at the top she turned, smiled, and curtsied. Good Heavens! it was the identical Lady of his fondest adoration herself, but lovelier, far lovelier than ever. He expected every moment that she would vanish as was her wont; but she did not—she awaited him, and received his embraces with open arms. She was a being of real flesh and blood, courteous, elegant, and affectionate. He kissed her hand, he kissed her glowing cheek, and blessed all the powers of love who had thus restored her to him again, after undergoing pangs of love such as man never suffered.

"But, dearest heart, here we are standing in the middle of the high way," said he; "suffer me to conduct you to my sister's house, where you shall have an apartment with a child of nature having some slight resemblance to yourself." She smiled, and said, "No, I will not sleep with Lady Luna to-night. Will you please to look round you, and see where you are." He did so, and behold they were standing on the Birky Brow, on the only spot where he had ever seen her. She smiled at his embarrassed look, and asked if he did not remember aught of his coming over from Ireland. He said he thought he did remember something of it, but love with him had long absorbed every other sense. He then asked her to his own house, which she declined, saying she could only meet him on that spot till after their marriage, which could not be before St Lawrence's Eve come three years. "And now," says she, "we must part. My name is Jane Ogilvie, and you were betrothed to me before you were born. But I am come to release you this evening, if you have the slightest objection."

He declared he had none; and, kneeling, swore the most solemn oath to be hers for ever, and to meet her there on St Lawrence's Eve next, and every St. Lawrence's Eve until that blessed day on which she had consented to make him happy, by becoming his own for ever. She then asked him affectionately to exchange rings with her, in pledge of their faith and troth, in which he joyfully acquiesced; for she could not have then asked any conditions, which, in the fulness of his heart's love, he would not have granted; and after one fond and affectionate kiss, and repeating all their engagements over again, they parted.

¹⁰ I.e. domestic economy, housekeeping.

Birkendelly's heart was now melted within him, and all his senses overpowered by one overwhelming passion. On leaving his fair and kind one, he got bewildered, and could not find the road to his own house, believing sometimes that he was going there, and sometimes to his sister's, till at length he came, as he thought, upon the Liffey, at its junction with Loch Allan; and there, in attempting to call for a boat, he awoke from a profound sleep, and found himself lying in his bed within his sister's house, and the day sky just breaking.

If he was puzzled to account for some things in the course of his dream, he was much more puzzled to account for them now that he was wide awake. He was sensible that he had met his love, had embraced, kissed, and exchanged vows and rings with her, and in token of the truth and reality of all these, her emerald ring was on his finger, and his own away; so there was no doubt that they had met, — by what means it was beyond the power of man to calculate.

There was then living with Mrs Bryan an old Scotswoman commonly styled Lucky Black. She had nursed Birkendelly's mother and been dry-nurse to himself and sister; and having more than a mother's attachment for the latter, when she was married, old Lucky left her country to spend the last of her days in the house of her beloved young lady. When the Laird entered the breakfast parlour that morning, she was sitting in her black velvet hood, as usual, reading "The Fourfold State of Man,"¹¹ and being paralytic and somewhat deaf, she seldom regarded those who went out or came in. But chancing to hear him say something about the ninth of August, she quitted reading, turned round her head to listen, and then asked, in a hoarse tremulous voice, "What's that he's saying? What's the unlucky callant saying about the ninth of August?"¹² Aih? To be sure it is St Lawrence's Eve, although the tenth be his day. It is ower true, ower true!¹³ ower true for him an' a' his kin, poor man! Aih? What was he saying then?"

The men smiled at her incoherent earnestness, but the lady, with true feminine condescension, informed her, in a loud voice, that Allan had an engagement in Scotland on St Lawrence's Eve. She then started up, extended her shrivelled hands, that shook like the aspen, and panted out, "Aih, aih? Lord preserve us! whaten an engagement has he on St Lawrence's Eve? Bind him! Bind him! Shackle him wi' bands of steel, and of brass, and of iron! — O, may He whose blessed will was pleased to leave him an orphan sae soon, preserve him from the fate which I tremble to think on!"

She then tottered round the table, as with supernatural energy, and seizing the Laird's right hand she drew it close to her unstable eyes, and then, perceiving the emerald ring chased in blood, she threw up her arms with a jerk, opened her skinny jaws with a fearful gape, and uttering a shriek, that made all the house yell, and every one within it to tremble, she fell back lifeless and rigid on the floor. The gentlemen both fled, out of sheer terror; but a woman never deserts her friends in extremity. The lady called her maids about her, had her old nurse conveyed to bed, where every means were used to restore animation. But, alas! life was extinct! The vital spark had fled for ever, which filled all their hearts with grief, disappointment, and horror, as some dreadful tale of mystery was now sealed up from their knowledge, which in all likelihood no other could reveal. But to say the truth, the Laird did not seem greatly disposed to probe it to the bottom.

Not all the arguments of Captain Bryan and of his lady, nor the simple entreaties of

11 Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (1730), a classic of Calvinist theology in the eighteenth century. Its author was long a minister in Ettrick.

12 Callant: boy or young man.

13 Ower true: too true.

Lady Luna, could induce Birkendelly to put off his engagement to meet with his love on the Birky Brow on the evening of the 9th of August; but he promised soon to return, pretending that some business of the utmost importance called him away. Before he went, however, he asked his sister if ever she had heard of such a lady in Scotland as Jane Ogilvie? Mrs Bryan repeated the name many times to herself, and said that name undoubtedly was once familiar to her, although she thought not for good, but at that moment she did not recollect one single individual of the name. He then showed her the emerald ring that had been the death of old Lucky Black; but the moment the lady looked at it, she made a grasp at it to take it off by force, which she had very nearly effected. "O, burn it, burn it!" cried she; "it is not a right ring! Burn it!"

"My dear sister, what fault is in the ring?" said he. "It is a very pretty ring, and one that I set great value by."

"O, for Heaven's sake, burn it, and renounce the giver!" cried she. "If you have any regard for your peace here, or your soul's welfare hereafter, burn that ring! If you saw with your own eyes, you would easily perceive that that is not a ring befitting a Christian to wear."

This speech confounded Birkendelly a good deal. He retired by himself and examined the ring, and could see nothing in it unbecoming a Christian to wear. It was a chased gold ring, with a bright emerald, which last had a red foil, in some lights giving it a purple gleam, and inside was engraved "*Elegit*," much defaced, but that his sister could not see;¹⁴ therefore he could not comprehend her vehement injunctions concerning it. But that it might no more give her offence, or any other, he sewed it within his vest, opposite his heart, judging that there was something in it which his eyes were withholden from discerning.

Thus he left Ireland with his mind in great confusion, groping his way, as it were, in a hole of mystery, yet the passion that preyed on his heart and vitals more intense than ever. He seems to have had an impression all his life that some mysterious fate awaited him, which the correspondence of his dreams and day visions tended to confirm. And though he gave himself wholly up to the sway of one overpowering passion, it was not without some yearnings of soul, manifestations of terror, and so much earthly shame that he never more mentioned his love, or his engagements, to any human being, not even to his friend MCMurdie, whose company he forthwith shunned.

It is on this account that I am unable to relate what passed between the lovers thenceforward. It is certain that they met at the Birky Brow that St. Lawrence's Eve, for they were seen in company together; but of the engagements, vows, or dalliance, that passed between them, I can say nothing; nor of all their future meetings, until the beginning of August 1781, when he began decidedly to make preparations for his approaching marriage; yet not as if he and his betrothed had been to reside at Birkendelly, all his provision rather bespeaking a premeditated journey.

On the morning of the 9th, he wrote to his sister, and then arraying himself in his new wedding suit, and putting the emerald ring on his finger, he appeared all impatience until towards evening, when he sallied out on horseback to his appointment. It seems that his mysterious inamorata had met him, for he was seen riding through the Big Town before sunset, with a young lady behind him, dressed in white and green, and the villagers affirmed that they were riding at the rate of fifty miles an hour! They were seen to pass a cottage called Mosskilt, ten miles farther on, where there was no highway, at the same tremendous speed; and I could never hear that they were any

¹⁴ An '*elegit*' is a writ granting a creditor the goods and lands of a debtor to the value of the debt.

more seen; until the following morning, when Birkendelly's fine bay horse was found lying dead at his own stable door; and shortly after, his master was likewise discovered lying a blackened corpse on the Birky Brow, at the very spot where the mysterious, but lovely dame, had always appeared to him. There was neither wound, bruise, nor dislocation, in his whole frame; but his skin was of a livid colour, and his features terribly distorted.

This woful catastrophe struck the neighbourhood with great consternation, so that nothing else was talked of. Every ancient tradition and modern incident were raked together, compared, and combined; and certainly a most rare concatenation of misfortunes was elicited. It was authenticated that his father had died on the same spot that day twenty years, and his grandfather that day forty years, the former, as was supposed, by a fall from his horse when in liquor, and the latter, nobody knew how; and now this Allan was the last of his race for Mrs Bryan had no children.

It was moreover now remembered by many, and among the rest, the Rev. Joseph Taylor, that he had frequently observed a young lady, in white and green, sauntering about that spot on a St Lawrence's Eve.

When Captain Bryan and his lady arrived to take possession of the premises, they instituted a strict enquiry into every circumstance; but nothing further than what was related to them by Mr McMurdie could be learned of this Mysterious Bride, beside what his own letter bore. It ran thus:—

"DEAREST SISTER,

"I shall, before this time to-morrow, be the most happy, or most miserable, of mankind, having solemnly engaged myself this night to wed a young and beautiful lady, named Jane Ogilvie, to whom it seems I was betrothed before I was born. Our correspondence has been of a most private and mysterious nature; but my troth is pledged, and my resolution fixed. We set out on a far journey to the place of her abode on the nuptial eve, so that it will be long before I see you again.

"Yours till death,

"ALLAN GEORGE SANDISON.

"Birkendelly, August 8th, 1781."

That very same year, an old woman, named Marrion Haw, was returned upon that, her native parish, from Glasgow. She had led a migratory life with her son—who was what he called a bell-hanger, but in fact a tinker of the worst grade—for many years, and was at last returned to the muckle town in a state of great destitution.¹⁵ She gave the parishioners a history of the Mysterious Bride, so plausibly correct, but withal so romantic, that every body said of it, (as is often said of my narratives, with the same narrow-minded prejudice and injustice,) that it was a *made story*. There were, however, some strong testimonies of its veracity.

She said the first Allan Sandison, who married the great heiress of Birkendelly, was previously engaged to a beautiful young lady, named Jane Ogilvie, to whom he gave any thing but fair play; and, as she believed, either murdered her, or caused her to be murdered, in the midst of a thicket of birch and broom, at a spot which she mentioned; that she had good reasons for believing so, as she had seen the red blood and the new grave, when she was a little girl, and ran home and mentioned it to her grandfather, who charged her as she valued her life never to mention that again, as it was only the

¹⁵ Under the old Poor Law, provision for the destitute was a matter for the parish in which they were born and could only be made if they returned there.

numbles and hide of a deer, which he himself had buried there.¹⁶ But when, twenty years subsequent to that, the wicked and unhappy Allan Sandison was found dead on that very spot, and lying across the green mound, then nearly level with the surface, which she had once seen a new grave, she then for the first time ever thought of a Divine Providence; and she added, "for my grandfather, Neddy Haw, he dee'd too; there's naeboddy kens how, nor ever shall."

As they were quite incapable of conceiving from Marrion's description, any thing of the spot, Mr McMurdie caused her to be taken out to the Birky Brow in a cart, accompanied by Mr Taylor, and some hundreds of the townsfolk; but whenever she saw it, she said "Aha, birkies! the hale kintra's altered now. There was nae road here then; It gaed straight ower the tap o' the hill. An' let me see—there's the thorn where the cushats biggit;¹⁷ an' there's the auld birk that I aince fell off an' left my shoe stickin' i' the cleft. I can tell ye, birkies, either the deer's grave, or bonny Jane Ogilvie's, is no twa yards off the place where that horse's hind feet are standin'; sae ye may howk, an' see if there be ony remains."

The minister, and McMurdie, and all the people, stared at one another, for they had purposely caused the horse to stand still on the very spot where both the father and son had been found dead. They digged, and deep, deep below the road, they found part of the slender bones and skull of a young female, which they deposited decently in the churchyard. The family of the Sandisons is extinct—the Mysterious Bride appears no more on the Eve of St Lawrence—and the wicked people of the great muckle village have got a lesson on Divine justice written to them in lines of blood.

16 Numbles: innards. Penalties for poaching included death, so the grandfather's pretence (if that's what it is) works to silence the child.

17 I.e. where the pigeons made their nests.